



From Queen Anne  
to Queen Victoria:  
Body & Mind

edited by  
Dorota Babilas  
Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołdys  
Magdalena Pypeć  
with Lucyna Krawczyk-Żywko

vol.8



QAWQW

The image features the letters 'QAWQW' in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is filled with a grayscale portrait of a woman, likely from the 18th or 19th century. The portraits are cut out to fit the shape of the letters, creating a layered effect. The first 'Q' shows a woman's face from the nose up, with her eyes looking slightly to the right. The 'A' shows a woman's face from the nose down, with her eyes looking slightly to the left. The second 'Q' shows a woman's face from the nose up, with her eyes looking slightly to the right. The 'W' shows a woman's face from the nose down, with her eyes looking slightly to the left. The portraits are set against a white background.



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The Art Institute of Chicago (fragment)**  
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## Foreword

The *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* book series has a long tradition and its publishing reflects numerous changes taking place over the years. The first four volumes were published by Ośrodek Studiów Brytyjskich UW (2009–2014), the fifth by Instytut Anglistyki UW Pracownia „Ośrodek Studiów Brytyjskich” (2016), while the sixth and seventh by Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (2018 and 2021). What connected them were not only the *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* conferences (2007–2019), but first and foremost the editors: Grażyna Bystydzińska and Emma Harris. We fully appreciate and strongly applaud their work and, in taking up the baton passed down by our Founding Mothers, hope to do justice to their editorial heritage in a way that they, too, will come to appreciate.

This volume is the eighth, but also, in a few ways, the first. It is the first available in Open Access and the first prepared by us as a research group. Starting in 2007, the *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* forum united members of the Department of British Culture and Department of British Literature researching eighteenth- and/or nineteenth-century studies and their rewritings. Between 2022 and now, we grew into a team integrating seasoned scholars and postgraduate students from various universities. Since our publishing cycle was interrupted by the pandemic, it is the first book after a longer break. To accentuate this challenging period, we invited contributions relating to *Body and Mind*, which marks a turn towards volumes defined not only chronologically, but also thematically.

In the previous volume in this series, the editors – Grażyna Bystydzińska and Emma Harris – noted that

in a post-pandemic landscape, a different style of academic attitude towards the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will perhaps inevitably take shape, entailing possible new perspectives on disciplinarity and divisions between fields of study, between aesthetics and politics, or between history and the present (“From the Editors” 9)

and all it takes to see to what extent they were right is to read the following pages.

There are, however, certain things that have not changed. The texts included in this volume are thought-provoking and engaging and, just like the ones from the first collection in our series, create “a mosaic of interrelated analyses of aspects of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and culture in Britain” (front flap). I am grateful to the new editors – Dorota Babilas, Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Holdys, and Magdalena Pypeć – for their individual and collaborative work. All of us were involved with the series since volume one as contributors and, speaking both for myself and the others, we want it to keep growing. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dorota Traczewska for keeping an eye on the technical side of the publishing process. I hope you will enjoy the outcome.

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## Introduction

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and culture widely engage with the issues of personhood, self-identity and the mind, as much as they are interested in the body, materiality and embodiment, in relation to class, race, gender and the material culture. This interest extends from the Augustan Age and Romanticism throughout the long nineteenth century, and culminates in the culture of the *fin de siècle*. Alan Richardson lists the topics and concerns usually associated with Romanticism: “the relation of mind to body, the relation of human beings to the natural world, the new emphasis on human difference and individuality, the environmental role in shaping mind and behaviour, the status of various materialist ideologies” and what he calls “such staples as sensibility and the creative imagination” (2). The Victorian period, in turn, was enmeshed in the frequently precarious and conflicting connection between the fascination with materiality, wealth, material culture and its various manifestations on the one hand, and the dilemmas of faith and agnosticism, the relationship between body and mind, spirit and matter, science and religion on the other. Notably, Peter J. Capuano emphasises the importance of the body/mind/spirituality theme as a subject of critical investigation to acquire a better understanding of the intellectual, cultural, and ethical climate of the age:

This was the era when modern medical models of the body were developed and disseminated, when modern political relations to the body were instantiated, and when modern identities in relation to class, race, and gender were inscribed. While questions about the distinctions between personhood and the body were studied by the ancients, 19th-century developments in technology, economics, medicine, and science rendered such categories newly important for Britons who were the first to experience a fully industrialized society. (“The Body”)

In the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, peripatetic literature and travel writing not only portray “body on the move” but also engage in the intellectual and philosophical journey of characters and authors as they navigate through

the changing landscapes of society and ideas. Authors like Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens and John Ruskin frequently incorporated the travel trope in their writing, e.g., *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–18), *Pictures from Italy* (1846), *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3). They also wrote travelogues themselves involving self-analysis of the tourist-narrator, for instance Defoe's *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–6), Fielding's *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755). An interesting example of travel as a journey of self-discovery is James Boswell's *London Journal 1762–1763* in which he imaginatively recreates the encountered places and people, as Frederic Pottle claims: "To the modern age with its insatiable interest in psychology, the confessional element of Boswell's journal may well be its most interesting feature. His kind of confession is almost unique. He is writing, as he himself frequently said, a history of his own mind" (13). Popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Grand Tour was an important educational experience, often perceived as a right of passage, for sons of wealthy British families. Apart from consolidating the school-acquired knowledge of European cultural heritage, it also exposed the travellers to exotic customs, traditions and locations, significantly expanding their perception of the world.

Victorian novels, poetry, theatre, and the visual arts served as rich canvases for examining such themes as the rise of psychology, psychiatry and neurology; spiritualism and mesmerism; fashion and aesthetics; mourning and the commemoration of the dead; imperial and colonial bodies; the criminal and criminalised bodies; and sexuality and sexualised bodies. Similarly, the issues of sight and seeing, visibility and perception, gained enormous importance during the nineteenth century. As Kate Flint observes:

The Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye and with the problems of interpreting what they saw. These problems extended from the observation of the natural world and the urban environment, to the more specialist interpretation demanded by actual works of art. (1–2)

Consequently, the Victorians were enthralled by visibility in culture, which expressed itself through various forms of technological novelties such as mass-produced illustrations, popular prints, photography, phantasmagoria shows, dioramas, panoramas, and theatrical stagecraft, culminating in the arrival of silent film at the end of the era. In some cases, visual depictions could be interpreted by the medical profession as symptoms of mental illness, allowing access into the inner worlds of an insane mind (e.g., illustrations of Louis Wain and Charles Altamont Doyle). The rise of print culture and consumerism resulted in interest and demand

for illustrated publications such as gift books, annual almanachs, novels and poetry volumes illustrated by renowned artists of the era, e.g., Daniel Maclise, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Cruikshank, Harry Clarke.

Significantly, Romantic and Victorian preoccupations continue to resonate in contemporary literature and popular culture inspiring various revisions and reinterpretations, interest in environmental concerns, popularity of neo-Victorianism, and adaptations in various media. The modern “right to roam” campaign can be seen as a continuation of the Romantic and pre-Romantic drive for freedom of movement and freedom of thought. The Victorian craze for spiritual séances and table-rapping influenced many neo-Victorian novels featuring mediums, ghosts, and apparitions including Sarah Waters’ *Affinity* (1999), Jo Baker’s *The Telling* (2008), Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* (2005), or Lorna Gibb’s *A Ghost Story* (2015). The legend of the pirates, popular since the eighteenth century, re-emerges in the video game *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End* (2016), while Victorian London during the Industrial Revolution is the setting for Ubisoft’s *Assassin’s Creed: Syndicate* (2015), featuring Charles Dickens, Queen Victoria, Benjamin Disraeli, and Karl Marx.

All the aforementioned themes are taken under critical scrutiny in the present volume. The chapters refer to the questions of consciousness, subjectivity, the relation between the self and the world. They explore the notions of freedom of thought, personal attitudes to aesthetic and literary conventions, quests for personal and political liberty, the tensions between the private and the social spheres. Further on, the volume explores the theme of the body and its aspects such as physicality, corporeality, and the experience of embodiment; otherness; disability; body as a vessel for self-expression; its connection to class, gender, and social hierarchy; its symbolism and agency in the social world – thus redefining the body as a sociocultural and historical phenomenon.

The themes of the body and mind have often attracted critical scrutiny. The essays collected in the volume *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Veronica Kelly and Dorothea von Mücke (Stanford University Press, 1994), examine how the human body serves as a central semiotic model through which eighteenth-century culture articulates its political and conceptual frameworks. The volume brings together scholars from the fields of English (discussing e.g., Jonathan Swift and John Locke), French, and German literature. Juliet MacMaster’s book, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Palgrave, 2004), explores how eighteenth-century novelists used various codes to make the minds of their characters legible through their bodies, probing the discourses of medicine, physiognomy, and gesture. This study enriches the reading of classics like Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, as well as novels by Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen. The chapter “Body and Mind” by Jenny Bourne Taylor in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1830–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) discusses how representations

of the body helped make sense of the complex social world of the Victorian era, including sections devoted to the visible codes of phrenology and physiognomy and to the embodiment of memory (considering the ways in which the past is inscribed on the body). Sue Zemka's chapter "The Body" in *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature* (Blackwell, 2015) provides an in-depth analysis of how economic conditions and political ideologies of the time shaped perceptions of the body, e.g., the impact of evolutionary theory and neurological studies, the role of technological advancement and racial theories in shaping bodily experience. The study *Mind, Body, Motion, Matter: Eighteenth-Century British and French Literary Perspectives*, edited by Mary Helen McMurrin and Alison Conway (University of Toronto Press, 2016), looks into the interplay between two major philosophical approaches to the natural world in the eighteenth century (mechanistic materialism and vitalism) and examines how these ideas are reflected in the works of prominent British writers and artists such as Daniel Defoe, William Hogarth, and Laurence Sterne. "The Victorian Mental Sciences" by Suzy Anger (*Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2018) investigates the diverse and often controversial theories of the mind that emerged during the Victorian era, delving deep into such topics as theories of degeneration, hysteria, and evolutionary psychology. Anger provides a critical examination of these theories, highlighting how they intersected with the fields like medicine, philosophy, legal studies, and even the occult. The essays in the present volume continue the critical discussion of the interconnectedness of the mind/body theme with broader social, economic, and scientific context of the time, focusing in detail on authors and artists who are not included in the aforementioned studies.

The volume opens with an essay by Mary Jacobus, entitled "Rambling and Romanticism. The Right to Roam". Mary Jacobus explores the connection between the freedom of movement and freedom of thought in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers (William Cowper, John Clare, and Jane Austen) arguing that our contemporary "right to roam" movement has a substantial cultural, literary, and political history stemming from the curtailment of public space and the "confinement" of those who wander, mentally or physically. Both rambling and roaming involve issues regarding well-being and rights, as well as literary formations and physical freedoms.

The next text in the volume, "A Solitary Wanderer: Tourism and Romantic Subjectivity in William Beckford's Travel Writing" by Przemysław Uściński, is thematically related to the preceding one, as it also refers to the idea (and practice) of travel and mobility. The article focuses on William Beckford's 1780–1781 letters from his Grand Tour in Europe, and also on his journal documenting his travels in Portugal and Spain. Uściński examines Beckford's writing in terms of the aesthetic, affective and ideological transitions in the cultural conventions of travel writing that signalled the onset of Romanticism. He also notes the impact of sentimentalism and the early-romantic tendencies in literature on Beckford's

approach to the presentation of travel experience, visible in the focus on emotionally charged impressions as well as the aesthetic appeal of the described scenes and objects. These features, however, are often intriguingly balanced with the authorial commentary highlighting the ironic distance towards the dominant conventions of travel writing.

The essay which follows the first two continues exploration of Romantic writing, but also reaches forward in time. Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołdys in “‘O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!’: Aestheticist Ideas in the Poetry of John Keats” examines how concepts and concerns expressed in poetry and letters of John Keats preview the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement that gained prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century. She investigates the attitudes to beauty and sensuality, to the passage of time, the search for the perfect, permanent moment; the ideas which are expressed persistently through language and images that Aestheticism will claim as its own a mere half-century after Keats’s death.

A quest for personal and political freedom, derived from the eighteenth-century legends of pirates, informs Aleksandra Jarecka’s “Searching for Libertalia: *Uncharted 4* and Its Reimagining of the Golden Age of Piracy”. The pirate utopia based in Madagascar receives a new lease of life in the video game *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End*, in which the player interacts with characters inspired by literary and historical pirates (Henry Avery, Thomas Tew, Anne Bonny). The success of the game proves that pirate lore, important for popular culture since the eighteenth century, still has the potential to enchant a new public by telling stories of universal appeal.

In turn, Tomasz Wiącek’s “The Discourse of Power in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance; or the Slave of Duty*” approaches the topic of popular culture’s fascination with pirates from the standpoint of Victorian theatre. The comic opera of 1879 by the hit-making duo of William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan engages with Victorian preoccupations concerning attitudes towards authority, duty, and the law, foregrounding the tensions present within the private and social lives of the characters.

Victorian literature’s preoccupation with history is the subject of Monika Mazurek’s “Pastiche as a Medium for Teaching Empathy in George MacDonald’s *St George and St Michael*”. The novel, published in 1875, is set during the English Civil War in the seventeenth century and is written in pastiche style, which allows the author a more impartial presentation of the characters and their motivations during the military, political and religious conflict. Thus, it encourages a more empathetic emotional reaction in the readers.

Conversely, in Rosario Arias’s “‘I Know that I Exist’: Lorna Gibb’s *A Ghost Story* as an Assemblage of Matter and Spirit” it is the Victorian culture that serves as an important backdrop to a modern retelling of a story of a ghostly apparition, as it is narrated by a spirit. Like MacDonald’s tale before it, Gibb’s neo-Victorian novel mixes fictional and historical materials for artistic effect, creating an interesting

conglomerate of documents which highlight the fluid nature of both the Victorian belief in ghosts and the contemporary modes of self-reflection.

Mary Newbould examines the portrayal of domestic tourism to London in late eighteenth-century British novels: Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and John Alcock's *The Adventures of Miss Fanny Brown* (1761). These novels, along with other contemporary fictions, vividly depict a wide range of tourist experiences, showcasing the diverse entertainments available in the city. By blending high-brow and "popular" entertainments, they challenge rigid classifications not only of different types of sights but also of spectators. In doing so, as Newbould convincingly argues, they subvert prevailing views from the eighteenth century that associated educated audience with disdain for "crass" shows and entertainments. Notably, Alcock's characters engage with statuary, including funeral monuments at Westminster Abbey and wax figures representing monarchs within London's popular waxwork showrooms.

In the context of nineteenth-century working-class autobiographies, Małgorzata Nitka addresses the intricate relationship between humans and machines, investigating how industrial workers themselves experience and describe the body-machine connection. The literary examples provided by Nitka include works such as *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe, an Orphan Boy* by John Brown (1832); *A Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple, Written by Himself* (1841); *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy* (1840) by Frances Trollope; and *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna. A central image in these texts is that of the labouring body, often associated with children. These bodies become entangled in the factory environment, compelled to respond to the regular and often rapid movements of the machines, which frequently results in various damages—becoming weakened, abused, misshapen, injured, or maimed. Despite occasional admiration for machinery's strength, magnificence, and complexity, workers cannot dissociate it from its antagonistic impact on their own bodies.

The criminal body is at the centre of Joanna Kokot's analysis of Fergus Hume's novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886), highlighting intriguing patterns that foreshadow elements typical of detective literature. Unlike traditional sensation novels, Hume's narrative provokes reader engagement. As she claims, readers are encouraged to speculate on both the motive behind the murder and the identity of the perpetrator. The novel presents a dual perspective: readers can immerse themselves in the unfolding events, following the sensational plot of the story, while simultaneously recognizing that the presented reality is a constructed puzzle. According to Kokot, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* not only entertains with its murder plot but also invites readers to actively engage in solving the puzzle – a precursor to conventions of detective fiction.

In turn, Rebecca Boylan focuses on the cultural significance of hair and on the symbolic implications of Victorian women deciding to cut their hair, portraying

the act as their paradoxical ruin and resurrection. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *The Woodlanders* (1887), characters like Tess and Marty South face sexual assault (the former literally, the latter by economic class injustice), leading them to cut their hair as a desperate act of self-preservation, but also self-effacement. Boylan's essay includes an insightful analysis of Hardy's two poems connected to the novels ("Tess's Lament" and "Marty South's Reverie"), shedding new light on the two heroines and exposing the mistreatment of working class women in his era. Additionally, Boylan studies depictions of women's hair in selected Victorian paintings and photographs, e.g., in Frederick Leighton's *Flaming June*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*, William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*, or Julia Margaret Cameron's *Pomona*.

Dorota Babilas's text "'A whole cat world': Domesticity, Consumerism, and Insanity in Cat Paintings of Louis Wain" examines the artist's quirky, anthropomorphised and even psychedelic depictions of cats, arguing against the widespread tendency to see these images as a testimony to the painter's schizophrenia. She explores Wain's art in the context of the genre of animal paintings, popular in Britain at least since the eighteenth century, and Wain's biography, particularly his precarious health, and concludes that his prolific artistic output can be regarded as a culmination of a certain cultural tendency, combining idealisation of bourgeois lifestyle with commercialised, consumerist attitudes.

Trish Baer's "Under the Influence: Charles Altamont Doyle and 'The Fairy Whisper'" follows up with her discussion of artistic expression influenced by bodily disease, using the example of the illustrator Charles Altamont Doyle (the father of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes' fame) and his tragic struggle with alcoholism. Doyle's depictions of fairies may serve as a metaphor for his mental turmoil against the backdrop of Victorian religious beliefs.

Last but not least, Dorota Osńska explores the interaction between text and image in her chapter "Between Musicality and Materiality: Harry Clarke's Illustrations for *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1928)". Prompted by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's theory of bitextuality, her interpretation focuses on the dialogue between the illustrations created by Harry Clarke and Algernon Charles Swinburne's poems, in the volume published in 1923. In his designs, Clarke, an early twentieth-century illustrator, frequently diverges from Swinburne's poetic narratives and becomes the poet's interpreter. Far from being merely a material embodiment of the poet's vision, his illustrations serve as a modernist reinvention of Victorian poetry, yet foreshadowing the practices of visual storytelling which are present in contemporary culture.

On the whole, the essays in the volume offer diverse critical perspectives on the representations of body, body in motion, embodiment, mind, mental processes and mental states (including perception, pain/pleasure experience, emotion, memory) in the 18th and 19th century British literature and culture, focusing on poetry, prose,

the visual arts, and performances of the period. We are confident that they will provide intellectually stimulating reading, fostering scholarly discussions and insights.

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Mary Jacobus

University of Cambridge

## Rambling and Romanticism: The Right to Roam

### Prelude

“’Tis against that / Which we are fighting.”

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XI. 519–20.<sup>1</sup>

These fighting words appear in the French Revolutionary book of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. The speaker is Wordsworth’s friend, Captain Michel Beaupuis, French patriot and revolutionary sympathizer. During their rambles through the Loire valley in 1792, walking and talking politics and philosophy, they encounter a girl listlessly grazing her cow. Like many of Wordsworth’s solitaires, she is almost, but not quite, motionless:

.....we chanced  
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,  
Who crept along fitting her languid self  
Unto a heifer’s motion – by a cord  
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane  
Its sustenance, while the girl with her two hands  
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood  
Of solitude – and at the sight my friend  
In agitation said, ‘’Tis against that  
Which we are fighting’ .... (*Prelude*, IX. 511–20)

A representative figure of *ancien regime* deprivation, the hunger-bitten girl is swiftly subsumed into Wordsworth’s utopian belief that revolution will eradicate poverty, and along with it “all institutes ... / That legalized exclusion” (*Prelude*, IX. 527–28).

Unlike Wordsworth and Beaupuis, the hunger-bitten girl is not rambling, but creeping. If she could speak, what would she say?

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations are from the 1805 text of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*.

\* \* \*

Wordsworth's hunger-bitten girl troublingly embodies the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's "bare life" [*la nuda vita*], the stripping away of the attributes and forms of political life.<sup>2</sup> To be excluded from land-owning (a peasantry without pasture) is to be deprived of the means of livelihood, if not of life itself. In the context of Wordsworth's late eighteenth-century England, the hunger-bitten girl might well have been a casualty of the process that culminated in the Enclosure Acts of 1809. The aim of Enclosure was to bring unproductive land (in practice, common land) under intensive cultivation. The modern Right to Roam campaign protests the continuing privatization of the English countryside – the banning of "wild" camping in National Parks, the closure of public footpaths across privately-owned land, the impact of infrastructure projects like railways and motorways. Struggles over access to the countryside have a history, even if once linked to survival rather than leisure.

The obvious meaning of "rambling" denotes recreational wandering from place to place – "to wander or travel in a free unrestrained manner, without a definite direction" (*OED*). But it has an additional meaning, wandering from topic to topic in speech or writing, like someone delirious or deranged: "unstructured, aimless, incoherent; straying from one subject to another" (*OED*). The word "roam" – "To wander, rove, or ramble; to walk, move about, or travel aimlessly or unsystematically" (*OED*) can also be used figuratively of thought. A word of obscure medieval origin (perhaps from the Old English *ramian*; the act of wandering about), it brings with it a disquieting link to the Old Norse *reimast* (to haunt). The meanings and etymology of rambling and roaming suggests that language, not only protest movements, contains forgotten meanings – just as places may be haunted by a forgotten past.

The "and" of my title ("Rambling and Romanticism") flags up the well-trodden link between Romantic walking and writing.<sup>3</sup> I will be revisiting three Romantic writers in whose work these different senses of rambling (denoting both walking and writing) converge, diverge, and come together again. First, William Cowper (1731–1800): Evangelical poet of the countryside, confined in a mental asylum for two years, living a retired life under the continuing threat of breakdown. His blank verse permeates autobiographical poems like *The Prelude* and the Coleridgean "conversation" poem. Book I of Cowper's *The Task* (1785) is called "The Sofa" after an upholstered item of drawing-room furniture associated with indolence. From light-hearted beginnings, *The Task* expands to include serious social comment,

<sup>2</sup> For Agamben's concept of "bare life" [*la nuda vita*], see Agamben 8: "The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, ...[i.e.] exclusion/inclusion."

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Solnit, Langan, and Jarvis. Jarvis is one of few Romantic scholars to acknowledge Cowper's contribution (79–83). Langan (59) uses as one of her epigraphs an anecdote about Wordsworth battering down a wall across an ancient right of way.

along with Cowper's own reflections and memories. Secondly, the "peasant" poet, John Clare (1793–1864), whose life and poetry are inextricably bound up with the effects on the rural poor of the early nineteenth-century Enclosure Acts, which deprived villagers of common land for growing their crops or grazing their animals. Enclosure also changed the landscape in ways that made it almost unrecognizable. For Clare, this was a personal disaster as well as a source of protest-poetry.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, Jane Austen (1775–1817), whose novels take place against the background of the "property" landscape belonging to the land-owning gentry during the Napoleonic Wars. Pedestrian excursions provide access to the inner lives of Austen's characters, while allowing the reader to overhear their conversations. The quintessential example is the walk that takes place in chapter 10 of *Persuasion* (1816), during which the reader overhears the musings of Austen's heroine, Anne Eliot, who doesn't (as we say) "have a life" apart from her inner life.

The contemporary Right to Roam campaign takes on new meaning in light of these histories of confinement and exclusion. One could add to this list the dangerous cross-border walks undertaken by today's refugees. The Romantic uses of poetry include both "cure" and consolation, pastime and occupation. I will be especially concerned with poetry as a vehicle for thought. In Freud's talking cure, wandering words (free association) not only find a mind; they also grow one. Not for nothing is *The Prelude* – a poem about its own origins – subtitled *The Growth of a Poet's Mind*. To Agamben's bio-politics, one could add writing for one's life.<sup>5</sup>

## Cowper's Stranger

"... prophesying still, / Though still deceived, some stranger's near approach."  
William Cowper (*Task*, IV. 294–95)<sup>6</sup>

In Cowper's *Task*, poetry as therapeutic occupation becomes a form of self-reckoning—ostensibly relaxed, yet exacting; a task is a kind of "tax" (etymologically, from *taxare*, to impose a tax). In the 1760s, Cowper fell into depression and attempted suicide; a second breakdown followed in the early 1770s. His mother died when he was a child; as an adult, he was cared for by a series of maternal figures. After his first breakdown, Cowper spent two years in Dr Cotton's Asylum

<sup>4</sup> Barrell (94–7, 98–109) provides an authoritative account of the impact of Enclosure on the English landscape and Helpston, Clare's native village.

<sup>5</sup> For "the relation of poetry and poetic identity to life and survival", see Guyer 26. I am indebted to Guyer's redefinition of biopolitics as biopoetics.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from Cowper's *Task* and from his poems and hymns are from *The Poems of William Cowper*.

at St. Albans, where an enlightened regime consisted of occupational therapy and personal supervision, with optional Bible-reading. Cowper's Evangelical Christianity was a lifeline – but not always. His periodic bouts of despair produced his anguished cry of abandonment in “The Cast-away” (1799) – “We perish'd, each, alone; / But I, beneath a rougher sea, / And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he” (ll .64–66). The first of his *Olney Hymns* (1779), “Walking with God” – “Oh, for a closer walk with God” – remains one of his most popular and yearning hymns: “Where is the Blessedness I knew / When first I saw the Lord?” (ll. 1, 5–6).

*The Task* recounts the nothing-much of retired country life, couched in conversational, sometimes moralizing blank verse. Cowper's account of his daily occupations – walking, gardening, playing cards – is interspersed with his views on a range of topical issues: the inhumanity of slavery, the pulpit as a means of reformation, commercialized religion, indiscipline in the universities, the evils of monarchy and arbitrarily waged war, British Liberty contrasted with French Liberty, and cruelty to animals. During the 1780s, Cowper's friend Lady Austen – no relation to Jane – suggested that he write a light-hearted poem and “gave him the SOFA for a subject”. Cowper recalls: “having much leisure, [he] connected another subject with it, and, pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length ... a serious affair!” (*Poems* ii. [113]). *The Task* uses (too) much leisure to pursue Cowper's associative train of thought and distinctive turn of mind: “a serious affair!” indeed.

Book I of *The Task* opens with a mock-epic history of sitting, from three-legged stools to the upholstered sofa. After defining idleness as an urban affliction, like the spleen (that eighteenth-century malaise combining low spirits and dyspepsia), or like gout (too rich a diet and too much sitting), Cowper gets off the sofa and goes for a walk. ‘Gouty limb / Though on a SOFA may I never feel’ –

For I have loved the rural walk through lanes  
 Of grassy swarth close cropt by nibbling sheep,  
 And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
 Of thorny boughs: have loved the rural walk  
 O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,  
 E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds  
 T'enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames,  
 And still remember, nor without regret ... (*Task*, I. 108–16)

“And still remember ....” What does memory bring? “hours that sorrow since has much endear'd.” *The Task* backs into its subject – the gap dividing past and present – between the thorny hedgerows of a double negative (“nor without regret”). Cowper's recollection of a schoolboy's truant ramble has the elegiac cadences of times lost: “How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed, ... I fed on scarlet

hips and stoney haws ...” (*Task*, I. 118–20). For all its light-hearted beginnings, *The Task* has a strain of elegy.

Cowper’s middle-aged poetical persona still loves his daily walks, with their familiar sights and sounds—hedgerows and cottages, church towers and spires; birdsong, cawing rooks, and distant church bells. Like the “revisit” poem (think of “Tintern Abbey”) that affirms enduring attachment to a place while acknowledging sadness and change in the intervening years, *The Task* affirms that what once gave pleasure, does so still. At times Cowper’s routine risks sounding too pedestrian altogether. But repetition is part of the treatment. Cowper needs to keep moving: “By ceaseless action, all that is, subsists, / Constant rotation of th’unwearing wheel / That nature rides upon ...” (*Task*, I. 367–69). Walking is associated with nature’s own movement—foot after foot, breath after breath: “The play of lungs inhaling and again / Respiring freely the fresh air ...” (*Task*, I. 137–38). Blank verse too is a kind of motion, with its interplay of propulsion and pause, the slight interruption of the line-end, and the intake and exhalation of breath. Like the lyric, ambulatory poetry thinks out loud in the presence of another.<sup>7</sup>

Cowper was passionately committed to the Abolitionist cause; Evangelical opposition to slavery played a part in the eventual abolition of the English slave trade in 1807. The opening of Book II (“The Time Piece”) laments slavery as the worst of all crimes against humanity: “The nat’ral bond / Of brotherhood is sever’d” when man finds his fellow man “guilty of a skin / Not color’d like his own”. Cowper attributes racial oppression to difference parsed as inferiority, combined with “pow’r / T’inforce the wrong” (*Task*, II. 9–10, 12–14). Worst of all is subjecting one’s fellow men to cruelty that one would weep to see inflicted on animals. Cowper views slavery as a shame-inducing spectacle of pain: “what man seeing this, / And having human feelings, does not blush / And hang his head, to think himself a man?” (*Task*, II. 24–29). Slavery on English soil had been legally banned since 1772, but the English slave trade continued for twenty years. Even after Abolition in 1807, plantation slavery lasted another thirty years.

Cowper’s reparative undertaking in *The Task* is most visible in its final Book, “The Winter Morning Walk at Noon”, where sound and sympathy chime: “There is in souls a sympathy with sounds, / And as the mind is pitch’d the ear is pleas’d ... / Some chord in unison with what we hear / Is touched within us, and the heart replies” (*Task*, VI. 1–5). The sound that touches the poet into sympathetic response – church bells – opens the doors of memory:

How soft the music of those village bells  
Falling at intervals upon the ear

---

<sup>7</sup> See Shell 9–17 for scansion, breathing, and the caesura; for the link between walking and talking, from Wordsworthian pacing to Freudian free association, see Shell 72–87.

In cadence sweet! now dying all away....

...

With easy force it opens all the cells  
Where mem'ry slept. (*Task*, VI. 6–12)

Casting his mind back over “the windings of [his] way through many years” (*Task*, VI. 18), Cowper reproaches himself for time misspent or happiness missed: “How readily we wish time spent revoked ... where once ... / We miss'd that happiness we might have found ...” (*Task*, VI. 25–28). Not just a mother early lost, but a stern and intimidating father, never fully loved while alive: “We loved, but not enough ...” (*Task*, VI. 37). As if prompted by this expression of regret, the winter walk is all blue skies and spring warmth – woods stilled, robin red-breast singing as it flits from twig to twig; meditative silence. Time stops, the restless quest for knowledge falls away, and thought begins: “No noise is here, or none that hinders thought ... Meditation here / May think down hours to moments” (*Task*, VI. 76, 84–85).

Time-arrested moments in *The Task* are the intervals when something happens – thought, roaming or retrospective. In “The Winter Evening” (Book IV), Cowper describes how indoor fire-gazing produces “a waking dream of houses, tow'rs, / Trees, churches, and strange visages express'd / in the red cinders ... myself creating what I saw” (IV. 287–90). In this phantasmagoric landscape, the strangest visage is his own. The superstition associated with the films of soot hanging on the bars of the grate signals “some stranger's near approach”:

Nor less amused have I quiescent watch'd  
The sooty films that play upon the bars  
Pendulous, and foreboding in the view  
Of superstition prophesying still  
Though still deceived, some stranger's near approach. (*Task*, IV. 291-95)

Quiescence heralds a snooze and a vacant mind: “the understanding takes repose / In indolent vacuity of thought ...” (*Task*, IV. 296–98). Outside the frost rages. But entry is denied: “How calm is my recess, and how the frost / Raging abroad ... endear[s] the silence and the warmth enjoyed within” (*Task*, IV. 308–10). Thought stops, as if to prevent the outdoors getting in.

Coleridge extends Cowper's fireside reverie in “Frost at Midnight” (1798). Fire-gazing presages the arrival of a long-awaited visitor. Seeing the fluttering film on the grate, the poet remembers his London schooldays:

Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,  
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.  
Methinks its motion in this hush of nature  
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live ...

....  
 .... But O! how oft,  
 How oft, at school, with most believing mind,  
 Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,  
 To watch that fluttering *stranger!* ...  
 (“Frost at Midnight”, ll.15-18, 24-27)<sup>8</sup>

The unquiet film announces the arrival of the poet’s other, summoned by memory’s restless movement. The “fluttering *stranger*” brings dreams and unforeseen potential as the schoolboy waits, unknowing, for his future paternity: “But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags / Of ancient mountain ...” (ll. 59–61).

Beyond memory, beyond the interchange between poet and second self, Coleridge’s benediction to the sleeping babe imagines a seasonal melding (“Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee ...”) that spans summer greenness and winter snow, rain drops falling from the eaves, and their silent transformation into icicles: “Or if the secret ministry of frost / Shall hang them up in silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon” (ll. 77–79). The secret ministry of frost signals the arrival of Cowper’s “*stranger*” – reverie, transforming disquiet into an image of magical strangeness and beauty; a mind in communication with itself.<sup>9</sup>

## Clare at the World’s End

....*I had imagined that the world’s end was at the orizon  
 & that a days journey was able to find it*  
 John Clare, *The Autobiography* (Prose 13)

Written during the mid-1820s and addressed to his children, Clare’s fragmentary autobiography contains a vivid account of how, as a child, he was lost for a day when he wandered beyond the familiar surroundings of his native village, Helpston. The passage is worth quoting at length for what it says about Clare’s precarious hold on the external world:

I loved this solitary disposition from a boy & felt a curiosity to wander about spots where I had never been before I remember one incident of this feeling when I was very young it cost my parents some anxiety it was summer & I started off in the

<sup>8</sup> The text of “Frost at Midnight” is that of the 1798 version. The passage about the film underwent many revisions.

<sup>9</sup> For the psychoanalytic concept of reverie, see Bion 35–36, where the mother’s capacity for reverie is crucial for transforming the infant’s raw experience into thought.

morning to get rotten sticks from the woods but I had a feeling to wander about the fields & I indulged it I had often seen the large heath called Emmonsales stretching its yellow furze from my eye into unknown solitudes ... and my curiosity urgd me to steal an opportunity to explore it that morning I had imagined that the world's end was at the orizon & that a days journey was able to find it so I went on with my heart full of hope's pleasures & discoveries expecting when I got to the brink of the world that I could look down like looking into a large pit & see into its secrets the same as I believed I could see heaven by looking into the water So I eagerly wanderd on & rambled along the furze the whole day till I got out of my knowledge when the very wild flowers seemd to forget me & I imagin'd they were the inhabitants of new countrys the very sun seemd to be a new one & shining in a different quarter of the sky still I felt no fear my wonder-seeking happiness had no room for it I was finding new wonders every minute & was walking in a new world & expecting the world's end bye & bye but it never came often wondering to myself that I had not found the edge of the old one the sky still touch'd the ground in the distance & my childish wisdom was puzzld in perplexitys night came on before I had time to fancy the morning was by which made me hasten to seek home I knew not which way to turn but chance put me in the right track & when I got back into my own fieldds I did not know them everything looked so different ... (*Prose* 13)<sup>10</sup>

An imaginative child ventures beyond the limits of his small world, discovers a new one filled with wonders, and finds the fields changed when he returns home: "I did not know them everything looked so different". A rift emerges between the landscape he knew and the disorienting "solitudes" beyond. This small adventure anticipates how Clare would become untethered from his childhood landscape. The close-looking in his poems about small animals and birds (especially birds' nests) anchor him.<sup>11</sup> But when familiar things drop away, he is lost—at or beyond the world's end.

Clare's childhood experience differs tellingly from a spot of time in *The Prelude*; compare Wordsworth's description of bird's nesting on the Lake District cliffs, when transgression becomes – figuratively speaking – uplifting, as the wind sustains him: "the sky seemed not as sky / Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds! (*Prel.* I. 348–50)<sup>12</sup> But when Clare loses his footing, his world is all turned around: "the very sun seemd to be a new one & shining in a different quarter of the sky".

<sup>10</sup> The spelling is Clare's. This passage has been exhaustively discussed in terms of the link between Clare's sense of identity and his experience of displacement, among others by Guyer 84–87; Barrell 120–22; and Bate 41–42.

<sup>11</sup> Clare also writes of hunting "Pooty shells" (snail shells—another small container) in his natural history letters of the mid-1820s (*Prose* 182–83).

<sup>12</sup> Clare's "Autobiography" also records a perilous birds' nesting experience: "there I hung with my hands & feet dangling in the air I expected every moment to drop and be pashd to pieces ..." (*Prose* 15).



Looking for the world's end suggests a dangerous probing of limits, as if the pit might hold an unbearable sight. Clare's related belief that he could find heaven by looking into the water carries the same risk of falling (in) – his autobiography describes two episodes of near-drowning (*Prose* 14–15). No longer able to tell up from down, the child risks losing his footing altogether.

In *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* (1972), John Barrell discusses Clare's autobiographical account as an experience not only of being out of his familiar, known place (“till I got out of my knowledge”), but altogether beyond knowledge, as if being out-of-body puts him out of his mind (Barrell 120–21). Sarah Guyer, in *Reading with John Clare* (2015), sums it up like this: “Clare's experience is one of the profound loss of orientation itself in a movement that can have no end because the destination is always at a distance” (Guyer 86). His disorientation – “walking in a new world & expecting the world's end bye & bye but it never came” – produced lasting perplexity. Where will it end? The wonder-seeking child might as well have fallen down, or in, or up. When he returns, he and his home are unrecognizable.

Another way of understanding Clare's account of going missing would be as a “screen memory”, date-stamped with later experience: the child who went out to gather sticks returns as a man to find that the Enclosure legislation of 1809 has finally been enacted. Or perhaps Enclosure prompted the memory – by the time Clare wrote his autobiography during the 1820s, his childhood village really had been rendered unrecognizable. Debates about whether Enclosure impoverished, or merely further impoverished, the rural poor of Helpston are endemic in Clare criticism. As Jonathan Bate writes in his biography: “For Clare himself, enclosure infringed the right to roam . . .” (Bate 50). Land once held in common for cultivation or grazing was enclosed, small parcels of land were brought together under private ownership, and commons and waste land targeted. Enclosure deprived villagers of pasture for their animals and fuel for their homes, moved boundaries, felled landmark trees, diverted lanes, and straightened brooks.

Clare's “Remembrance” compares Helpston to a landscape levelled by the Napoleonic wars: “Inclosure like Buonaparte let not a thing remain / It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill . . .” (“Remembrances”, ll.67–68).<sup>13</sup> “The Lament of Swordy Well” itemizes the losses that pushed villagers into the poor house; as for many without any financial margin, destitution was always around the corner. Here, the very body of the land laments having been turned inside out, bones picked as if it were a corpse:

The silver springs grown naked dykes  
Scarce own a bunch of rushes

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<sup>13</sup> Quotations of Clare's poetry are from Clare, *Major Works*.

When grain got high the tasteless tykes  
 Grubbed up trees banks and bushes  
 And me they turned me inside out  
 For sand and grit and stones  
 And turned my old green hills about  
 And pickt my very bones

There was a time my bit of ground  
 Made freeman of the slave  
 The ass no pindard dared to pound  
 When I his supper gave  
 The gypsy camp was not affraid  
 I made his dwelling free  
 Till vile enclosure came and made  
 A parish slave of me. (ll. 57–64, 177–84)<sup>14</sup>

Using the language of radical protest in “The Mores”, Clare wrote: “Inclosure came and trampled on the grave / Of labours rights and left the poor a slave” (ll. 19–20). Where once sheep and cattle roamed freely, birds roosted and wildflowers flourished, “Fence now meets fence in owners little bounds .... On paths to freedom and to childhood dear / A board sticks up to notice ‘no road here’” (ll. 47, 69–70).<sup>15</sup>

“No road here” blocks the path to childhood. Clare’s sense of being cut off from his past rhymed with the dead-end of his life. Always close to the poverty-line, he worked intermittently as a laborer to maintain his family of seven children, even after the success of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820). Admirers, patrons, and publishers did not always pay up. In 1832, with help from Earl Fitzwilliam, Clare was able to move to another cottage three miles away, in Northborough. The move represented a step towards financial independence; the cottage had its own small plot of land and grazing rights. But it intensified his sense of dislocation. In “The Flitting” (1832) he uses the same terms that he had used to describe his experience of being lost as a child: “The sun e’en seems to loose its way / Nor knows the quarter it is in” (ll.55–36). The entire object world becomes de-personified: “Strange scenes mere shadows are to me / Vague unpersonifying things .... Here every tree is strange to me / All foreign things where ere I go” (ll. 89–90, 97–98).

To be unpersonified means to become strange, insubstantial, ghostly; the world that Clare had known as a child no longer anchors his identity. Now that the fashion

<sup>14</sup> “Swordy” is pronounced “swaddy;” a “pindar “or pinder was a person employed to impound cattle).

<sup>15</sup> Burnside 79–96 makes the link between Enclosure and modern projects (windfarms, solar power) that encroach on the landscape.

for peasant poets had passed, he felt himself to be truly a nonentity. In 1837, he became ill, depression and anxiety alternating with manic violence and the fixed delusion that he was married to his boyhood sweetheart, Mary Joyce, as well to as his real-life wife, Patty. His London doctor, the Dickensian-ly named Dr. Skrimshire, certified him as insane and arranged for him to be re-homed in Dr. Allen's asylum, High Beech, in Epping Forest. Dr. Matthew Allen – author of *Cases of Insanity* (1830) and *Classification of the Insane* (1837) – diagnosed a mind “suspended in its movements by the oppressive and permanent state of anxiety, and fear, and vexation” produced by poverty and neglect.<sup>16</sup>

In anti-psychiatric mode, Roy Porter asserts that Clare wasn't confined because he was mad, but mad because he was confined.<sup>17</sup> Modeled on the famous Retreat in York, the therapeutic regime of High Beech included gardening, card-games, and country walks (compare Cowper's soothing occupations). Clare was treated like a privileged paying guest, allowed to walk freely in the grounds and surrounding woods, and encouraged to write poetry and help in the garden. During his three years there, he wrote torrents of cynical and bawdy stanzas modelled on Byron's wildly successful *Don Juan*, maintaining his delusion of having two wives (Mary Joyce had died meanwhile). A week after his forty-eighth birthday, Clare absconded from “the madhouse”. He laid plans to walk the eighty miles home after a Gypsy whom he met in Epping Forest showed him the right direction (Clare had a fondness for Gypsies and enjoyed spending time in their encampments).<sup>18</sup> He took with him a straw hat, left behind by the Gypsies.

Clare's account of his walk is preserved in the record of his three-day ordeal that he wrote after reaching home.<sup>19</sup> During his time on the road, Clare seems to have reverted to an earlier identity: that of a penniless laborer tramping in search of work. Again, the details are well-known. Without food, shelter, or money, he hardly ate, except for an occasional pub meal of bread and cheese. Later he grazed on roadside grass that tasted like bread; he was so hungry that he swallowed the tobacco quids he chewed. He slept rough in sheds or porches, or in the lee of a barn. All he knew (and sometimes he was unsure about it) was that he had to keep walking north on the Great North Road.

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<sup>16</sup> See Bate 421–32 for Allen's asylum and its background. Allen's diagnosis appeared in a fund-raising letter to the *Times* (Bate 430). Clare had been a brief sensation in London during the mid 1820s, where he met major Romantic movement figures (Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, and Coleridge).

<sup>17</sup> See Porter, 259–78. Porter provides an authoritative account of Clare's diagnosis and treatment. For a psychoanalytic reading of Clare's poetry, see also Phillips 178–88.

<sup>18</sup> See Clare, *Prose* 25, 36–38; Clare refers to Enclosure having left Gypsies with nothing but narrow lanes for their encampments (*Prose* 38).

<sup>19</sup> See “Recollections &c of Journey from Essex” (*Prose* 244–50).

Recognizing that he was confused and down-and-out, people who met Clare on the road tried to help him, telling him where he could find a meal and a bed for the night. A group riding in a cart clubbed together to throw him a few pennies. A man on horseback passed him on the second day, said “here’s another of the broken down haymakers”, and tossed him a penny to buy half-a-pint of beer. A Gypsy girl showed him a short cut and advised him to pad his straw hat to make himself less conspicuous (“You’ll be noticed”). Hardly able to walk, “footfounded & broken down”, Clare rested on piles of stones used for road-repair, walking by night when he could find nowhere to sleep. Towards the end, he lay down on a gravel causeway and dozed: “a young woman ... came out of a house & said ‘poor creature’ & another more elderly [mistaking him for a beggar] said ‘o he shams’ But when I got up the latter said ‘O no he don’t’ as I hobbled along very lame ....” (*Prose* 249)

News of Clare’s flight reached his wife Patty who met him in a cart and took him home. But: “I am homeless at home” (*Prose* 250). After six months, Clare was re-certified, and admitted to Northampton Insane Asylum, where he remained for the rest of his life. Believing himself to be Byron (the peasant poet’s aristocratic antithesis), his identity dispersed across the Romantic literary field, he adopted a series of multiple personalities that included being a prize fighter and winning the battle of Waterloo, where he claimed that his head had been shot off.<sup>20</sup> In 1841 Clare had written: “A very good commonplace counsel is *Self-Identity* to bid our own hearts not to forget our own selves .... forget thyself and ... thou art nothing but a living-dead man dwelling among shadows and falsehood” (*Prose* 239). A non-person.

“I am”, Clare’s desolate Northampton Asylum poem, describes himself as an insubstantial shadow, tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,—  
 Into the living sea of waking dreams,  
 Where there is neither sense of life or joys,  
 But the vast shipwreck of my lifes esteems;  
 Even the dearests, that I love the best  
 Are strange—nay rather stranger than the rest. (ll.7–12)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> According to the superintendent of the Northampton Asylum, P .R. Nesbitt, “[Clare] may be said to have lost his own personal identity as with all the gravity of truth he would maintain that he had written the works of Byron, and Sir Walter Scott, that he was Nelson and Wellington, that he had fought and won the battle of Waterloo, that he had had his head short off at this battle, whilst he was totally unable to explain the process by which it had been again affixed to his body” (Porter, 265).

<sup>21</sup> Reading “I am” as “a poem of nonpersonification”, Guyer argues: “we can see the subjective predicament (the failure of recognition) emerge as indistinguishable from a poetic predicament” (Guyer 50–55).

The lyric poem, once a refuge like the birds' nests of his childhood, has become a self-consuming artifact: "I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows; / My friends forsake me like a memory lost: / I am the self-consumer of my woes ..." (ll.1-3).

After twenty years in Northampton Asylum, Clare told a visitor: "they have cut off my head, and picked out all the letters of the alphabet – all the vowels and consonants – and brought them out through my ears; and then they want me to write poetry! I can't do it" (*John Clare in Context*, 10). The metaphorically unlettered peasant poet feels himself to be literally un-lettered, deprived not only of personhood but of the very means to think and write. For Clare, the alphabet – the elementary components of language that link him to himself and to others – has been attacked ("picked out") and extracted through his ears. His pain is evacuated, but at the cost of losing his mind.<sup>22</sup>

Tracing Clare's route out of Epping Forest to Northborough in *Edge of the Orison* (2005), the writer Ian Sinclair tried to find Clare's starting point, High Beech. He was soon confronted by developers' signs. Fittingly, his memorial walk turned into Clare's epitaph ("no road here"):

PRIVATE PROPERTY, NO PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY. Padlocked gates across ancient footpaths. Dry flowers woven into mesh fences. Rain-erased memorial labels. Smeared ink of lost names. WALTHAM POINT NEW 48 ACRE INDUSTRIAL PARK. Tolerated edge-land irrigated by a blurred section of orbital motorway.... (Sinclair 128–29).

## Austen in a Nutshell

*This nut ... is still in possession of all the happiness  
that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of.*

Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (59)

Austen's *Persuasion* (1816) contains a precisely calibrated critique of the tyranny of familial control over affairs of the heart. It is also Austen's most lyrical novel. As readers will recall, Anne Eliot had been pressured into giving up her lover, Frederick Wentworth, eight years before. She was too young—nineteen, and the daughter of a snobbish baronet; while he had yet to make his mark as a naval officer during the Napoleonic Wars. When he returns as a self-made man in search of a wife, Anne (still unmarried) has become an indispensable aunt, living life

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<sup>22</sup> See Bion (1967) for "the destructive attacks which the patient makes on anything which is felt to have the function of linking one object to another" (93).

in the shadows. She observes the eddies of love, rivalry, and marital exasperation, but is herself overlooked. Living among others, she often overhears conversations without taking part – the silent third in any couple. This makes her subject-position close to the author’s. But even she can be targeted by Austenian irony, the subtle stylistic cues that make Anne a filter but not the final arbiter of meaning.

We access Anne’s consciousness via the poetry she quotes while walking in the autumnal countryside.<sup>23</sup> The previous chapter ends with Austen’s lightly ironized account of Anne’s self-management under emotional duress (Captain Wentworth has quietly removed a rambunctious nephew from her back): “She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous ... but so it was; and it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her” (*Persuasion* 54). The following chapter describes the events of an autumn walk that includes Captain Wentworth, Charles Musgrove and his wife (Anne’s querulous sister), the two young Musgrove sisters vying for Captain Wentworth’s attention, and Anne herself. The undeclared goal of the walk is to restore good relations with a Musgrove cousin and neighbor, the suitor of one of the Musgrove sisters, who has been put out by their joint admiration for Captain Wentworth and needs to be brought round. All this Anne observes.

Meanwhile, “Anne’s object was, not to be in the way of any body” (*Persuasion* 56). Ostensibly, the pleasure she takes in the November walk is seasonal. But she is keenly attuned to the courtship issues playing out around her, especially to Captain Wentworth’s nearness:

Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling. She occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations; but it was not possible, that when within reach of Captain Wentworth’s conversation with either of the Miss Musgroves, she should not try to hear it .... (*Persuasion* 56)

Austen’s language slips imperceptibly into the descriptive and affective language of “the thousand poetical descriptions” that Anne (whose mind has taste and tenderness) repeats to herself – poetical descriptions often excerpted in the anthologies of the period. We don’t need to look them up.<sup>24</sup> All we need to know is that Anne (prematurely on the shelf at twenty-seven) finds comfort in “such like musings and

<sup>23</sup> I have written elsewhere about this scene in the larger context of *Persuasion*, drawing on a Winnicottian frame of reference (Jacobus 237–66).

<sup>24</sup> Austen’s own favorites included Cowper; see Jacobus. 241–51 for the poetry Anne (and Austen) has in mind.

quotations” and that they are her way of being alone in company, like a someone wearing headphones and listening to their favorite playlist to get away from a family that (so Anne complains to herself) always has to do everything together.

As the walk unfolds, there is enough in the way of exchanges between Captain Wentworth and Louisa, the more spirited of the two Musgrove sisters, to cross the sound-barrier. Louisa enthuses that if she loved a man, nothing would ever separate her from him. Captain Wentworth pointedly honors her enthusiasm. Enough said:

Anne could not immediately fall into a quotation again. The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by—unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the image of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together, blessed her memory. (*Persuasion* 57)

Blessings they may be, but these tender sonnets are a tad predictable, with their apt analogies of the declining year and happiness (“all gone together”). In a later chapter, we learn that Anne is well able to discuss the most recent and fashionable poems by Scott and Byron. Here, she favors the moralizing sentiment of the earlier turn-of-the-century loco-descriptive sonnet. Austen is gently sending up her taste in poetry – and its uses. Poetry can only defend her so far when it comes to overhearing other people’s conversations.

As the group reconfigures and the couples re-form, Captain Wentworth and Louisa wander down the narrow path within a double hedgerow. Anne, seated unobtrusively on a bank beside the hedgerow, finds herself again overhearing Captain Wentworth, this time praising firmness of mind in a woman. He gives Louisa his advice – “let those who would be happy be firm”. He plucks a hazelnut as a teaching aid:

“Here is a nut,” said he, catching one down from an upper bough. “To exemplify – a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where. – This nut,” he continued, with playful solemnity, – “while so many of its brethren have fallen and been trodden underfoot, is still in possession of all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of.” (*Persuasion* 59)

Captain Wentworth’s teacherly mode is playful but serious. Austen slyly uses it to smuggle not just a nut but a metaphor into her usually un-metaphorical prose: “If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind” (*Persuasion* 59). Readers will recall that Louisa’s “powers of mind” take a dent from which she never fully recovers when she jumps off a breakwater at Lyme during another group trip.

And what about Anne’s mind? Is she the antithesis of the nut, with its glossy exterior and unpunctured shell? Captain Wentworth implies that she hasn’t weathered

well. Hidden on the other side of the hedgerow, “[Anne’s] own emotions still kept her fixed. She had much to recover from, before she could move” (*Persuasion* 59). She hears that Captain Wentworth still smarts from her earlier rejection. But Anne is also shown to be immobilized by her past love for him. Has it been a good thing for her to remain stopped at an earlier stage in her own development? Suppose the nutshell was less confining, or even broken open, like Louisa’s head? The hazelnut is not just a teaching-aid, but also a container—a potential space, within which growth might occur.<sup>25</sup> The novel’s harvest is the change in both lovers’ minds. Anne is changed by her years of solitude (and Captain Wentworth may be changed by the Napoleonic Wars). By the end of the novel, Anne’s mind is firmer – not just firmed-up, but re-affirmed.

The walk in *Persuasion* functions like Captain Wentworth’s hazelnut – the glossy shell must be opened if the kernel is to grow. Austen implies that Anne’s poetical musings have held her in a state of perpetual mourning and that she must come out of her shell if she is to reclaim happiness on her own terms. In a nutshell: Austen makes her characters take a walk, gives the reader access to their consciousness, then rewards their growth with the predictable resolution of the marriage plot: “Who can be in doubt of what followed?” (*Persuasion* 65). The walk in *Persuasion* releases the hidden tenderness that still links two seemingly estranged lovers. A taste as sweet as any autumnal hazelnut to the belated Romantic reader.

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Adorno’s essay “On Lyric Poetry and Society” argues that the relation between lyric and society “should lead not away from the work of art but deeper into it” (Adorno 38). A poem is not just the expression of individual feelings but participates in something larger; it makes manifest what can’t otherwise be grasped. For Adorno, thought is not extrinsic to the work of art, but something that it demands and does not exhaust: “once thought has been called into play by the poem it does not let itself be stopped at the poem’s behest” (Adorno 38). I want to enlist Adorno’s bid to redeem the utopian potential of the German Romantic lyric in order to recover my starting point: the silence of Wordsworth’s hunger-bitten girl.<sup>26</sup>

For Adorno, “the poem [is] a philosophical sundial telling the time of history” (Adorno 46). He argues that lyric subjectivity expresses antagonism to things as they are: “In its protest the poem expresses the dream of a world in which things would

<sup>25</sup> For Bion’s concept of container/contained, see Bion (1962) 89: “Container and contained are susceptible of conjunction and permeation by emotion. Thus conjoined or permeated or both they change in a manner usually described as growth.”

<sup>26</sup> See Culler 330–36 for a sceptical reading of “On Lyric Poetry and Society”. Adorno’s examples include walking poems: Eduard Mörike’s “On a Walking Tour” and Goethe’s “Wanderers Night Song” (Adorno 41).



be different” (Adorno 40). If the Romantic lyric takes part in the opposition to the process of reification – a process that Adorno identifies as the dominant force since the Industrial Revolution – then even the alienated “I” of Clare’s “I am” can be heard as oppositional: “The ‘I’ whose voice is heard in the lyric is an ‘I’ that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective ...” (Adorno 41). Resistance to the collective emerges in language’s apparent immediacy and spontaneity. And language is the medium of thought.

Put another way: if language makes it possible to voice the peculiar experimental action called thinking, the lyric poem is a special kind of thinking-in-language under the dual pressures of emotion and social oppression. It is this that links us to other people—Adorno’s collective “society”—as well as revealing the feelings or psychology of the individual writer or fictional character. Even at its most invisible, the subjective “I” voices a silent protest: “When the ‘I’ becomes oblivious to itself in language, it is fully present nevertheless; if it were not, language would become a consecrated abracadabra ...” (Adorno 44) – just meaningless words, empty incantations.

The hunger-bitten girl on her walk is excluded from the regime of Romantic poetry. Like an automaton, she does her knitting, but has no “I”. Her speechlessness is what she has to say. Even silence is a form of protest.

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**Abstract:** Rambling and roaming (the words are etymologically connected) form part of a tradition that has provided titles and subject-matter for literary works from the 18th century onwards. Enclosure of public land has long been associated with struggles over freedom of access, whether for grazing animals or for recreational walkers. Privatization and public infrastructure projects have galvanized a comparable modern movement. This article focuses on late 18th c. and early 19th c. writers (William Cowper, John Clare, and Jane Austen) arguing that our contemporary "right to roam" movement has a substantial cultural, literary, and political history stemming from the curtailment of public space and the "confinement" of those who wander, mentally or physically. Both rambling and roaming involve issues about well-being and rights, as well as literary formations and physical freedoms.

**Keywords:** Romantic literature, poetry, William Cowper, John Clare, Jane Austen, "right to roam" movement

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## **A Solitary Wanderer: Tourism and Romantic Subjectivity in William Beckford's Travel Writing<sup>1</sup>**

In *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* (2019), the entry on the keyword “World” discusses the relation between mapping and objectivity: “By the eighteenth century, maps attempted to display the sum of geographical knowledge based on the latest mathematical and surveying techniques. However, maps are not objective; they also present the world in an ideological way. For example, many depicted uncharted land as empty space, thus encouraging more European settlement” (Armstrong 295–6). Tellingly, the size of the British Isles on many modern maps, when compared with the “equal area projections”, has proven to be “unnaturally inflated” (Armstrong 296). Mapping, perhaps much like travel writing (and the two are historically closely connected), purports to offer some objective view of the world, yet it inevitably partakes in the construction of knowledge about the world that reflects and builds into diverse biases and limitations: “travellers have been influenced by particular ideologies that colour the way they view other peoples and places”, as Catherine Armstrong notes, later returning to the issue of colouring when she mentions “the British Empire map published to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, with the empire depicted in traditional pink” (296). As James Buzard observes, “travel’s pervasive appeal [in the eighteenth century] may have owed something to the high degree of acceptance which philosophical empiricism had gained in Britain by the end of the seventeenth century” (Buzard 37). The accounts of Grand Tour in particular, written mostly by professional writers and middle-class travellers, grew in popularity as the demand for detailed and pragmatically-oriented travelogues grew with the growth of tourism in the eighteenth century. As Katherine Turner observes in her study *British Travel Writers in Europe*: “It might surprise some readers how few published travel narratives from the eighteenth century are actually products of the aristocratic Grand Tour... Increasingly, the middle classes not only dominated the realms of published travel literature, but claimed most insistently

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to embody Englishness or Britishness, in contrast to the unpatriotic cosmopolitanism of the aristocracy” (Turner 16). Continental Europe was thus usually portrayed by these travellers though a discernibly English perspective. One of such travellers was Tobias Smollett, the author of *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), a popular travelogue that deliberately underlined the British nationality of its author, being informed by a strongly patriotic perspective (Turner 73). Smollett’s *Travels*, famously satirized by Laurence Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), enjoyed a wide appeal among the growing middle-class readership, probably also due to its deployment of grudgingly satirical and not infrequently xenophobic attitude within its professedly “anti-luxury, anti-aristocracy discourse” (Turner 73). Other guidebooks that prioritized detailed, educational description included John Breval’s *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe* (1726), Thomas Nugent’s *The Grand Tour* (1749), as well as Samuel Sharp’s *Letters from Italy*, published in 1676, their author being a surgeon and a member of the Royal Society.

William Beckford (1760–1844) was born into an enormous wealth accumulated by his ancestors – his father, Alderman William Beckford (twice an Alderman and Sheriff of the City of London and the owner of sugar plantations in Jamaica), and his grandfather, Peter Beckford, a planter and President of the Council of Jamaica under Charles II (Fothergill 13–14). Thus, the Beckford fortune came from generations of slave-owners: “Upon the death of his father in 1770 Beckford became one of the largest slave-owners in England, inheriting a considerable number of sugar plantations in Jamaica and over 2,000 slaves” (Gemmett 2011, 25).<sup>2</sup> Beckford’s travelogue, titled *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, “was printed in 1783 in a lavish large format edition of 500 copies” (Mowl 1998, 92), yet the work was prevented from making a larger cultural impact that it would, as a highly original contribution to the travel writing of the time, most probably have made, for Beckford was pressed by his family, much concerned about his reputation and “keen to quieten the rumours of homosexual scandal” (Turner 47), to withdraw *Dreams* from publication, which he did on 15 April 1783, in a letter to his editor and friend, Reverend Samuel Hanley.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, while remaining “unavailable

<sup>2</sup> As Gemmett further explains: “The Jamaican properties were the ongoing source of [Beckford’s] wealth and the cause of persistent anxiety for him in later years, when he began losing some of them in lawsuits and was fleeced by agents who exploited his position as an absentee landlord. It was a time when the pro-abolition movement was strengthening, but Beckford refused to support it or the Abolition Act of 1807. Instead he sought to protect his interests as a Jamaican proprietor by opposing any increase in duties on sugar. Beckford’s biographers say very little about this and his own published writings consistently discuss the Jamaican estates in an economic context without mention of the role of slavery in underpinning his wealth” (Gemmett 2011, 25).

<sup>3</sup> The circumstances of the publication and Beckford’s family situation are discussed by Gemmett in his ‘Introduction’ to *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents by William Beckford of Fonthill* (2006, 15–21).

to the public eye for many years following its suppression, it enjoyed a kind of notoriety among a select group of writers, such as Thomas Moore, Samuel Rogers, and John Mitford” as well as among painters such as Joseph Farington and Henry Fuseli (Gemmett 2006, 24). When the book was finally published much later, it was after extensive revisions by its author, as volume one of *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, in 1834, receiving mostly enthusiastic reviews. Salvaged by Richard Garnett of the British Museum in 1890 and included in the four-volume edition of Beckford’s works in 1891, the original version of *Dreams* started to attract some scholarly attention, but on the whole failed to generate a wider response among the readers (Gemmett 2006, 27). More recently, however, Beckford’s travel writing has gained in scholarly appreciation, and though he is still chiefly remembered as the author of the (in)famous Oriental tale *A History of the Caliph Vathek* (1786), he is by now recognised as a talented and important eighteenth-century travel writer and diarist. Consequently, his early efforts as a travel writer (notably, the original version of *Dreams*, which is the account of his 1780–1781 Grand Tour, and the original version of *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain, 1787–1788* – both manuscripts republished in 2006: *Dreams* edited by Robert J. Gemmett and the *Journal* edited by Boyd Alexander) are being re-examined from various perspectives by readers interested in travel writing, literary history and culture of the eighteenth century.

Young Beckford’s travels to Europe were undoubtedly envisioned as fulfilling the conventional purposes of the Grand Tour. As A.V. Seaton aptly puts it, “The word ‘Grand’ did not just describe the tour but the status of the tourists. Though ostensibly meant to round off a classical education, the tour was also a social rite of passage intended to convert the sons of patrician families from schoolboys into urbane men of the world, who would return to manage country estates, or enter career in politics, the professions or the church” (108). However, there were more specific motivations as well, since the tour “had been undertaken in part to distance [Beckford] from William Courtenay”, a young boy that apparently fascinated Beckford, as well as “to remove him from the dangers of the ceremonial Catholicism and solemn high Masses that had just begun to be celebrated at Wardour Castle, near Fonthill, to which he had been drawn” (During 272). Educated under private tutors (notably Alexander Cozens, a talented artist and art theorist brought up in St Petersburg), Beckford developed quite eccentric interests, becoming fascinated with such topics as Orientalism and occultism, while his eighteen-month stay in Switzerland (1777–1778), where he reportedly met with Voltaire, amplified his taste for music, landscape and “gothic” (Catholic) architecture. Having read Thomas Gray’s ode, he visited the monastery of Grande Chartreuse in June 1778, where he “fell into a frenzy of passion for the old, cloistered building and the wild, mountainous setting in which it was placed” (Jack xii). Contrary to his family’s (chiefly his mother’s) somewhat unwarranted expectations, “the European tour simply gave the young Beckford the

opportunity further to develop the sensibility that his family had begun to fear. He immersed himself in southern European ways of life [...] He became immersed in Italian opera, drawn to the tenor voices of the castrati, especially that of the great Gasparo Pacchierotti. He found another male love object in Venice” (During 272). What is more, Beckford’s travels in Europe surely did not make him forget about young Courtenay; it was after his return, when “Kitty” Courtenay (1768–1835) was fourteen years old, that “a public scandal erupted when the London newspapers printed stories in 1784 accusing him of a sexual affair with the young heir of Powderham Castle, Devon [...] While the charges in the press were never substantiated, the episode made Beckford a social outcast in his own country” (Gemmett 2011, 25). Later, Lord Byron “added to Beckford’s notoriety through his public admiration of *Vathek*, Beckford’s popular and influential oriental tale published in 1786, and by dubbing him ‘England’s wealthiest son’ in *Childe Harold* (1812–18), where he presented Beckford as a prototype Byronic figure” (Gemmett 2011, 25). While the aim of Beckford’s 1780–81 Grand Tour was to prevent the scandal, his subsequent travels to Switzerland and France, and later to Portugal and Spain, were to help him escape from the repercussions of what came to be called the Powderham scandal, though all these journeys may have simultaneously contributed to the solidification of his image as an eccentric, a recluse and even an outcast.

Although my analysis of Beckford’s travel writing is not primarily biographical in its scope, the circumstances narrated here do provide important contexts, especially since Beckford’s reputation for eccentricity, lavishly luxurious lifestyle and ambiguous sexuality continued to influence the reception of his writings. Indeed, the specific circumstances of his early travels may partly account for some of the qualities of his travel writing, which nonetheless should also be seen against the background of the more general intellectual and literary developments in the period. What I focus on in particular, therefore, is the degree to which Beckford’s early works challenge the then dominant conventions of travel writing and thus perhaps prefigure Romanticism, including in such crucial aspects as the critical self-consciousness of the traveller, the contrast between the outward (descriptive) and the inward (sentimental) orientation in his travel accounts, and the relation between experience and imagination. In other words, while the originality and specificity of Beckford’s travel writing should be acknowledged, it seems necessary to go beyond the frequently adopted biographical reading to think of his writing as a product of the period. It is thus important to research not only how, as Mirella Billi puts it, “the aspects of Beckford’s macrotext express that particular combination of what is considered Neoclassic and Romantic proper” (Billi 37), but also to examine, within a more specific focus on the history of travel writing and its aims and conventions, to what extent Beckford manages to reshape and perhaps redefine travel and travel writing in that transitory period of literary history. For Timothy Mowl, Beckford should be

considered “the morning star of the English Romantic movement”: “At eighteenth in Protestant Geneva he had grasped the spirit of Goethe’s emotional intensity and was prepared to practice it” so that he would become, “long before his death, an icon of defiance for more hesitant fellow Romantics” (Mowl 2002, 17). He was also one of the earliest “Tourists of the Picturesque” that visited and admired the Lake District in North-West England in 1779, “with the recently published guide-books of West and Hutchinson in [his] hands” (Boyd 73).<sup>4</sup> *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, prepared for publication when Beckford was only 23 years old, “established a new mode of travel writing” by moving away from “a conventional record of curiosities and cultural landmarks” – in that book, as During argues, “travel writing turns radically inward, treating grand tourism as a form of intoxication – a stimulus for private, non-social intensities, fantasies, pleasures” (During 273). Attempting to classify this eccentric and eclectic work, Billi describes it as an “idiosyncratic narrative” of “a complex individual quest”, perhaps best seen as a somewhat confusing mixture of “travel diary” and “descriptive travelogue” – “at once a reverie, a memoir, a confession, and a fantasy” (Billi 41). As Robin Jarvis insists, “the dominant strand in Beckford’s travel writing is indeed that of a romantic interiority, a confessional style that veers between emotional extremes” (102). Gemmett likewise underscores in his description of Beckford’s early prose its intensely “intimate tone” and “confessional character”, though he values it principally for its aesthetic qualities, seeing in *Dreams* “one of the best illustrations of ‘literary picturesque’ produced in the declining years of the eighteenth century”, testifying to its author’s sensitivity for shade, colour, texture, distant perspective and other pictorial qualities, exhibiting some of the fashionable qualities of the picturesque description, including Beckford’s partiality for contemplating objects in “dubious, visionary light” of dusk as well as his preference for “paintable qualities of rough, rugged surfaces and irregular lines” (Gemmett 2006, 30).

In order to produce such categorisation-defying, idiosyncratic narrative, he needs to self-reflexively gesture towards the rejection of the conventional. Hence, Beckford posits himself as a tourist and travel diarist only to upset the contemporaneous reader’s expectations. For this end, he adopts diverse strategies, including parody, sarcastic commentary, shifts in tone and style, unusual associations and a formidable combination of the visual and the visionary, of description and imagination – a combination which most potently links him with the later Romantic writers and travellers. Beckford challenges any expectations of impersonality bestowed on a traveller, and, by extension, any predefined conventional requirements for what a tourist’s account of a Grand Tour experience should ideally provide. As Jeremy

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<sup>4</sup> The guides to the Lakes mentioned by Boyd are *An Excursion to the Lakes in Westmoreland and Cumberland 1773* by William Hutchinson, published in 1774, and Thomas West’s *A Guide to the Lakes*, first published in 1778.

Black notes while commenting on numerous recommendations included in the letters to the eighteenth-century Grand Tour travellers, there was, by mid-eighteenth century, a large body of prescriptive discourse concerning the Grand Tour. The utility of the experience was frequently underscored, including in terms of education and refinement, as it was to ensure a “general improvement” of young gentlemen; others, however, would see the affair more in terms of pretence and privilege, with wealthy tourists buying fashionable clothes in Paris and paintings in Italy, so that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and others could write “of how lords newly arrived from abroad won the admiration of young ladies at the court” (Black 324–5). The tendency to endorse an educational function of travelogue with reference to the Grand Tour experience was strongly promoted also by such accounts as Joseph Addison’s *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705), which “was for many years a nearly indispensable handbook” for the Grand Tour travellers, coaxing them to appreciate the classical heritage of Italy (Buzard 40). Long before E. M. Forster lampooned in his novels the interiorisation of the guidebook-induced precepts by the English tourists visiting Italy, Beckford had performatively confronted in his writing the narrowly-defined parameters for the “proper” experience of continental travel. Consequently, his own “voice” speaks in *Dreams*, and later in *The Journal*, in defiance of any claims to impersonality, giving as much authority to a personal or emotional response couched in outburst of expressive, visionary writing as to the learned commentary, often spiced with irony and rich intertextual reference. In short, Beckford asserts his own voice, and constructs his own figure, largely opposed to that of a “typical” tourist. Moreover, *Dreams* and *The Journal* are composed at a period when the number of published travel accounts grows, the majority of them penned “by travellers from the ranks of the middle classes” (Turner 3).

Characteristically, therefore, Beckford tends to become disgruntled whenever finding himself in places crowded with tourists, for whom he often expresses a dose of contempt. In Letter VII of *Dreams*, narrating his visit to Spá (Liège, Belgium), Dusseldorf and Cologne (Germany), on his way southward, Beckford characteristically complains of the crowds and praises the merits of solitary sauntering:

Next morning (July 6<sup>th</sup>) a zigzag road brought us, after many descents and rises, to Spá. The approach, through a rocky vale, is not totally devoid of picturesque merit; and, as I met no cabriolets or titupplings on the *chaussé*, I concluded, that the waters were not as yet much visited; and that I should have their romantic environs pretty much to myself. But, alas, how widely was I deceived! The moment we entered, up flew a dozen saches. Chaveliers de St. Louis, meagre Marquises, and ladies of the scarlet order of Babylon, all poked their heads out. In a few minutes, half the town was in motion [...] Half an hour was wasted in speeches and recommendations; another passed, before we could snatch a morsel of refreshment; they then finding I was neither inclined to go to the ball, nor enter the land where Pharoah reigneth, peace was restored, a few



feeble bows were scraped, and I found myself in perfect solitude. Taking advantage of this quiet moment, I stole out of town, and followed a path cut in the rocks, which brought me to a young wood of oaks on their summits. (*Dreams* 62–63)

Admiring how “a melancholy cloud shaded the wild hills and irregular woods at a distance”, Beckford fancies himself to be at “the skirts of the forest of Ardenne, amongst whose enchanted labyrinths the heroes of Boyardo and Ariosto roved formerly in quest of adventures” and feels ready, “Don Quixote like”, to explore “its recesses in search of that memorable Fountain of Hatred, which (if you recollect the story) was raised by Merlin to free illustrious knights and damsels from the torments of rejected love” (*Dreams* 63). Beckford wanders apparently for hours in the dark forest, captivated by “these romantic fancies”, in contrast with the other visitors to the town, who “were all at the assembly, as happy as billiards and chit-chat could make them” (*Dreams* 63). But the passage ends somewhat bathetically, with Beckford failing to find anything interesting: “I left the knights to their adventures, and returned, ingloriously, to my inn” (*Dreams* 64). Leaving the town dejected and disappointed on the following day, he humorously recollects being chastised for failing to perform his task as a tourist: “Indeed, Sir, no *Monsieur comme il faut*, ever left Spá in such dudgeon before . . . You have neither breakfasted at Vauxhall, nor attended the Spectacle, nor tasted the waters. Had you but taken one sip, your ill-humour would have all trickled away” (*Dreams* 64).

In the same letter, Beckford despairingly alludes to a travelogue by Lady Anna Miller, *Letters from Italy, describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings, etc. of the Country in 1770-1* (1776) when visiting a gallery in Dusseldorf, where Beckford, instead of admiring the works of Rubens placed in the main room and “deluging ten pages with criticisms” of all the displayed paintings, focuses solely on a picture of a holy family by Camillo Procaccini, as he happens to be enchanted by the graceful figure of the young Jesus, which he nonetheless refuses to describe in detail since it is pointless, he claims, to convey in words “what colours alone can express” (*Dreams* 65). Beckford routinely refuses to admire what is deemed most attractive for tourists and often lambasts the recommendations made by different cognoscenti, connoisseurs, handbooks and tour guides, sometimes to a hilarious effect, as when a gardener in the famous gardens of Schweidsing near Manheim (Letter VIII) drags him “to a sun-burnt, contemptible hillock, commanding the view of a serpentine ditch, and decorated with the title of *Jardin Anglois*. Some object like decayed lime-kilns and mouldering ovens; is disposed, in an amphitheatrical form, on the declivity of this tremendous eminence: and there is to be ivy, and a cascade, arid [sic!] what not, as my conductor observed. A glance was all I bestowed on this caricature upon English gardens” (*Dreams* 74). This anecdotal account finely reflects Beckford’s impatience with thoughtless sightseeing and the tasteless tourist attractions increasingly advertised at the time of the burgeoning mass tourism.

When in Sienna, Beckford declares, half-seriously, his prime obligation as a visitor to the city: “Here my duty of course was to see the cathedral, and I got up much earlier than I wished, in order to perform it” (*Dreams* 150). The venerated building he finds to be, however, “a master-piece of ridiculous taste, and elaborate absurdity. The front, encrusted with alabaster, is worked into a million of fretted arches and puzzling ornaments. There are statues without number, and relievos without end” (*Dreams* 150). Beckford is undoubtedly capable of strong opinions, frequently expressing his sense of distaste or absurdity in viciously eloquent musings. His judgments, though conveyed in an emotive language of a personal response, usually come with some illustration and, despite their frequent idiosyncrasy, are far from arbitrary or purely capricious. Although principally keen to observe “all the delights of Catholicism”, Beckford indulges in a sardonic, mock-learned diatribe when describing the Shrine of Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral, a reliquary traditionally believed to contain the bones of the Biblical Magi, also known as the Three Wise Men:

Do you not wonder at hearing of these venerable bodies, so far from their native country? I thought them snug in some Arabian pyramid, ten feet deep in spice; but, you see, one can never tell what is to become of one, a few ages hence. Who knows but the emperor of Marocco may be canonized some future day in Lapland? I asked, of course, how, in the name of miracles, they came hither? but found no story of supernatural conveyance. It seems, the holy empress Helena, as great collectress of relics as the D[uchess] of P[ortland] is of prophane curiosities, first routed them out; then, they were packed to Rome. King Alaric, having no grace, bundled them down to Milan; where they remained, till it pleased God to inspire and ancient Archbishop with the fervent wish of depositing them at Cologne. Then, these skeletons were taken into most especial consideration, crowned with jewels, and filagreed with gold. Never were skulls more elegantly mounted; and I doubt, whether Odin’s buffet could exhibit so fine an assortment [...] I examined their shrine; and was rather surprized to find it, not only enriched with barbaric gold and pearl, but covered with cameos and intaglios of the best antique sculpture. Many an impious emperor and gross Silenus, many a wanton nymph and frantic bacchanal figure in the same range with the statues of saints and evangelists. How St. Helena could tolerate such a mixed assembly (for the shrine was formed under her auspices) surpasses my comprehension. (*Dreams* 66-67)

Whenever he refers to prominent touristic sights in particular, Beckford appears to follow solely his own taste and his own discernment, readily flaunting his learning and erudition; he may shift from agitated reverence to violent disgruntlement, but altogether refuses to merely duplicate the preformed ideas or the widely-circulating verdicts about the sights he visits. Indeed, he has a tendency to escape the crowds, and to scold that which others venerate; in Rome he speaks of Coliseum as “this holy trumpety” while St. Peter’s, in turn, melts his heart, inducing a desire to live

permanently within its confines, on the condition that its doors be closed, “not a mortal admitted. No priests, no cardinals; God forbid!” (*Dreams* 156).

Wordsworth-like, Beckford frequently prefers to wonder solitarily and frequent the untrodden paths; much of his account could be classified as belonging to what Anne D. Wallace, in her influential study *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of the Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (first published in 1993), calls “the peripatetic mode” or the “peripatetic aesthetic”, to which Romanticism contributed especially in terms of a figure of “the walker-poet” – a figure connected with rural, more than urban, spaces and surroundings, engaging in “walking” understood as “a deliberate mode of travel [that] accomplishes material and metaphorical education, explorations of world and self that can be regarded as a cultivation of both the individual and his society” (11-12). Though the “practice of deliberate excursive walking” was a broader phenomenon at the turn of the centuries, it was the “conspicuous example set by Wordsworth and Coleridge”, who practiced frequent walking tours undertaken often on considerable distances, that influenced a number of writers from their broad circle of acquaintances: William Hazlitt, for instance, “joined Coleridge on a pedestrian tour to Lynton and the Valley of the Rocks”, while Coventry Patmore, De Quincey, Keats and others were directly inspired by the two poets to undertake long-distance walking tours (Wallace 166-167). Preceding the Romantic “walker-poets”, Beckford has a tendency to walk for hours on end, often wandering aimlessly and ignoring any maps or itineraries, thus exploring the landscape in his own, unhasty tempo: “I rambled about the meads, scarce knowing which way I was going: sometimes a spangled fly led my astray, and, oftener, my own strange fancies”, he writes of his rambles near the town of Emms (*Dreams* 70); in Italy, he appreciates the urban and the rural environs alike, but during his long walks he is keen to discover the wilder, as yet untracked territories, as when he wanders about near Caprea: “I walked on, with slowness and deliberation; musing at every step, and stopping, ever and anon, to rest myself by springs and tufted bay-trees... Here, were no paths; no enclosures; a primeval rudeness characterized the whole scene... The idea of going almost out of the world, soothed the tone of my mind” (*Dreams* 168-169). As Brian Fothergill insists, “Where [Beckford] differed from others was in his response to the beauty of the landscape” as his “very first impression of Italy, was of the physical beauty of the land itself” and the “calming effects of nature” provided for him a frequent respite from the overstimulation of the Tour (82-83).

But if the picturesque, sometimes sublime, vistas of natural landscape are a source of joy and tranquility for Beckford, much in the manner of Wordsworth, they also often induce states of melancholy and even the fits of sadness and nostalgia. The shifts in mood are actually characteristic of Beckford’s travel narratives, where excitement mingles with ennui, and cheerfulness gives place to a more gloomy disposition, often within a space of a single page. Some entries in his journals focus

entirely on such mood swings, induced by a darkened sky, a sound, or a particular memory, providing no other details as to his location or activities during the day. The entry for October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1780 (Letter XVII), for instance, concentrates solely on the play of shades in the evening prospect of Florence, upon Beckford's arrival to the city, the contemplation of which happens to be interrupted by a "sullen sound" of a tolling bell that fills Beckford with intense sadness: "I closed the casements, called for lights, ran to a harpsichord Vannini had prepared for me, and played somewhat in the strain of Jomelli's [sic!] *Miserere*" (*Dreams* 140). Growing somewhat weary of the sunburnt landscape of Portugal ("It is too hot for fairies in the Portugal. One must not expect their inspiration"), Beckford indulges in nostalgic musings about his childhood and the charms of the English verdure: "I have been haunted all night with rural ideas of England. The fresh smell of my pines at Fonthill seemed wafted to me in my dreams. The bleating of my sheep and lowing of herds in the deep vale of Lawn Farm faintly sounded in my ears. And shall I banish myself forever from these happy scenes of my childhood?" (*Journal* 72-73). Homesick and miserable, he manifests here a strong sentimental attachment to his native land.

Generally, however, his travel writing rarely exudes a patriotic bias; Beckford manifests a palpably cosmopolitan outlook, he does not seek to assert his Englishness but instead discloses his enduring fascination with whatever strikes his fancy as exotic, peculiar and marvelous – and as yet unappreciated by the connoisseurs. Himself a polyglot, bibliophile and art collector, Beckford would amass a wide selection of books about China, India and the Orient, whether in Spanish, Latin, Italian, Portuguese or French. Despite occasionally adopting a sardonic or satiric tone to express his disgruntlement, Beckford should not be paired with the likes of Tobias Smollett, the author of *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), a popular travelogue that "overflows with articulations of patriotic subjecthood" and elaborates a narrative perspective of "self-consciously British, empirical and rational nature" (Turner 73). Smollett's *Travels*, lampooned by Laurence Sterne in his travel narrative, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), enjoyed a wide popularity among the growing middle-class readership at the time.<sup>5</sup> Beckford's taste for the bizarre and the exotic, his avowed cosmopolitanism, his fascination with the Orient and his reverence for the "gothic" aesthetic all make him closer to Byron than

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<sup>5</sup> Beckford himself is aware of that intertextual relation, as evidenced by the humorous comment in Letter II of the *Dreams*: "if another rising generation should lodge above me at the next inn, I shall grow as scurrilous as Dr. Smollet [sic!], and be dignified with the appellation of the Younger Smelfungus" (*Dreams* 45). As Jean Viviès observes, Sterne was the first to challenge the "empiricist conventions of travel writing" in the eighteenth century, perhaps thus paving the way for Beckford's subjective style of travel writing (Viviès 72).

to Wordsworth, though he shares much with the latter as well, as I argued here, especially in terms of the attention paid to the enchanting powers of nature, best appreciated during long, solitary rambles through the hitherto unexplored rustic surroundings, though not necessarily the English ones.

Beckford's fascination with the Catholic Saints, notably Thomas Becket, Bruno of Cologne and Anthony of Padua, testifies to his appreciation of exceptional, solitary minds, perhaps reflecting something of his perennial dissatisfaction with the polite society of his times. Moreover, his avid interest in Catholicism may be a symptom of his frustration with the dominant strains of the English culture, with its Protestant orientation towards disenchanting empiricism and its no-nonsense pragmatism. Beckford embraces the fanciful and the marvelous as necessary supplements to the factual and the realistic, as indispensable for the expression of true humanness. Dreaded and derided by many of his compatriots, Catholicism provides Beckford with an access to a markedly divergent and alluring sensibility early on in his life, perhaps also in a half-conscious revolt against his mother's (Maria Hamilton's) strict Calvinism (Deandrea 227). The reader of his early travel writing may notice, however, some tension between his eager reverence for Catholic mysticism and his penchant for a pose of a blasé, urbane ironist, which sometimes results in a peculiar clash within some passages of both *Dreams* and the Portuguese *Journal*. Beckford views Catholic myths and rituals through the eyes of an aesthete, yet these are also capable of inducing an intensely emotional response, as reported in Letter XVIII of the *Dreams*; describing "a high festival, and mass celebrated at the grand church of Saint Anthony, with more than ordinary splendour", the account underscores the role of music and foregrounds emotional intensity as much as sensual stimulation:

The music drawing us thither, we found every chapel twinkling with lights, and the choir filled with a vapour of incense. Through its medium several cloth of gold figures discovered themselves, ministering before the altar, and acting their parts with a sacred pomposity, wonderfully imposing. I attended very little to their functions, but the plaintive tones of the voices and instruments, so consonant with my own feelings, melted me into tears, and gave me, no doubt, the exterior of exalted piety. (*Dreams* 119–120)

Given his unaffected piety, it would not be accurate to say that Beckford would relish the Catholic mass solely as an alluring musical performance, yet he seems to value the sometimes flamboyant Catholic rituals for what may be their more universal appeal, namely the sensual stimulation and the powerful atmosphere of mysticism they can produce. Indeed, sacred music frequently moved him deeply; describing the "performance" of Niccolò Jommelli's High Mass at the Royal Chapel in Lisbon, he writes: "It closed with the *Libera me, Domine, de morte*

*aeternai*, which thrilled every nerve in my frame and affected me so deeply that I burst into tears. My knees knocked against each other, a cold sweat moistened my forehead” (*Journal* 184).

Writing of opera, the Enlightenment, and cosmopolitanism, Jeremy Tambling notes how “there is a pursuit, in eighteenth-century music, and particularly in Mozart, of universality and cosmopolitanism [as] Western music then claimed for itself the virtue of being natural, including in the theoretical arguments of Rameau or Rousseau. Some evidence of that is found in a statement of Haydn” (94). Franz Joseph Haydn, an Austrian composer who visited London twice in 1790s and whose concerts were reviewed by Charles Burney as electrifying the London audiences, reportedly stated that “My language is understood throughout the whole world” (Tambling 94). If “music can travel anywhere” (Tambling 95), then music as a medium, including the opera and the instrumental classical music of the eighteenth century, symbolizes cosmopolitanism and perhaps the universalism of art, suggesting a refusal of national boundaries, in the spirit of cross-pollination and cultural exchange. Beckford’s avid interest in music and in opera thus adheres to the general tendency within his travel writing, namely the focus on aesthetic appreciation that eschews any limitations imposed by a patriotic or parochial concern. As John Brewer notes, in England “opera was often attacked as foreign – similar accusations were levelled against pantomimes, spectacles, and afterpieces – because they were frequently based on Italian *commedia dell’arte*, used foreign dancers and fancy scenes, and had no spoken parts. Critics of opera contrasted its alien sounds to English spoken drama, which was intelligible, virtuous and instructive” (Brewer 369). William Hogarth’s print *Masquerades and Operas* (1724), also known as “The Bad Taste of the Town”, reflected pointedly this attitude, as did some major satirical texts of the period, including John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1743), with the latter directing its mockery also at the castrati singers. In Letter XXVII of the *Dreams*, excluded from the 1834 edition of *Italy*, while admitting some improvements in fine arts in Britain, crediting the “solid institution of the English youth in the polite literature of the Greeks and Romans” as well as “the improvement of their taste by foreign travel”, Beckford nonetheless insists that Italy “still bears the palm of music, from every other nation” (English music of the past, in turn, he deems to be “little more than dry counter-point, without air, or grace”) (*Dreams* 199-200). Beckford’s ongoing fascination with opera illustrates how classical music was an avowedly international affair, fostering a cosmopolitan attitude and a sense of transnational cultural community in the Enlightenment Europe. While staying in Lucca, he repeatedly attended the performances of Bertoni’s opera *Quinto Fabio*, so that he could compare different “coloratura improvisations Gasparo Pacchierotti would invent each time he took the stage after the Grand March in Act 2” (Mowl 1998, 94–95). Beckford ardently praised Pacchierotti, a mezzo-soprano castrato

and surely one of the most celebrated opera singers of his time; famously, Pacchierotti performed Haydn's cantata *Arianna a Naxos*, in a series of concerts during his last visit to London in 1791, to the composer's own piano accompaniment. As Timothy Mowl underscores, the author of *Vathek* was "a confirmed melomaniac, enchanted by the virtuoso singing, the unpredictable improvisations and inhuman voice range of Gasparo Pacchierotti, who had succeeded Farinelli as Europe's most celebrated castrato opera star" (1998, 89).

Beckford writes his journal neither as a tourist nor as a professional writer, but as an aesthete – one who is confident (and privileged) enough to celebrate his own peculiar tastes and sensibilities, without replicating the established patterns of cultural consumption and appreciation. As one scholar puts it, in Beckford's travel writing we find "a glorious assertion of the self" (Billi 49). It may be added that art, and perhaps music in particular, allows Beckford to exercise such outspoken self-assertion of his own tastes, providing a significant means to stress his individuality. Clearly, he found in music a powerful blend of the sensual and the spiritual, while the lavishness of the *opera seria* particularly suited his taste, whether due to its pathos, emotionalism, or the sexual allure of the castrati. Some of his tastes and sensibilities, however, Beckford could not assert in so vocal a manner. His fascination with the male singers, be it the castrato Gasparo Pacchierotti in *Dreams*, or Gregorio Franchi (a choirboy at the Patriarchal music academy who became Beckford's long-term confidante) in the Portuguese *Journal*, as well as his infatuation with William "Kitty" Courtenay, arguably hint at how Beckford's sexual inclinations could be expressed in his writing only indirectly. "Beckford's complex sexual identity" (Deandra 231) has been discussed by different scholars, pointing tentatively to Beckford's possible homosexuality, bisexuality or pansexuality (Mowl 1998, 2-4). Needless to say, Beckford's taste for the exotic and the outlandish – his lasting fascination with Catholicism, Gothicism and Orientalism – have been interpreted also as an expression of his wayward desires, in a response to the often bigoted mainstream English culture that vilified him as a deviant. Consequently, his travel writing may be seen as envisaging not only a pre-Romantic celebration of subjectivity but also an occasionally audacious celebration of otherness. In contrast with Smollett's travel writing, for instance, his journals promulgate an attitude of openness to whatever falls outside the parameters of the domestic culture, readily embracing the bizarre and the foreign.

While often informative, Beckford's travel writing generally rejects the confines of empiricism and discards the instrumentality of dry factual prose for a narrative of Grand Tour written in a self-consciously distortive and fragmentary manner, keenly blending the factual and the visionary, willing to express thought as much as feeling, through texture and mood, whether by means of a painterly description or a musical cadence of a melancholic remark. Brian Fothergill stresses the predominance of "impressionistic passages" in Beckford's writing, which make it "so different from

the usual topographical observations of eighteenth-century travellers” (81). Beckford apparently wished to flee from the rigidity of the Enlightenment; he appreciates classicism but seeks for ways of expression that are Romantic in character, enabling him to nourish and develop his sensitivities as well as to celebrate the eccentricity of his own self. Hence, Beckford’s travel writing testifies to his dissatisfaction not only with the growing tourist industry of the later eighteenth century, but also with many tenets of the mainstream classical culture of the Enlightenment.

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on William Beckford's 1780–1781 letters from his Grand Tour in Europe, collected in *Dreams, Walking Thoughts and Incidents*, referring also to the journal documenting his 1787–1788 travels in Portugal and Spain, to explore Beckford's writing in terms of the aesthetic, affective and ideological transitions in the cultural conventions of travel writing that signalled the onset of Romanticism. Art collector, bibliophile, writer, and an heir to the enormous fortune, Beckford is chiefly remembered for his outlandish tale, *A History of the Caliph Vathek* (1786), though his voluminous travel writing has recently received more extensive scholarly examination. The rise of sentimentalism and the early-romantic tendencies in literature had an impact on Beckford's approach to the presentation of travel experience, visible in the focus on emotionally charged impressions as well as the aesthetic appeal of the described scenes and objects. These features, however, are often intriguingly balanced with the authorial commentary highlighting the ironic distance towards the dominant conventions of travel writing. Consequently, Beckford's writing often combines sublimity with bathos and learned commentary with highly emotive and eccentric passages that subvert contemporary literary conventions.

**Keywords:** William Beckford, Romanticism, Grand Tour, travel writing, aesthetics, landscape, tourism



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## **“O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!”: Aestheticist Ideas in the Poetry of John Keats**

When in one of his most famous letters Keats advocated the primacy of sensations over reasoning and analytical thought, exclaiming: “O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!” and praising those who “delight in sensation rather than hunger . . . after Truth” (Scott 54), he was previewing the major Aestheticist turn that would arrive in the second half of the nineteenth century and become such a characteristic feature of the writings of Walter Pater, Charles Algernon Swinburne, Arthur Addington Symonds, Vernon Lee, Michael Field and other important writers of the Aesthetic Movement. Similarly, Keats’s reception in the Victorian era was dominated by his perception as a delicate, sensitive, effeminate, overtly sensuous man—in short, as an Aesthete. It is no wonder, therefore, that towards the end of the century Keats was even heralded the father of the art for art’s sake movement (Symons 306).

Walter Pater, in his influential essay “Aesthetic Poetry” (1889) defines the major tenants of Aestheticism in such a way:

One characteristic of the pagan spirit the aesthetic poetry has, which is on its surface—the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life. This is contrasted with the bloom of the world, and gives new seduction to it—the sense of death and the desire of beauty: the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death. (“Aesthetic Poetry” 227)

In his text, Pater advocates the attitude of alertness, heightened sensitivity to the fleeting moment, and the intense sensory engagement with lovely things and with art, which provides us with the essence of beauty. These words compare with his famous “Conclusion” to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, where he postulates that “[n]ot the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life” (*Studies* 210). Pater’s words were radical even by the *fin de siècle*’s standards; it was a call to concentrate all effort on individual, subjective experience of beauty and sensation, an appeal to “drink life to the lees” as Tennyson’s Ulysses postulates.

Aestheticism, with its emphasis on the present, its call for intensity of sensation and even excess, its preoccupation with momentary, transient beauty, gives expression to concerns which lie very much at the core of John Keats's poetry. In the present essay I want to claim that Keats's poetry is not merely aesthetic (concerned with the creation and experience of beauty) but primarily Aestheticist. Hence, I will endeavour to examine the complicated dialectic between temporality and permanence, between numbness and heightened sensitivity in Keats's writings, the dialectic which is expressed persistently through language and images that Aestheticism will claim as its own half a century after Keats's death. Still, my aim is not to trace the reception of Keats, his poetry and ideas in the nineteenth century; much has been written on his influence on Victorian poets.<sup>1</sup> Instead, in this chapter I will try to demonstrate that Keats's verse and his poetic theory abound with attitudes and concepts that proved essential in the formulation of coherently expressed artistic theory in the second half of the Victorian era. That is to say, Keats anticipates the Aestheticist stance.

In his *Introduction to Keats*, William Walsh notes that there are two characteristic strands of Keats's poetry: the first one, characterised by concomitant concentration of expression and intensity of feeling and the other, subordinated to the love of what he calls the "drowsily vague and languorously narcotic, which dimmed his clear eye and betrayed him into the cult of 'silken phrases and silver sentences'" (Walsh 11). Surely, the temptation to sink into sleep and forgetfulness, to numb the senses and escape the pain of existence is well remembered by Keats's readers: it is figured as "The feel of not to feel it" in "In drear-nighted December" (l. 21) or the intoxication and love for easeful death in the Nightingale ode; however, in this chapter I want to concern myself with the other attitude, of alertness and heightened sensual receptivity, which embraces the notion of excess, of beauty and of temporality. It is well expressed already in a letter which Keats wrote in the summer of 1818 from his pedestrian tour to the North with Charles Brown:

What astonishes me more than anything is the tone, the colouring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. ... I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write, more than ever, for the abstract endeavour of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows. (Scott 132–134)

Similar, almost breathless, admiration for the present moment, the intense desire to feel, taste, experience it to the fullness which is almost unbearable in its intensity surfaces in many other of Keats's poems and letters. It is the tone of "To Autumn",

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance James Narjarian *Victorian Keats. Manliness, Sexuality, and Desire*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

in which summer has “o’er-brimm’d” the clammy cells of days (l.11), filling the fruits with ripeness to the core, while the branches of trees are bent with overabundance; it is the feast of “The Eve of Saint Agnes”, the foreplay of what is going to happen in Madeline chamber, as Porphyro

... from forth the closet brought a heap  
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,  
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon; ...  
 These delicates he heaped with glowing hand  
 On golden dishes and in baskets bright  
 Of wreathed silver; sumptuous they stand  
 In the retired quiet of the night,  
 Filling the chilly room with perfume light.

(ll. 264–267; 271–275).

The quoted passages are fine examples of Keats’s synaesthetic technique, the strategy of description which channels the surrounding world through the prism of bodily sensation – another fine link with *fin de siècle*’s sensibility. As Stacey McDowell notes, the view of Keats as “a poet of the senses” “gained currency during the Victorian period, with critics by turns fascinated and disconcerted by his poetry’s luxuriating delight in sensory experience” (189). The description of Madeline’s room appeals to all the senses: we feel the chill of the winter air, smell first the lavender of her bedclothes and next the scent of fruits and of cinnamon, and the coldness is gradually dispersed by the warmth and glow of Porphyro’s presence in the room, by the gold of the dishes and the sumptuousness of “spiced dainties” (l. 269). Numerous are other similar famous passages of other famous poems: the description of the magical palace that Lamia conjures in the midst of her love fantasy projects the state where the senses are activated by “the gorgeous dyes, / The space, the splendour of the draperies” (II. 205–206), by “fragrant oils” (II. 194), “A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood” (II. 176), “the soft / Wool-woofed carpets” (II. 178–179), “the cold full sponge to pleasure pressed” (II. 192). This is a moment of sensual intensity bordering on excess experienced shortly before it is dispersed by the cold scrutiny of reason; likewise, the speaker of the Nightingale ode creates a super-sensuous image of overbrimming excess of “beaded bubbles winking at the brim” (l. 17) of a beaker full of cooled wine, famously tasting of “Flora and the country green, / Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth” (ll.13–14). Finally, the overarching bodily excess transpires from Glaukus’s encounter with Circe, when the words of the enchantress come as music to the man’s “o’er-sweetened soul” (III. l. 445) and when “with tears, and smiles, and honey-words she wove / A net whose thralldom was more bliss than all / The range of flowered Elysium” (III. 427–8).

The importance of bodily sensation in Keats's poetry does not concern synaesthesia only; McDowell notes that "[i]n the descriptions of what can be seen and heard, the scents and tastes, the attentive recounting of feel and touch, Keats is engaged in reflecting upon the means by which sensory experience can be represented or recreated as aesthetic experience, and how, through his poetry, words could be made to give sound, shape, form, even palpable feeling, to sensation" (189). Keats frequently channels the world through the senses and bodily reactions. He uses the vocabulary of sense and sensation and even the medical register to relate the impressions on one's mind through the reactions of one's body. In his seminal *Keats and Embarrassment* Christopher Ricks gives a convincing account of how Keats records feelings and emotions through images of bodily sensation – his lovers blush, swoon, their palms sweat, their mouths salivate ("slippery blisses" of *Endymion*), their blood pulses and throbs. His poetic descriptions relate to heat and coolness, hunger and appetite, but also to bodily disintegration – mouldering, rotting and decomposing, as in "Isabella; or the Pot of Basil", where Lorenzo's body becomes a thing "vile with green and livid spot" (l. 475). Very similar emphasis on senses and bodily sensations, rendered sometimes metaphorically, sometimes with almost literal accuracy became a characteristic tone of the leading poets and writers of the Aesthetic movement: Swinburne, Rossetti, Pater, Wilde, Symonds.

However, Aestheticist tones are characteristic not only for Keats's poetry. Interestingly, the Keats that emerges from his letters to Fanny Brawne is definitely Keats the Aesthete. Deborah Lutz claims that "Something of the erotic always lurks about the Aesthete: he faints with love; he luxuriates in exotic decadence; he tends even towards the perverse. He quivers, he throbs with the pure ecstasy of life, with the exquisiteness of his own experience" (257). When Keats writes to Fanny, his letters are similarly infused with intensity of emotion and sensation that is as luxurious as it is painful. Writing on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1819 Keats says:

... indeed I am almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature stealing upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights have I find not at all cured me of my love of Beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me .... (Scott 312)

In a similar vein, on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1819 he confesses:

I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you. My sweet Fanny, will your heart never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love .... I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion—I have shudder'd at it—I shudder no more—I could be martyr'd for my Religion—Love is my religion—I could die for that—I could die for you. (Scott 312)

and concludes that love has become an overpowering obsession:

I cannot exist without you—I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again—my Life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb’d me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving ... You have ravish’d me away by a Power I cannot resist: and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often “to reason against the reasons of my Love.” I can do that no more – the pain would be too great – My Love is selfish – I cannot breathe without you. (Scott 390)

When Keats’s letters to Fanny were first published in 1878, an avalanche of outraged comments followed. For the Victorians, who valued restraint and moderation, and believed that self-discipline is a mark of manliness, this display of emotional excess was both shameful and dangerous. Thus, Matthew Arnold was shocked by Keats’s vocabulary of passion and lamented the want of “character and self-control”, and claimed that the correspondence made an “unpleasing” impression (Strachen 43–44). In his biography of Keats, Andrew Motion recounts that Arnold found Keats’s comment that Fanny has absorbed him especially unnerving, a testimony to “relaxed self-abandonment ... underbred and ignoble”, written “without the training which teaches us that we must put some constraint upon our feelings and upon the expression of them” (415). Seen from the vantage point of the standard Victorian sensibility, the letters express first of all a “vulgar excess”, “disgracefully extreme”, and secondly, they mark Keats as a sensuous Aesthete, an effeminate poet who allows himself to be flooded by emotions and passion (Motion 415). Strikingly, exactly the same charges were made by Robert Buchanan against Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Aesthetic School of Poetry, when Buchanan, writing under the literary pseudonym of Thomas Maitland, published a pamphlet called “The Fleishy School of Poetry” (1871), where he accused Rossetti and Swinburne of writing poetry which is “. . . morbid deviation from the healthy forms of life . . .” In Buchanan’s view, these poets exhibited “. . . weary wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility...”. These terms sound familiar to those who remember *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine’s* attack on Keats in 1818, in which he was famously pronounced to be an “infatuated bardling” (Matthews 15) while his poetry was claimed to be a product of some “eunuch’s muse” (Matthews 34). Since then it became standard to describe Keats as effeminate, overtly sensual and excessively sensitive.

Still, nowhere in Keats’s poetry are the Aestheticist tones more audible than in the exquisite dialectic of pleasure and pain, beauty and corruption, the awareness of mutability and the desire for permanence. When Walter Pater claims that the most characteristic feature of Aesthetic poetry is “the desire for beauty quickened by the sense of death” and that the contrast between the shortness of life and the bloom

of the world gives a “new seduction” to human existence ( “Aesthetic Poetry” 227), we may wonder whether he was thinking of Keats. Keats’s exquisite imagery frequently rests upon the unresolved tension between the sense of temporality and the longing for permanence. Frequently, it seems that Keats is forever on the lookout for the perfect moment – the moment which would enhance the intensity of experience and simultaneously lock it in time, encapsulating forever the passion, the beauty, the vigour, the ecstasy. No other poem expresses it better than “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, where the “mad pursuit”, “struggle to escape”, “pipes and timbrels” and “wild ecstasy” (ll. 9–10) of the scenes represented on the urn function to preserve the Dionysian moment of sensual abandon, creating a space outside time where it can exist for ever. The ode’s meaning heavily rests upon the dialectic of temporality and permanence, history and art. While time “shall this generation waste” (l. 46), the urn will remain, “in midst of other woe / than ours” (l. 47), still provoking questions about the sense of the depicted images, some of which manage to capture and arrest the (almost) perfect moment of emotional and sensual intensity. This is particularly true about the image of two lovers, locked in embrace and just about to kiss, immortalised one tiny step from fulfilment, at the height of the intensity of their passion. The same desire to stay locked in a space outside temporality structures the Nightingale Ode, where the speaker looks for means of escape to the realm of permanence, through intoxication (“O, for a draught of vintage”, l. 11) poison (“as though of hemlock I had drunk”, l.2) and, finally, poetry (“on the viewless wings of Poesy”, l.23). The plaintive anthem of the bird offers a momentary transition to the world beyond “The weariness, the fever, and the fret” (l. 23) of human existence, to the realm of the tender night and the lustrous, permanent Beauty.

Yet, what the Aesthetes strive for is precisely the overcoming of the duality of pleasure/pain, real/ideal, stasis/mobility. While it can easily be argued that in the “Ode to a Nightingale”, similarly to “In Drear-Nighted December” “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, “Lamia” and some other of Keats’s poems we can find an expression of what some critics called Keats’s tendency for escapism which rests upon the unbridged gap between the two sides of those polarities, it is patently not true about all Keats’s verse. Thus, in the “Ode on Melancholy” the theme of forgetfulness and oblivion appears, but only to be renounced. The associations with escape and withdrawal are explicitly negated:

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist  
 Wolf’s bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine:  
 Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed  
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine (1–4);

The images of Lethe, wine and poison of course also appear in the Nightingale ode, but the way Keats employs them here is radically different. Lethe, the mythological



river of forgetfulness in Hades, wine, a typical symbol of intoxication and the numbing of the senses, and death (here figured by the image of Proserpine, the queen of the underworld) – which are sought for in the “Ode to a Nightingale – in the “Ode on Melancholy” are ardently rejected, in the tone of decisive protest. The strategies that bring ease and forgetfulness and help escape pain are denied, because they would “drown the wakeful anguish of the soul” (l. 10). To court the goddess of Melancholy is to embrace the experience life offers, together with the awareness of its mutability. In this poem Keats seems to have achieved what the Aesthetes would strive for—the attitude of alertness, of heightened sensitivity to beauty, not despite, but precisely because of the sense of its inevitable fading. This development is captured in one of the most poignant images in the poem, the vision of “Beauty that must die; / And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu” (ll. 21–23). The final scene of the poem – the act of bursting the grape of Joy against one’s palate – is a paradox of at once finding happiness and simultaneously losing it, and becomes an epitome of the perfect Aesthetic moment, of indulging in sensuous pleasure, of embracing its temporality, of bridging the gap between pleasure and pain. Mutability becomes an inseparable aspect of existence and enhances experience instead of dulling and chilling it.

The same strategy may be observed in “To Autumn”, chronologically the last of Keats’s Great Odes. The three stanzas of the poem slowly, meticulously and luxuriously lead the reader through the phases of the season, starting with ripening and fruition, through harvesting and collecting, up to barrenness and the unavoidable end. The poem is a meditation on the process of fulfilment and the inevitability of fate; yet, the tone that dominates the whole text is that of acceptance. Poetically, Keats achieves an effect of time slowing, almost stopping, but only to a point. Initially, this is visible already in the first verses, which offer a blissful vision of nature ripening to the core, almost unbearable intensity and abundance. The stanza projects images of trees bending with apples, swelling gourd, plump hazel shells, clammy cells of beehives, still budding flowers, and the idea that “warm days will never cease” (l. 10). Stanza two upholds this vision, but pushes it further towards closure in the scene where the personified Autumn has stopped the harvesting work and sits “careless on the granary floor” (l. 14) or falls asleep on “a half-reap’d furrow” (l. 16). Here, however, the tones of transience are already more detectable, as the poem plays with the idea of (in)completion: the harvest is stopped for a while, but it will be renewed; even if it takes hours to watch the last oozings of cyder from a cyder-press (l. 22), the last drop will inevitably fall. This prepares us for the final stanza, with images of ‘stubble plains’, “soft-dying day” (ll. 33–34), bleating lambs (waiting to be shorn or slaughtered) and swallows gathering in the sky for departure. The poem luxuriates in its vision and celebrates the abundance, not shrinking from the awareness of the moment’s transience, which seems to enhance its sense of beauty. In his reading, Jack Stillinger offers a deeply Aestheticist perspective

on the ode (not naming it so), when he states that: “In *To Autumn* we read a series of statements about the season’s beauties, then we are made to realize that all this beauty is dying, and finally (perhaps), if we put these two contrary notions together, we understand that death is somehow beautiful” (220).

There is, however, a problematic aspect of uncritical reading of Keats’s poetry as unquestionably Aestheticist. As Elizabeth Prettejohn notes, “Aestheticism” as a general doctrine involves a consistent separation of art from concerns of life, an idea expressed in one of programmatic texts of the movement, Charles Algernon Swinburne’s essay “William Blake” (7), where Swinburne says: “Handmaid of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, [art] cannot in any way become” and continues with a further statement that: “To art, that is best what is most beautiful; to science, that is best which is most accurate; to morality, that is best what is most virtuous” (qtd. in Prettejohn 7). For the Aesthetes, “Art should not mean, but be” and its only purpose is to be the source of pleasure for its admirers. Keats’s poetry is frequently read in a similar vein; particularly it is the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” in which scholars have found confirmation of parallel ideas. Undoubtedly, in Keats’s ode the orders of art and life seem to battle almost endlessly. The former is embodied in the idea of the urn itself, the eternal idea of Grecian grandeur, which will remain “a friend to man” when “old age shall this generation waste” (ll. 46–48), and in the never ending dance of spring, youth and desire represented on its surface. The latter becomes encapsulated in the image of “all breathing human passion” that “leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue” (ll. 28–30). It may thus seem that the sphere of art exists separately from the sphere of life, and that the latter is infinitely preferable to the former. Yet, Keats complicates this assumption by what the critics recognised as the poet’s “imperfect contentment with the eternal, but unfulfilled happiness of the figures on the urn” (Bush 141). The conflict is best audible in stanza three:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.  
(ll. 21–30)

The diction of these lines betrays internal strife: while the speaker in two former stanzas revealed his eloquence in nuanced, multi-layered, evocative images and

phrases, frequently elaborately oxymoronic (“still unravished bride of quietness”, “unheard melodies”, “ditties of no tone”, “foster-child of silence and slow time”, “Sylvan historian”), now we can hear him falter and stutter as we, readers, stumble upon so many repetitions: the word “happy” appears six times in ten lines, the word “forever” – five. Surely, this cannot be just for emphasis? Perhaps we can suspect the speaker to be ironic? Alternatively, the repetitions might be a way to reassert poetic authority where it crumbles and to force us to believe what the speaker starts to doubt. The ambiguities of this stanza work to subvert its central contention about the supremacy of art over life. In his reading of the poem, David A. Kent goes as far as to claim that the central stanza of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” uncovers “the lifeless desolation of art” (25).

Moreover, the ode’s chief, most frequently quoted line is its ending: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (ll. 49–50). Taken at face value, this statement seems to preview the Aestheticist assumption about art’s function as purely aesthetic, not engaging in concerns of life. Yet, there is so much in this ode that talks about violence, and violence specifically directed at female gender: the “maidens loth” (l.8) struggling to escape; the wedding-like scene, where the female cow is brought to a sacrificial altar; the bride, who is (yet) unravished, but the threat hangs in the air; as Anahid Nersessian has persuasively argued, “[t]o agree with the urn’s proclamation—again, it’s really the speaker’s—is to affirm a world in which harm and the threat of harm remain infinite even as they are covered up and brushed aside” (55). Thus, the poem really does tease us out of thought, but it also questions the tendency in art to aestheticize pain and violence than affirms the view that the sole purpose of art is the expression of beauty, even if it represents horror. This perspective is also supported by Keats’s idea of the poet as a healer, a “physician to man”, which he elaborates on in *The Fall of Hyperion* (l. 1.190).

This, however, does not mean that “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is not an Aestheticist poem; it remains so in its constant interplay of temporality and permanence, in its search for a moment which will not be devoured by time; what is more, the unanswerable questions about the represented scenes, of “what men or gods are these”?, “what mad pursuit”, “what struggle to escape” in “Tempe of the dales of Arcady” (ll. 7–9) tentatively suggest that art is, and should remain inscrutable; the poet’s ultimate test is whether he possesses what Keats famously called Negative Capability; “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Scott 60). The urn’s surface can be surveyed and admired, but it will always leave the spectator in doubt, in mist, with a burden of Mystery, will “tease us out of thought” (l. 44), since it cannot be explained by logic and reason, or by science, by religion, by philosophy. The only available proposition is to get immersed in the experience which art may provide, refraining from the urge to define and explain it. In this very idea we can

easily locate “the interplay of accessible surface and inaccessible depth, and the interplay of knowing and not knowing”, which Kathy Alexis Psomiades finds to be the central features of Aestheticism (60).

Finally, another point that links Keats and the Aesthete is the infatuation with Ancient Greece, in England popularised by Henry Fuseli’s translation of *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1765) by a German art historian, Johann Winckelmann. Although it is not known whether Keats read Winckelmann, yet he may have been familiar with Fuseli’s translation through Haydon, who was Fuseli’s student and owned a copy (Phinney 211). Winckelmann locates both aesthetic and intellectual ideal in the art of Ancient Greece, a locus of perfect harmony between man and nature, beauty and permanence. Stefano Evangelista notes that “his work became the bible of Hellenism and set the tone in which discussions of ancient art would be conducted for the next century at least” (26). An interesting intersection, thus, becomes the fact that for British Aestheticism Winckelmann’s text was similarly paradigmatic, and it is Walter Pater’s essay entitled “Winckelmann”, the last chapter in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which stresses the importance and the ideal nature of Greek art for British readers. For Winckelmann, as for Keats and Pater, Greek art embodies what A.W. Phinney calls a “world of unchanging beauty, free from the defects of poor humanity” (*Studies* 211). Much of Keats’s poetry has symbols, settings, figures and ideas from classical literature and mythology; the most conspicuous examples, apart from the titles already discussed in this chapter, are “Hyperion”, “The Fall of Hyperion”, “Lamia”, “Endymion”, “Ode to Psyche”, “Ode to Maia”, “Sleep and Poetry”. The classical allusions are present even in poems with distinctly medieval settings, like “The Eve of Saint Agnes” or “Isabella; or the Pot of Basil”. Keats’s poetic precursors were Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Pope; his tutor and friend, Charles Cowden Clarke, assistant teacher at Enfield was, as Nicholas Roe confirms, a decisive influence on Keats, as he encouraged him to read Tasso, Spenser and Chapman’s Homer (31), and even may have inspired him in his attempt to translate *The Aeneid* (42). Keats’s important reading was both Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Lempriere’s *Classical Mythology*, while his close friends – Benjamin Haydon, Leigh Hunt, Cowden Clarke were all interested and influenced by Greek literature and art. Moreover, for Keats – just as for the Aesthete half the century later – “Greek mythology not only represented a shared ideal of beauty, but also a realm of warmth and freedom from the refrigerating effects of contemporary religious mores” (Leadbetter 94).

In conclusion, although Arthur Symonds’ assumption that “Keats, when the phrase had not been invented, practiced the theory of Art for Art’s sake” (306) may seem an overstatement, yet it is undeniable that the Aestheticist perspective informs much of Keats’s poetry. Thus, the considerations of Keats as an Aesthete should not end with the conclusion that the search for the ideal, permanent beauty

that offers ultimate truth lies at the core of his verse; instead, we should move on to acknowledge that Keats’s poetry expressed multifarious ideas and concerns which would form a backbone for a coherent, consistent Aestheticist stance at the end of the nineteenth century.

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**Abstract:** Aestheticism, with its emphasis on the present, its call for intensity of sensation and even excess, its preoccupation with momentary, transient beauty, gives expression to concerns which lie very much at the core of John Keats's poetry. In the present essay I want to claim that Keats's poetry is not merely aesthetic (concerned with the creation and experience of beauty) but primarily aestheticist. Hence, I endeavour to examine the complicated dialectic of temporality and permanence, of numbness and heightened sensitivity in Keats's verse, the dialectic which is expressed persistently through language and images that Aestheticism will claim as its own a mere half-century after Keats's death.

**Keywords:** John Keats, Walter Pater, Romantic poetry, the Aesthetic Movement, Art for Art's sake

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## **Searching for Libertalia: *Uncharted 4* and Its Reimagining of the Golden Age of Piracy**

If one were to pick up a volume of *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of Most Notorious Pyrates* (1724), one would probably end up with a variant of one of the first three editions of the book, which contains no mention of Libertalia, a legendary pirate paradise based in Madagascar. It was finally included in *General History*'s fourth edition (1725), twice as long as the previous ones, divided in two volumes. The authorship of the *General History* is shrouded in mystery; for years attributed to Daniel Defoe, in some circles this work is still considered to be his, although this theory was challenged by P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens (Cordingly 17). The text is commonly published and cited as authored either by Defoe or, more typically, the pseudonymous "Captain Charles Johnson" (Jones 72). The text tells the story of captain Misson, a fictional pirate disillusioned by religion and politics, who decides to found his own pirate settlement. The description of the colony's rise and fall is continued in the chapter dedicated to captain Thomas Tew. The chapter focusing on Misson ends abruptly, perhaps due to uneasiness from exploring visionary tendencies and propagation of piratical practices. This could be the reason why the story returns to safer, more conventional Tew. The other theory is that the author was uncertain how to proceed with the imagining of a new society (Burwick and Powell 26, Faller 6). The story of Libertalia can be considered a thought experiment, since it combines the utopian and the dystopian modes to speculate what would have happened if that pirate society had been separated from the European context (Faller 4).

The settlement received its altered interpretation in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, a video game developed by Naughty Dog in 2016, where Misson is replaced by Henry Avery and eleven other captains. The question arises whether the interpretation of the legend carries a similar message to the one presented by the pseudonymous Captain Johnson: the game does not take place in the pirates' historical period, instead setting the narrative in the modern times and taking inspiration from the modern misconceptions of pirates (Idol and Thomas 43). Additionally, it takes significant liberties in terms of worldbuilding, adjusting the popular legends

in order to shape its own narrative, and yet attempts to speculate about the settlement's principles and its evolution in a manner similar to *A General History*. If one has the knowledge of pirate legends at their disposal, they can notice the parallels between the legendary figures and the in-game characters. The creative freedom with which they are treated becomes a base for comparison of the game's plot with its eighteenth-century fascinations, since the protagonist seems to retrace the route taken by the famous seafaring criminals. This essay analyses the connections between the pirate text of the past and the attempt at its interactive adaptation in order to ascertain to what degree the new story stays true to its predecessor, and which aspects of the lore are reinvented and remixed so that the new pirate plot would seem more appealing to modern audiences.

According to Manushag Powell, Misson seems to be a romantic character in a generic sense. Idealistic and convinced of his moral superiority over pirates, he flies the white flag (107) and rejects national identities in order to create a new one, that of the Liberi. And to him, equality and democracy are of utmost priority (Burwick and Powell 26). The pirates have no doubts about the righteousness of their goals:

[our flag] is a brave, a just, an innocent, and a noble Cause; the Cause of Liberty. I therefore advise a white Ensign, with Liberty painted in the Fly, and if you like the Motto, *A Deo a Libertate*, for God and Liberty, as an Emblem of our Uprightness and Resolution. ("General History" 441)

Marcus Rediker points out that the pirates were a fragile social group due to having no geographic boundaries and being economically parasitic. As a result, their possibilities to unite and use their collective strength were limited. They were mostly ordinary people who found themselves in harsh circumstances and who established their own ideals of justice and equality (226). Therefore, it is not surprising that the legend of Libertalia would seem to be an answer to the need to fight the unfair authority and establish pirates' own culture of "masterless men" – removed from the religious, familial, social and political bonds, they demonstrated aspirations that would remain suppressed otherwise (227). The foundation of the settlement emphasises that the pirates planned to create their own nation, their own enclave, which would go beyond previous affiliations, hoping that it would "[drown] the distinguished Names of *French, English, Dutch, Africans, &c*" ("General History" 464; emphasis in the original). The genesis of Libertalia reminds one of a carefully scripted performance of freedom fighters who criticise the abuse of power and get rid of their yoke in an act of brave rebellion. However, the words of the liberated do not find confirmation in their actions. Although he wraps his words in idealistic terms, Misson conveniently finds justification for his piratical acts. A pirate commune, where "money [was] of no Use where every Thing was in common,



and no Hedge bounded any particular Man's Property" (474), is in constant need of outside resources and supplies. Tew notes that the island is abundant in natural resources (483), yet it is still not enough to satiate the pirates' hunger. Misson goes as far as to additionally defend his actions by claiming that

Self-Preservation (...) and not a cruel Disposition, obliged him to declare War against all such as should refuse him the Entry of their Ports, and against all, who should not immediately surrender and give up what their Necessities required; but in a more particular Manner against all *European* Ships and Vessels, as concluded implacable Enemies (442).

The pirates remain pirates; they take what is not theirs, perpetuating the trope of *hostis humani generis*, enemies of all mankind. However, they couch it in lofty words. They say they do not use violence, nor take personal belongings and they intend to keep their word in this matter, yet they still engage in naval combat and capture ships.

Misson expresses disenchantment regarding politics and religion, fiery speeches are made by him and Father Caraccioli, the priest who spurred him into action, and then the work on a new settlement is briefly described. The pirates raise a fort on both sides of the harbour, they arm themselves, they build houses and magazines, and then the story stops short. No more information on the settlement, unless the reader proceeds to a chapter about a more traditional pirate. The chapter focused on Thomas Tew is where the readers receive a description of the methods with which the settlement tried to survive on Madagascar, its ships being sent out to plunder as before. One of the more significant instances is the case of taking 100 girls from a captured ship, which undermines Misson's proclamations regarding liberty. It might be a paradise, but only for a chosen group of people, whose conscience can be settled with claims of greater good that, after all, serves only them. Some problems arise between the founders, when Misson and Tew disagree on how they should be resolving conflicts, but said problems are easily solved when new laws, government, and democracy are established, thus contributing to the foundation of a new nation.

The idyllic times do not last for long, however. Libertalia's fall is brought upon by the native people of Madagascar, who "without the least Provocation given, (...) came down upon them in two Great Bodies, and made a great Slaughter, without Distinction of Age or Sex" (485), and the text does not delve into details. The outside influence, not the consequences of the pirates' actions, is what destroys the enclave, which seems to try and shift the responsibility for the utopia's fall, justifying the lack of preparation in case of attack on the pirates' part. The sudden disaster is shrouded in mystery, and the pirates discuss the necessity to protect their settlement: they raise fortifications (463) and their advancement surprises

Tew who approaches them (471), yet Libertalia falls regardless of the pirates' preparations – it was prepared to defend itself from the outside influences, against a European threat; no one expected the danger to come from Madagascar's native people (Faller 4).

*A General History* did not give the game creators many dots to piece together a consistent chronology that would keep some of the mystery and allow the game to keep its adventure-packed action-film atmosphere. Life in Libertalia is scarcely described, the pseudonymous Johnson focuses more on the naval battles Misson engaged in rather than the reality of living in the pirate colony. *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* at one point challenges the author by describing *A General History* as “more like ‘a generally made-up history’” and introduces the settlement in its own pace and on its own rules. The developers give the players an illusion of navigational freedom – the game's locations are mostly meant to be explored in the search for collectibles. There is only one route leading to the protagonist's goals, the only elements the players might miss are a few documents that do not impact the reception of the story severely. Thus *Uncharted 4* remains a fully traditional type of story, since it remains the same regardless of the number of times it is played (Lebowitz, Klug 121). As a result, it might make one suspect that it is more of an interactive action film where, while exploring new locations, the player is allowed to have a break from the main plot, listen to character banter and enjoy the scenery; however, they have no power over the story, they can only watch as it unfolds (125). There are no side-quests, no optional interactions. Every puzzle has to be solved, every enemy encounter has to be triggered.

The protagonist of the game is Nathan Drake, a veteran adventurer and explorer. The main theme of the series was the search for legendary cities and lost treasures, such as El Dorado or Shambhala. The Drake whom players meet in the fourth instalment has retired from treasure hunting, yet the story once again calls for adventure in the person of Samuel Drake, Nathan's older brother, who has been presumed dead for the last 15 years. The game both shows their backstories and then unravels in a traditional action-movie manner – the long-lost brother suddenly turns up alive at the protagonist's door, tempting the “retired” little brother with the idea of “one last heist”. Nathan answers positively to the call for adventure, which then takes him from New Orleans through the Scottish Highlands to the island of Madagascar.

For more than half of the game, the characters do not realise that it is Libertalia they are looking for. Sam Drake insists that he knows of a treasure that belonged to Henry Avery and asks for help in finding that treasure, lest he gets punished by the Panamanian mafia. The story that unfolds in the game partially reflects the piratical motif of the two thieves against the world. The conclusion of the brothers' story is achieved by cooperation during the exploration. In the same way, the settlement of Libertalia in *Uncharted 4* is a product of cooperation between various historical

pirates, not necessarily captains – in the early game, Nathan follows the clues left by yet another version of Thomas Tew, Avery’s right hand, not Avery himself. Avery remains the mysterious, legendary figure, a symbol that embodies everything that is fascinating in piracy.

*Uncharted 4* omits the figure of Father Caraccioli, who was partially responsible for Misson’s initiative. Instead, the game plays upon an artefact trail revolving around the imagery of St Dismas, reiterating his fame as “the penitent thief”. The main idea is that pirates, having accumulated enough riches, experiment with the idea of redemption by trying to create their own paradise in Madagascar. Tew and his crew are responsible for recruiting the pirates “worthy” of their cause. Thus, the road to Libertalia is hidden behind a set of puzzles and red herrings. The game uses a well-known action/adventure game format – the protagonist finds some clues, follows them, some ruins get permanently lost to history due to an unreasonable amount of explosions set off by centuries-old traps, then finds the legendary city of the day, confronts the greedy villain, and emerges victorious. Building upon this, the game also perpetuates the idea that to find a “paradise”, one has to pass a series of tests, such as the ones planted by Tew in the Scottish Highlands. The cross of St Dismas, containing the clues about the location of Tew’s testing grounds, seems to be an initiation just like the road through a complex of caves that eventually leads to King’s Bay on Madagascar.

On the way there, the characters’ conversations suggest that they have different ideas about what it means to be a pirate, with Sullivan, Nathan’s father figure remaining sceptical about pirate ideals, and Sam retaining the idealised, romantic vision of a pirate rebel, despite being considered the expert on the topic. A stereotypical pirate with his parrot, eye patch, and lack of rules seems to make too irresistible an image.

SAM: Just imagine... you’ve come here, a well-to-do pirate, far away from your oppressive government...

SULLIVAN: Poor, oppressed pirates. All they wanted to do was to murder and pillage in peace.

SAM: No, no. They wanted to live as free men. (“Uncharted 4”)

As the story progresses, Nathan’s brother tries to convince his companions about the value of the lost settlement and its meaning to the pirate society. Throughout the game, the main characters explore military towers, finding not only collectables contributing to the game exploration progress but also emblems of various famous pirates. These emblems suggest that the idea of Libertalia was not one rich pirate’s dream, but an idea that united all kinds of people. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Sam idealises the colony, imagining a perfect pirate society on land.

SAM: See, as the story goes... this place [Libertalia] provided a safe haven for hundreds... maybe even thousands of pirates. And they shared everything. Property, resources, (...) and they kept all in one common treasury building. (“Uncharted 4”)

Sam is motivated to search for Libertalia no matter the cost. However, his judgement is clouded by his imagined conception of the pirates as paragons of freedom and equality. To some extent, he becomes a mirrored image of Misson, both in terms of idealistic notions in his speech and in the lack of self-reflection regarding his actions and goals.

*Uncharted 4* modifies the pirate lore, giving more space for women – or rather one special woman, namely Anne Bonny. She is one of the 12 founding pirates and protectors of Libertalia. Her pirate emblem, imagined by the developers as a pegasus, is identified by the Drakes on top of one of the defence towers scattered over the region, and her portraits can be found in multiple locations in the game alongside other captains. In *A General History of the Pirates*, Bonny was never a captain, yet here she is, made equal to the other pirate leaders. One could say that *Uncharted 4* plays upon the story of Bonny that despite the women’s lower rank, they still prove themselves as formidable warriors and leaders. After all, her name, alongside Mary Read’s, was what advertised the text – the full title specifically stating that the book contains “the remarkable Actions and Adventures of the two Female Pyrates, *Mary Read* and *Anne Bonny*” (emphasis in the original). Parallel to them, the game has its two token female characters who are not afraid of direct confrontation; Drake’s wife, Elena, and Nadine, the leader of a paramilitary organization. Despite the fact that they receive little information from the men, they have a significant influence on the plot, both either creating new obstacles on the protagonist’s path, or indirectly contributing to solutions of his problems. In this aspect, they are similar to Bonny and Read, the she-pirates who found their niche in a male-dominated setting, fighting alongside men as equals. As the players invest more time into exploration, the complexity of the connections between various stories becomes increasingly noticeable. One could say that the story of the treasure hunt created by Naughty Dog is a sandbox of ideas derived from various pirate legends.

When the Drakes finally reach Libertalia, the players have an opportunity to piece together its story, its foundation and its downfall through environmental storytelling. Instead of describing the events, the players are only presented with the events’ outcome and are encouraged to speculate on what was responsible for that outcome. The confirmation of those theories can be provided through old documents one can find while exploring, and in this instance, is also supported by the characters’ commentary. This mode of storytelling is more collaborative and immersive, since its creation is based on the content developer’s arrangement. The responsibility for implementing information is put onto the objects whose presence in the scene is supposed to appear meaningful. The game also tends to reiterate

the ideas of pirate conduct, ironically establishing the settlement as an outpost of law and order. Additionally, the game builds upon the idea of a well-planned, organised settlement. One could say that this setup, referring to the vision of piracy present in popular culture, causes the audience to overestimate the pirates' ability to organise and rule themselves. The scale of the Johnsonian Libertalia might seem disappointing in comparison to its modern interpretation. In the 1725 version, Libertalia might simply have two forts, while its modern interpretation suggests much more advanced technology and planning, demonstrated by a miniature model of the neighbourhood that the protagonist finds in the tunnels under the settlement. The reliefs on the walls tell the story of the settlement, elevating its meaning and history.

Misson's pirates make a vow that "the particular Avarice of no one should defraud the Publick" (441–442) and this idea is rejected by the Libertalia presented by Naughty Dog, leaving no place for improving the image of the pirate. The brave antiheroes, rebels against the unfair yoke, freedom fighters excluded from unfair society stray from the ideals they might have had during the foundation of the settlement. The more inquisitive players may find some Libertalia journals, in which hopeful colonists find a sense of belonging and purpose, they decide to "build a model society for the rest of the world and forge a destiny of their own choosing" ("Uncharted 4"), yet these noble intentions are soon verified. Nathan and Elena gradually discover the true motivations of the pirate founders. The legendary treasury that was supposed to hold everyone's riches is pillaged, probably by the mutinous colonists, who wanted to retrieve the treasure they had accumulated; the portraits hanging around the room are defaced by the word "thief", which implies the treasure had probably already been stolen by the pirate founders. Nathan and Elena summarise it by saying "Pirates will be pirates"; their motivations did not change despite the promises, despite the codex. Conversely, they elevate their cruelty as pointed out by the characters exploring the building.

NATE: Well, whaddya say we go... rob from the rich, huh?

ELENA: I have to wonder if this was always the plan.

NATE: What... to slaughter all the colonists?

ELENA: No... To lure them here in hopes of finding a utopia. Only to rob them of everything that they have.

NATE: Well, we are dealing with a bunch of pirates.

ELENA: Well.. that is pretty diabolical, even for pirates. ("Uncharted 4")

Finally, the letters found with the skeletons scattered on the way to Avery's treasure dungeon piece together a story of civil war, with the pirates turning against each other. At the very end, the protagonist enters a hall with a gathering of dead pirate captains. The letter found by the characters explains that Tew poisoned the men at Avery's order:

May God forgive me. They were my compatriots and I betrayed them all.

I have done everything that treacherous madman asked of me. Now, our once great colony lies in ruins and he retreats further into his delusion, casting suspicious glances in my direction. I am certainly next on his list. He was the Captain, but I was the Quartermaster. It was through my efforts that Libertalia came into being, and it is through my efforts that its legacy will be preserved. Avery shall not have the last word. Tomorrow, I gather my men and settle this once and for all. (“Uncharted 4”)

The story of Libertalia in *Uncharted 4* is not a story of a paradise fallen due to outside influence, as was the case of Misson’s settlement according to Johnson, but a warning about one man’s ambition and greed that led him into paranoia and madness. “Avery’s Descent,” the chapter opening the sequence in the bowels of Libertalia, becomes an accurate clue as to what end the story is approaching.

The descent into the tunnels under Avery’s mansion is riddled with traps and skeletons of people whom he considered traitors. The display seems to be a part of the performance, where fear of punishment is to deter possible thieves, since the chambers are “decorated” with various body parts. The protagonist visits the chambers filled with skeletal hands (“the hands that stole from me”), ribcages (“the hearts that hardened against me”) or jaws (“the mouths that spoke ill of me”). The reveal of Avery’s dungeon, combined with the aftermath of the civil war and the skeletons of the pirate founders demonstrates that he is no longer the idealistic leader from Libertalia’s beginnings, but instead turns into a tyrant. In the light of the discoveries made by the protagonist, the settlement degenerates into a dystopia, an elaborate trap that was to entice people willing to make their own fortunes and rob them of their riches.

The question of why the game developers decided to depict Avery as the founder of Libertalia remains. Was it because of the popularity of this pirate figure? Or perhaps it was an attempt to collate a new story for already known characters? Firstly, there is no mention of Libertalia in the chapter about Avery in *A General History*. There are numerous works with “Madagascar settlement”, “king of pirates”, and “king of Madagascar” as their keywords, yet none connects these with Libertalia. However, the chapter dedicated to Avery provides us with information on another settlement. As Manushag Powell points out, in *A General History*, Avery’s pirates mistreated Madagascar’s native population, set up plantations, and were not averse to slavery. When Woodes Rogers finds their haven, it turns out that the “pirate princes” did not pose any real threat and did not seem appealing to the readers (Powell 106).

The pirates of the in-game Libertalia seem to have inherited only the part where they try to betray each other, the developers quietly paving over the aspect of slavery. Additionally, they focus on the figure of Avery himself, emphasising that the colony’s fall was caused by its leaders’ greed. This approach to the story allows one to focus on the attitude and goals of an individual, meanwhile *A General*

*History* lives up to its name due to being generally vague. Misson's Libertalia seems to be a paradise for a chosen group of outlaws; however, it is a paradise neatly wrapped in ideals. The captain states that he encourages "brotherly Love to each other" (442) and that he rejects the way of tyrants. Additionally, he argues that suspicion in society would thrive lest equity was of utmost priority (442–43). However, the readers do not receive the information whether these rules were followed by all colonists.

The exploration of the in-game Libertalia allows the players to reach the conclusion that its ideals were similar to its literary version. However, *Uncharted 4* tells a story in which keeping such high standards remains only in the realm of reliefs and written codices. The promises are short-lived, ruined by treason stemming from greed. The story reimagined and adjusted by Naughty Dog seems to be more consistent in its plot, chronology, and character motivations, which are partially reflections of the 18th-century piratical plot. To some extent, the Drakes pursue redemption just like the pirates fascinated by the imagery of St Dismas – Sam insists that he wants to save himself by finding the treasure. Nathan is trying to help him, probably partially out of attachment, partially because of the guilt – his brother was presumed dead as a consequence of their unsuccessful treasure hunt. However, Sam's long-term goal, after a series of scuffles and confrontations with a rival treasure hunter, Rafe Adler, is revealed to be something different. Throughout the game, he lies that he is desperate to save himself from the Panamanian mafia's leader, yet the only thing he wants is adventure and the treasure for himself, which creates an additional conflict. As a result, he is partially a mirror of Avery due to his obsession with Libertalia's riches, and that obsession almost brings him to a similar end.

What is more, it seems that Naughty Dog took some creative liberties in terms of building the mystery surrounding the settlement by including a religious theme. Mission's Libertalia rejects religious notions, Father Caraccioli is described to be "as ambitious as he was irreligious" (436) and convinces Misson that "all Religion was no other than human Policy" (437). Taking this into consideration, Misson could have possibly become many complicated characters in the story, yet one cannot call him "penitent". In the book, he is described as follows: "*Misson* was for no such violent Measures, he was averse to every Thing that bore the Face of Cruelty and thought a bloody Revenge, *if Necessity did not enforce it*" (459; emphasis added), yet he cultivates a conflicted image of a pirate. He strives for freedom, for liberty, yet he cannot oppose his crew that wants to kidnap a hundred girls from a captured ship. On the one hand, since the captain's power is given to him by the crew, the text could be seen as a demonstration of the democratic manner in which the pirates ruled themselves. On the other, the lack of authority Misson demonstrates at this particular moment makes a jarring contrast to his previous fiery speeches, where he describes a new vision of freedom. Mission establishes the rules,

yet the pirates seem to be appreciative and willing to cooperate as long as it benefits them. Additionally, at this point one cannot help but notice that despite the promises, the liberty praised by the pirates does not extend to women. In a similar hypocritical manner, the in-game Avery wants to create a paradise for penitent outlaws, yet the game implies that gathering the colonists' money could have been a meticulously organised scheme that resulted in a civil war. As a result, no pirate nor treasure hunter can be called "a penitent thief", it is simply a justification of their goals; instead of building a paradise, they create a trap. Their hubris and greed become their downfall, and the presence and arguments of the protagonist are what prevents Sam from sharing their fate.

The stories about conflict and carving out one's way despite one's social standing and backstory easily become projection material. The childhood stories about pirates were what helped the Drakes' keep their spirits up when Nathan was still in an orphanage; in the retrospective chapters of the game, Sam says "Nothing about our lives has been fair... but we made it work" ("Uncharted 4"). The daydreams about embarking on a great adventure were what kept the boys motivated, especially since they knew that their late mother was an archaeologist/adventurer researching pirates. The boys idealise these outlaws, they are thrilled by their mother's notes containing a theory that they might be Drake's descendants, and take his name, reinventing their identities, thereby closing the protagonist's origin story. As Manushag Powell sums up,

*The General History* is careful to temper the subversive power of Misson by intertwining his imaginary destiny with that of a historically real pirate, Thomas Tew, who sailed in Avery's fleet. Ultimately, the *General History* kills off both men, the real and the invented, attempting to bury Avery's fame in their collectively failed potential. (Powell 106)

*Uncharted 4* repackages Misson into Avery. One could say that this creative decision might be grounded on the expanded mythos of this pirate. Avery was present in Madagascar, and one could trace a series of Avery fictions published in London between 1709 and 1720: from *The Life of Adventures of Capt. John Avery, the Famous English Pirate (raised from a Cabin-Boy to a King) now in Possession of Madagascar* (1709) to *The King of Pirates* (1720) varying in their contents and usage of rumours (Jones 72). The Missonian settlement does not seem to have a significant reserve of money like Avery does, or at least pretends to possess in *The King of Pirates*; he offers the pirates' wealth in exchange for a pardon. The amount later evolved from five to ten million offered to the Queen ("The King of Pirates..." 66). The Johnsonian Avery plans to leave his pirate comrades after his short episode of being the leader. The rumours, the variety of texts and the plans of betrayal could be the main reason for the developers to use the legend of Avery rather than settle for the idealistic Misson.



Misson's Libertalia could be a proposition of a sanitised version of Avery's pirate colony, where its leader does not betray his people, and it is an outside influence that marks their end. Consequently, this version of the Madagascar settlement is more optimistic in the judgement of its government. The colonists attempt to keep it prosperous, thus the responsibility for its downfall falls on the attack of the native people of Madagascar, not on the utopia's inhabitants. Avery's colony in *A General History* is doomed to fail from the very beginning, especially since he seems not to care about his crew's fate. Both in the Johnsonian story and in the one told in *The King of Pirates*, Avery betrays his crew and sails away with their riches. It seems that Naughty Dog built upon the idea of Avery's betrayal much more significantly than on the ideal of a Johnsonian freedom fighter, mixing names and stories into a new one, where differentiating between all these versions of pirate settlement becomes impossible. Creating an engaging narrative is a priority for the game developers, therefore they took some creative liberties to either modify their historical/literary references, or added them in their original form (Idol and Thomas 46). Therefore, the game presents this modernised Libertalia in a more concise way.

Regardless of the version, treason is a recurring theme in stories around legendary settlements in Madagascar. The locals attack Misson's settlement without a warning, the Johnsonian Avery sails away with his crew's riches, the Avery from *Uncharted 4* spirals into paranoia and tyranny. The settlements are failed utopias; torn by conflict, not living up to their initial standards and ideals. However, the settlement in *Uncharted 4* exacerbates the treacherous nature of a pirate's life, it elevates it as the story mixes the legends of the past with the dilemmas of the present. The characters go as far as to imply that Avery's in-game Libertalia was an elaborate trap to strip the colonists of their gold. As a result, the modern adaptation leaves no place for redemption of the legendary pirates despite the recurring references to St Dismas. The figure of a penitent thief as the patron of the pirates leading to an earthly paradise through a rite of passage turns out to be an elaborate trick designed for Avery's followers. The appeal of the colony relies on the mystery surrounding the pirate paradise, recruits a group of chosen people, thus creating a pirate elite (unlike Misson who easily rallies his crew and convinces others to join his initiative regardless of their position or origin). The environmental storytelling in the game, including tablets with fragments of the pirate code and places of punishment, implies that the pirates either needed deterrents to stay obedient, or the distrust permeated the colony despite the rules. Sam expresses his surprise at the discoveries he makes:

SAM: ...thought the point of this place was not having rules?"

NATE: Guess even a pirate utopia needs a place to lock up riff-raff.

SAM: Can you imagine who pirates put in prison? That's a little hypocritical don't you think? Pirates having a jail? ("Uncharted 4")

The brothers also stumble upon a significant number of skeletons of executed or gibbeted colonists – Avery ruled like a tyrant of whom the pirates wanted to free themselves in the first place, his distrust permeating and challenging the peace in the colony. Tew, witnessing the misery permeating the colony, desperately attempts to right the wrongs, yet his course of action inevitably leads to mutual destruction. His rebellion against Avery results in a duel and eventual death of both pirate captains, whose corpses are found aboard *The Fancy* centuries later. The ship becomes the location of the final confrontation between the protagonist and Rafe Adler. The scene, mirroring the events from centuries ago, forces the characters to re-evaluate their goals and motivations.

The search for pirate treasure for Nathan means another adventure; in the case of Sam one could notice the escapism evolving into an obsession. The brothers' fascination with pirates could be seen as a coping mechanism. The stories were what kept them optimistic as well as helping them find a sense of identity – having found their late mother's notes regarding Sir Francis Drake's legacy, the boys reinvent themselves. Based on the theory that they might be descendants of the legendary pirate, they change their name from Morgan (which also might be a reference to a 17th-century Welsh privateer) to Drake, completing the cycle of references between various pirate accounts. In addition, the game's developers have confirmed the deliberateness in which they create the story. What happens between Avery and Tew seems to mirror Drakes' relationship (Takahashi, qtd. in Idol, Thomas 46). However, it is Nathan, centuries after Libertalia's fall, who breaks the cycle of treason that followed the piratical plots throughout the game, although not without a final confrontation with the antagonist.

The image of the pirate as the misunderstood hero is a product of a carefully-planned performance that fascinates us to this day. The themes present in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* align with the series' theme of corruption and greed (Idol and Thomas 46) – Libertalia according to Naughty Dog also comments on the unstable, selfish nature of the pirate society. It discusses the stability of ideals of a community at sea, where the crews were equal in every aspect of their communal life, transplanted into a utopia on land. Avery's betrayal exposes the hypocritical nature of this settlement, whose members do not adhere to the rules they established. Additionally, the game explores how pirates, despite their common goals, are prone to treason and mutual destruction. The idea of redemption and achieving paradise through the imagery of St Dismas exacerbates the contrast of the colonists' actions and ideals. The legend, confronted with Nathan Drake's choices, provides a playground for exploring such notions. One could expand this theory through treating the story as a suggestion that human selfishness is the ultimate obstacle in establishing a fair unstructured society and leads to a commune's inevitable failure (Callahan 91). The characters in *Uncharted 4* are as complicated as the pirates they idealised, with their own agenda and inclination for betrayal

in the name of riches. They make similar mistakes to their ancestors; however, their character development shows that they are able to redeem themselves and overcome their differences, thus breaking the cycle of terror and treason. Perhaps the fact that *A General History* leaves one guessing about the details of the pirates' endeavours makes a compelling argument in support of building upon these tropes to create old-new stories, as exemplified by *Uncharted 4*.

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**Abstract:** Through the legend of a pirate colony named Libertalia described in *A General History of the Pyrates*, pseudonymous Captain Charles Johnson seems to question the traditional bases of society, which turns his work into a social commentary. This essay examines selected representations of the pirate haven and contrasts them with its

reimagining in the video game *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, with Captain Misson, the founder of this utopian settlement, replaced by another pirate, Henry Avery. It investigates whether the modern interpretation of Libertalia in *Uncharted* conveys a message akin to the one presented by Johnson, collating the 18th-century plotline with its digital successor. Finally, the personalities of the game's characters are compared with the motivations of the 18th-century literary rogues. The essay concludes by discussing the allure of Libertalia and its evolution from a symbol of pirate freedom to a story of corruption and greed inserted into a world of mystery and treasure hunting.

**Keywords:** adaptations, *A General History of the Pyrates*, Captain Charles Johnson, Captain Misson, gaming, Henry Avery, Libertalia, *Uncharted 4*

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## **The Discourse of Power in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance; or the Slave of Duty***

*The Pirates of Penzance; or The Slave of Duty* is a comic opera in two acts written by William Gilbert and composed by Arthur Sullivan; it was one of their most successful productions. It tells a story of a young man, Frederic, who on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday celebrates the completion of his indenture to a group of pirates. The contract was a result of the comic combination of his sense of duty paired with his nursemaid's clumsiness and her confusing the words "pirate" and "pilot". Soon after his release, Frederic meets and falls in love with Mabel, one of Major-General Stanley's wards, but their happiness is interrupted when his sense of duty forces him to be true to a previous legal contract, as being born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February apparently means that he still has not reached the age of release.

Analysis through Marxist-derived scope in literary theory generally revolves around ideological, Althusserian school of interpretation, after the works of Louis Althusser and his later followers, such as Pierre Macherey or Terry Eagleton, to name a few (Moriarty 44). This approach treats the literary text as "an experience that resembles knowledge of the social formation" (Moriarty 46), representing ideological drives behind the work. For Michel Foucault, however, ideology is less important, as it "stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material" (*Power/Knowledge* 118, Moriarty 53). That "something" is power, its productive aspect, control-oriented aims and mechanics that remain hidden yet influential, even "insidious" in their designs and works (Klages 143–144, Fry 249). Combining these notions with the fact that, unlike standard work of literature, the comic text amplifies its discourse, reveals ideologies and relations and "relaxes [their] grip, by displaying [their] ... discrepancies and contradictions" (Moriarty 52), Savoy Operas, as parodies, not only reveal the aforementioned power relations, but also distort them. Still, though parodied, they retain semblances of the real-world mechanics as discussed by Althusser and Foucault, albeit with a comic twist. Therefore, the theories of power used to analyse comic in-text relations can result in intriguing and interesting conclusions. Although Frederic, as the eponymous slave of duty, seems to be the most visible

subject of control and discipline in this comic opera's discourse of power, the other introduced characters and groups, such as Major-General Stanley, the Police with their Sergeant, the Major's daughters, and the pirates with their King, also reflect various power dynamics within the play's libretto. These at first seem less obvious in their interpretation than those of Frederic, but equally if not more significant. This chapter aims at exploring two of these power and control relations, through the scope of both the traditional theories, as those of repressive and ideological apparatuses, as well as more insightful, Foucauldian approaches to power dynamics and disciplining the individual bodies and groups.

### The Authors and the Savoy Opera

Before their collaboration begun William Schwenck Gilbert (1836–1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) were already established authors in their fields (Gänzl xviii). Arthur Sullivan was educated at the Chapel Royal and Leipzig Conservatory as well as a recipient of the Mendelssohn Scholarship by the Royal Academy of Music (Williams 1, Wren 16). His works of sacred music, cantatas and oratorios were performed by professional orchestras and choruses, while his entrance into serious and light theatrical music begun with an opera *The Sapphire Necklace* (1863) and a largely successful adaptation of John Maddison Morton's farce *Cox and Box* (1866) (Bradley 294, Gänzl xix, Williams 1–2, Wren 16–17). Similarly, William Schwenck Gilbert was a journalist and a writer of "parodistic playlets" for a comic periodical *Fun* as well as "short stories, reviews, essays" and light verse such as *Bab Ballads* (Williams 2–3, Wren 8, Dark and Grey 25, Gänzl xix). Additionally, Gilbert wrote burlesques and librettos for nautical melodrama parodies, which associated him with theatrical productions, showed his talent for verbal humour, and introduced themes which would occur in his later collaboration with Sullivan, e.g., a pirate apprentice or living portraits (Wren 9–13, Williams 3, Gänzl xix–xxi). This, and his additional work as a producer and a director of such plays as, e.g., *The Palace of Truth* (1870) and *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871), established Gilbert as a successful dramatist and writer (Williams 3–4, Wren 11–13).

As a result, the fourteen savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan are fundamentally the offspring of their authors' previous endeavours. They draw from Sullivan's experience with the opera, melodrama, and his light productions, such as the aforementioned *Cox and Box* (Williams 4, Gänzl xix). In fact, so much was of the classic opera in Sullivan's later scores that when *The Pirates of Penzance* were to be premiered in America, the members of the orchestra asked for a raise, arguing it to be as demanding as classical opera (Bradley 260). The influence of Gilbert's previous commitments are also visible, e.g., his comic journalism for

*Fun*, light verse, and the *Bab Ballads* provided templates for characters and their on-stage antics (Wren 9).

Savoy operas are essentially parodies of previously existing theatrical forms, as they mimic the literary work, its stylistic aspects, and “[apply] the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject” (Abrams and Harpham 38). Gilbert and Sullivan’s plays take the opera, the melodrama, the extravaganza, and turn them upside down, so that the seriousness of the opera is lost to patter songs, elevated themes become silly, conventional characters succumb to figural parody, librettos become saturated with “pathological ... punning,” and acting is filled with pantomime (Wren 9, Williams 4–5). The denouement of melodrama, where “a document is produced or a secret is confessed” is now achieved through absurd and preposterous means, amplified with humour and satire on the English, their morality, patriotism, the laws, and institutions (Williams 5–6). This makes Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas ideal for analysis from Marxist and Marxist derived perspectives, as while parodying their own genres they utilize plots that “[turn] things upside down, ... [invert] social hierarchies,” and “[pervert] the representation of the world outside the theater” (Williams 7), thus simultaneously uncovering “the social dynamic as it exists in the present” with all its realistic complexities (Fry 223) while criticizing the flaws in prevalent ideologies through the imitation and parody of their “everyday language” (Sinfield 631–632).

One such analysis provoking parody is the fifth collaboration between Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance: or the Slave of Duty*, which premiered in 1879, a year after its previous great success, *HMS Pinafore; or, The Lass That Loved a Sailor* (Williams 97). Both plays are parodies of nautical melodramas, a 19<sup>th</sup> century English form deriving from military shows and melodramas referring to events during and after Napoleonic Wars, e.g., mutinies, or Nelson’s campaigns (Williams 98). The plays focused on themes of national pride and service, as well as moral, domestic, disciplinary, or legal dilemmas of stock characters, like “Jolly Jack Tar”, on land or on board the vessels they serve (Williams 98–99). The introduced conflicts with authority, experienced by simple servicemen, usually formed a criticism of the state or the navy (Williams 128).

*HMS Pinafore*, as a parody of the genre, introduced the same criticism as well as that of “class relations; government bureaucracy and its disregard for merit; the theatricality of patriotism and national pride; and ... the performative quality of all social roles” (Williams 101). When it premiered at the Opéra Comique Theatre in London on 25 May 1878 it was immediately a great success, having almost six hundred first run performances and established the final and quintessential ‘Gilbert and Sullivan’ genre of comic operas which was followed by further eight works (Bradley 185).

The *Pirates of Penzance* were an almost immediate follow-up to *Pinafore*’s success. Its plot was based on a theme of “accidental pirate” from Gilbert’s previous

work for Thomas Reed, *Our Island Home*, and inspired by the circumstances surrounding a tremendous success of *HMS Pinafore* in America, which premiere took place at the Boston Museum on 25 November 1878, but without Gilbert and Sullivan's knowledge (Gänzl 89, Bradley 185–186). The success of *HMS Pinafore* on the other side of the Atlantic was more due to a “cultural misunderstanding” (Jones 8), as American audience apparently mistook the play's resolution involving a switch of the protagonist's social standing as “an affirmation of the ... American “classless” democratic society” and “egalitarian marriages”, which was not the author's intention (Jones 8–9). However, Gilbert and Sullivan's works, in general, owed their popularity to themes and form quite distinctive from domestic scenic art of the day, as Americans could finally appreciate the “feeling of cultural autonomy” while laughing at their former rulers, enjoy presented gaps in their ideologies, and abandon young nation's feelings of inferiority (Jones 8, Vorder Bruegge 67–68).

Unfortunately, the American copyright law did not protect non-American creators and a premiere in one country, be it Britain or America, effectively made the work unprotected from acts of piracy in the other (Williams 124). As a result, after the Boston premiere there were over a hundred pirated productions of *Pinafore* in America played at the same time (Williams 122), sometimes even in neighbouring venues (Bradley 186). Moreover, no licensing and various skills of “memory pirates” resulted in “dumbed-down” plots and characters, or translations into local dialects, such as Pennsylvania Dutch (Gänzl 88, Williams 124). When the official *Pinafore* finally opened in New York on 1 December 1879, with famous cameo of the librettist himself playing a camouflaged part of a sailor, it ran only for a month, as most Americans have already seen the play in one or other form (Gänzl 88, Bradley 186).

As a result, the next time Gilbert and Sullivan came to America to stage a premiere, enjoying the status of “world-class celebrities” (Wren 76), they made it sure that their rights were secured, and they could defeat “the piratical people” (Williams 124). On the last day of December 1879, at the Fifth Avenue Theatre they presented a new play, *The Pirates of Penzance*, which parodies the piratical themes referring to the wanton day-to-day copyright piracy that Gilbert and Sullivan experienced in America (Williams 123–124). Being a parody, however, the pirates in the play, though a group of sea faring criminals, are hardly stereotypically piratical in their behaviour as they drink sherry instead of rum, they do not attack orphans, and are surprisingly legalistic in their conduct.

The main protagonist of the play is young Frederic, who was unintentionally contracted to indentured service. The play begins with the moment of Frederic's finalization of his indenture and continues with a satire on legalism, the timid and unsuccessful authorities, bureaucratic incompetence, illegitimate authority figures, and “the opposition between law and lawlessness in general” (Williams 128–129),



at the same time exploring numerous power relations between the characters, of which two will be the subject of this chapter.

## The Police

One of the groups subjected to these relations of power is the local constabulary and their sergeant, called to deal with the pirates and their King, who turned their attention towards Major-General Stanley's daughters and to "indulge in the felicity / Of unbounded domesticity" by marrying the girls *en masse* "with impunity" (Gilbert and Sullivan 1.427–429).<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, their attempts are temporarily stopped by Major-General Stanley's plea and a claim to be a lonely orphan whose only company are his daughters. However, this clever tactic exploiting the general knowledge that the pirates and their King do not harm orphans was only a temporary solution and to assure their safety he requests assistance of the local constabulary. He tasks them with helping Frederic solve the problem of piracy by arresting the rowdy bunch and at the same time allowing the young man to "atone, in some slight measure, / For the repeated acts of theft and pillage" (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.139–140).

The Police entering the stage seem to represent a typical repressive element of the state apparatus, an embodiment of a direct oppressive force aimed at subduing subjects to the will of the ruling authorities or prevailing ideologies (Althusser 92). Major-General Stanley, representing through his military rank the authority of the State, seems to have the power to command the Police, which appear at his request to subdue the pirates and thwart the group's disobedience and lawlessness. Additionally, the manner in which they arrive on the stage, marching in single file, organised, uniformed and with batons held at attention, ready to spring to action, presents and identifies them as subjected, moulded by disciplinary powers docile bodies, tamed with control activities, trained and obedient.

According to Foucault, uniformed organizations provide a perfect example of "mechanics of power" (*Discipline* 138), disciplining through drills and unified forms of movement and coordination of a group, achieved through "the control of activity," i.e. the "temporal elaboration of the act," "correlation of the body and the gesture," and the "body-object articulation" (*Discipline* 149, 151–153), which "make use of the body" as well as "ready for utility" (Dowing 79), and, eventually, construct "subjected and practised bodies" (*Discipline* 138). "Temporal

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<sup>1</sup> Act 1, lines 426–429. This system of referencing to the fragments of *The Pirates...* from Ian Bradley's *The Complete Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan: 20th Anniversary Edition* (2016) will be used throughout the rest of the chapter. The fragments of the Paignton version of the libretto which are included in Bradley's notes to *The Pirates...* and have no line division will use standard page references.

elaboration of the act” regulates the body according to “temporal imperatives”, such as “obligatory rhythm” in its movement (*Discipline* 138, 151–152). However, performing a series of gestures in specified sequence is only partially an element of disciplinary control, unless “correlation of the body and the gesture” introduces the “condition of efficiency and speed”, i.e., a requirement of the proper and correct use of the body as per instructions, requiring it to be more efficient and, therefore, more disciplined (*Discipline* 152). Finally, “the body–object articulation / ... / defines each each of the relations that the body must have with the object that it manipulates”, be it a rifle in case of a military parade, a pencil by a student in class while learning how to properly write letters (*Discipline* 152–153), or a police baton in case of marching constables in a Savoy Opera.

The Policemen appear in their unified clothing, wearing the same 19<sup>th</sup> century blue Victorian uniforms, custodian helmets and, in some later stagings, even the same moustaches,<sup>2</sup> also marching, saluting with batons, chorus singing and presenting, through “the correct relationship between the body and the objects it obligatorily wields”, timidity, docility and eagerness to perform and meet ones’ duties and expectations (Dowing 80). However, this initially promising image of a unified and disciplined force of obedient bodies is partially lost the moment they make more than several steps and begin to sing.

*(Enter Police, marching in single file. They form in line, facing audience.)*

**SONG – Sergeant, *with* Police**

When the foeman bares his steel,

Tarantara! tarantara!

We uncomfortable feel

Tarantara!

And we find the wisest thing

Tarantara! tarantara!

Is to slap our chest and sing

Tarantara!

For when threatened with emeutes

Tarantara! tarantara!

And your heart is in your boots

Tarantara!

There is nothing brings it round

Tarantara! tarantara!

Like the trumpet’s martial sound (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.58–74; emphasis in the original)

<sup>2</sup> In the 1983 movie version of *The Pirates of Penzance*, directed by Wilford Leach, with Kevin Kline as the Pirate King and Rex Smith as Frederic, every policeman has the same style of moustache, making them practically indistinguishable.

The Police was quite possibly inspired by real life events when Sullivan, as an organist at St Michael's Church at West End, while organizing the choir, remedied the missing tenors and basses with the constables from the local Cottage Row Police Station, who, as he wrote in one of his letters, were "capital fellows" that "never missed a practice" no matter how tired they were when their duty was over (Bradley 300). Probably those pleasant memories inspired their loveably goofy representation, which Ian Bradley considers to be, and specifically the way they appear on the stage, as "one of the funniest moments in all the Savoy Operas" (300).

As Bradley writes, the Police's entry on stage in the majority of the productions "almost invariably involves some business" in the form of tripping, falling, or general tomfoolery (300).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, while the control activities remain, they appear to be incorrect, faultily executed, flawed and inverted in their purpose, and similarly to the parodied genre of the nautical melodrama, the Foucauldian relations of power and "control activities" are parodied and inverted as well. The group is marching not in complete unison, the batons are at times dropped, the line is not straight, and the gestures are not executed with parade grade precision. All in all, the police, through gesture alone, gives a splendid spectacle of clumsiness and ineptness.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault states that military's presentment, or in that case any form of uniformed repressive state apparatus, was its form of declaring power, as a uniformed individual "recognized from afar ... bore certain signs ... of his strength and his courage, ... his body was the blazon of his strength and valour" (135). When the body is additionally trained through control activities, after being "manipulated, shaped, [and] trained" it elaborates its skills, but most importantly, it "may be subjected, used" (*Discipline* 136), and through that utility it emanates power "concerned with the creation of a population that is more efficient in direct proportion to its increased obedience" (Dowing 79).

However, in *Pirates*, the Police's docility and effectiveness seems to be questioned not only by their inept behaviour and lack of proper execution of control activities, but also through the very first lines of their lyrics, which trigger suspicion that they are not the courageous force the Major-General expected. Their libretto, especially remarks towards feeling "uncomfortable" (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.61) when met with the opposition, not to mention their rather straightforward admittance to having "hearts in their boots" (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.69), puts them in stark contrast to assumed emanation of authority from military presence, not to mention pointing towards seemingly unsuccessful mechanics of power (*Discipline* 138).

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1983 movie version of *The Pirates of Penzance*, directed by Wilford Leach, as well as in the 1994 TV movie directed by Peter Butler and Craig Schaefer, the police arrive marching in a semi-unified and synchronised, yet extremely clownish fashion, while the sergeants, during their librettos, enjoy feats of on-stage acrobatics and somersaults (1983), or clown circus tricks (1994).

But, as inept and afraid as they are, the Police seem to be genuinely invested in their duties. Therefore, in face of their shortcomings, in order to turn themselves into more effective force and fulfil their duties, they devise a way to acquire much needed courage, i.e., through “the trumpet martial sound” (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.73). Gilbert’s intention for the “naturally timid” Police to use the “tarantara” motif as a form of self-improving strategy to “work their courage to sticking-point” was presented in one of his letters (Dark and Grey 81, Bradley 302), and clearly shows them as aware of their duties and obligations to follow orders and uphold the law, as well as desire to not fail in those duties. Their resolve is put to the test even more when Mabel, one of the Major-General daughters greets them and salutes their task and glorious fate:

**Mabel.** Go, ye heroes, go to glory,  
 Though you die in combat gory,  
 Ye shall live in song and story.  
 Go to immortality!  
 Go to death, and go to slaughter;  
 .....  
 Go, ye heroes, go and die! (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.77–84)

Mabel’s words addressed with a smile and glee towards terrified Policemen is of course a rather straightforward satire on those joyfully sending others to their deaths in battle while staying safely away from danger (Williams 133). Still, they effectively stress the Police, which are already exceedingly concerned about their own fate. However, despite their awareness of bloody consequences and ineptness, the local constabulary know that they must go and confront the pirates because they *are* the Police. Foucault states that power turns individuals into subjects by subjugating them, among other things, to their “own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” thus “[imposing] a law of truth on [them] which [they] must recognize” themselves (“The Subject” 781), in this case as *policemen* who do the *policing*. Hence the “tarantara” becomes a “talisman”, as Gilbert called it, necessary in panoptical self-disciplinary activity enabling to fulfil ones’ duties (Bradley 302, *Discipline* 201). As a result, this willing acceptance of one’s unpleasant obligations (“Sergeant. / ... / We are timidly inclined, / ... / And anything but blind, / ... / To the danger that’s behind”, Gilbert and Sullivan 2.348–352) makes them, in Foucauldian sense, ‘free’ individuals, who, when “faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized” (“The Subject” 790), choose in that freedom to do, albeit reluctantly, what they are expected to do (“Sergeant. / ... / Yet, when the danger’s near, / ... / We manage to appear, / ... / As insensible to fear / As anybody here” Gilbert and Sullivan 2.354–359), and at the same time losing one of the great social struggles of an individual,

the one “against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others”, the one “against subjection, ... and submission” (“The Subject” 781).

The “internalized ... belief in the truth” of their own purpose dictates them to not object to required actions (Klages 144), but at the very same time comic awareness that they cannot fulfil those demands makes them adorably uneasy. As a result, to be able to fulfil these demands, to avoid sense of failure and uncomfortableness, they empower themselves into accepting the task and its outcome by imitating the trumpets, which are believed to increase their courage the way marching bands support soldiers in their flashy uniforms and authoritative step, expressing unflinching power through emanations of force and authority and disciplinary actions; or assuring themselves that certain actions, though dangerous, are “well meant” (Gilbert and Sullivan 2.98), hence morally justified and necessary, turning them into docile bodies, willingly and consensually utilised.

### The Pirates and the Pirate King

While the Police are the example of relations of power controlling a group, the pirates and their King represent a significantly different relation. When at the beginning of the play Frederic is declared to be free of his indentures, he is greeted as a full member of the pillaging band. However, to their surprise, he declares himself to be bound by duty to persecute his former brothers as his conscience dictates. Therefore, though he loves the individual pirates “with affection unspeakable, ... collectively, [he looks] upon [them] with a disgust / that amounts to absolute detestation” (Gilbert and Sullivan 1.65–67). After the initial surprise, the pirates root for him and his future endeavours (“King. ... Always act in / accordance with the dictates of your conscience, my boy” Gilbert and Sullivan 1.72–73), but when the farewells and sincere wishes of good luck in his upcoming exterminatory ventures are over, the Pirate King still promotes the benefits of a freebooting life.

**King.** Oh, better far to live and die  
Under the brave black flag I fly,

.....

But I'll be true to the song I sing,  
And live and die a Pirate King.  
For I am a Pirate King!

**All.** You are!

Hurrah for the Pirate King!

**King.** And it is, it is a glorious thing

To be a Pirate King. (Gilbert and Sullivan 1.136–148)

The picture of pirates as romanticised rogues, unbound by any forms of legal concessions and retaining freedom of actions is a rather common theme in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, seen in such works as, e.g., Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822), or James Fenimore Cooper's *Red Rover* (1827), and inspired numerous theatrical productions (Williams 130). Similarly, *The Pirates of Penzance* in its parody of nautical melodrama still seems to follow the representation of the Pirate King as a free buccaneer unbound by duty, authority or constraints. At least in the final version of the play.

As it was mentioned, the copyright problems with *HMS Pinafore* caused the authors to devise a plan aimed at securing the rights to their own creation. Therefore, while they personally premiered *The Pirates* in New York on 31 December 1879, the D'Oyly Carte theatre company actors that were performing *HMS Pinafore* in Torquay, Devon, performed a one-time only copyright performance of the *Pirates of Penzance* on 30 December at the Royal Bijou Theatre in nearby Paignton, and with this second premiere ensured the dramatic copyrights on both sides of the Atlantic (Williams 124–125, Bradley 260). However, the result of this legal trick was a slightly different libretto of the Paignton performance left behind by Gilbert before his departure for America, which apparently did not include several changes that he made on the way and seen in the New York version. As a result, the Paignton performance introduced a different take on the character of the Pirate King.

When at the beginning of the play the Pirates sing “Pour, oh, pour the pirate sherry; / Fill, oh, fill the pirate glass” (Gilbert and Sullivan 1.6–7), the stage directions inform us that during the song “SAMUEL, *the Pirate Lieutenant*, / is going from one group to another, filling the cups from a flask” (Gilbert and Sullivan 1.3–4; emphasis in the original). However, the Paignton version states that this is done by “Thomas, the Pirate King” who “is waiting on [the other pirates], ... acting as a servant, while the others are enjoying themselves” (Bradley 262), the “Pour, oh, pour” lines are now “Pour, oh King” (Bradley 262), and the play begins with the ‘I am the Pirate King!’ song, from which we learn that being a Pirate King entails slightly different activities than one would assume.

**King.** It's true I have to work all day

Like a genial help in a humble way!

**All.** (*significantly.*) You should!

You should if you'd be our king!

**King.** But to cook your meals I don't refuse

And I black piratical boots and shoes

I clean your knives, I bake your bread

I light your fires – I make your beds

I answer all the bells that ring (Bradley 264,266; emphasis in the original)

The position of a king is associated with a sovereign power, where as an individual he possesses final authority as well as direct control over his subjects (Fendler 44). Such representation is seen in the final version, where the Pirate King is an acting leader of the pirates, and his status is determined by traditional understanding of kingship. However, in the Paignton version this appears to be reversed, as the King no longer seems to have sovereign power nor the means of its execution.

Historically, the pastoral power, unlike its sovereign form, achieved control not through direct means, but by demanding “sacrifice from its subjects”, and from “itself for the life and salvation of the flock” (“The Subject” 783), whose members are dependent on the persona of a pastor (Fendler 45). It is, therefore, a “salvation oriented” form of power, grounded not only in obedience to its source, but in the interest in the subjects’ salvation (“The Subject” 783), although Foucault notes that this past form is no longer valid as the modern “new pastoral power” modified its objectives from religious to humanitarian in the form of individual “health, well-being ..., security, [and] protection” (“The Subject” 784). In this regard, the King’s references to him performing such mundane duties as cleaning, baking bread, or lighting fires (Bradley 266), can refer to the caretaking aspect of the pastoral power, aimed at nurturing its subjects, and sacrificing oneself for their “life and salvation” (“The Subject” 783).

Apart from pastoral aspects of power, the King refers to two other power related mechanics, mainly enclosure and interpellation. The first distributes an individual in a specified space, in this case “closed in upon itself” and “protected” but also “of disciplinary monotony” (*Discipline* 141). As a result, an enclosed subject not only does not misbehave, but also, through being subjected to disciplinary measures and routine activities, while separated from external influences, acquires in this “educational regime” for groups of individuals that need to be controlled and disciplined the knowledge of ‘proper’ conduct (*Discipline* 141). As a vessel at sea is a perfect environment for such disciplinary measures of subjecting individuals to the everyday rules governing their day, the King’s obedience seems to be a consequence of such enclosure, and when he considers not tending to his crews’ needs, he either quickly reminds himself of the consequences (“King. ... For if I said I’d rather not / (I know you! I know you!) / You would depose me like a shot! / All. We would! / Hurrah for our Pirate King!” Bradley 266), or is reminded and disciplined by his faithful crew, to whom he reacts with understanding and gratefulness:

**King.** ... To tell the truth I feel a little lazy.  
How would it be if I remained behind?

.....

**James.** We rather think your majesty would find  
That course of action highly injudicious.

**All** (*drawing knives*). We rather think etc.

.....  
**King** (sighing). True, true - I thank you for your very good advice.  
 The cares of government are overpowering.  
 For I am a Pirate King! (Bradley 268,270; emphasis in the original)

The King expressing gratitude for being disciplined points towards yet another form of control over the subject, which is interpellation, or hailing. Louis Althusser argues that through the process of interpellation, “ideology ... ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals ..., or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects” (Althusser 118). Through a direct address of the ideological message to a subject, by literally communicating it through the use of personal pronouns, it distinguishes and acknowledges “concrete individuals as concrete subjects” of its otherwise general message (Althusser 117), thus rendering it through being personally addressed as more influential in subjecting subjects to its will.

Therefore, whenever the Pirate King declares the unusual duties or obligations as being a “genial help”, the crew heartedly interpellates “(*significantly*.) You should! / You should if you’d be our king!” (Bradley 264; emphasis in the original), subjecting him to the belief that it is really his task. When he states that he is a Pirate King, the crew again hails him as one, “You are! / Hurrah for the Pirate King!”, and when he says that he knows they “would depose [him] like a shot!” if he did not agree to his chores, the crew again shouts, “We would!” and continues with yet another interpellation “Hurrah for our Pirate King!” (Bradley 264, 266). And finally, when the King himself, after considering abandonment of his duties, realises the consequences, which is being dethroned by his men, he hails them (“I know you! I know you!” Bradley 266), thus closing the circle of mutual hailing, ensuring the shared belief in one’s duties and obligations, i.e. him working, and them controlling.

## Conclusion

The productive aspect of power aims at achieving a certain goal, which for Foucault is to “create subjects who act properly on their own”, willingly and without any enforcement through, e.g., Althusserian repressive apparatuses (Klages 143–144). To achieve this goal, it involves “largely unseen forces in a social network or system” which induces “conformism of thought to perceived ... social pressures” (Fry 249). The result is the “‘good’ subjects who obey the rules”, but not because they were forced to do it, but because they believe in them being right (Klages 144).

As Sidney Dark and Rowland Grey put it in their biography of William Gilbert, “to be comic is the mark of humanity”<sup>4</sup>, and as a result, the represented

<sup>4</sup> Because “no one ever saw a comic cow” (Dark and Grey 151).



“topsy-turvy world” of the Savoy Opera might actually have elements of reality, or at least represent some real-world mechanics (Dark and Grey 151). As a parody which turns things upside down, *The Pirates of Penzance*'s comic world does not negate represented relations of power, although twists them slightly. Therefore, even though the pirate ship is not a French prison, it does provide a form of enclosure and influences disciplinary measures. The tumbling and cowardly Police are not a perfect armed force trained in perfect acts of physical unitarian discipline but is docile enough to be driven with a self believed purpose and, if the need arises, sacrifice themselves while following that belief. And finally, the pirate King, who may have lost all his sovereign power for docility and timidity of a well-disciplined body, but he still believes that, despite being a servant to his men, actually, really, *truly* “it is a glorious thing / To be a Pirate King!” (Bradley 264).

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**Abstract:** *The Pirates of Penzance; or The Slave of Duty* is a comic opera by William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, which tells a story of a young man, Frederic, who on his 22nd birthday completes his accidental long-term indenture to a group of pirates, which he kept since he was a child due to his nurse's mix-up and personal sense of duty. When he leaves the pirates, he falls in love with one of Major-General Stanley's daughters, but his sense of duty again forces him to resume the contract due to an unforeseen legal loophole. Although Frederic, as the titular slave of duty, seems to be the most visible "docile body" in the comic opera's discourse of power, the other presented characters and groups, such as the Major-General, the local constabulary, the Major-General's daughters, and the pirates with their King, reflect various power and control dynamics which at first seem less obvious in their interpretation than those of Frederic, but are equally if not more intriguing. This chapter aims at exploring these discourses of power and control in this comic opera through the scope of both the traditional and later theories of power, surveillance, and penalization of the individual bodies and groups.

**Keywords:** comic opera; discipline; Gilbert and Sullivan; parody; power

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## **Pastiche as a Medium for Teaching Sympathy in George MacDonald's *St George and St Michael***

Pastiche, or the imitation of the style of another work or genre by blending various elements to create a new composition with a distinct, referential quality, evoking the texts by other authors and/or written in other periods, appears to be particularly suited to the historical novel. It has become one of the most favoured techniques of postmodernist historical novels. Although criticism of the use of pastiche and its near relative, parody, in neo-Victorian fiction is abundant, the use of pastiche in Victorian fiction itself has been largely overlooked in academic discourse. Moreover, studies on pastiche in neo-Victorian fiction have been heavily influenced, understandably enough, by the works of Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon. Their approach to pastiche and parody focuses on their (in)ability to be subversive political forces. Fredric Jameson describes pastiche as a characteristic stylistic feature of postmodernist culture, a toothless substitute for parody in the world devoid of any normative narratives or languages with which parody could engage (17). On the other hand, Linda Hutcheon describes pastiche as a monotextual form that emphasizes “similarity rather than difference” (34). The emphasis on similarity is also the key concern in a little-known historical novel by George MacDonald, *St George and St Michael* (1875). This article aims to examine the use of pastiche as a means of serious ethical engagement with the past and present in the novel which is concerned with similarities between people across the political boundaries and across the historical eras.

The term “pastiche” is often used in a way that does not lead to a clear definition. In the case of individual texts, it can be challenging to determine whether they are examples of pastiche or parody (Hutcheon 38). Nevertheless, the majority of definitions of pastiche imply that it incorporates the distinctive characteristics and idiosyncrasies of a specific author or literary period in a manner that, in contrast to parody, does not seek to ridicule them. This makes pastiche an ideal technique for historical novels, which imitate the languages of past eras to varying degrees. Jerome De Groot even posits that the historical novel as a genre could be regarded as a pastiche of history: “it imitates history but is never *actually* history” (115).

This analysis of *St George and St Michael* will, however, focus on the use of pastiche in a more specific sense – on MacDonald’s use of linguistic pastiche as a literary technique. It will be argued that for him, this technique has a purpose that is more significant than creating a believable semblance of how characters in the 17th century could think and speak.

*St George and St Michael* is an oddity in George MacDonald’s oeuvre. It is neither a fantasy novel, the genre for which he is widely celebrated today, nor is it a novel of contemporary Scottish life, for which he was renowned in his lifetime. As a result, critical studies of MacDonald’s work seldom include it, or, as in one of the major monographs on MacDonald’s work, relegate it to a mere footnote (Wolff 408 n. 22). Nonetheless, the novel merits closer examination, as it represents an intriguing development in the evolution of popular novels about the Civil War, moving from partisan perspectives to a subtler and more nuanced outlook.

*St George and St Michael* was published in late 1875 (with the cover date post-dated to 1876), initially in a serial form in *The Graphic* before being published as a book later that year. *The Graphic* paid MacDonald five hundred pounds, the most MacDonald had ever received for serialization. (By the way of comparison, Thomas Hardy was paid the previous year four hundred pounds by *Cornhill Magazine* for *Far from the Madding Crowd* [Millgate 144]). It was the work of a mature and recognized writer; in fact, it could be said it was the work of the writer at the peak of his career, modestly successful as it was. By the time of its publication, MacDonald had already produced twelve realist novels as well as the books for children which proved to be his most lasting ones, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) and *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872). He had also completed a successful lecture tour of the United States in 1872–3 and one year later he was going to receive a civil list pension. The novel reviews ranged from lukewarm to favourable: *The Westminster Review* gushed over it, calling it “by far the finest work of art which Mr Macdonald [sic] has produced” (“Contemporary Literature: Belles Lettres” 283), but other reviewers, while generally positive, complained about MacDonald’s “cloudy” style (“Recent Novels” 5).

*St George and St Michael* is a historical novel set against the backdrop of the First Civil War, with a timeline spanning approximately from 1641 to 1646, and it takes place almost entirely in Monmouthshire. The two titular saints, which serve as a shorthand for the political and religious divisions in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, also function as the patron saints of the main characters: Dorothy Vaughan, born on St George’s Day, and Richard Heywood, born on St Michael’s Day. At the beginning of the novel, the two protagonists are childhood sweethearts, now seventeen and nineteen respectively, but their political views drive them apart, and the saints become the symbol of this: during a heated argument, Dorothy says “St George for merry England!” and Richard replies “St Michael for the Truth!” (1: 15). Richard departs to fight for Parliament, while Dorothy, now orphaned, seeks refuge at the

nearby Raglan Castle, where she becomes one of the gentlewomen of Margaret Lady Herbert, wife of Lord Herbert, the eldest son of Henry Somerset, Marquess of Worcester.<sup>1</sup> Although the family is devoutly Catholic, they are tolerant and both Protestant and Catholic members of the household coexist peacefully.

Raglan Castle serves as the primary setting for most of the novel, from the moment when Dorothy enters it early in volume 1 until she is ultimately reunited with Richard in its ruins at the novel's conclusion. The mysteries of Raglan Castle, in fact, form much of the plot of the novel, so much so that one of its Victorian reviewers suggested, not unreasonably, that *Raglan Castle* would be a more appropriate title (Review of *St George... , Lancaster Gazette* 2). A significant aspect of the novel is Dorothy's apprenticeship with Lord Herbert, an enthusiastic scientist and engineer, who created most of the purported marvels of Raglan Castle through his inventiveness. One such example of seemingly supernatural events occurs when a group of local self-appointed rustic parliamentary commissioners, who have been searching all the Catholic houses in the area for weapons, appear at the gates and demand to be let in. The Marquess seemingly agrees, but as they are led through the maze of castle corridors, the men hear a terrible roar and run away, unaware that it is being produced by Lord Herbert's water pumps, used to regulate the water in the moat and fountain. The incident in question was documented by Dr Bayly, the Anglican chaplain at Raglan Castle at the time in his book, *Worcester's Apothegms* (1650), a reverential collection of anecdotes from the Marquess's life, which was one of MacDonald's main sources. It is possible that his fascination with Lord Herbert began in the 1860s with the publication of another book he mentions as a primary source: Henry Dircks's *Life of the Marquis of Worcester* (1865), which included a reprint of Herbert's *Century of Inventions*, describing over one hundred machines.<sup>2</sup>

Dircks's biography of Worcester provided MacDonald with what he called "the bones of fact" (3: 300): the story of an aristocrat who, while compelled by

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<sup>1</sup> Following aristocratic titling conventions, Edward Somerset became the 2nd Marquess of Worcester on the death of his father in 1646, and this is the name by which he is commonly referred to in historical texts. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will refer to Henry Somerset as the Marquess of Worcester and Edward Somerset as Lord Herbert, as these are the names by which they were known for most of the period covered by the novel and the names which MacDonald uses predominantly.

<sup>2</sup> In 1861, a few years prior to the release of Dircks's biography, Bennet Woodcroft, a clerk from the patent office, opened the crypt of the Worcesters at Raglan, hoping to find the model steam engine believed to have been buried alongside Lord Herbert, but without success. Woodcroft did not publicize his failed attempt and Dircks's book does not mention it, though brief references to it appeared in local or technical press (Hewish 196–7) and in Samuel Smiles's *Lives of Boulton and Watt* (26), whose first chapter is dedicated to Lord Herbert as a pioneer of steam engines. Since MacDonald does not mention it, he was probably unaware of this raid.

history to engage in customary pursuits of aristocratic men such as the military and politics, was more interested in science and technology. It was even rumoured that he constructed a prototype of the steam engine before Watt. On the other hand, Bayly's *Apothegms* provided MacDonald with a first-hand account of Herbert's father, the Marquess, who emerges from Bayly's book as a charming, witty, but also deeply conscientious man. It was Bayly who provided MacDonald with some episodes which, if he had come up with them himself, would probably have been considered to be too good to be true. Perhaps the most striking scene recorded by Bayly and repeated by MacDonald may be the one in which the Marquess reads to King Charles I the story of Alexander being tutored by Aristotle from John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in order to teach the King about the importance of keeping one's word. Although Worcester was unswervingly loyal to the King and practically ruined himself in supporting him financially, he was keenly aware of his faults.

It is possible that Herbert's unusual scientific interests were the reason MacDonald selected him over other historical figures from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. What could have attracted MacDonald to Lord Herbert is the potential to describe the stories of his inventions as fantastic events, even if they have rational explanations; indeed, the titles of some chapters such as "The Enchanted Chair" or "The Magician's Vault" might have belonged in MacDonald's fantasy novels (Stelle 140). What is more interesting here, however, is MacDonald's decision to choose the Civil War of all the possible settings as the time period for his only historical novel. During the Victorian era, the Civil War was one of the most widely debated topics. As W.E.H. Lecky famously stated, "We are Cavaliers or Roundheads before we are Conservatives or Liberals". Prior to MacDonald's work on the subject, much of the literature, written both by novelists and historians, was unabashedly biased. Two prominent historians of the time, Macaulay and Carlyle, who differed in almost every other aspect, were united in their admiration for Cromwell and their disdain for King Charles. In contrast, writers influenced by the Young England and/or Tractarian movement idolised the Martyr King. Disraeli wrote about him in *Sybil* (1845), apparently without irony, stating "Rightly was King Charles surnamed Martyr; for he was the holocaust of direct taxation" (210). The debate surrounding the Civil War was often viewed not just as a matter of pro and con arguments within their historical context, but as an ethical zero-sum game where only one side could be deemed right. One's stance on the issue could be seen as a verdict on their ethical position, as can be seen in Henry Hallam's proposed method for determining which side of the Civil War was right: by "judging whether a thoroughly upright and enlightened man would rather have been listed under the royal standard or the parliamentary standard" (104). This, of course, could only lead to the conclusion that the opponents of one's own views could only be wicked or, at best, deluded.

In contrast to this approach, MacDonald strives to maintain a scrupulously impartial narrative by repeatedly emphasising the probity of both Dorothy and

Richard. Both characters are deeply committed to doing what they believe is right, but their definitions of “right” differ. Dorothy idolises the king and values loyalty and obedience, while Richard values liberty and justice. In the heat of their argument quoted above, which gave the book its title, they forget that both military saints who represent their respective codes of values, are actually not opponents but rather brothers-in-arms in the struggle against evil, whether in the symbolic shape of a dragon or in the actual figure of Satan. Also neither Richard nor Dorothy are aware that to a significant degree they repeat the talking points they heard at home. What they share with each other, and apparently also with MacDonald, is a belief in the key role of the notion of duty, which resonates with the tenets of Victorian moral philosophy. They both believe they must do what they consider their duty and accept that the other person must do the same. Richard accepts without complaint that Dorothy had to raise the alarm when she saw him sneaking into the castle. When Dorothy attempts to deliver a message to the King from the besieged castle and is caught by Richard, she prefers that he search her rather than neglect his duty. This central idea of MacDonald’s ethical stance is summarized in this paragraph:

[Richard] saw more clearly than before what he had been learning ever since she had renounced him, that it is not correctness of opinion - could he be *sure* that his own opinions were correct? —that constitutes rightness, but that condition of soul which, as a matter of course causes it to move along the lines of truth and duty—the *life* going forth in motion according to the law of light: this alone places a nature in harmony with the central Truth. It was in the doing of the will of his Father that Jesus was the son of God—yea the eternal son of the eternal Father. Nor was this to make little of the truth intellectually considered—of the *fact* of things. The greatest fact of all Is that we are bound to obey the truth, and that to the full extent of our knowledge thereof, however *little* that may be. This obligation acknowledged and *obeyed*, the road is open to all truth—and the *only* road. The way to know is to do the known. (3: 282–3; emphases in the original)

In essence, MacDonald refrains from evaluating the worth of any cause by judging whether upright and enlightened individuals enlist under its standard, to use Hallam’s words. Rather, he prefers to judge people by the fidelity with which they serve the cause they have chosen, regardless of its nature. He argues that this kind of behaviour brings its own rewards: Dorothy experiences pain knowing that Richard was caught due to her alarm, but she also feels a much greater love for him, and “the love... was the reward of the duty done” (2:205).

MacDonald avoids using a partisan narrative, which was common in writing about the Civil War before him. Additionally, he also largely eschews the mode of writing about Cavaliers and Puritans which was succinctly summarized in *1066 and All That* as “Wrong but Wromantic” and “Right but Repulsive” (Sellar

and Yeatman 63). He achieves this primarily by portraying Richard and Dorothy as individuals rather than relying on exaggerated Cavalier/Puritan stereotypes. Dorothy, who until her arrival at Raglan lived a very sheltered life in her country estate with her widowed mother, is so serious that some of her enemies at Raglan suspect her of being a crypto-Puritan. (In fact, one Victorian reviewer complained of “heroine’s unvarying sternness and ... occasional complacent priggishness” [Review of *St George and St Michael, Pall Mall Budget* 23]). Richard, for his part, feels increasingly doubtful about the cause he fights for:

Or had ever a battle wherein he had perilled his own life, striking for liberty, conveyed that liberty into a single human heart? Was there one soul the freer within, from the nearer presence of that freedom which would have a man endure the heaviest wrong, rather than inflict the lightest? He could not tell, but he greatly doubted. (2:152)

The novel’s main moral and historical message is that there were conscientious and good people on both sides of the Civil War, as well as less good ones, and this is given an additional dimension by placing Dorothy in the castle of an aristocratic Catholic family. Dorothy, a devout High Anglican, enters Raglan Castle with some trepidation. However, the Worcesters are an ideal Catholic family, devout, kind and tolerant, with half their staff being Catholic and half Protestant, and Raglan Castle under their rule is presented, as Bethany Bear has pointed out, as a kind of utopian ideal for Victorian society, where religious prejudices still ran high. In Raglan

[b]oth Protestants and Catholics live in the medieval fortress, and while they have separate chaplains and services, both groups use the same chapel. Furthermore, while the inhabitants respect one another’s consciences, this respect does not preclude earnest discussions about the nature of the true Church and its place in English history and society. (Bear 200)

If the narrative appears to favour the Royalist side, it is not because MacDonald holds a negative view of Puritans. Rather, it may be attributed to a class-based perspective. Richard and his father Roger are the only gentlemen on the Parliamentary side in the story, apart from a brief cameo from Thomas Fairfax. MacDonald acknowledges that there were Puritan intellectuals in the world, since Richard and his father read Milton. However, the Puritan side is mostly represented by uneducated yokels, such as those who are scared out of the castle by Lord Herbert’s machines or those who come to plunder the castle after its surrender.

*St George and St Michael* has been often described as an imitation of Scott, but it must be said the similarity is rather superficial: certainly, it is a historical novel with a romantic plot, written by a Scottish author. But on a deeper level these two novels are, in fact, quite distinct in their fundamental aspects. For one thing, MacDonald does not give his working-class characters the same kind of agency



that Scott was willing to give them, as Lukács has pointed out (49–52) – they are reduced to comic relief, or at best, like Goody Rees (the local healer whom Richard saves from accusations of witchcraft), confidantes and helpers. For another, MacDonald’s novel seems strangely static, probably because the narrative stays with Dorothy most of the time, and Dorothy stays in one place, Raglan Castle. MacDonald acknowledges as much, calling his novel “my story of hearts rather than fortunes” (3: 44). This phrase seems to be an answer to Scott’s claim in the ‘Introduction’ to *Waverley* that his story is “more a description of men than manners” (35), and which in turn was a reversal of Fielding’s own description of *Joseph Andrews* (Ferris 96). While Scott distanced himself from Fielding by defining the purpose of his novel to be more about individuals than types, MacDonald went one step further, stating that his interest lay in the psychology of the main characters rather than in their adventures.

If there is any aspect in which MacDonald can be compared with Scott, it is the interweaving of historical documents and literature of the era with his own narrative. As it could be guessed from their names, Richard Heywood is related to Thomas Heywood and Dorothy Vaughan to Henry Vaughan. Richard is introduced to Heywood’s poetry by his father. Henry Vaughan makes a cameo appearance in the novel when in his double capacity as a doctor and as a poet he treats the Cavalier suitor rejected by Dorothy, Rowland Scudamore, who is suffering both from the depression brought about by Dorothy’s rejection as well as the effects of a battle wound. Henry Vaughan treats him by reciting to him a poem which is MacDonald’s own beautiful pastiche of Vaughan’s style about the evils of being absorbed by one’s self<sup>3</sup>. He also advises him to read George Herbert, whose spirit lurks behind much of the story: Matthew Herbert, a friend of Dorothy’s mother and her guardian after her mother’s death, is a relative and friend of George Herbert, whose *Temple* “to [Dorothy’s mother was] only less dear than her New Testament” (1: 139). MacDonald is actually credited with being instrumental in reviving interest in Herbert and especially Vaughan thanks to his study of religious poetry *England’s Antiphon*, published in 1869 (Bear 216). However, his literary references are not limited to metaphysical poets. In one of the early chapters, Richard reads ‘Lycidas’ during a winter walk and feels a strong desire to share his admiration for the poem with Dorothy, who has just ended their relationship. Unfortunately, just when he is deeply affected by Milton’s poem, Dorothy passes him with a cold greeting, causing him double pain. Also Dorothy is accidentally imprisoned, when visiting Lord Herbert’s workshop, in “the enchanted chair” (2: 36) which holds her down like the lady in Milton’s *Comus*.

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<sup>3</sup> The story of Sir Rowland’s depression, recovery and relinquishing his pursuit of Dorothy in favour of Richard bears a resemblance to the tale of Anodos and the White Lady in MacDonald’s early fantasy novel *Phantastes* (1858) (Stelle).

Literary allusions are not limited to those to the writers contemporary or nearly contemporary to the time in which Macdonald's novel is set. Dorothy sings a song (quoted in its entirety) set to a lyric from Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*; the memorable episode in which the Marquess used Gower's *Confessio Amantis* to teach Charles I (with little success) a moral lesson has already been mentioned.

When it comes to the linguistic aspects of the seventeenth-century world, the language the characters speak in the novel is slightly archaized, with the author's particular quirk of using "an" instead of "if". However, both the narrator and the characters, when using free indirect speech, employ the language of MacDonald's contemporaries. The author acknowledges as much, when he writes after summarizing a particular interior monologue of Richard: "In forms natural to the age and his individual thought, if not altogether in such as I have here put down, Richard thus fashioned his insights" (3: 283). Nonetheless, the style (if not the vocabulary itself) occasionally seeps into the parts delivered by the narrator in sentences like this one: "Dorothy longed for peace, and the return of the wandering chickens of the church to the shelter of her wings, to be led by her about the paled yard of obedience, picking up the barley of righteousness" (1: 133). This sentence was actually singled out by two different newspaper reviewers for ridicule, the reviewer of *Pall Mall Budget* calling it "puerile conceits" (23). They failed to pick on the fact that what MacDonald probably was doing here was an attempt to approximate in his prose the actual style of seventeenth-century literature, in particular that of metaphysical poets.

The reason why MacDonald employs pastiche in his novel is quite serious and far removed from Jameson's idea of pastiche as "blank parody" (17), an empty stylistic exercise without political or social engagement. As is well known, MacDonald, a former Congregationalist minister, thought of his writing as an extension of his ministry through other means. In *St George and St Michael* he conceives of pastiche as a tool helping his readers to cross in their imagination the gap between their times and the time in which his novel is set. He makes his point clear in the last chapter of his novel, in which the narrator imagines himself roaming through the ruins of Raglan Castle and seeing it as it was before its destruction. He implies that he wants to re-create not only the past glory of Raglan but also the souls of its inhabitants. He imagines walking through Raglan as it was and seeing Lady Herbert: "There stands my lady herself, leaning from it, looking down into the court! Ah, lovely lady! is not thy heart as the heart of my mother, my wife, my daughters?" (3: 305) Imaginatively, he sees in her the essence of modern women and feels a bond of sympathy with her which can stretch over the chasm of centuries. MacDonald employs pastiche with a profound purpose, aiming not just to revive Raglan's former glory but also to resurrect the spirits of its inhabitants. His imaginative stroll through Raglan, envisioning Lady Herbert, reflects a deep connection across time.

Sympathy with historical figures is for MacDonald an ethical proposition:

But the same sky, with its clouds never the same, hangs over them; the same moon will fold them all night in a doubtful radiance, befitting the things that dwell alone, and are all of other times, for she too is but a ghost, a thing of the past, and her light is but the light of memory... And however the mind, or even the spirit of man may change, the heart remains the same, and an effort to read the hearts of our forefathers will help us to know the heart of our neighbour. (3: 305–306)

The act of sympathy with historical figures would be futile if it were not for what is mentioned in the last words in the quotation above, which are also the last words of the novel (except for the endnote in which MacDonald credits Dircks and Bayly for providing him with “the bones of fact”). This act of sympathy with historical figures, according to MacDonald, holds ethical significance. He underscores the constancy of the human heart, suggesting that understanding our forefathers’ hearts facilitates insight into the hearts of our neighbours, emphasizing a timeless and shared human experience. Pastiche as a writing technique could help this facilitation; by creating a version of seventeenth-century English language which would be more accessible to Victorian readers than the actual language spoken in the Civil War era, he made the historical characters more understandable and thus, by fostering sympathy with the people who had lived two centuries ago, he hoped to foster sympathy between the contemporaries. The metaphor of the moon could be seen as a metaphor of the way MacDonald employs pastiche. The moon is never seen as it is, but always with a slight delay, much like MacDonald’s representation of seventeenth-century life and language: not quite the exact image of seventeenth-century life and language, but filtered through the elapsed time, like moonlight is filtered through distance. The novel’s focus on fostering sympathy may seem unusual given its setting in the era of the Civil War, a time when it would be an understatement to describe society as polarised. However, MacDonald’s characters’ extreme circumstances could provide his readers with a glimmer of hope for overcoming internal divisions in Victorian society. This is particularly relevant given that, although not as intense as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, these divisions were no less painful.

Another important link between the past described by MacDonald and the present was the issue of industrialization and what he perceived as greed motivating it. It is important to note that MacDonald did not view mechanization as inherently evil, but rather that it was misused due to the sole motivation of those implementing it being financial gain.

Little did Lord Herbert dream of the age he was initiating—of the irreverence and pride and destruction that were about to follow in his footsteps, wasting, defiling, scarring, obliterating, turning beauty into ashes, and worse! That divine mechanics should thus, through selfishness and avarice, be leagued with filth and squalor and ugliness. ...

What would the inventor of the water-commanding engine have said to the pollution of our waters, the destruction of the very landmarks of our history, the desecration of ruins that ought to be venerated for their loveliness as well as their story! Would he not have broken it to pieces, that the ruin it must occasion might not be laid to his charge? (3: 302-303)

The key issue for Macdonald here was “not the struggle against industry but the struggles against *mammon*, which he saw as a spiritually degenerative state of mind” (Smith 45, emphasis original). Lord Herbert, being a wealthy aristocrat was not motivated in his pursuit of mechanics by greed. The inventions described in the novel were made either for defence purposes, like the system of pumps running the moat, or for entertainment, sometimes quite cruel, like the “enchanted chair”, but also sometimes used in quite a touching manner, like the water-spouting horse fountain which Dorothy used to amuse his youngest daughter, who was dying. The disfiguration of English landscape brought about by industrialization was not, as MacDonald implies, brought about by science, but by its misuse because of human avarice.

The last chapter of the novel, containing the passage quoted above, is titled significantly “Ave! Vale! Salve!”. The juxtaposition of these greeting and farewell expressions makes us think about their addressees. Obviously, MacDonald is saying goodbye to his characters, but by placing the word of farewell between two greeting phrases, he suggests the continuity between his contemporaries and the world he portrayed. The particular era he chose for the setting of his novel was not only in itself the age of conflict, but the arguments about this conflict reverberated into the nineteenth century. However, MacDonald tried to create in his novel a middle ground where the seventeenth and the nineteenth century people could meet, and his contemporary followers of St George or St Michael could learn to see their similarities rather than differences. In an indirect way, his use of pastiche to achieve this purpose could be seen as foreshadowing Linda Hutcheon’s emphasis on pastiche focusing on similarities.

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**Abstract:** This analysis explores George MacDonald's use of pastiche in *St George and St Michael*, a historical novel set during the First English Civil War. The article highlights MacDonald's departure from traditional bias in depicting the conflict, providing a nuanced portrayal of characters with diverse political and religious views. It emphasizes MacDonald's ethical engagement with the past, using pastiche to bridge the gap between Victorian readers and the 17th-century setting. The main characters, Dorothy and Richard, represent the political and religious divisions of the era, demonstrating MacDonald's

commitment to impartiality. The analysis highlights MacDonald's avoidance of partisan narratives, portraying conscientious individuals on both sides of the Civil War. Furthermore, it acknowledges MacDonald's skilful interweaving of historical documents and literature, creating a rich tapestry that enhances readers' comprehension. The chapter examines MacDonald's linguistic choices, including slightly archaic language which reflects the speech of the era but also remains comprehensible to contemporary readers. MacDonald's pastiche serves a profound purpose by helping readers empathise with historical figures and fostering a connection across centuries. In conclusion, MacDonald's deliberate use of pastiche in *St George and St Michael* emerges as a meaningful strategy to engage readers ethically with the past, encouraging empathy and understanding across historical and cultural divides.

**Keywords:** English Civil War, George MacDonald, historical novel, *St George and St Michael*, Victorian novel

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## **“I Know that I Exist”: Lorna Gibb’s *A Ghost Story* as an Assemblage of Matter and Spirit<sup>1</sup>**

Lorna Gibb’s *A Ghost Story* (2015) focuses on the story of the spirit celebrity of the 1880s, Katie (and John) King, narrated by the disembodied voice of the ghost, a first-person narrative voice that moves in and out of time and space.<sup>2</sup> Her voice is everywhere, being in and out of the narration, providing comments on the spiritualist acts, exposing what she saw in séances and theatrical acts, and only intervening to make her existence meaningful and visible, and sometimes corporeal. She takes up the role of both spectator and actor when she interferes in people’s lives and possesses the body of several mediums and spiritualist believers in their séances and theatrical performances. In parallel to the spirit’s narration, Gibb’s neo-Victorian novel traces the development of Spiritualism since its beginning, from the perspective of the ghost, but also supplemented with other sources. It also deals with female spiritualists, like Florence Cook and Guppy, the Davenport brothers, as well as with the material conditions of séances. One of the first scenes of the novel portrays the spirit’s encounter with a young boy, the Scottish-born Robert Dale Owen, later to be the famous philanthropist, whose life Katie supposedly saved when he was very young and sick. From there, the spirit takes the reader to multiple settings and places (London, New York, France, Russia and Naples), moving to and fro, following Katie from spiritualist circle to psychic event (both private and public), revealing the theatrical tricks employed by Spiritualism, but also at times fuelling the spiritualist belief through her spirit interventions.

Gibb’s *A Ghost Story* is a neo-Victorian novel, mostly set in the Victorian past, but firmly grounded in our current age, as the text is made up of several computer printouts which appear on an Italian bookshop’s printer apparently without human

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<sup>2</sup> The spirit takes both female and male forms throughout the novel. However, since most of the narrative is taken up with Katie King, the female form, I will address the spirit as a she.

intervention; bits and pieces of “spirit writing” provided by the Magic Circle’s library; analyses of documents by Adam Marcus, an academic who, ill with cancer, took his own life; and correspondence between the Magic Circle’s librarian and Lorna Gibb, the academic who has taken over from Marcus, and who describes the text as “my collage (seems the best thing to call it really!)” (Gibb 295), an assemblage, in a letter she has written to the Magic Circle’s librarian, Bob Loomis. The narrative combines disparate elements and documents, and “is interspersed with real and fake material” (Gibb 2023); then, “the result is a meta-fictional ghost story which explores the boundaries of belief and scepticism”, as stated in a review of the novel (Wilson). Spanning a century and a half, the novel ends in 2013 with the spirit’s impressions of a life that she has “not lived” (Gibb 318), since she has a yearning for connection and physicality. A disembodied form, a spirit, longing for (human) physicality punctuates the novel’s clear rejection of binaries such as human/nonhuman, matter/spirit, embodiment/disembodiment. Moreover, the novel highlights the fluidity of the multiple elements (bodies, parts, terms) involved in Victorian Spiritualism, and in séances particularly, as well as in relation to the ambiguous nature of the spirit. My aim will be to examine the shifting relations between those elements, as well as the tension between human/nonhuman, matter/spirit through the lens of assemblage theory. Thus, I will discuss the protean nature of the spirit, and I will consider it a networked self that floats and inhabits bodies and places, and whose story is retrieved in a self-fashioning mode, gaining agency, and constructing her own story, but also made up of assembled materials, both fake and real, collected by different individuals. Clearly, the novel focuses not so much on the desire of the ocular, tangible (corporeal) proof that testifies to the veracity of the powers of the medium, but on the non-human form (the spirit) which manifests itself through different people and through different phenomena, shaping a “networked self”, an assemblage of matter and spirit.

Much has been written on Katie/John King, the notorious medium Florence Cook’s materialised spirit, who appeared as female or male in many séances and theatrical acts held in the States, in Great Britain and across Europe during the nineteenth century. Henry T. Child recorded one of those instances in the *Narratives of the Spirits of Sir Henry Morgan, and His Daughter Annie, usually Known as John and Katie King, Giving an Account of their Earth Lives, and Their Experiences in Spirit Life for Nearly Two Hundred Years* (1874), and in the concluding chapter, John King explains the reasons why John and Katie King appear materialised in many countries at the same time:

[Materialisation] is an artistic work requiring a knowledge of the laws by which it is performed, as well as a skill which can only be obtained by repeated practice. The materializations produced by different spirits will vary. There are numerous schools here in which this art is taught... We have been connected with schools of this kind for a long



time, and it is part of our business to go with the students wherever they may find an opportunity to practice, and assist them all we can. This is the reason why our names are so often connected with the materializations in various parts of the world. (Child 93)

William Crookes, the well-known scientist, discoverer of thallium, devoted several years to investigating Florence Cook’s materialisation powers and the real existence of the spirit Katie King, and published his findings in *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874). Trevor H. Hall and Amy Lehman, among other critics, have carried out in-depth studies on this relationship, which led to a significant controversy between science and spiritualism, in which the prestigious scientist Alfred R. Wallace also played an important part (Shortt). The groundbreaking work carried out by feminist historians in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Alex Owen, Janet Oppenheim, Ruth Brandon, Diana Barsham, on women’s role in Spiritualism, fuelled the imagination of fiction writers, and since then Victorian Spiritualism has become a staple of neo-Victorian fiction (as well as mesmerism, and the occult, broadly speaking). Particularly, the intriguing figure of Florence Cook and her alliance with William Crookes, and other scientists, captured the imagination of women writers like Michèle Roberts and Melissa Pritchard, who published *In the Red Kitchen* (1990) and *Selene of the Spirits* (1998), respectively. Unlike these novels, *A Ghost’s Story* unfolds the narrative of the existence of the spirit Katie/John King from the point of view of the spirit, in a first-person account, which runs in parallel with the narration of the history of Spiritualism since its inception, deeply ingrained in the culture of the spectacle in the nineteenth century: there were private performances, conducted in the safe space of the Victorian household, in the drawing room or parlour, where invited guests sat around a table. In addition, public performances were paying events, taking place in large halls, where the acts caused suspicion and where the audience tried to discover the ruses behind the spiritualist events, or the supernatural occurrences. However, “séances held at home were often not too different from the theatrical versions of this ritual” (Natale 44).

The Spiritualist movement evolved from disembodiment (the connection between the medium and the spirits from the afterlife was first proved to be successful through sound as seen in the Koons’ episodes in the novel) to embodiment with the popularising of spirit cabinets in the late 1860s and of materialisation mediums as with the notorious case of Florence Cook. It cannot be forgotten that contradictions lie at the heart of Victorian Spiritualism as it predicated upon the belief in the unseen, but it also necessitated and relied on the ‘ocular’, material, proof (not only auditory) to convince sceptics of the existence of the other world. This is evinced in the evolution and development of the séance, and its links with technology i.e. the use of electrical tests and photography to prove the matter of the spirit, especially when the medium had materialisation powers, as Florence Cook and Eusapia Palladino (also featuring in Gibb’s novel). Although many aspects concerning Victorian

Spiritualism and the occult have been amply discussed by critics, as seen in Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn's edited collection *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the Occult* (2012), as well as in publications by Christine Ferguson, Marlene Tromp and Patricia Pulham, to name a few, there are some areas that remain somewhat neglected, and there are other aspects that they would acquire an added meaning when approached from different angles i.e. the material turn in Victorian studies with a renewed focus on objects, and on sensory perception. Precisely, in the prologue to Kontou and Willburn's edited collection, Jennifer Tucker states that regarding Victorian Spiritualism "the past became 'present in the present' by its articulation through smells, touch, sounds and tastes" (xv). Interestingly, *A Ghost's Story* privileges sensory experience in Spiritualism through the spirit narrator's story: "In the years when I was developed enough to borrow human bodies...I learned what it is to feel the pleasure of *human touching* and the heaviness, the terrible weight of flesh that seems in contrast to its utter vulnerability" (Gibb 10; emphasis added).

This material turn has led to a consideration of Victorian materiality, bodies, and things through the lens of material studies, object-oriented ontology, and thing theory, where the emphasis is on the object having meaning, as well as on the relational nature of subjects and objects, and the relevance of sensory perception. Therefore, the Victorian fascination with the body's materiality, as well as the blurring of boundaries between subject and object, have attracted critical attention in the last twenty years. The Victorian notion that the body "as an assemblage of matter, embodied perception, and lived experience...that links the object world and the self" (Boehm 5) ties in with twentieth-century phenomenological concepts of the body, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), emphasising the affective currents between subjects and objects, embodied subjectivities, and the fluid interaction between inside and outside. In keeping with contemporary concerns, many Victorian writers and intellectuals challenged binaries as regards the human, questioning the dichotomy of mind/body: "the body has the capacity to *unmake* the human...and opens possibilities for mutable ways of being in the world, both materially and politically" (Cohen xvi; emphasis in the original). Crucially, *A Ghost's Story* shows a rejection of binaries such as human/nonhuman, matter/spirit, embodiment/disembodiment, and I contend that this tension between those elements and aspects, understood as relational and processual, can be explored from the perspective of assemblage theory, since "[a]ssemblage thus bypasses old binaries between material/discursive, form/function, and language/society by shifting the focus to relationships and interactions between elements" (Pietikäinen 236), being part of the network turn.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *A Ghost's Story* easily lends itself to an examination through the framework of Jacques Derrida's hauntology, since the protagonist is a spectre, rather than a spirit, in Derrida's

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The network turn was heralded by scientists like Albert-Lászlo Barabási in his model for network science at the turn of the century, as described by Ruth Ahnert et al. in *The Network Turn: Changing Perspectives in the Humanities* (2020), reflecting our networked age. However, Ahnert et al. further claim that the network turn should be considered in the humanities as our opportunity to cross disciplinary boundaries, and to bring together various disciplines when carrying out research in the humanities. More interesting, these critics’ contention is that “the critical skills native to humanistic inquiry are vital to the theorisation and critique of our networked world” (Ahnert et al. 4). Following up on this statement, I wish to argue that assemblage theory, as part of the network turn, provides an apt notion to analyse Gibb’s *A Ghost’s Story*, which, as a neo-Victorian novel, not only deals with the past, but also it mobilises current issues in a globalised, networked, world. Assemblage thinking derives from social theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Bruno Latour who also used the image of the network in his first formulation of the concept of Actor-Network Theory, holding “the potential of connecting people across disciplines” (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein 3). Both Deleuze and Guattari offered variants of the notion of assemblage in several works such as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), where they acknowledged that “[a] book is an assemblage” (4), later refined by Bill Brown, the founding critic of thing theory, stating that “[t]he novel has an assemblage mode of existence” (271). Generally speaking, Deleuze and Guattari agree in defining an assemblage as involving various elements (bodies, parts, terms), that has the capacity to function by means of co-operative and shifting relations in a constant dynamic and transformative mode, both allowing for and respecting the heterogeneous nature of those elements (Deleuze and Parnet 69-70). Thus, the concept ‘assemblage’ escapes any fixed definition as what characterises the assemblage is the constant flux, an ongoing process of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, with centripetal and centrifugal forces at work (Brown 271), in permanent change, assembling and disassembling. Two important features of the assemblage cover the abstract and the concrete, that is to say, the concrete assemblage and the abstract assemblage. In short, the abstract encompasses the conditioning relations (abstract machine) or “the network of specific external relations that holds the elements together” (Nail 24),

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terminology: “what distinguishes the specter or the *revenant* from the *spirit*, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible...” (Derrida 7). In fact, the theorist is obliquely referred to at the end of the novel: “*I am reminded of a philosopher and his notion of hauntology*” (Gibb 119; emphasis in the original), which shows the theoretical backdrop that supports the novel. However, as I have written on haunting and spectrality quite extensively elsewhere, I wish to provide an altogether different reading of the novel.

whereas the concrete machine refers to “the concrete elements of an assemblage [which] are the existing embodiment of the assemblage” (Nail 26).

Moreover, Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* (2010) further examines assemblages, advocating for the vital materiality “that flow[s] through and around us” (xii). In so doing, Bennett calls our attention to the ethical dimension and responsibility of the human towards “vibrant matter,” and develops a theory of action and “responsibility that crosses the human-nonhuman divide” (24), doing away with dichotomies and binaries (stressing non-hierarchical arrangements). The non-human spirit voice that narrates their own life story in Gibb’s novel, the first-person narrative voice, seems to represent the agentic power of vital materiality, only that it is a spirit that moves in and out of bodies, matter, objects, spaces, and, in so doing, the novel dramatises the affective currents between them. By focusing on networks of connections, the spirit shows a capacity to function by means of co-operative and shifting relations with her environment in a constant dynamic and transformative mode, thus proving the assemblage mode of her nature, and exploring further possibilities with binaries such as spirit/matter.

As regards spaces, the spirit populates various environments: Robert Dale Owen’s bedroom, Koons family’s cabin, the Davenport family’s parlour, domestic settings as well as theatrical stages, houses, palaces, countries, and continents. The spirit voice travels across space (and time): she is constantly on the move, searching for a body, and she compares herself with the incessant movements of the sea: “...the sight of the sea, which I found that I loved, as, like me, it did not physically change with the years but, like my thoughts, moved ceaselessly, incessantly” (Gibb 305). Her constant mobility facilitates border crossings, and promotes her in-between status, and involvement, in the spiritualist acts, keeping her both in proximity in the phenomenal space, but also at a distance, being disembodied.

Those shifting relations with her environment become more obvious when it comes to the dichotomy matter/spirit, whose borders are blurred in the networks of connections the spirit nurtures throughout her existence. In fact, contradictions constitute a staple of the séance, and of Spiritualism at large, where boundaries of all sorts are dissolved, notably those pertaining to matter/spirit. One specific moment illustrates this contradiction: Eusapia Palladino, the notorious Italian medium who became very popular in the nineteenth century, and who attracted the scientific interest of the Society for Psychical Research, and that of relevant names including Cesare Lombroso, managed to generate and produce spirit matter, ectoplasm, that oozed from her body in her spiritualist acts, thus representing Bennett’s agentic power of vital materiality. In fact, ectoplasm, as the interface between sitters and producer, has recently been signalled as a key factor in the history of Spiritualism when the movement reached momentum because, to a certain extent, it became “an artistic and technological avant-garde” (Vilaplana de Miguel 10). Then, ectoplasm, or spirit matter, a term given by the occultist Dr. Richet in 1894 (Gunning 56), has been

interpreted as a pre-historic cinematic technology of the time, as part of new media practices, “in terms of embodiment and interactivity” (Vilaplana de Miguel 10), and in relation to “expanded modes of vision which refuse the supremacy of the eye as the only visual organ” (Vilaplana de Miguel 11). The novel portrays several fictional representations of Palladino’s mediumistic powers and of the ectoplasm she was able to produce:

Mme Curie knelt in front of Eusapia’s wide-open legs and gently began to pull the ectoplasm that was coming forth...still thought about the vaginal fluid which was starting to form a much more recognisable shape. I thought of a real birth, the outline of a human child...and the substance rose away from Mme Curie and took form in the air. But I could not hold it there for long because the sensations were overwhelming. (Gibb 275).

Thus, ectoplasm breaks down dichotomies such as inside/outside, matter/spirit, occupying a liminal position between the spirit and the human world. In extruding ectoplasm, Palladino gives birth to, shapes and resuscitates, in an embodied form, the dead spirit in front of the sitters at the spiritualist séance. Clearly, the séance, as an intertwined space of production of flows, and multiplicity of bodies, spaces, matter, objects, allowed for the circulation of vital materiality between the medium-producer and the sitters.

Critics like Marlene Tromp have considered the sexual titillation and connotations in the dark room, and this can be seen particularly in the novel when the spirit crosses gender identity and manifests as both male, John, and female, Katie King. Harsh attacks on the spiritualist movement, as well as against the authenticity of spirit phenomena, were based on alleged accusations of sexual promiscuity between the medium and the sitters. An analysis of the body of the medium in terms of desire deserves closer attention, especially in the case of Palladino where the spirit takes on a male identity, thus depicting gender fluidity. The existing sexual titillation between Palladino and the spirit John King contributes to the appeal of her spiritualist acts in several countries, including Italy and France:

Part of our appeal to the Parisian séance crowds lay in the scandalous idea that I was a male spirit entering a female medium...the idea that she might welcome a male phantasm into her shocked men with its impropriety but made her a huge success with women of a similar age, who seemed to revel in the heavy sexual metaphor made respectable within the setting of a séance. (Gibb 269)

Desire flows in the novel in manifold ways: the spirit nurtures the desire to be tangible, physical, throughout the narration, but crucially, the desire to have had an existence: “*I am obsessed by my desire to find a sign of what I have known, a trace of my existence*” (Gibb 319; emphasis in the original). However, this statement also punctuates another reading concerning desire, and circulation of feelings in

the dark room, the desire that blurs the boundaries between flesh and spirit and between self and other: “[d]isruption of identity within Spiritualism...impacted notions of womanly identity and roles...Spiritualism’s assault on the permanence and rigidness of the boundaries between spirit//matter and self/other disrupted other social dichotomies...like those between the mind/body, spiritual/sexual...” (Tromp 27). This deconstruction of dichotomies must be understood, then, as producer of meaning, and transformation, from the point of view of assemblage theory. Thus, desire has an added significance if we turn to assemblage thinking as “assemblages are desired” (Müller 29), and they always have a corporeal existence. This refers to the concrete assemblage, or the embodiment of the assemblage: the spirit is constantly moving in and out the bodies, sometimes having a corporeal existence; in other words, a concrete assemblage. Nonetheless, the spirit’s nature is also dictated by the disembodied existence of her networked relations as an abstract assemblage.

Lastly, following Brown’s statement that “[t]he novel has an assemblage mode of existence” (Brown 271), Gibb’s *A Ghost’s Story* displays such an assemblage mode of existence, from a formal point of view, as seen in the fragmentary structure of the novel. It is made up of bits and pieces, penned by human beings and non-human forms (the spirit), that reads like “a collage”, an assemblage (Gibb 295). This composite text assembles auto/biography, history and fiction, where the reader has access to archival sources, private writings and letters, some of them are real and others are fake, all of them becoming tangible proofs of the existence of the spirit on earth. The result does not cause a distancing effect, as the material interacts with the spirit’s narration but never acquires a predominant role in the novel. Thus, *A Ghost’s Story* moves beyond postmodernist techniques and flattens out the distance between past and present, subject and object, spirit and matter. Here the past is made tangible and conjured up by the dis/embodied, fluid, presence of an absence: the spirit Katie King, who takes ownership of her own story in this first-person narration (“A Ghost’s Story”). In so doing, privileging the disembodied I/eye challenges traditional assumptions of what an autographical narrative should be like, providing a composite I, a networked self, an assemblage. The non-human form (the spirit) manifests herself through different people and through different phenomena, shaping a networked self through performance. As seen before, the psychic event, or the séance, is understood as a spectacle, a staged performance (either public or private), where spectatorship becomes multiple: sitters and audience are spectators, the reader of the text(s) takes up the role of the spectator, and, importantly, the spirit appears as spectator of the séances and the spiritualist acts; all of them representing an embodied eye/I, excepting the dis/embodied I of the spirit: “the embodied I of theatrical spectatorship is grounded...in an embodied eye” (Garner 4; emphasis in the original). Thus, the spirit narrator plays with and deconstructs the embodied I/eye of the theatrical performance.

Zizi Papacharissi has lucidly explored the concept of “networked self” in a series of recent edited volumes covering related themes such as identity, online platforms, love, birth, life, death, and artificial intelligence. The second of the series, entitled *A Networked Self and Platforms, Stories, Connections* (2018), delves into storytelling “in the contemporary networked digital environment” (Papacharissi 1), since we, as human beings, survive and make sense of our identity through narration and social connections. Following this critic’s contention that “[p]eople tell these stories on spaces that function as platforms for performativity” (4), the spirit similarly tells her own life narrative in a performative way, to make sense of her identity in a relational mode. Her existence is defined only through relations or networks of connections, through assemblage.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the disembodied, non-human, nature of the spirit engages with human interaction through dissolving body boundaries when possessing those Victorians who really believed in the spirit world, becoming an assembled/networked entity. The spirit only succeeds on a few occasions: with Florence Cook: “this time I found that, with great concentration, and for only the briefest of times, I was able to inhabit her physical body. I fixed my attention on the rise and fall of her breathing, and then, as if I had been inhaled, I felt myself to be the air that entered her” (Gibb 189–90); with Eusapia Palladino, as seen above, and with Eliza White when she finally manages to have a physical contact with Robert Dale Owen: “And then it happens. I become her. For no more than a few seconds, but I do. I concentrate hard, wish with all my will and then I find I am touching his sleeve, its stiff fabric. The heaviness of a human body imprisons me and I do not know how long it can be this way” (Gibb 218). As seen here, the spirit’s voice acquires a poignancy and some kind of (human) feeling with her yearning for connection and physicality.<sup>5</sup> If Papacharissi affirms that today “human identity...is performed and networked” (4), it could be argued that the spirit’s identity likewise is performed and networked in the narrative, showing parallels and dis/continuities between the Victorian world and our networked age.

In conclusion, Gibb’s neo-Victorian novel impinges on the fluid relations between matter/spirit, embodiment/disembodiment, subject/object. I have claimed that the notion of the assemblage, as part of the network turn, helps us see this novel as showing an assemblage mode of existence because of the spirit, a non-human entity, whose disembodied voice shapes the narrative, asserting her existence only through connection and relations. The in-between nature of the spirit has been tackled as a networked self, who constructs her own story in a self-fashioning mode, and made

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted here to Manuel Hueso for his perceptive comments on this section of the essay.

<sup>5</sup> This is especially clear in her constant devotion to Robert Dale Owen, whose figure looms the narrative from the very beginning until he suffers a mental breakdown, and the spirit decides to leave him alone.

up of assembled materials, both fake and real, collected by different individuals. In addition, assemblage thinking allows us to see beyond static forms and frameworks, by undoing binaries and dichotomies, to offer alternative ways to see the complexities of the past and today's networked age, thus offering a methodological tool to examine multiplicities, relational forms, entanglements and ongoing processes (Pietikäinen). In this sense, *A Ghost's Story* both stages Victorian preoccupations with networked ideas between subjects and objects, as well as addresses dis/continuities between the Victorian past and our current concerns in new and unexpected ways.

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**Abstract:** Lorna Gibb's *A Ghost Story* (2015) focuses on the story of the spirit celebrity of the 1880s, Katie (and John) King, narrated by the disembodied voice of the ghost, a first-person narrative voice that moves in and out of time and space. The spirit takes the reader to multiple settings and places (London, New York, France, Russia and Naples), following Katie from spiritualist circle to psychic event (both private and public), revealing the tricks employed by Spiritualism, but also at times fuelling the spiritualist belief through her spirit interventions. *A Ghost Story* is a neo-Victorian novel, mostly set in the Victorian past, but firmly grounded in our current age, as the text consists of the spirit's autobiographical narrative as well as several documents and texts, both fictional and real. This way, the novel highlights the fluidity of the multiple elements (bodies, parts, terms) involved in Spiritualism, and in séances particularly, as well as in relation to the ambiguous nature of the spirit. In this chapter I discuss the protean nature of the spirit as a networked self, whose story is retrieved in a self-fashioning mode, gaining agency, and constructing her own story, but also made up of assembled materials, collected by different individuals. Then, I demonstrate that the novel shows an assemblage mode of existence, as part of the network turn.

**Keywords:** Neo-Victorianism; Spiritualism; ghost; Lorna Gibb; assemblage; networked self

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## The “Shows of London” and Late Eighteenth-Century British Novels

An ongoing feature of eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse concerned the effect that certain sites and sights, objects and experiences exerted on the so-called common man. As Matthew Craske writes, the predominant idea was that a person’s lowly class status and education could be discerned by assessing their reaction to “unsophisticated illusions and crass, formulaic tricks of the senses” (192), and that they were naturally more inclined to be in awe of entertainments such as magic shows, spectacles, and pantomimes. In turn, such spectators were likely to be incapable of appreciating “high” artforms: textual, performative, and belonging to the visual and plastic arts. Samuel Johnson, typifying this view, declared in *The Rambler* no. 132 (1751): “That wonder is the effect of ignorance has been often observed”, adding that “It is common for those who have never accustomed themselves to the labour of enquiry ... to sleep in the gloomy quiescence of astonishment” (222). The differentiation between types of spectator, based on “ignorance” or knowledge, seemed particularly easy to determine – but also to challenge – in evaluating the effects of the sights and shows of London.

Eighteenth-century London had plenty to offer pleasure-seekers of all stamps, as numerous texts from the period demonstrate, from John Gay’s topographical 1716 poem *Trivia* – which describes the “art of walking the streets of London” and the vast variety they provide – to “Residence in London”, book VII of William Wordsworth’s long autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1805 version). The polarisation of “high”- and “low”-brow approaches towards London’s entertainments adopted in such texts tended to reflect the social and political viewpoints of the author; Johnson’s *London* (1738), for instance, an imitation of Juvenal’s third satire, juxtaposes the present-day capital with ancient Rome to expose the shortcomings of contemporary modernity. Johnson built on an existing tradition from the earlier decades of the century, itself part-modelled on the texts of classical antiquity (Horace, Virgil) which contrasted country and city, which explored both the possibilities and the negative dimensions of London. Periodical essays deployed city-savvy avatars to examine these complexities; Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* (1711–1714) is

perhaps the most familiar, with Ned Ward's *London Spy* (1698–1700) offering a satirical correlative. The novel, especially as it took shape in the latter decades of the century, offered an alternative space for exploring, admiring, and critiquing the shows of London in ways that brought fresh scrutiny to notions of high or low spectatorship: itself a purportedly demotic form that incorporated the experiences of middle- and lower-class life, potentially reaching a wider social spectrum of readers than other types of writing, it grappled with the contradictory appeal of wonder and its supposedly “unsophisticated” associations. Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and the less well-known *Adventures of Miss Fanny Brown* of 1761 (dated 1760), by “John Piper” (the pseudonym of John Alcock), provide contrasting approaches to what London offered visitors to the city, and the educative role those entertainments and experiences could yield beyond the initial sensation, turning “wonder” into a positive tool for self-improvement. These novels highlight how, as Richard Altick points out in his classic study *The Shows of London*, among the multi-sensorial entertainments the city provided, distinctions between types of experience and of participator, classified according to apparently impermeable boundaries between popular and elite, tended to collapse in practice (1–2).

These seemingly conflicting tendencies, and the symbiotic dynamic of shows as captivating wonders but which provoked some spectators to inhabit a posture of distancing, repeatedly resurface. *Spectator* 22, of 26 March 1711, for instance, muses on the notion of spectatorship itself in relation to theatre and opera audiences, critiquing the “monstrous things” admired in both contexts: “Our Mirth is the Laughter of Fools, and our Admiration the Wonder of Idiots; else such improbable, monstrous, and incoherent Dreams could not go off as they do” (92), Steele concludes. In *London*, Johnson condemns in the 1730s the “Beau” whom “Masquerades debauch’d” (69) as “lost in thoughtless Ease, and empty Show” (73), and allies superficial social performativity with the corrupted taste of “this discerning Age” for “wond’rous Talents for the Stage” (75).

Johnson's protégé, Boswell, nevertheless later reported more mixed reactions to his experiences of London. On his arrival in November 1763, he noted that “The noise, the crowd, the glare of shops and signs agreeably confused me” – “Shops breathe perfumes” (30), according to Gay – and that he was “wildly struck” (Boswell 44). He visited everything from people, to theatres, to wax-work exhibitions, and prostitutes. Boswell's numerous sexual encounters, and his ongoing struggles with venereal disease, have been well-documented – in tandem with Johnson's denouncements of prostitution, as recorded by Boswell in his *Life* (640), and in a pair of *Rambler* essays (170 and 171) that lament a prostitute's fate as “the drudge of extortion and the sport of drunkenness” (256). Johnson's moralistic but sympathetic assessment contrasts sharply with the humour that street-ramblers such as Ward found in derogatorily describing prostitutes as “Punks” and “Lechery

*Layers*" (*London Spy* no. 2, 6), women bought and sold as commodities in London's numerous brothels.

Boswell loved the theatre, but was conscious of himself as a particular type of audience-member, of his doubleness as a spectator who was willingly immersed yet also critically detached by his educated awareness of artifice: "In my opinion, perfect simplicity and intimate knowledge of scenes takes away the pleasing sort of wonder and awe that we have for what is not clear to us ... This makes the great difference between people that are raw and those that know the world" (176). The fear of imposition in all its guises (especially financial) which attended visiting the city was a longstanding feature of warnings against vice-ridden urbanity, as Gay satirically touches upon in describing how "Careful Observers, studious of the Town", "contemn the Jugler's Feats" and do not "try the Thimble's Cheats" – "A Cheat, commonly practic'd in the Streets, with three Thimbles and a little Ball", a footnote informs us (31).

Frances Burney, an equally educated spectator, nevertheless echoes but questions Johnson's conjunction in *Rambler* 132 between wonder and ignorance, astonishment and credulity in a diary entry written as a young woman in the 1770s: "Wonder, they say, is the attribute of Fools. I cannot think it" (*Journals* 143). However, she goes on to qualify that

Surely this maxim should be confined to intellectual ignorance.—to those who stare with stupid and uninformed astonishment at the Works of Art—who exclaim at the sight of any thing unusual—Lord! how is this done? Lord! I wonder how that is done? But it seems to me to be very unjust to impute to folly the wonder of inexperience at the Works of man. (*Journals* 143–44)

Burney's distinction may seem nice, and simply to reassert the assumptions it appears to refute; but it gestures towards a nuance that increasingly conditioned who experienced what and how, as Altick suggests, confusing simple lines of discrimination between "crass" shows and rabble crowds, higher-brow experiences and more educated spectators – and reasserting the significance of pleasure, both as an end in itself and as an instructive tool.

Indeed, Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755 suggests a more generous, or less critical, role for "wonder": "To be struck with admiration; to be pleased or surprised so as to be astonished". A few years later, in the 1790s, William Wordsworth notes a similar doubleness as Boswell and Burney when describing the effects of popular entertainments on seemingly indiscriminating crowds, witnessed as a young man, in *The Prelude*'s book VII, "Residence in London" (1805). He is part-immersed, part-detached spectator. At "Half-rural Sadler's Wells" – licensed only to perform non-spoken drama – "Amid the uproar of the rabblement" he watches "exhibitions, mute and still" and "shifting pantomimic scenes" (266). He mostly spectates on

the crowd, though: “Nor was it mean delight / To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds, / To note the laws and progress of belief” (266). Wonder, surprise, and astonishment were, perhaps, sensations of which to be wary, as a thinking, educated spectator, but the pleasure they provided – most aptly stimulated by the variety of shows London offered – was undeniable.

Textual moments such as these suggest the fault-lines running through the seeming differentiation of types of show, and types of spectator, which contemporary, evolving literary forms were helping to expose. Altick observes how London’s diverse shows emerged and flourished in close proximity to the modes of print publication that expanded in number and scope as the century’s decades moved on: “the broad stream of urban culture ... ran parallel to and sometimes merged with that of the printed word” (1). The one nourished the other. Numerous guidebooks to London, for instance, incorporated such sights into their proposed itineraries, mixing the seemingly elevated and the popular as part of the tourist experience. In turn, many novels of the century’s latter decades also brought travel sections into the narrative, with London featuring prominently. But whereas the guidebook aimed to instruct by an ostensibly objective detachment from the sight presented to the reader (for all that subjectivised travel narratives became increasingly popular in this period), the travelogues embedded in contemporary novels complicated subjective-objective dichotomies through a range of narratorial strategies that brought earlier literary representations of the vice-ridden capital and its entertainments under fresh scrutiny.

What to see and what to think about it was routed through either the overtly fictive lenses of familiar, relatable characters within the story, or the questionable reliability of the third-person narrative voice. The novel’s varied narrative perspectives proved peculiarly conducive to exploring – and to undermining – the separation between the viewing self and others who view, the response to “wonder”, and the capacity for examining subjective experience through quotidian occurrences. As such, the novel in the second half of the eighteenth century provided a particularly fertile print media zone for exploiting hybrid intersections between high-brow and popular experiences, and experiencers. The London tours of texts such as *Humphry Clinker* and *Fanny Brown* participated in the democratisation of travel offered by domestic tourism, as a cultivated and cultivating experience pursued through contact with “art”, broadly defined, among a wider public, diversified by gender, class, and education.

Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker* presents an unambiguously negative personal account of tourism in London as projected through the narrative voice of Matthew Bramble; however, it places his critique within a narrative framework of critical observation that allows the reader to evaluate, agree with, or object to Bramble’s views. Writing to his correspondent in Wales, Dr Lewis, Bramble is unabashed in his hostility towards the sights and shows of London, and of the unthinking minds so dubiously taken in by them: “The diversions of the times are not ill suited

to the genius of this incongruous monster, called *the public*. Give it noise, confusion, glare, and glitter; it has no idea of elegance and propriety" (Smollett 120). He is particularly critical of the pleasure gardens, Ranelagh and Vauxhall, which Peter Borsary describes as "Dazzling and vibrant", and "among the top tourist attractions of the capital" (49). They provided an array of entertainments, as visitors "ate and drank, listened to music, admired paintings and sculpture, and enjoyed a variety of other spectacles" (Conlin 1). For Bramble, this messy confusion mirrors the messy crowds, who "can neither discourse, distinguish, nor be distinguished" (120), given Ranelagh's noise and low-level lighting. Vauxhall, meanwhile, is a visual overload, "a composition of baubles, overcharged with paltry ornaments", with cheap effects "seemingly contrived to dazzle the eyes and divert the imagination of the vulgar": "Here a wooden lion, there a stone statue; in one place, a range of things like coffeehouse boxes, covered a-top; in another, a parcel of ale-house benches; in a third, a puppet-show representation of a tin cascade" (120). The hodgepodge of ill-assorted objects and entertainments enjoyed by noisy crowds emblematises the rapidly expanding city itself, which swells like "an overgrown monster" (118) and breeds "luxury and corruption" (119).

For Bramble, the confusion of new buildings, of traffic, of people, and of "diversions" represents a worrying mix of social classes, an erasure of hierarchical distinctions meaning that everything, like everyone, is "jumbled together" (119). The higher status, "well dressed people" at Vauxhall are themselves the objects of spectacle, "exposed to the eyes of the mob" (120) – but this does not seem to bother them. Self-display was inherent to the performance of spectatorship, which simultaneously combined self-absorption in the consciousness of being looked at and of looking at others. For Peter de Bolla, Vauxhall's very design created an environment in which "the beholder constantly sees self-reflection in the form of others engaged in an activity of looking" (88). In the whirl of entertainment, to see and to be seen, to mix and to mingle, seemingly with complete disregard for the proprieties of status or place, embodies the onward swoop of modernity that, for Bramble at least, assumes apocalyptic proportions of decline.

Smollett's seeming critique of the city, as voiced by Matthew Bramble, must nevertheless be situated alongside the subjective interpretations of the other tourists to the capital who also describe what they experience in *Humphry Clinker*, as Vic Gatrell points out in his exploration of eighteenth-century London's seamier sides (31–32). Lydia, Bramble's ingenuer niece and new to London, marvels at "the crowds of people that swarm in the streets", she is "giddy", and her "imagination is quite confounded with splendour and variety" (Smollett 122–23). For "Liddy", the pleasure gardens are redolent with excitement, the sensorial overload stimulating her but not occasioning an inward turn of revulsion: "Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding ... crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and

the fair" (123). At Vauxhall, meanwhile, "I was dazzled and confounded with the variety of beauties that rushed all at once upon my eye" (124) – "dazzle" repurposed from Bramble's lexicon to approximate instead the effect that Borsay describes (49). A mixture of artforms creates a thrilling panoply of sensorial opportunity rather than a monstrous confusion, "a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottoes, lawns, temples and cascades; porticoes, colonnades, and rotundos; adorned with pillars, statues, and painting" (124). This is an "assemblage" rather than an unholy mix, and holds creative possibilities that, unlike in Bramble's perception, are appropriate to each other, harmonised. Wonder, here, is a pleasurable recognised response, and not something to be ashamed of – a positive ignorance as innocence, along Burney's lines. And, just as the verisimilar lifeforms found in paintings and sculptures excite her senses, so Liddy sees the comingling of people of all classes, genders, and nationalities as a natural extension of these thrilling surroundings: "the place crowded with the gayest company, ... enlivened with mirth, freedom, and good humour" (124). As Conlin says, "the most important" of all the pleasure gardens' sights "was the crowd itself" (1). Giddy Liddy's enthusiasm – even if ironically inflected by Smollett – echoes that of her near-contemporary, Frances Burney's *Evelina*. At Vauxhall, "The trees, the numerous lights, and the company in the circle round the orchestra make a most brilliant and gay appearance" (216) – although *Evelina*'s pleasure is compromised by her disagreeable companions, and sours when she is besieged by a group of drunken men, recalling the drink-fuelled brawl that also puts Liddy into a "flutter" (Smollett 124).

The different viewpoints of these tourists expose the extent to which visiting London could stimulate opposing responses in the visitor, but also how far a written account could distort or repackage that experience for a range of intended effects. The social critique at which Matthew Bramble aims entrenches a conservatism based upon the land-owning, wealth-hoarding privilege of an elite for which a blurring of social boundaries – driven by a rising middling sort newly monied through industry and trade, but also by servant classes with ideas above their station, according to the prejudice – posed a dangerous threat of subordination, usurpation, or at the very least a fuzziness surrounding the established superiority of country squires such as Bramble. Lydia, although the product and beneficiary of such privileged status and wealth, nonetheless sees the positive manifestations of social mobility in terms of her own relation to them: it is not simply the naivety of her youth and inexperience (even if Smollett satirises the ingenue character-type) that encourages Liddy to observe, but also to immerse herself in London's sights and sounds with pleasure. Her response indicates the conditioning of wonder as an honestly emotive reaction, characteristic of her sentimental traits. The experience of tourist attractions – and what certain sights are supposed to reaffirm, in terms of social hierarchies founded on educational privilege – turns out, in *Humphry Clinker*, to



demonstrate the potentialities of shared cultural experience, “high” and “low”, as magnified through a spectrum of subjectivities.

Alcock’s *Fanny Brown* similarly comingles aesthetic hierarchies in the tourist experiences of its lower-middle-class protagonists, who, though armed with sufficient education to distinguish and differentiate, also underline (like Lydia Melford) that the temporary, pleasurable suspension of oneself in immersive wonder is a vital way of participating in a broader aesthetic – and morally educative – experience. Tourism provides a mechanism for reminding readers that to develop an aesthetic cultivation is to cultivate the mind, and in turn the morals, and that this is an opportunity available to all; in fact, it is a social duty incumbent on all. As the prefatory matter to *Fanny Brown* declares, “What Sculpture is to a Block of Marble, says the *Spectator*, Education is to a human Soul” (xli), invoking *Spectator* 215, 6 November 1711; the malleable reader is similarly shapeable. But both the model to emulate and who will benefit from its example are clearly differentiated along gendered lines. On the one hand, *Fanny Brown*’s titular heroine, “A Clergyman’s Daughter”, presents an exemplar of her kind: as beautiful and virtuous as Richardson’s Pamela, and equally beset by the machinations of wicked men with designs on her virtue, Fanny pursues a trajectory that, like her fore-runner’s, sees adversity and perseverance rewarded with a happy marriage, children, and, ultimately, “immortal felicity in Heaven, the certain recompense of all who deserve it” (Alcock 352). Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor point out that, in fact, *Pamela* was cited in the publicity campaign designed to promote sales of Alcock’s novel, not necessarily successfully (110). But *Fanny Brown* is only partly concerned with the heroine herself, and closer contemporary comparisons than *Pamela* lie in *Roderick Random*, *Joseph Andrews*, and Jonathan Swift’s work, all of which are referenced in the novel’s footnotes, and which infuse the tourist experiences of Fanny’s three brothers, while Fanny herself takes a backseat role.

*Fanny Brown*’s formative potential is consolidated by its use of teaching-tools belonging to the show-and-tell world of the vast museum of sights available to the London tourist. It presents its pseudo-guidebook intentions in its subtitle: the story includes “A Description of the most elegant Monuments in *Westminster Abbey*; the Curiosities in and about *London*; and Remarks on several Cathedrals”. Alcock’s pseudonym, “John Piper”, gestures towards his profession as an organist at Southampton, Reading, and finally Lichfield, though it was a troubled career which saw him wrangle with the church authorities (Diack Johnstone). His profession partly explains this semi-autobiographical novel’s considerable interest in church music. Partly through his avatar, Fanny’s brother Thomas – who acts as travel writer in letters to his mother in Lancashire – and through a third-person narrative voice, Alcock presents a cynical appraisal of the present-day church, which encourages his idealised approach towards the past. Monuments, especially statues and statuary, form a significant part of this nostalgia: the notable individuals memorialised in stone

or marble represent a piety and integrity now in peril. The stones of the past project a valuable lesson onto the present moment in the novel's touristic experience of Westminster Abbey, London's main site of worship and of symbolic history.

Formerly known as St Peter's, Westminster Abbey was a must-see for visitors to London. It had featured in guides to the city published in the years prior to *Fanny Brown's* appearance, such as David Henry's *An Historical Description of the curiosities of London and Westminster* (1759), which describe the architecture and decoration of the edifice and, through them, its history, as represented by memorials of the nation's formative figures. At "*Westminster-Abbey*", Thomas summarises, "for many Ages past, all the *Kings* and *Queens* of *England* have been crown'd, and indeed most of them are buried there, as well as the Nobility, the most eminent Poets, and other Persons of any Consequence: And many who are not buried there have Monuments erected to their memories" (Alcock 133–34, emphasis in the original). Ned Ward, too, professes his "Rev'ence and Amazement" for the Abbey and its "worthy Monuments and astoinshing [sic] Antiquities", which he beholds "with equal Wonder and Satisfaction" (*London Spy*, no. 8, 8). Henry VII's chapel at the Abbey

...is reckon'd ... one of the finest Pieces of Architecture in the World. The Walls are wrought into the most beautiful Imagery, and contain 120 large Statues, of *Patriarchs*, *Saints*, *Martyrs*, and *Confessors*, plac'd in Niches, under which are *Angels* supporting Imperial Crowns, besides an infinite Number of small ones; and these have been esteem'd so curious, that Painters, Statuaries, and other Artisans of all Countries, have travell'd hither to copy them. (Alcock 134, emphasis in the original)

Not only does this chapel, as a "*Wonder of the World*", according to David Henry (11), offer a model for artists of all nations to copy, it also vies with foreign – and some British – counterparts: "The whole Church is 482 Feet in Length, within the Walls, so that it equals in Length *St. Peter's* at *Rome*, and *York Minster*, and is much longer, as is generally suppos'd, than the Temple of *Solomon*, the Temple of *Diana* at *Ephesus*, and the great *Mosque* at *Fez*, in the Emperor of *Morocco's* Dominions" (Alcock, 135, emphasis in the original). This passage, in fact, recycles Jodocus Crull's *The Antiquities of St. Peter's, or, the Abbey-Church of Westminster*, first published in 1713 and subsequently reprinted, and possibly other, similar guides besides, which tended to thrive on the repeatability of content (Crull 25).

Thomas's travel-guide enumeration of the Abbey's statuary and ornaments is nonetheless woven into an acknowledgment of the historical, political, and religious changes that had shaped the present-day building, carried by its stone memory. He notes, for instance, that of the "Statues gilt with Gold, of the *Apostles*, *Saints*, *Fathers*, and *Doctors* of the Church ... there are only four now remaining ... the rest being stolen away in *Cromwell's* Time" (Alcock, 138, emphasis in the

original). Again, Thomas echoes a contemporary travel guide to London; Henry’s *Historical Description* records of Henry VII’s chapel and its monuments that “In the Towers are Niches, in which stood a Number of Statues that for Expression were hardly to be equalled; but these were ordered to be removed by Order of the Rump Parliament, lest they should tumble upon the Heads of some of its Members” (1). Fairly recent British history, and the still pertinent memory of England’s Civil War, had left indelible traces on the visible embodiments of that history, although the humour in this comment – suggesting that the heads were removed for practical rather than political or religious reasons – provides one way of distancing from the past within the present moment of viewing.

Alcock’s third person narrative voice takes over the travel-writer role from Thomas to describe sites elsewhere in London that the three brothers visit in company with Mr Shoot, Fanny’s fiancé, including “*Greenwich-Hospital*” and Woolwich, “where they were highly entertain’d with the Sight of the *Men of War* that were building, and some *India-Men*” (171–72, emphasis in the original), ships variously demonstrating Britain’s naval prowess as a military force and its imperial expansion via flourishing trade. Their tour also takes in the Tower of London, long held to be one of the city’s major sites. The narrator notes its menagerie of “*Lions, Tygers, and Leopards*” and its armoury, stocked with mortars, guns, and blades of various kinds (87–89, emphasis in the original). Henry’s *Historical Account* describes the now obsolete phenomenon of the menagerie in greater detail, writing “*Of the LIONS and other Wild Beasts in the Tower*” that “The first Thing a Stranger usually goes to see, whose Curiosity leads him to view the Rarities in this Place, is the wild Beasts”, which they can visit “for six-pence each person” (13, emphasis in the original). The Georgian menagerie was not, however, a problem-free entertainment, as Burney’s eponymous Camilla finds when her enthusiasm for seeing “a superb exhibition of wild beasts” on show in the city is dampened by Edgar’s suggestion that it is not “a species of curiosity” appropriate for “young ladies” (*Camilla* 421). Indeed, the menagerie at the Tower was not a neutral part of the visit, not least because of the violent accidents that sometimes occurred. As Christopher Plumb suggests, the frisson of encountering a wild beast was “gratifying to the senses” because it offered a “visceral ‘dicing with danger’ experience” (Plumb 120–21). Yet exotic beasts also participated in the moral anxieties surrounding the corruption that could result from “Luxury and excess”, Plumb argues (59), in line with Matthew Bramble’s concerns about London’s intoxicating vice.

Alcock’s tourists, however, do not dwell among the lions and tigers, but instead hurry on to the Tower’s highlight: “The Brothers seem’d almost transported with the many rich Curiosities at the Jewel-Office” (177), where they see the crowns, sceptre, orb, and other symbols of sovereignty that provide tangible counterparts to the stone, marble, and bronze monuments they had admired at Westminster Abbey. The mixture of morally borderline – perhaps gawdy – experiences such as

the menagerie and the display of the highest symbols of state indicates a recalibration of how appropriateness was perceived in the city's shows: types of entertainment, of location, and of spectator converged in ways that subverted clear-cut hierarchies. In seeming contrast to the monumental stone statuary at Westminster Abbey, the brothers visit "Salmon's Wax-Work" on Fleet Street, famed for its life-size recreations of numerous historical figures, old and new, mythical and real. Originally under the direction of a Mr Salmon, his wife took over upon his death in 1718, and the museum remained popular for several decades (Altick 52). The most renowned among contemporary ventures of this kind, and a significant precursor to the vastly successful Madame Tussaud's, Salmon's features in numerous guidebooks, and recurrently provided a destination for real-life tourists to London. It merited mention in contemporary publications ranging from Ned Ward's cynical *The Modern World Disrob'd* (1708) to the *Spectator* (no. 28, 2 April 1711), to Boswell's London journal. By 1760, Mrs Salmon herself had died, but her business was taken on by a successor (Altick 53). Boswell writes fleetingly on 4 July 1763 that "I breakfasted with Temple, and the Doctor and I drank tea with him. This afternoon I went and saw Mrs. Salmon's famous wax-work in Fleet Street. It is excellent in its kind, and amused me very well for a quarter of an hour" (289). As one guide-book observes in 1767, Salmon's was "a place much resorted to, the figures being finished in a masterly and elegant manner" (*A Companion* 60). It was, however, a borderline entertainment, its pseudo-artistic credentials invoked as a point of derisory comparison that relied on the suspect lifelikeness of the figures represented. One correspondent who writes to the *Spectator* in October 1714, for instance, says of a rival that "he looked more like one of the Figures in Mrs. Salmon's Wax-work, than a desirable Lover" (82). Indeed, Ward describes how "By the help of *Paint, Powder, and Patches*", the prostitutes whom he treats as a gaudy spectacle at one of London's brothels "were of a Wax-work Complexion" (*London Spy* no. 2, 8).

Waxworks such as Salmon's, in fact, had long been popular among visitors to the capital, since the seventeenth century. That waxworks tended to be displayed in showrooms dedicated to the experience provides one intriguing parallel to the era's emerging museum culture, where classical sculptures featured prominently, as well as to the public spaces that displayed monuments representing prominent figures, and, of course, to the religious buildings where stone versions were venerated. Showrooms presenting effigies of monarchs began to appear, with handbills advertising the famous personalities on show, and their seeming lifelikeness: "wanting but life and motion" (50), Altick observes, became a stock feature of such advertisements – an association no doubt enhanced by the display of waxworks as anatomical models (Pulham 13–14). The potentiality of animation was, indeed, a core constituent of the appeal of statuary representing human figures (Pulham 7–8, 79–81), energised by the increasing popularity of automata on the one hand, and by the imaginative

appeal of lifelikeness on the other. The association between the life-and-deathlike and the statue (Pulham 192–94) attained a particularly macabre quality in waxwork figures because of the material’s fleshly approximation, pasty and ironically deathlike though it could actually look (as Ward suggests), recalling its close association with funeral effigies.

London’s waxwork shows provoked a proximity between living and dead comparable to the conceptual terrain inhabited by the animated statue. Identifying a famous personage “revivified” in wax was no doubt heightened by the period’s emergent celebrity culture. Mrs Salmon, that “shrewdest judge of popular taste among the waxwork impresarios” (Altick 52), created a business that drew in crowds with its recognisable human-like figures, but also enhanced the illusion of animated lifelikeness by the figures’ arrangement and by using technological innovations. In *Fanny Brown*, among the models Alcock’s visitors see is the spring-actioned figure of Mother Shipton, the Yorkshire woman who claimed prophetic powers, as well as “a *Hermit* moving, *Mermaids* waving, a *Satyr*, an *Æthiopian* Seaman, and several other Curiosities, all by Clock-Work. King *Henry* the VIIIth, introducing to Court *Anna Bullen*, to the great Mortification of Queen *Catherine*, his Royal Consort, and Cardinal *Wolsey*” (193–94, emphasis in the original). This commemoration of the Tudor monarch is a far cry from the splendour of Westminster Abbey, just as Thomas’s lengthy transcription of the epitaph on Elizabeth I’s tomb at the Abbey contrasts with her waxwork embodiment at Salmon’s, with “one of her Maids of Honour, who is said to have died by pricking of her Finger” (Alcock 195). British monarchs parade alongside Roman emperors, courtiers, and now-forgotten figures with curious and fantastical histories, such as “*Margaret*, Countess of *Hennenburgh*, who was deliver’d of 365 Children at One Birth” (Alcock 195, emphasis in the original). The “Clock-Work” motion, which the enterprising Mrs Salmon introduced to several wax figures as the vogue for mechanisation took hold (Altick 57–58), contributed towards the pleasure of simulated animation. It complemented the imaginary motility the viewer, temporarily submerged in wonder, might imaginatively lend to non-mechanical figures, too. Lifelikeness was also achieved by placing some figures, such as Henry VIII, in narrative scenarios that encouraged the spectator to picture them as actors temporarily suspended in a larger scene of action. Through these combined mechanical and imaginary ways of simulating an illusion of lifelikeness, the “lively Representation” made this eclectic array of “Rarities” a living show.

As Craske observes, critics such as James Ralph, writing in the 1730s, considered such waxworks to “have lessened the mystique of monarchy”, showing it in “a disconcertingly mortal light”, and to have “vulgarized national society” and history (192–94). The considerable disdain among those who saw the “common people” as merely indulging the “visual sense” (192) without engaging more intellectual powers was exacerbated by the blurred boundaries between high and

low, noble subject-matter represented in crude material forms, but also in the mingling of apparently inappropriate low entertainments in culturally or historically significant spaces. Like the mixed shows of the Tower, Westminster Abbey (at which Ralph's criticism is directed) regularly displayed waxworks of famous deceased figures, such as the monarchs William III and Mary II, which stood alongside the seemingly nobler stone and marble embodiments of illustrious individuals. Altick points out that this aligned the Abbey with London's popular shows, not least because the vergers tasked with introducing visitors to the monument were "classed with common showmen" (90). They charged a fee for visiting not only the ill-kept tombs, but also a variety of exhibits, "slovenly" waxworks included, in Oliver Goldsmith's estimation (Altick 90). *Fanny Brown's* Thomas, however, seems to make no difference, unfavourable or otherwise, between the regal memorials in Henry VII's chapel and the "Effigies" of various monarchs and nobles, "as big as life ... all made of wax", that "stand upright, exactly as if they were alive" (330). Earlier, in 1699, Ward, too, had admired the "Effigies" of Charles II displayed at the Abbey as embodying monarchical excellence (*London Spy* no. 8, 9).

In fact, the demystification of monarchy in statue form was integrated into the experience of representing such life-size figures, or, rather, reveals the hybridity that characterised such memorials and monuments. The typically snobbish Horace Walpole wrote, somewhat enigmatically, to George Montagu in 1748: "Would not one swear that old Hal had showed all that is showed at the Tower?" (70), referring to a statue of Henry VIII formerly displayed at the Tower of London. Walpole's editors refer back to an earlier letter to Horace Mann of December 1741, in which Walpole mentions "King Harry's cod-piece". They add that "Other contemporary references are as cryptic" as his, Caesar de Saussure writing in 1725 of Henry's statue that "If you press a spot on the floor with your feet, you will see something surprising with regard to this figure; but I will not say more, and leave you to guess what it is" (70n.22). Here there is less uneducated wonder than the almost universally shared snigger at a puerile joke.

In *Fanny Brown*, the visit to Salmon's immediately precedes a trip to Bartholomew Fair, a frequent topic for literary and artistic treatment, where the idea of animated history – and of bringing noble subject-matter to the level of apparently lowly amusement – takes on a new dimension, and the convergence of the popular and the seemingly high-brow, of the "common" and the educated visitor, acquires dynamic intensity. The family see a re-enactment of "the *Siege of Troy*, at one of the Great Booths", suggesting a continuity of the pleasurable immersion in knowing delusion. This includes magic tricks, with a stop at "*Fawkes's* Booth, to see him perform his *Dexterity of Hand* and *Leger-de-main*, with *Cards*, and *Cups* and *Balls*, which appear to be transformed into Golden Eggs, Birds, and several other Things, to the Admiration of the Spectators" (197, emphasis in the original). It is no mystery that it is a trick, no matter who the spectator, but that does not compromise the pleasure

of this momentary immersion in wonder. There is a sensory overload at the Fair that surpasses the, by comparison, more genteel confusion of the pleasure gardens.

For Wordsworth, Bartholomew Fair was a furious mass of different types of entertainment available to “the crowd” (VII:657): dumb-shows, pantomimes, “Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl, / The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes, / The Wax-work, Clock-work” (290), freakshows, menageries, merchandise stalls, and swarming crowds. “Oh, blank confusion!” (292), he concludes, the Fair a metonym for the city itself, recalling Bramble’s fretted sense of overload. But Wordsworth is both repulsed and attracted, both spectator and participant. He “looks / In steadiness”, aware of the “widely different modes / Of education” of the crowd, but nonetheless passes through it with “delight” (292). For *Fanny Brown*’s visitors, the experience of what Gatrell describes as the Fair’s temporary period of “wonderfully carnivalesque disorder” (27) is not one of destabilising confusion, but nor does it reinforce the difference between thinking and mindless spectators. It is, quite simply, an experience, one which does not betray a poor education or inability to discriminate between types of entertainment, but which involves a combination of sensorial stimulations that at once invite spectatorship and participation, requiring only a temporary suspension or submersion of the self, and which are not deemed especially dangerous or problematic on the one hand, or particularly transcendent on the other.

David Henry claims of his guide that “the Intent of this Book [is] rather to assist the Spectator to view with Advantage, what is here presented to him, than to fill his Mind with fanciful Notions of the admirable Works of remote Ages” (2.8). *Fanny Brown*’s reader, however, is less “Spectator” than participant, like *Humphry Clinker*’s, or that of other novels simulating the London tourist experience. Each is led through a panoply of entertainments to evaluate and to enjoy for themselves, whether as a Bramble, a Liddy, or a Brown. These novels incorporate the travel-guide experience but transform it into a subjectivised account catalysed within the genre’s narrative space. And, in turn, the tour shapes the reader’s encounter with the symbolic – and pleasurable – sights on offer in London as a collective experience of different types of spectacle, and of spectator.

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**Abstract:** This chapter explores the experience of domestic tourism to London as represented in eighteenth-century British novels, focusing on Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) and John Alcock’s *The Adventures of Miss Fanny Brown* (1761). Both novels, alongside other contemporaneous fictions, incorporate an array of tourist experiences that exemplify the diversity of the city’s entertainments as explored in Richard Altick’s classic study, *The Shows of London* (1978). They mix together high-brow and “popular” entertainments in such a way as to challenge apparently rigid classifications not only of different types of sight, but of spectator. As such, they contribute towards undermining views prevalent in the eighteenth century regarding educated spectators and those of lower social ranks and, by extension, education levels, typically considered to be more easily enthralled by “crass” shows and entertainments. The novel, itself sometimes derided in the period for being “popular”, provided an apt space for challenging these ideas through recounting the varied perspectives of its protagonists, using a range of narrative strategies. Scepticism towards “wonder” dissolves in the pleasurable immersion some novelistic characters express in a variety of entertainment experiences, a hybridity embodied in the contrasts, and similarities, between viewing the venerable monuments of Westminster Abbey, among them funereal statuary, and the figures represented at London’s popular waxwork showrooms.

**Keywords:** London, novels, statuary, tourism, waxworks



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## **“Move, move, everything moves”: The Representations of the Body–Machine Relation in the Literature of Factory Reform**

In 1835, Sir George Head took a “desultory ramble through manufacturing districts” (vii) of England, stopping at such places as Liverpool, Manchester, or Leeds as well as small country towns or even villages. Leeds in particular afforded him many opportunities to visit “manufactories” (156) and to watch from a close-up perspective various machines in action. He declares himself “an uninterested spectator” (156) – in the original meaning of “not biased; free from selfish motives” – and a lay observer, who lacks knowledge or technical vocabulary, and whose descriptions will inevitably be inept. While technically faulty, they certainly are informed by enthusiasm, “delight and amazement”, and “a feeling of veneration” (153). In perhaps the most famous excerpt from *A Home Tour through the Manufacturing Districts of England*, Head writes:

After viewing the manufactory, I ascended by a flight of steps to the small stone building containing one of the said steam-engines. Although so vast a power was in action, not the slightest tremulous or other motion was perceptible; the enormous fly-wheel spinning meanwhile in silence, though weighing some tons, close to the wall; and the harmony of the movements of the engine altogether was so perfect and free from friction, the brilliancy of polish bestowed on many parts so lustrous, and the care and attention paid to the whole so apparent, that imagination might readily have transformed the edifice to a temple, dedicated by man, grateful for the stupendous power that moved within, to Him who built the universe. (154)

This depiction has all the hallmarks of the technological sublime, as Head marvels at the spectacle in which principal roles are played by machines (see Kuskey 133). While he acknowledges the functional, almost dazzling, magnificence of the engines, as he notes “the brilliancy of polish bestowed on many parts so lustrous”, his attention is captured by the imposing size of the complex mechanism and its fast, efficient, and eerily silent operation, which fill him with awe at their prodigious power and mystery (Sussman 217). For the sight of the seemingly self-acting machinery at work inspires Head to make a curious imaginative leap, whereby the

machine becomes a tribute to God's engineering omnipotence; Head's God "built the universe" rather than created it.

Even though Head's tour was made at an advanced stage of industrialisation, he tends to deliver eerily sanitised accounts of manufactories, such as were written by first industrial tourists. The result is a machine-centric vision; the Leeds factory is remarkably disembodied, there is next to no mention of industrial workers and their toiling bodies, and the wonderful show seems to happen without them. Paradoxically, the moment at which Head more extensively writes about labourers comes on the occasion of "viewing the interior of a manufactory of machinery" (184). Unusually, he ignores the extremely mechanical aspect of the production to claim that what makes this particular spectacle gratifying is the observation of "the features of each hard-working mechanic blackened by smoke, yet radiant with the light of intelligence", and praises "the combination of the [workers'] powers of mind and body" which contribute to the "commercial greatness" of England (Head 184–185). The body that he sees is, notably, a well-functioning and at times heroic body, performing occasional feats of great strength. The general situation of factory workers is excellent; Head declares: "I saw around me wherever I moved, on every side, a crowd of apparently happy beings, working in lofty well-ventilated buildings" (187). He makes this claim in response to contemporary reports on the working conditions of factory labourers, which he suspects to be "probably the work of interested artists", drawing "touching portraits of misery and overfatigue" (187). Thus, he undermines his declared identity of "an uninterested spectator" (156) and conforms to the propagandist vision of industrial labour provided by apologists of the factory system.

Incidentally, as Derek Gregory notes, six years later William Dodd, one of the most famous factory operatives of the period, went on a similar tour of manufacturing districts (186). However, more than in machinery, he was interested in the labouring bodies. Funded by Lord Ashley, a Tory advocate of factory reform, Dodd undertook to inquire into "the various causes of decrepitude, mutilation, or death – whether arising from long hours of labour, or accidents by machinery" (*The Factory* v). The first place on his itinerary happened to be Leeds, whose many tall chimneys of the factories he saw from a distance, but for Dodd the more relevant "marks by which a manufacturing town may always be known", are "the wretched, stunted, decrepid [sic], and, frequently, the mutilated appearance of the broken-down labourers" (*The Factory* 2). *The Factory System Illustrated* is in the end a record of his interviews with operatives who report deformities and injuries they sustained when working with machines. Their accounts point to another, also subjective, understanding of the factory, which for the labourers, to use Tamara Ketabgian's words, consists in "a destructive coupling of humans and machines" (37).

In what follows, I shall closely examine the machine-body relation as experienced and narrated by industrial workers themselves and by novelists who imaginatively

transformed similar accounts in their campaign for the factory reform. These representations stand in obvious contrast to depictions provided by apologists of industry or industrial tourists, such as Sir George Head, not least because they address the reality of work and redress the balance of sorts, by looking less at machinery and more at those who operated them for many, too many, hours a day. Or looking differently at this machinery, for even if these accounts include admiration for its complexity, endurance, and efficiency, ultimately machines are paired with exploitation and oppression, and the worker’s body with vulnerability and injury.

It is exactly the body deformed by labour alongside machines that is at the centre of the debate over the so-called Factory Question and, as Aleksandra Baryłowicz writes, “a key argument” in the campaign, which gathered momentum in the second quarter of the 19th century, “aiming at reforming ‘the evil system’” (104) and limiting the daily working hours of children. Official reports, parliamentary blue books, reformists’ pamphlets, workers’ testimonies and memoirs as well as two early industrial novels: Frances Milton Trollope’s *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy* (1840) and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) reached most readily for “the figure of the . . . factory-child”, identifying it, Mike Sanders observes, as the “most powerful symbol of the harm wreaked on working-class bodies” (316). The child, “malnourished, . . . deformed or exhausted as a result of unnatural labor, and subjected to intolerable punishments by cruel overseers” was the most obvious embodiment of exploitation and abuse, and highlighting their ordeal, campaigners would naturally seek to “provoke pity leading to moral indignation in the expectation that this would produce the public outcry necessary to remedy the perceived evil” (Sanders 316).

The most frequently used image – the most relevant, given the purpose of the campaign – in that of the fatigued body, debilitated by long relentless hours of drudgery in poorly ventilated, congested with machinery and other workers spaces, sleep deprivation, lack of proper nutrition, etc. Recruited from the London workhouse to the Lancashire mill, Robert Blincoe (whose memories were recorded by journalist John Brown) immediately sees the difference between his comparably healthy self and the child workers: “the pale, lean, sallow-looking multitude” (Brown 112). Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna highlights pallor and infirmity as tell-tale effects of factory labour on Helen Fleetwood’s health: “weakness of the ancles [sic], the narrowness . . . of the frame, a stoop, and a quickness of breathing, together with the increasing paleness of her complexion” (Tonna 257). Other factory girls show

[t]he same aspect of exhaustion, the same vacancy, and lack of youthful animation . . . Hollow cheeks, heavy eyes, narrow chests, and stooping shoulders met the inquiring gaze at every turn. Discontent, not noisy or active, but gloomy and silent, seemed impressed on all, together with a sort of helpless resignation to what they knew must be. (Tonna 269)

Frances Trollope, too, weaves deformities into her tale of factory evils, as she refers to the “crippled, dipping gait” characteristic of children who “when [their] knees are aching, permits them to bend under [them]” (293). Disfigured bodies of real workers – such as Blincoe, Dodd, or those interviewed by him and parliamentary commissions – were a more direct, though for many still unreliable, manifestation of damage. Their knock knees legs, lame ankles, distorted spines, an asymmetrical physical development were reported to have come from “stresses and strains of repetitive workplace tasks” (Kirby 62) and from unnatural positions adopted when attending to machines for many hours. Whether examined in treatises written by physicians or social critics of the factory system, the labourer’s deformed body was positioned as an outcome of working with machines, reimagining the factory as a site of pathological production. Accordingly, contemporary reports and narratives make relatively little mention of goods as a product of mechanised labour, to concentrate instead on production of defective bodies; the power of the machine is manifested in its ability to shape and misshape workers. In this context, Ketabgian recalls apt comments which Erin O’Connor made on deformities generated by industrialisation. In *Raw Material*, O’Connor writes: “[mechanised] labour reforms the body in its own image, twisting, bending, and stiffening it into postures that are at once perfectly adaptive and acutely pathological” (7).

These disfigurements were a grim illustration of the principle, noted by critics and apologists alike, that the body–machine relation exercised in factories relies on adjustment:

Whilst the engine runs the people must work – men, women, and children are yoked together with iron and steam. The animal machine – breakable in the best case, subject to a thousand sources of suffering – is chained fast to the iron machine, which knows no suffering and no weariness. (qtd. in Jennings 185)

Dr James Kay (later Sir James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth) to whom this quotation is attributed repeats the point in his 1832 pamphlet, describing workers as

drudges who watch the movements and assist the operations of a mighty, material force, which toils with an energy ever unconscious of fatigue. The persevering labour of the operative, must rival the mathematical precision, the incessant motion, and the exhaustless power of the machine. (10)

The apparent advantage, that is the flexibility of the human body, is taken advantage of: it adjusts itself “to the shape, stress, and weight of . . . machines” (Ketabgian 38), and their speed.

Representations of factory labour are in essence scenes of adjustment in which the worker’s body responds to the movement of the machine. In *Helen Fleetwood*, Tonna tells the story of a poor rural family decoyed into an industrial town, “M”,

standing for Manchester. The appropriately named Greens are a family consisting of the widow grandmother, her grandchildren, and an adopted girl, the eponymous Helen Fleetwood. Prior to starting their work in a factory, the children have the place thus explained to them:

Everything is done by machinery . . . they are great things, ever so high and big, all going about and about, some on wheels running up and down the room, and some with great rollers turning about as fast as the steam can drive them; so you must step back, and run forward, and duck, and turn, and move as they do. (71)

The description defines work as motion, both of the machinery and the operatives. Machinery is presented here as doubly intimidating: due to its size and the speed at which its various elements constantly move. It is exactly this regular, incessant restlessness of huge and complex machines that Mary Green finds astonishing on her first day in the factory:

Move, move, everything moves. The wheels and the frames are always going, and the little reels twirl round as fast as ever they can; and the pulleys, and chains, and great iron works over-head, are all moving; and the cotton moves so fast that it is hard to piece it quick enough; and there is a great dust, and such a noise of whirr, whirr, whirr, that at first I did not know whether I was not standing on my head. (85)

Mary’s phrase, “Move, move, everything moves”, which captures the essence of the factory that she tries to communicate to other members of her family (who are unfamiliar with industrial labour), is actually far from critical. Rather, it registers her bewilderment or even fascination with the dynamic, dizzying environment she has been brought into. Peter J. Capuano provides another angle on the image of the factory interior created by Tonna, suggesting that while it focuses on “the extreme physical disorientation new factory workers experience”, it also “highlights the inversion of a ‘natural’ religious hierarchy” (33). Mary’s confusion and the impression of the world gone topsy-turvy come from the sense of the space destabilised by the multiplicity and intensity of movement and sounds, but put in a broader perspective, Capuano argues, the scene shows the world in which work is no longer supervised by God’s imagined presence above, but very material, and very oppressive and real presence of the machine, placed overhead (33).

With the emphasis put on the machines and their motion, Mary’s account unwittingly makes light of human labour, which is evidenced by her brother’s reaction “‘How funny!’ said James, laughing, ‘but what was your *work* like?’” (Tonna 85, emphasis added). He clearly fastens on the sensation of giddiness and almost misreads her factory experience as play, such as perhaps belongs to the funfair. Yet in the middle of this report, there actually is a mention of actual work and its nature, which inheres in a specific relationship between man and machines,

when Mary hints at the impact of the vertiginous motion on labourers, saying that “the cotton moves so fast that it is hard to piece it quick enough”. Machine takes precedence, determines the rhythm of work to the extent of making what seems an apparently trifle occupation of “piecening”, joining together ends of broken thread, difficult.

Tonna uses the novice’s naïve perspective to explain both machinery and other aspects of labour in the textile mill: mechanised spinning, “pretty hard work” in that it entails physical strength needed to push back the big frames and apparently less strenuous tasks performed by children such as piecening or scavenging. Again, Mary’s wide-eyed report dissociates the latter from work, as she sees the comical aspect of the relation between a little girl and the machine whose rapid movement requires her to “bob and duck, and get very low” so as to avoid “a fine knock on her head” (86). The sight of the scavenger “so frightened and all in a bustle” makes Mary laugh, but Tonna is quick to use other, more observant, more thoughtful, more mature, more knowledgeable or more sympathetic characters to rectify Mary’s misreading and reconnect factory labour to effort, torment, and fatigue. Helen Fleetwood’s understanding of factory labour, although she initially believes that it “does not seem very hard”, recognises that “There is no resisting in a mill, for nobody can stop the great wheels always kept going by the steam” (87).

Perhaps the most detailed, the most dynamic, and the most compelling depiction of factory work that highlights the body–machine relation comes from Frances Trollope’s *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy*. The narrator describes the factory room, the “monstrous chamber”, in which “the dirty, ragged, miserable crew, were all in active performance of their various tasks the overlookers, strap in hand, on the alert; the whirling spindles urging the little slaves who waited on them, to movements as unceasing as their own” (Trollope 76). The reader gets to see:

a little girl about seven years old, whose office as “scavenger” was to collect incessantly from the machinery and from the floor, the flying fragments of cotton that might impede the work. In the performance of this duty, the child was obliged, from time to time, to stretch itself with sudden quickness on the ground, while the hissing machinery passed over her; and when this is skilfully [sic] done, and the head, body, and outstretched limbs carefully glued to the floor, the steady-moving, but threatening mass, may pass and re-pass over the dizzy head and trembling body without touching it. But accidents frequently occur; and many are the flaxen locks, rudely torn from infant heads, in the process. (Trollope 76)

The term performance, apparently neutral, is ironically apt, as Trollope reconstructs here the peculiar choreography involved in the execution of the task. The child has to show remarkable flexibility as she forces her body into a number of positions to negotiate the movement of the machine. The ‘cooperation’ of the machine and



the body juxtaposes two kinds of movement: the steady, movement of the hissing machinery and far more varied, erratic even, movement of the girl (for an extensive discussion of this scene see Lo 96). There is no spontaneity or freedom in her motions, rather a display of the presence of mind and body as all her choices are dictated by the “threatening mass” she has to avoid. The machine turns the girl into “the dizzy head and trembling body” as her work comes close to an exercise in self-preservation. Notably, in her industrial scene Trollope does not show the picking of bits of cotton; her representation, focused on the girl adjusting her body lest it should be injured, is to convey the image of the factory as, to use Ketabgian’s phrase again, “a destructive coupling of humans and machines”. Needless to say, apologists of the factory system would not see this coupling as dangerous, and classified quickness, agility, and adjustment shown by children taking care of machines as exercise and play. So did, most notoriously, Andrew Ure who found children employed in mills “always cheerful and alert, taking pleasure in the light play of their muscles, – enjoying the mobility natural to their age”, concluding that “[t]he work of these lively elves seemed to resemble a sport, in which habit gave them a pleasing dexterity” (301).

The scavenger girl manages to keep her body unscathed, but such close proximity of the labourer and the machine combined with the disparity in strength and speed meant that an accident was always an awful possibility. *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* contains an unbearably graphic description of an industrial accident of a fellow child worker, whose apron gets caught by a shaft: “In an instant [she] was drawn by an irresistible force and dashed on the floor”. Blincoe watches her

whirled round and round with the shaft – he heard the bones of her arms, legs, thighs, &c. successively snap asunder, crushed, seemingly, to atoms, as the machinery whirled her round, and drew tighter and tighter her body within the works, her blood was scattered over the frame and streamed upon the floor, her head appeared dashed to pieces – at last, her mangled body was jammed in so fast, between the shafts and the floor, that the water being low and the wheels off the gear, it stopped the main shaft! When she was extricated, every bone was found broken! – her head dreadfully crushed! – her clothes and mangled flesh were, apparently inextricably mixed together, and she was carried off, as supposed, quite lifeless. (Brown 123)

Although the *Memoir* precedes *Michael Armstrong* by over a decade, the scene may be treated as a horrific supplement to Trollope’s depiction of the body-machine relation. So we are also given a meticulous reconstruction of the morbid choreography, only here there is no distinction between two kinds of motion as the worker’s body, since caught by the machine, perfectly as much as agonisingly merges with its “unceasing” movement. The accident embodies the most drastic version of adjustment, an absolute submission and mechanisation of the human component. It is also an extreme exemplification of Dr Kay’s future image

of the factory worker as a “breakable” “animal machine” (qtd. in Jennings 185), what with the girl’s body being mangled and as it were disarticulated: the bones “successively snap[ped] asunder, crushed, seemingly, to atoms”, “head [apparently] dashed to pieces”. The mechanics of the accident means the inert body is drawn “tighter and tighter within the works”, complementing the merger of the motion with the actual fusion of the body and the machine. In this instance, the result of the human-machine coordination imagined by the advocates of the factory system as an ideal, is counterproductive. In the end, the machine stops because, paradoxically, it becomes broken by the broken body which jams the mechanism and incapacitates its motion. Helen Fleetwood might not be exactly right, when she says: “There is no resisting in a mill, for nobody can stop the great wheels” (87); the mangled body can.

Accidents constituted extreme cases of violent body-machine interactions, and certainly accounts of horrid injuries and deaths taking place in factories had a shock value for the general public who had been reading such reports in the daily press, respectable and otherwise, since the early nineteenth century. As Elisabeth A. Cawthon observes, “[at] the level of spectacle, factories also inspired frequent and detailed newspaper coverage, especially when the “dark satanic mills” were the sites of spectacular new forms of death and degradation” (57). Their use of animism in depicting machinery, sensationalist tenor, and combination of “sentimentality and vivid imagery”, earned them a moniker of “child-eating-machine” stories (Cawthon 57). While newspapers were giving their readers a new ghastly subject of interest, they were also providing further arguments in support of the anti-factory system campaigns. “[A] different magnitude” of violence of injuries, Kirby observes, “attracted even greater sympathy [also] because the factory workforce was made up predominantly of women and children” (94), and yet, it seems that this same magnitude, the very shocking aspect of industrial accidents, made them paradoxically less useful for reformist purposes. Given the objective of the campaign to reduce working hours, the image of the body subjected to daily attritive damage from factory labour was more pertinent. The much-emphasised fatigue caused by long working hours could result in inattention, which, in turn, could lead to aprons, legs, arms, fingers getting caught in the machinery. Sanders explains this strategy as less dramatic, less sensationalist, and ultimately more effective. The injured working-class body, for all its horrendous or fatal marks of damage wrought by machinery, showed the kind of harm that, although not infrequent, did not point to the everyday reality of factory labour (Sanders 317).

Still, the bodies maimed by machinery make their appearance in the literature of factory reform. Robert Blincoe reports in his *Memoir* other situations: “Some [workers] had the skin scraped off the knuckles, clean to the bone, by the fliers; others a finger crushed, a joint or two nipped off in the cogs of the spinning-frame wheels!” (Brown 122), whereas William Dodd mentions more drastic and yet “common”

cases of workers crippled by machines: “wanting arms and legs, or whose arms and legs have been crushed or torn, and rendered useless” (“A Narrative” 209). Tonna has among her characters a disabled girl who lost her arm. When the prospective factory workers in her novel are instructed beforehand about machines and their intimidating regular restlessness, they are thus forewarned to observe their movement. If they have to “step back, and run forward, and duck, and turn, and move as they do”, it is also because if they do not, “off goes a finger or an arm, or else you get a knock on the head, to remember all your lives” (Tonna 71). This is evidenced by Sarah Wright: a “twisted and crooked” girl who “had only one arm, and that one so contracted as to be nearly useless; while her feet were bent in, until she rested on the ankle-bones” (60). As Sarah’s mother, who keeps her disabled daughter out of sight, explains, “The arm was lost by an accident, and all the rest came from convulsions and fits” (60). The mutilated, pathetic body of the ex-operative, whom the machine rendered invalid, has a double role. On the one hand, it has the already mentioned political, pro-reformist value, functioning as “a synecdoche for the impact of factory toil on children” (Bronstein 198), while on the other, it has an economic resonance, reminding the Green children and the reader that factory employment depends on efficiency and carefulness with the machines.

Signalled early on, Sarah’s mutilation returns in several later accounts, each time differently explained. As she herself specifies, “It was partly done by the machine . . . , and partly by the overlooker that used to strap me and kick me, when I used to get too tired to work” (Tonna 84). Thus behind her disfigurement lies also an ugly complicity of man and the machine. Indeed, the labouring body that is displayed in reports accompanying the Factory Question debates often bears another kind of injury, marks of “rough usage” (Tonna 173), an understatement for cruelty and violence of overlookers who thus “stimulated [operatives] up to labour” (qtd. in Kovačević and Kanner 167). Blincoe declares that “during his ten years of hard servitude [in the factory], his body was never free from contusions, and from wounds inflicted by the cruel master whom he served, by his sons, or his brutal and ferocious and merciless overlookers” (141). Similar references to violence appear in Dodd’s accounts as well as in Trollope’s novel.

In still another explanation of Sarah’s deformity, a neighbour states that the girl

was always simple and weak-minded, and all manner of advantages were taken of it, not so much by the children as the overlooker, who . . . having some spite against the innocent creature, was always for revenging every body’s faults on her. He would give her orders that she had not the wit to understand properly and then knock her about for the mistakes that could not but follow . . . Sarah . . . got a blow from this fellow, which hurt her so much that he was summoned for it, and fined; this made him more bitter, though at the same time more cautious how he showed it. I don’t suppose it is true, though many say so, that she was sent or pushed into a dangerous part

of the machinery on purpose to cripple her; but I do believe that man has to answer to God for all her sufferings . . . she was worked till her ancles [sic] bent under her; and . . . it was an infamous shame to let the child continue going after she got so weak and ill. However, the machinery settled the matter by pulling off her arm. (154–155)

Here, Sarah's injury is ascribed indirectly to her intellectual vulnerability, whereby she became the scapegoat upon whom the overlooker vindicated his own frustration as well as resentments he held against her and others. Her body becomes here a symbolic collective body of all workers, which Tonna represents in terms of martyrdom. Machinery is somewhat exonerated as it is assigned to the role of the secondary agent of physical damage, and possibly deliberately turned into a malevolent use by the nasty adult. Ultimately, the harm it inflicts becomes a sort of *coup de grâce*, which facilitates the release of the exploited and enervated girl from her ordeal.

Although the abovementioned abuses are delivered by man, they cannot be dissociated from machines, not merely in the sense that they were a usual brutal response to the child workers' disruption of the factory rhythm and failure to "keep pace with the machinery" (Brown 116, 142). The cruelty of overlookers came from the economic ramifications of factory labour as their wages and employment depended on the performance of their workers. But another reason why harm delivered by overlookers represents the body-machine relation is that their acts of violence involved putting machinery to extracurricular uses. Both autobiographies and memoirs expose a rich repertoire of corporeal punishment used to threaten workers or discipline them into obedience, and which avails itself of the mediation of machinery whose various elements become transformed into literal instruments of physical torment when child workers as victims of bobbying or strapping as they are beaten with leather straps nominally used for fixing parts of machines. Helen is "struck . . . severely across the arm and shoulder with one of the rods of the machinery which [an overlooker] had in his hand" (Tonna 166). Blincoe mentions rollers, which are readily flung at children workers (Brown 141, 145), and Dodd recalls being "thrashed with a billy-roller till [his] back, arms, and legs were covered with ridges as thick as [his] fingers" ("A Narrative" 191).

Rollers make a repeated notorious appearance in the narratives of factory abuse. In *Michael Armstrong*, when the rich heiress Miss Brotherton first hears the phrase as a worker explains to her that another child is in pain because "The billy-roller smashed her", she believes it must be a name of a person, Billy Roller, to be then told that "[i]t is an instrument used in the works" (Trollope 134). This is how the factory owner defines it, but later on Miss Brotherton has this word explained again as "a stick big enough to kill with; and many and many is the baby that has been crippled by it" (138). Pei-Hsuan Lo, who offers a more elaborate examination of bodies abused by overseers, mentions also in this context John C. Cobden's *The White Slaves of England*, in which, Cobden refers to it as "a murderous instrument with

which many children had been knocked down, and in some instances murdered by it” (146), soon providing a more technical depiction:

A heavy rod of from two to three yards long, and of two inches in diameter, and with an iron pivot at each end. It runs on the top of the cording, over the feeding-cloth. I have seen them take the billy-roller and rap them on the head, making their heads crack so that you might have heard the blow at a distance of six or eight yards, in spite of the din and rolling of the machinery. (150).

For all the details, largely concerning dimensions, the billy-roller is never shown in its nominal operation. The main context in which these accounts inscribe it is misuse and physical abuse. This abuse has the obvious form of exploitation: any part of machinery is by definition implicated in fast movement and regularity which produce exhaustion of the bodies attending to the machine. The exhaustion results in inattention and inability to keep the pace, which produces, in turn, violence: overlookers ‘employ’ machinery for the sake of more palpable man-made torment, thus further complicating the body-machine relation, or revealing another configuration of man and the machine within the factory system: an evil “combination of people and machinery exerting tyrannical power” (Lo 109).

This “tyrannical power” exerted upon the working body by the “combination of people and machinery” is one of several aspects of factory labour which William Dodd brings up in a particularly insightful passage. The reflection is provoked by his, certainly idealised, depiction of the situation of agricultural labourers, superior by dint of such “privileges and advantages” (215) as more polished human company, better health, access to the sun, fresh air, and birdsong, or an allowance of various cultivated crops. Whereas,

The manufacturing labourer knows nothing of these blessings by experience. He is placed in a mill or factory as a machine, for the performance of a quantity of labour—he hears nothing but the rumbling noise of the machinery, or the harsh voice of the overlooker—sees nothing but an endless variety of shafts, drums, straps, and wheels in motion; and though these may, at first, inspire him with a feeling of respect for, and admiration of, the inventive powers of his fellow-creatures, yet this feeling will vanish, when he reflects on their power to destroy or render useless for life that exalted piece of mechanism formed by and after the image of God!” (“A Narrative” 216)

Dodd’s observations constitute an apt conclusion of this article, as he gathers together many complexities of the body-machine relationship determined by industrial production. This relationship is entrenched in oppressiveness, with machines holding a practically exclusive monopoly not only over the workers’ movements, as shown by various previously mentioned examples, but also over their sensations, being the primary source of sights and sounds. The human voice, “the harsh voice

of the overlooker”, is metonymically placed alongside the “rumbling noise of the machinery” not only because they are key elements of the industrial soundscape, but also because they belong to the situation of demand, tyranny, and even violence, when in an act of brutal collusion, a part of machinery is used by the overlookers to coerce weary bodies into efficiency.

Still, Dodd acknowledges other possibilities in which the simple labourer reads “an endless variety of shafts, drums, straps, and wheels in motion” as an enthralling spectacle of vastness, complexity, efficiency, synchronicity, energy, and power, thus not unlike Sir George Head quoted at the beginning of the article. The experience of the sublime however depends on distance, and in the case of the factory worker, the distance between man and the machine cannot be maintained, except for the brief moment when the labourer is *first* “placed in a mill or factory”. So when the labourer sheds the transient identity of the spectator and reverts to his true capacity of the worker, he denies machines their abstract aesthetic aura and equips them with antagonistic significance. Interestingly, the worker does not align machinery with production and usefulness, nor does he see it as a means of amplifying abilities of human anatomy, easing off his labour.

In his examination of the man-machine relation, Dodd cannot resist the temptation of construing the human body as a mechanism of sorts. First, he describes an industrial labourer as one who “is placed in a mill or factory as a machine, for the performance of a quantity of labour”. His work amounts to overseeing a task actually performed by the machine, and so is grounded in disregard for and devaluation of the labourer’s abilities (see Kuskey 102). Against this conception of the body undervalued and reduced to the status of the machine Dodd places another image in which this same working body, while still represented as a machine, is nominally upgraded since made by God, and in God’s image, only to become drawn into a further degradation that comes from its dramatic vulnerability. As God’s creation, man, the “exalted piece of mechanism”, embodies perfection and omnipotence, but when measured against iron machinery, the human machine always becomes exposed as fragile and faulty. Therefore, the experience of working with machinery, makes the worker see in the “endless variety of shafts, drums, straps, and wheels in motion” less an admirable feat of engineering, and more a wicked proliferation of the possibilities of injury the machines can inflict upon their operative’s body, “destroy or render [it] useless for life”.

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**Abstract:** Taking as its premise Tamara Ketabgian's interpretation of the factory as "a destructive coupling of humans and machines", the chapter looks into the body-machine relation as experienced and described by industrial workers themselves, and imaginatively transformed by novelists opposed to the factory system. Examples are provided by, e. g., *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe, an Orphan Boy, A Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple, Written by Himself*, Frances Trollope's *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy*, or Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*. These works belong to the broadly understood literature of factory reform, which sought to urge changes in legislation which would, for instance, raise the child labour age limit and reduce working hours for children and women. A key image present in such texts is that of the labouring body, often the child's body, implicated into the situation of adjustment, requiring it respond to the regular, often fast, movement of the machine. Workers' failure or inability to respond, because of the physical limitations, fatigue, and inattention, would result in variously damaged bodies: weakened, abused, misshapen, injured, or maimed. Accordingly, even though workers would occasionally admire machinery for its strength, magnificence, and complexity, they could not dissociate it from antagonistic valences, i.e. its abilities to disable the labouring body.

**Keywords:** body, deformity, factory reform, literature, machine, 19<sup>th</sup> century



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## **On the Threshold of Detective Fiction: *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* by Fergus Hume**

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a new type of fiction which was soon labelled as “sensation novel” or “sensation romance” and which was in opposition to the hitherto dominant novel of manners.<sup>1</sup> While the ambition of the latter genre was to present the everyday life of the middle class, so that the characters, the events and the social background could be recognised by the readers as known from their own experience, sensation fiction proposed a different vision of the Victorian society, advertised as more true and less idealised than that shown in the novel of manners.<sup>2</sup> Using motifs known mostly from penny dreadfuls, like crime, mistaken identity, bigamy, frauds, or impersonation, it proposed a world model the most important aspect of which was breaking norms and crossing borders, renouncing the Victorian middle class ideals and rules:

Although many critics, both then and later, feel that sensation fiction owes its popularity primarily to its shock value and its appeal across class lines, few can deny that it was daring in its readiness to question a range of contemporary Victorian norms relating to class, gender, race, and sexuality. (Fantina 12)

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<sup>1</sup> Although the sensation novel is usually assumed to have originated at the beginning of the sixties of the nineteenth century, the key publications being Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859–60), Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1860–61) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), the motifs typical of this genre were already present in earlier fiction. A thorough analysis of a number of such texts published in the 1850s is offered by Anne-Marie Beller (7–20).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* opens with a critique of the English legal system while Mary Elizabeth Braddon in *Lady Audley’s Secret* renounces the idyllic stereotype of the English countryside. Charles Reade provides in the introductions to his novel the state of research on actual cases which were the bases for his plots. As he states himself: “‘Hard Cash’ like ‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ is a matter-of-fact Romance; that is a fiction built on truths” (Reade iii).

Sensation fiction was a rather short-lived phenomenon, as it flourished mainly in the sixties and the seventies of the nineteenth century; however, it did not disappear completely from the literary map of the Victorian period. Its echoes can be traced in several mainstream novels as in Anthony Trollope's *Orley Farm* (1861-2) and *The Eustace Diamond* (1873), George Meredith's *Evan Harrington* (1861) and *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), George Eliot's *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866), or Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) (Pykett 211–213). Above all, sensation novel can be viewed as one of the predecessors of the detective fiction (and its later variants) which emerged near the end of the nineteenth century:

Even though “sensation novels” were a minor subgenre of British fiction that flourished in the 1860s only to die out a decade or two later, they live on in several forms of popular culture, obviously so in their most direct offspring – modern mystery, detective, and suspense fiction and films. (Brantlinger 1)

Indeed, the debt that English detective fiction owes to the sensation novel cannot be overestimated. The action of the latter genre (or at least part of it) is often dominated by the motif of investigation, even though it is usually conducted for personal reasons. For example Valeria Macallen's objective is to prove her husband's innocence (Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* [1874–5]), Franklin Blake is suspected of having stolen the eponymous gem (*The Moonstone* by the same author [1868]), Robert Audley investigates the past of his aunt (Mary Elisabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* [1861–2]) while Marion Halcombe – the fate of her step-sister (Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* [1860]). A professional detective is rare here – one might mention the insurance agent, Ralph Henderson (*The Notting Hill Mystery* by “Charles Felix” [1862–3]) or Sergeant Cuff (*The Moonstone*), foreshadowing the sleuths typical of the detective fiction, a genre initiated by Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes stories.<sup>3</sup>

In 1886, a year before *A Study in Scarlet*, the first Holmes tale, appeared in print, an Australian writer, Fergus Hume published *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, which almost immediately became a bestseller – “300 000 copies were sold in less than three months” (Pittard “From Sensation” 108; see also Knight “Radical Thrillers” 175 and Knight *Crime* 52).<sup>4</sup> The action of the novel (being Hume's literary debut)

<sup>3</sup> Not all critics share this view. Thomas Stearns Eliot considers *The Moonstone* to be the first (and the best) English detective novel (412). Julian Symons is of the same opinion, adding *The Notting Hill Mystery* to the list (50–52). What is interesting, Arthur Conan Doyle in his first Sherlock Holmes novel alludes to the texts by Edgar Allan Poe and Emile Gaboriau (even though he is rather critical about their detectives) but not to sensation fiction.

<sup>4</sup> To be more precise, it became a bestseller in 1887 when its English edition was issued (the 1886 edition was published in Australia). The hypothetical causes of such

revolves around a puzzling murder of an Oliver Whyte committed in the eponymous vehicle. The investigation is conducted by two rival police detectives, Gorby and Kislip. At first the main suspect is one of Whyte's acquaintances, Brian Fitzgerald, later, when his alibi is established beyond any doubt, the suspicion is directed at Mr Frettlby, the father of Brian's fiancée, Madge, and Moreland, Whyte's friend. Beside the investigation carried out by the policemen another – and more crucial one – is conducted first by Brian and then by Calton, a lawyer. As the result of their search it turns out that Mr Frettlby was blackmailed by Whyte who threatened to expose him as a bigamist and Madge as an illegitimate child.

The echoes of sensation fiction are obvious here. The plot embraces such typical motifs as murder, secrets from the past, bigamy, a question of legitimacy – all set in the upper middle class context – as well as the life in the slums of Melbourne where Mr Frettlby's rightful daughter dwells. Thus one can only agree that *The Mystery of a Hanson Cab* “actually constitutes a late sensation novel” (Pittard, “Real Sensation” 39) while “the central mystery is not who murdered Whyte, but, rather, the Frettlby family secret” (Pittard “Real Sensation” 40).<sup>5</sup> However, the novel does not merely offer the reader the recognition of conventional and familiar patterns on the level of the fictional world (this would hardly account for its popularity). What seems to be worth investigating is the way in which the narrator models and manipulates the addressees' style of reading, which, as shall be demonstrated, foreshadows the style of reading typical of detective fiction.

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Like the authors of both sensation fiction and novels of manners, Hume strives to build bonds between the characters, the narrator and the assumed readers based on the common social and cultural background. The action of the novel is set in Australia, but there are no allusions to the stereotypical image of the continent: “colourful shearers, diggers, squatters, farmers and freed convicts are notably absent” (Kipperman 130), neither are any specimens of the local fauna and flora unique to this continent mentioned. The only peculiarity referred to by the narrator is the heat

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a popularity of Hume's novels are discussed by Christopher Pittard (“Real Sensation” 37–48). It is worth mentioning that while nowadays Hume is an almost forgotten author, the popularity of his first novel surpassed that of *A Study in Scarlet* – Conan Doyle and his master-detective became famous later, due to the series of short stories published in *The Strand* (Haycroft 4–5).

<sup>5</sup> That the murder mystery functions as a pretext to delve into Mr Frettlby's past is corroborated by the author's introduction to the 1898 edition of the novel, where the murderer's name is given straight away. “In the first draft I made Frettlby the criminal, but on reading over the M.S. I found that his guilt was so obvious that I wrote out the story for a second time, introducing the character of Moreland as a scape goat” (Hume *Gutenberg*).

at Christmas, but the remarks on this subject are immediately counterbalanced by foregrounding the familiar customs cultivated by the Australians which are exactly the same as those in the Old World:

Therefore on a hot Christmas day, with the sun one hundred odd in the shade, Australian revellers sit down to the roast beef and plum pudding of old England, which they eat contentedly as the orthodox thing, and on New Year's eve, the festive Celt repairs to the indoors of his "friends" with a bottle of whiskey and a cheering verse of Auld Lang Syne. (Hume 146)

Melbourne, the background of most of the events, is "a very modern Victorian city" (Kipperman 130). There is no colonial or peripheral flavour about it; on the contrary, it is constantly stressed that it is like any other European or American metropolis, and so are the customs of its dwellers. The Block in Collins Street is similar "to New York's Broadway, London's Regent Street and Rotten Row, and to the Boulevards of Paris" (Hume 60). Its objective is exactly the same too: "It is on the Block that people show off their new dresses, bow to their friends, and their enemies, and chatter small talk" (Hume 60), continuing the tradition which goes back to Via Appia in ancient Rome. The spatial arrangement of Melbourne proves to be analogous to that of any other great city over the ocean: there are elegant quarters comprising Collins Street and St. Kilda, the slums of Little Burke Street inhabited by the poor, and Burke Street – a border sphere of theatres and night clubs, frequented both by the high society and the demimonde.<sup>6</sup>

Little Burke Street itself is a place at the same time strange and familiar. On the one hand, it is different from the protagonists' (and the readers') everyday experience. When Calton goes there for the first time, he takes a policeman with him, like any reasonable middle class Londoner or New Yorker would do – for the sake of his own safety. The slums are not only a dangerous place but also one drastically different from the elegant and familiar districts of the city, provoking a question: "how human beings could live there" (Hume 106). On the other hand, this district is exactly the same as other such areas in great cities – "the neighbourhood [...] was so like that of the Seven Dials in London" (Hume 105) – thus it would be recognised as familiar by any non-Australians, be they from London, New York or Paris.

The border between the intra- and extratextual world (that is the fictitious reality and that of the assumed readers) is not blurred merely by foregrounding the typicality of the space setting. The cultural background, too, appears to be common for both the narrator (and the characters) and the addressee. The characters are

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<sup>6</sup> The initially sharp divisions between the poor and the higher class as well as between the spatial areas ascribed to them become blurred later in the novel (Clarke 50–1 and 54). Such easy crossing of class borders seems to be typical of sensational fiction as well.

shown playing and listening to musical pieces fashionable at the time, or reading books by popular authors, even if these activities are not related to the criminal plot. Sometimes not only literary tastes but also distastes are supposed to be shared. For example, Madge's aversion to modern overintellectualised novels is mentioned by the narrator (Hume 211) who also rebukes the novelists for their "polyglotism" (that is inserting French and German words and phrases – Hume 141) – the reader is evidently expected to agree with this critique.

The literary controversies and disputes of the late nineteenth century are alluded to as well. In Whyte's room an assortment of French books is found by the police. Gorby thus comments on putting the novels by Emile Zola on the victim's reading list: "I've heard of him; if his novels are as bad as his reputation I shouldn't care to read them" (Hume 28). It is not merely the detective's opinion: in the extratextual reality the French naturalists (especially Zola) were highly criticised in England and blamed for the immorality and indecency of their productions which were allegedly the source of their readers' depravation (Frierson 37–38). Bearing these opinions in mind, the reader may arrive at the proper conclusions concerning Whyte's character and conduct.

Often parallels are drawn between particular situations or characters and certain stereotypes rooted in the cultural heritage, the latter functioning as an interpretative code of the former. For example, the narrator comments on the favourite topic of Whyte's landlady referring to Disraeli's remarks: "It is Beaconsfield<sup>7</sup> who says, in one of his novels, that no one is so interesting as when he is talking about himself" (Hume 18). Disraeli's words serve also as a means of characterising one of Brian's not-very-bright acquaintances: "Rolleston put him [Calton] in mind what Beaconsfield said in one of his characters in *Lothair*, 'He wasn't an intellectual Croesus, but his pockets were always full of sixpences'" (Hume 37). Gorby's figure resembles that of Hamlet who is "fat and scant of breath" (Hume 49) and of "the Robber Captain in *Ali Baba*" (Hume 49). Calton – commenting upon Madge's incomprehensive attitude – states: "I quite agree with Balzac's saying that no wonder man couldn't understand woman, seeing that God who created her failed to do so" (Hume 82), and while discussing the circumstances of the crime he refers to another authority: "You read De Quincey's account of the Marr murders in London, and you will see that the more public the place the less risk there is of detection" (Hume 40).

Several chapters open with general remarks on cultural stereotypes which function as the background of a given character's carrier or behaviour. For example, the retrospective part of the novel narrating Madge's hitherto life begins with the narrator's monologue concerning Fate or Nemesis shaping human lives, while Mr Frettlby with his easiness to make money is introduced by an allusion to King Midas and to the philosopher's stone:

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<sup>7</sup> Disraeli was given the title of Lord Beaconsfield in 1876.

The old Greek story of Midas, who turned everything he touched into gold, is truer than most people suppose. Medieval superstition changed the human being who possessed such a power into the philosopher's stone, after which so many alchemists went hunting in the dark ages, but we of the nineteenth century have given the miracle of changing everything into gold by the touch, back to its human possessor. We, however, do not ascribe it either to Greek deity or Medieval superstition, but simply call it luck. (Hume 33)

The main function of such cultural allusions is to model a particular kind of an addressee – one who is an erudite him/herself and is able to appreciate the erudition of others. At the same time they reveal the fictional reality as one which is equivalent to the extratextual one: there is the same cultural background, the same reading experience, similar tastes and distastes and so on. Like in sensation fiction, the characters are revealed to be “people next door” even though their behaviour and fates might appear rather striking to a novel-of-manners reader. The objective is the identification of the addressee with the characters, and the involvement of the former in the events which – extraordinary and they might seem – are still verisimilar and might occur in the reader's world as well. However, submerging into the presented reality and following the events and the fates of the protagonists is not the only style of reading assumed by Hume's novel.

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As has been already stated, when Hume's novel appeared in print the sensation novel was already a waning genre, therefore the reader's role should consist mainly in recognising the familiar patterns and not reconstructing any unique ones. Hume himself in the introduction to the 1898 edition admits to the lack of originality, although he reveals as his source the novels by Emile Gaboriau and not English sensation fiction. The novel was not intended to propose something new but merely to sell well due to the employment of the French writer's tricks and stratagems:

I inquired of a leading Melbourne bookseller what style of a book he sold most of. He replied that the detective stories of Gaboriau had a large sale; and as, at the time, I had never heard of this author, I bought all his works – eleven or thereabouts – and read them carefully. The style of these stories attracted me and I determined to write a book of the same class; containing a mystery, a murder, and a description of low life in Melbourne. (Hume *Gutenberg*)

On the one hand such a confession merely corroborates the writer's consciousness concerning the lack of originality of his literary debut. On the other hand, however, it foregrounds the artificiality of the presented world – it is not to be interpreted as a quasi-copy of the reader's reality but rather as an imitation of the realities communicated in other literary works.

Both the narrator's and the characters' remarks carry similar suggestions. More than once the murder and its peculiar circumstances are compared to those known from fiction. The anonymous reporter of *The Argus* whose article is quoted in the first chapter of the novel makes references not only to Gaboriau's detective novels but also to *La Crime de l'omnibus* by Fortuné du Boisgobey, another popular French writer. Brian's remarks concerning the crime also situate it closer to literature than to everyday life: "Murdered in a cab [...] A romance in real life, which beats Mrs Braddon hollow" (Hume 47). The conventionality of the world model typical of sensation novels is revealed here – while, as has already been mentioned, the original purpose of this type of fiction was to renounce the allegedly idealised image of the society proposed by the novel of manners and to replace it with a more true-to-life one, in Hume's text the eponymous mystery is presented as an intrusion of an artificial, literary world into real life – something improbable, rather befitting a romance.<sup>8</sup> Such a suggestion constitutes a counterbalance to the strategies aiming at involving the reader in the fictional world and provoking him to recognise it as his own – a distance towards the presented reality is imposed, while the reader is defined rather as an observer than a fellow-citizen.<sup>9</sup> Such a distance foreshadows the techniques and the reader's role that will be later typical of detective fiction: the reader is incited to search for clues left for him by the narrator which would prompt the proper solution of the mystery.

The murder plot develops in Hume's novel in a different way than in sensation fiction where the reader is not provided with clues – material and non-material evidence – that might put him on the right track but simply follows the events as they are revealed by the narrator.<sup>10</sup> In *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* the reader

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<sup>8</sup> What is interesting, a murder similar to that in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* really occurred three years after the novel had been published: "The victim, a wealthy paper merchant and a member of Lancashire County Council, was poisoned with chloral during a drunken cab journey on 26 February 1889" (Clarke 188). It is not clear whether it was a copycat job (thus – to reverse the above quoted Reade's words – "truths built on a fiction"), but the circumstances, crime site and the murder weapon were the same. As in Hume's reality, it was a crime like in romance.

<sup>9</sup> As LeRoy Panek notices, references to other detective stories or their authors are typical of the Golden Age writers (the interwar period). They fulfill the same function as in Hume's novel: they remind the reader that he/she has to do with fiction and not with a "copy" of extratextual reality: "This [...] points out that Golden Age writers did not try to absorb their readers in the actuality of a fictional world. The reverse is true: writers remind us of the artificiality of the form – that is not normal life or even normal fiction" (20)

<sup>10</sup> There is perhaps one exception from this rule: *The Law and the Lady* by Wilkie Collins, where one of the characters proposes several subsequent solutions of the puzzle using the pieces of information that the reader is already familiar with (thus the reader might come

is provoked to speculate and reason on the basis of the data which the narrator provides him with.

The way in which the clues are suggested is, however, different from that which will be typical of detective fiction. In the latter, the reader has at his disposal the same information as the sleuth – the traces left on the crime scene, the witnesses' testimonies, as well as further evidence that expires during the investigation. Even though in the early detective stories the fair play principle is not always observed, it is the reader that is handicapped and not the detective. In *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* the reader has access to the characters' thoughts, "hears" them talking to themselves or observes their reactions usually not noticed by others – all this can furnish him/her with clues which are beyond the detective's reach. The clues are fragmentary – the thoughts or utterances are unfinished, the reactions are far from univocal – thus the reader is made to complete the information he/she is provided with his/her own inferences. Like in detective fiction, the reader is often put on the wrong track when – confronted with the narrator's understatements – he/she is prompted the most obvious but erroneous conclusions.

At first the primary suspect is Brian. The fact that it was him who saw Whyte to the cab is corroborated by his own words: "Could anyone have seen me? [...] Pshaw, of course not, and the cabman would never recognize ma again" (Hume 43). Therefore the reader can have little doubt that it was also him who got on the cab with the victim. This is suggested both by his uneasiness when he notices a strange man in front of his house: his suspicions as to the man's identity as a police agent point to a guilty conscience and so does the monologue he utters when he learns that the police have made some discoveries concerning the case:

"They have found a clue, have they?" he muttered, rising and pacing restlessly up and down. "I wonder what it can be? I threw that man off the scent last night, but if he suspects me, there will be no difficulty in him finding out where I live. Bah! What nonsense I am talking. I am the victim of my own morbid imagination. There is nothing to connect me with the crime, so I need not be afraid of my shadow". (Hume 52)

Brian's further behaviour also points him out as the guilty party. For example, when Madge alludes to the man who entered the cab with Whyte, he answers in a way "so different from his usual nonchalant way of speaking" (Hume 63) that is "listlessly, without turning his head" (Hume 63) and "as calmly as he was able" (Hume 63), which suggests rather lack of calm. Such a reaction would be incomprehensible if Brian knew nothing about Whyte's companion. On another occasion Brian asks himself, "If they knew all, I wonder if they would sit with me so

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to the same conclusions even earlier). However, not only all these solutions are false, but also their "inventor" is the only one who knows the truth and strives to hide it in this way.



cool and unconcerned?” (Hume 66) – indeed, who would be “cool and unconcerned” knowing they are having tea with a murderer. His reaction to Gorby’s visit leaves no doubt as to the state of the young man’s conscience: “Fitzgerald turned as white as a sheet, for he felt that they had come for him” (Hume 67),<sup>11</sup> neither does his concern for Madge expressed in the words overheard by the detective: “Poor girl! Poor girl! [...] If she only knew all! If she—” (Hume 46), as well as in his cry: “Oh, Madge! my darling [...] if you only knew what I suffer, I know you would pity me— but you must never know the truth— ‘Never! Never!’” (Hume 52). There is little doubt what the truth that he is determined to hide from his fiancée is.

Not only Brian’s reactions testify against him. So do the narrator’s comments concerning the reaction of the young man’s friends to his arrest. Although they do not believe in his guilt, their trust in him is interpreted in his disfavour – there are always people who are ready to whiten villains against obvious facts:

There are, no doubt, many people who think that Nero was a pleasant young man, whose cruelties were merely an overflow of high spirits; and who regard Henry VIII, as a henpecked husband, who was unfortunate in having six wives. It is these kind of people who delight in sympathising with great criminals of the Ned Kelly sort, and look upon them as embodiments of heroism, badly treated by the narrow understanding of the law. (Hume 79)

The obvious inferences prove false, and when Brian is eventually found innocent, his words and behaviour appear to carry a different meaning: they seem to suggest Mr Frettlby’s guilt and the young man’s determination to hide the murderer’s identity before Madge and the world. That would explain both his fear of being arrested and his refusal to give evidence – too much might be revealed and the identity of the true culprit might be discovered. Later, when Fitzgerald considers moving to Ireland with Madge and Mr Frettlby, his reaction testifies to his certainty as to the older man’s guilt: “He felt sudden chill come over him as he murmured the last words to himself – ‘her father’” (Hume 166), and then he states: “It can make no difference to me as long as Madge remains ignorant; but to sit beside him, to eat with him, to have him always present like a skeleton at a feast— God help me!” (Hume 166). The legitimacy of the reader’s inferences concerning the identity of the murderer is further asserted by the narrator’s own words (which later prove as misleading as his comments on Brian’s friends quoted above):

On Whyte’s death he [Frettlby] again breathed freely, when suddenly a second possessor of his fatal secret started up in the person of Robert Moreland. As the murder of Duncan

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<sup>11</sup> Although Brian is arrested at that moment under the charge of murder, Hume offers his reader a counter clue – the solution of the puzzle would hardly be provided in the first quarter of the novel!

had to be followed by that of Banquo in order to render Macbeth safe, so he foresaw that while Roger Moreland lived his life would be one long misery. (Hume 207)

The allusion to Shakespeare's tragedy indeed suggests that it was Frettlby who got rid of the blackmailer and now – like Macbeth – he is going to murder another man who knows his secret. His sleepwalking also seems to be ascribed to his guilty conscience or even to his planning another murder; as the narrator states, it results from “the dictates of the excited brain” (Hume 212). The earlier reference to *Macbeth* still enhances this impression, if one remembers both the bloodstained dagger and Banquo's ghost which may be merely the figments of Macbeth's “excited brain”. However, the further course of events proves that the narrator's statement merely refers to the relief that the blackmailer's death brings and which eventually proves to be illusionary. The analogy to Shakespeare is incomplete, as Frettlby – although benefitting by the murder – did not kill Whyte and is not planning to kill Moreland,

Thus, although the reader is on a more privileged position than the fictitious detectives, having access to the characters thoughts and utterances as well as to the narrator's remarks, he/she is constantly directed to a wrong track due to the incomplete information and the narrator's misleading comments. Paradoxically, when the reader's perspective is less privileged and the provided facts are known to other characters, including the detectives, he/she has a better chance to connect the bits and pieces into a comprehensible whole, arriving at right conclusions and solving at least part of the mystery before the final resolution. Here, the author's strategy is similar to that which will be adopted by detective story writers.

The second chapter, which consists mainly of a report of the inquest, seemingly doubles the information which is provided in *The Argus* article. However, a closer look would reveal new details which will prove important in the further course of the investigation and which provoke the reader to delve deeper. The press article contained in the first chapter states merely that the drunk Whyte was led to the cab by a man who left him there only to return a moment later and depart with him. The only information concerning the stranger is that he had “a short covert coat of a light colour, which was open” (Hume 4). According to the cabman's evidence given at the inquest, the man's hat covered the upper part of his face and his coat was buttoned up when he returned. He was also wearing a ring which was noticed only when he was getting on the cab

The evidence allows for some inferences concerning Whyte's companion. The fact that the cabman practically did not see his face as well as the change in his attire may suggest that there could have been two men – one who saw Whyte to the cab and another who entered the vehicle with him. While Brian's anxiety suggests that he indeed accompanied Whyte on that fatal evening, his – mentioned more than once – aversion to any kind of jewellery rather rules him out as the

murderer who actually got into the cab. Further clues are provided later in the novel when the resemblance of all the three suspects (Brian, Frettlby and Moreland) is stressed several times: they are tall and slim, wear similar clothes, have blond hair and moustache.<sup>12</sup> Even though the clues do not allow the reader to identify the murderer, they provoke doubts: the reader is prompted that there may be more than one suspect and that it does not have to be the most obvious one who is guilty.

Thus, beside the narrator's understatements which might put the reader on the wrong track, there are clues in Hume's novel of the type which foreshadows the detective story conventions: material and non-material evidence which is known both to the detective and to the reader and which is instrumental in arriving at the final conclusions (even though in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* the function of such hints is more to undermine the apparently obvious solution, revealing more possibilities than one, than to provide a univocal answer to the problem). The reader is thus offered the role of the detective's rival, being able to make use of the extant evidence before the sleuth does.

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As can be concluded, the reality presented in Hume's novel and the reader's relation to it are governed by two opposite organising principles. On the one hand the social and cultural identity of the reader and the characters (and the narrator) is established – the former is to recognise the world of the novel as his/her own (despite some unfamiliar aspects, like the life in the slums for example). As in sensation fiction (taking after the novel of manners) an illusion of a copy of the extratextual reality is created while the reader is "invited" to submerge in the fictitious world. On the other hand the author imposes distance towards the created world, presenting it as ordered according to certain artificially imposed rules. The point is not only in recognising literary conventions but also in remembering that the novel's reality is a construction – the events do not "simply" happen but everything is purposeful and serves as a means of manipulating the reader's reactions and inferences. *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* thus foreshadows what will be the essence of detective fiction: the reader's task is to connect the seemingly

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<sup>12</sup> Let us observe that also the motif of mistaken identity, so important for the detective plot in Hume's novel, is typical of sensational fiction. As Winifred Hughes states: "The favourable expedient, universal in Victorian melodrama, is mistaken identity, caused by crime, accident, illegitimacy, or deliberate impersonation" (20) – examples can be found for example in several Wilkie Collins's novels, like *The Woman in White* or *Griffith Gaunt* (a lookalike), *Armadale* (the same name and surname), *No Name* (impersonation). In Hume's novel the problem with the culprit's identification consists mainly in the fact that "all the wealthy suspects seem to dress alike" (Kipperman 135; see also Clarke 52) and look alike.

unrelated elements into one logical whole and on this basis to draw conclusions concerning the puzzle he/she is confronted with, while the writer plays with the reader providing him/her with false clues as well as proper ones.

The new genre is foreshadowed not only by offering to the reader the role of a detective. Contrary to sensation fiction, in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, the investigation proper is not carried for personal reasons and the detective is not a party at the same time. True, there is Brian Fitzgerald, who can be viewed as a version of the sensation novel detectives, but when he eventually learns about his future father-in-law's shady past, he makes all-out efforts to obstruct the investigation and hide the truth – like, for example, Rachel Verrinder from Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* who is convinced of her fiancé's guilt but refuses to give him away. The investigation proper is carried by three professionals – the police detectives Gorby and Kislip and the barrister Calton – and solving the murder case would facilitate their careers. All this is not distant from Conan Doyle's Holmes and his "rivals" created by other detective fiction writers.

The new convention is also announced by the references to Gaboriau whose texts (as well as the Dupin short stories by Edgar Allan Poe) were the inspiration for Arthur Conan Doyle. Even though Doyle, through Holmes's voice, criticises his predecessors, he makes his own detective use the same method of the investigation – from the premises to the inevitable conclusions. However, Hume, in spite of the references to Gaboriau, does not apply the methods used by the French writer (or rather his detective): the investigation is based on the non-material evidence given by witnesses and suspects who can manipulate the facts (or simply err) and not on the material traces which would put the detective in full control. It is worth reminding that *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* the case is closed due to the murderer's confession; thus, in spite of foregrounding the investigation plot, Hume's novel is still deeply set in the sensation novel tradition.

This type of literature finds its continuation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While detective fiction (which in England at first developed as short story) the crime puzzle is mainly an intellectual problem, the central position is given to the detective and his method, and the action itself develops according to a rather stiff formula, in the crime-adventure literature, as it is sometimes defined, the plot is dominated by such motifs as dark secrets from the protagonist's past (*The Three Oaks Mystery* [1924] by Edgar Wallace, *The Opal Serpent* [1905], *The Silent House* [1899] and *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* by Fergus Hume, or *The Bartlett Mystery* [1919] by Louis Tracy), illegitimate children and the problem of legacy (*The Stowmarket Mystery* [1904] by Louis Tracy or *The Three Oaks Mystery*), disguises and changed identity (*The Silent House* and *The Secret Passage* [1905] by Fergus Hume) – also for the investigation sake (*Room 13* [1924], *The Daffodil Mystery* [1920] or *The Dark Eyes of London* [1924] by Edgar Wallace), the Doppelgänger motif (*The Stowmarket Mystery* – in this

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novel there is the identity of first and last names, like in Collins's *Armada*), the culprit's confession instead of the detective's reasoning (above all, Hume's novels), or the motif of a miraculous invention related to a spy plot (*The Mystery of the Green Ray* [1915] by William Le Queux). In *The Stowmarket Mystery* the murder is part of a sequence of violent deaths foreseen in a prophecy nearly 150 years old, while at the moment when the crime is being committed the protagonist dreams about the first of these deaths – thus the mimetic order of reality is questioned. The protagonist often finds himself in immediate danger; moreover, he is often a person incidentally involved in the crime plot and not a professional or even an amateur detective (though there are also “serial” detectives, like Reginald Brett, the policemen Winter and Furneaux in Louis Tracy's novels, or some of Edgar Wallace's protagonists; while Kilsip and Gorby will return in *Madam Midas* [1888]). The criminals rarely stand to court – Ooma (*The Stowmarket Mystery*) takes poison, Moreland (*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*) hangs himself in his cell, Maude (*The Opal Serpent*) is killed by a train, while Maraquito (*The Secret Passage*) – by a car, Lord Caranby (*The Secret Passage*) dies of vitriol burns, while Rhoda (*The Silent House*) – of pneumonia. Sometimes the authors add an exotic touch – the Romani in some of Hume's novels (*Hagar of the Pawnshop* [1898] or *Red Money* [1911]), the Chinese (*Number 17* [1915] by Louis Tracy), the Japanese (*The Stowmarket Mystery*), the envoys of the Turkish sultan (*The Albert Gate Mystery* [1904] by the same author). There are also beautiful *femmes fatales* (Maraquito from *The Secret Passage*), international conspiracies (*The Albert Gate Mystery* or *Number 17*), exotic religious sects (the fire worshippers in *The Fire Tongue* [1921] by Sax Rohmer) or native criminal organizations (*The Terrible People* [1926] by Edgar Wallace).<sup>13</sup>

Thus *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* at the same time foreshadows the appearance of a new genre – detective story – and is a continuation of nineteenth century sensation fiction. Hume's next texts follow the latter convention and do not make much use of what was evidently new in his first novel – even if there are some detective sub-plots, they are not dominant and do not determine the flow of events. Moreover, contrary to *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, where the reader is expected to recognise the presented world as a quasi-copy of his/her own, Hume's later novels (like the novels of other writers of this genre) with their adventurous and

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<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that these novels lack motifs typical of detective novels. At the beginning of *The Albert Gate Mystery* Reginald Brett in a true Holmesian style deciphers the vacation plans of his butler, while Hagar from Hume's novel utilises the deduction method to solve the mysteries of stolen amber beads and hidden last will. Doctor Ganesk from *The Mystery of the Green Ray* also acts as a detective drawing conclusions from the extant premises. As he states himself: “The two callings are very closely allied [...]. Detectives deal with murderers and thieves, and I with nerves and tissues. It is all a question of diagnosis” (Le Queux 97).

often improbable plots propose a world which is overtly fictitious. One can risk a statement that while the initial variant of sensational fiction utilised certain motifs known from the penny dreadfuls to correct the stereotypes proposed by the novel of manners, crime-adventure fiction, though more “democratic” and not class limited, takes over the original function that the penny dreadfuls were to fulfill – to provide diversion and entertainment.

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**Abstract:** Although Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) refers back to the convention of English sensation fiction, popular in the 60s and 70s of the nineteenth century, one can notice there patterns which will later be typical of detective literature. While the reader of a sensation novel was not provoked to solve the detective puzzle (provided there was any) by himself/herself and so to act as a rival of the fictional detective, in Hume's text the way in which the narrative discourse is carried incites the reader to speculate both on the motive of the murder and on the identity of its perpetrator. Thus, on the one hand the reader is offered an opportunity to "enter" the presented reality and follow the sensational course of events as they "happen", on the other this reality is revealed as a construction – the tale is a puzzle containing clues necessary to solve it, while the reader is to link the seemingly unconnected elements into one logical whole.

**Key words:** detective fiction, crime-adventure novel, Fergus Hume, sensation fiction, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*





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## **Raping Her Locks Beneath the Trees: A New Reading of Tess d'Urberville & Marty South**

In our recent global pandemic, many lost their hair to covid fevers. Others, cautious of the contagious dangers of public indoor spaces, forsook barbershop and salon, effecting self-cuts or disappearing beneath overgrown hair. Undeniably, the pandemic violated choice when it came to hair. The silver – perhaps even spiritual – lining in the unruly overabundance of tresses for many was an opportunity, in returning to a stylist for that first welcomed haircut, to share the strands with those whose hair was stolen by covid and other diseases or the treatments for such. No matter how we “cut” it, hair is a cultural, social, political, and even economic part of our individual identity and larger reality. Consider how easily we might title various chapters of our lives according to “hair glories”, “hair experiments”, and “hair crises”. As the pandemic reminded us, our relationship to our hair is both intimate and private as well as a part of our public persona – often the first physical aspect others look upon and notice about us. I do not think it is much of a stretch to expand this truth to recognising the timeless reality that hair measures and documents how we are regarded within our society and culture. Perhaps during extraordinary public health crises as well as ordinary socio-cultural identity disturbances, perceiving hair as cultural marker invites understanding its importance in how we choose or feel coerced to connect with others – our spiritual extensions embodied in our hair extensions.

This chapter studies the meaning in the paradoxical ruin and resurrection of the Victorian woman when she loses her hair by focusing mostly on Thomas Hardy’s titular Tess d’Urberville, while briefly appreciating Marty South’s supporting but unforgettable role in *The Woodlanders* as my study’s concluding remarks. Readers of Tess and Marty spy a female character cutting – ridding herself of her own hair as self-deprivation of a natural beauty integral to her consciousness and spirit. Hence, the story of hair and ruin. Hardy’s well-known Tess and perhaps less recognized Marty South are raped, the former literally, the latter by economic class injustice, and both by societies so careless of purity, they force these women to cut their locks to preserve the self. It is these women’s autonomous choices

to preserve an essence beyond beauty, though not escaping tragedy, that resurrect them as immortal to both Hardy and his reader. Canadian Hardy scholar Keith Wilson perceives the significance shared by Tess and Marty as “both a wrenchingly sympathetic individual woman and an emblematic representation of both the tragedy and the moral responsibility contained in the burden of consciousness” (60). Tess and Marty think; therefore, they feel.

This chapter secondarily finds Tess’s and Marty’s immortality in twentieth-century poems Hardy wrote, resurrecting both women’s voices in his own resurrection of poetry. Tess’s lamentation and Marty’s reverie are significantly the only Hardy poems showing an intense continued regard for his characters after their narrative demise. Therefore, the physicality of Tess’s and Marty’s images, in large part through their hair, are indelible not only to the reader, but also to Hardy.

As my study focuses on the cultural significance of hair, I begin with a brief appreciation for how the Victorians perceived and imaged hair in the visual arts. Given this study’s regard for Tess and Marty, I draw our attention here to the allure of female natural crowns in Victorian visual art. The literary and cultural critic, Galia Ofek, writes of the nineteenth-century obsession with hair, especially female locks, in visual and literary art, noting that Victorian

hair attracted increasing attention as a focus for tensions and uneasy compromises between natural forces and cultural codes; ‘low’ and ‘high’ brow culture; sensuality and spirituality; private and public spheres; potentially disruptive self-assertion and reassuring social conventionality; personal subjectivity and communal identity; originality and reproduction; authenticity and artificiality; the requirements of realism and the powers of the imagination. (Ofek ix)

We might glimpse some of Ofek’s tensions in Victorian portraits. I include URLs in my Works Cited for these images according to their institutional holding places in order to provide the reader access to these paintings and photographs.

First, Frederic Leighton’s 1895 *Flaming June* gushes her unnaturally vibrant hair as unabashed sensual fetish in a pose reminiscent of spiritual ecstasy, suggesting hair as the intersection of the sacred and profane. As I demonstrate later in this study, Tess relinquishes her life to Man’s law, sacrificing herself at Stonehenge, site of pagan worship. Second, in Charles Dodgson’s (aka Lewis Carroll’s) discomfiting 1858 photographic image of his Wonderland child, the wealthy Alice Liddell, seduces her viewer while adorned in a provocatively torn dress, one hand strategically upturned and empty. This hand draws our eyes upward to her whimsically side-cocked head, her short locks teasing us with false innocence. This sacred and profane tension further plays out in Julia Margaret Cameron’s posing of grown-up Liddell in the 1872 photograph titled *Pomona*. While Dodgson’s Alice beguiles her viewer as an eerily aware and performative child, Cameron disturbingly portrays an

adult woman of a consciousness at once intense and vacant. Tess's society wants to blame her beauty for provoking men to commit crimes on her body and mind, but these photos in concert remind us that the posing begins with a man's lurid fascination with untouched beauty and ends with a woman's traumatised soul. Thirdly, luxuriant hair in William Holman Hunt's 1853 *The Awakening Conscience* voyeuristically exposes a woman's shame of her endangerment within a private space sacred to her. This shame intrudes into both Tess's and Marty's homes. Both women relinquish their hair, vulnerable to society's profane lack of compassion. One final illustration of Ofek's hair tensions is visible in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1866–68 *Lady Lilith* in which we sense the Victorian woman's awareness of her beauty secreted and celebrated in a mirror as she combs her ravishing red hair for the pleasure of the male gaze. Though of vastly different socio-economic class than *Lady Lilith*, the labourer Marty South wishes to attract the gaze of her fellow forest worker, Giles Winterborne, believing her uniquely auburn-hued tresses will eventually turn his initially unrequited love to meaningful desire. Marty believes in the sanctitude of her and Giles's shared love for the natural world which, for Marty, includes a dignified pride in her hair's wild hue. However, a more studied look at both Rossetti's red-haired beauty and Marty reveals a flamboyant disregard for society's gaze upon her. On the one hand, we appreciate the autonomous sanctity of these females' mirrored reflections deliberately refusing the world's exploitative dictate that they serve society's pleasure and not their own. On the other hand, ignoring the world leaves them alone, isolated by their admirable but alienating rebellions. In a current Rossetti exhibition catalogue essay, Delaware Art Museum curator, Margaretta Frederick writes that *Lilith* exposes the Victorian male's troubled but mesmerized awareness of the New Woman (178, 181, 183, 186). Hardy was similarly agonized by respecting women's voices but wary of such actualization (Ofek 131).

I find Ofek's sighting of the era's regard for hair documented in both literature and visual representations helpful to my reading of Tess's and Marty's narratives for their cultural meanings. Hardy's writing merges narrative and visual regard for hair as he simultaneously merges these female characters' physicality and plight. It is in the liminal spaces dialectically created by these crises of disrupted female selves struggling within alienating conventions that Tess and Marty cut their hair. At first, the shearing of their tresses represents a lost trust in their own dignity. However, Hardy curiously manages to tinge his profound tragedies with an unshakeable awareness that human vulnerability signifies human strength. Hardy's fierce realism acknowledges that this strength alienates his underappreciated characters from a society that cruelly sacrifices their resolution along with their discarded locks. However, despite society casting out these maligned women, identified by natural beauty and labour of landscape and forest, the novelist creates two women forever unforgettable first in their narrative ruin and second in their immortalized poetic resurrection.

Aware of this symbiotic relationship between literature and image which signifies Victorian hair as site of the female struggle between disempowerment and empowerment, Hardy's reader perceives the writer's grief and rage at his society's wronging of Tess. She is initially violated by the male privilege of Alec d'Urberville in the Chase Forest and then abandoned on her wedding night by the moral hypocrisy of Angel Clare. Tess's survival depends on her own will and work, for her birth family's ignorance, poverty, and careless scapegoating of Tess expose her to the sexual appetite of Alec. Alec's rape of Tess precipitates self-centred and hypocritical Angel to exile her from a marriage before it begins. And so Tess becomes an itinerant dairy and field worker, vulnerable to, but never overcome by, ravaging labour, weather, female jealousy, community scorn, and undisciplined male desire. Escaping a possible second assault, she catapults herself into a shade of wounded birds, where in desolation, she bandages her head and half her face, finishing her self-defacement by cutting off her eyebrows. Tess's violence against herself to protect herself mirrors her society's violence against her to protect itself, which means abandoning her to conditions she eventually cannot withstand. Raped again within the eventual marriage she forces herself to endure for the wellbeing of her birth family, she kills her assailant, facing the Law only too ready to hang the woman it has killed throughout her life. In *Tess*, Hardy arguably offers a diatribe against a world that in callously devaluing women has lost a moral guilt and shame which the novel returns to both author and reader.

Let's spend a little time first with Tess in her narrative and then look at a few lines of her lament written by Hardy in 1901, reflecting on its viable meaning in light of Hardy's 1891 novel. In her Introduction to *Tess*, Canadian literary scholar, Sarah E. Maier notes that Hardy's resilient Tess is aware of her era's social injustices reflecting Hardy's wrath at Victorian male vanity: "[Tess's] spirit and individuality refuse to succumb to Alec's manipulations and declarations that she should act as 'Everywoman'" (Maier 22). Maier finds this especially poignant when Alec d'Urberville, shamelessly proud he fathered Tess's child born of his rape, seeks to renew his chance to own Tess by offering to economically help her family. However, Tess, in the words of Maier, "refuses to be appropriated by Alec . . . and so renounces him", not once but over and over (22). Hardy is equally adamant to grieve for Tess and to salute her rebellious outrage as enacting his own dialectical response to Tess's fire: "She had no fear of him now, and in the cause of her confidence, her sorrow lay" (Hardy 106). Tess refuses to "buy" Alec's fiscal support by falsely claiming she loves him, admitting, "I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late" (107). Alec carelessly dismisses her resistance: "That's what every woman says!" Maier perceives Hardy's admiration for Tess firing back, "'How can you dare to use such words!' . . . her eyes flashing as the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her. 'My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every

woman *says some women may feel?*” (Hardy 107, qtd. in Maier 22–23; emphasis added). Hardy’s novel here launches the moral strength of Tess’s consciousness of her later “Lament”.

A few of the novel’s passages illustrate how Tess’s hair spins a web tragically entrapping, before releasing, this female within a male-myopic society, creating what Hardy scholar Keith Wilson deems an uncanny and lasting bond between writer and character (Wilson 44–47).

Hardy introduces us to Tess’s uniqueness with attention to her hair: “She was a fine and handsome girl. . . She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment” (47). Angel Clare, a stranger ambling through the Vale of Blackmoor boisterously celebrating its May Day dance, takes special notice of Tess and she of him. However, Angel accepts the advances of another more forward maiden, quickly forgetting Tess, who is somewhat perplexed by his slight. Tess’s red adornment is notably prompted by awareness of her natural beauty which arrests but does not immediately move Angel. Later in the narrative the two meet again at a dairy farm and become engrossed in a conversation musing “the hobble of being alive [as] rather serious” (149). Angel is unable *not* to be intellectually and emotionally mesmerized by “just that touch of rarity about her shaping such sad imaginings . . . surprised to find . . . [her] feelings--the ache of modernism . . . and advanced ideas . . . strange . . . impressive, interesting, pathetic” (149–150). Angel’s eventual almost ethereal swoon over Tess began when he was momentarily struck by the singular ribbon in her hair.

Hardy moves Tess’s tragedies along at rapid pace: in the middle of the night following the May dance, an exhausted Tess, substituting for her drunken father, falls asleep while driving the family wagon to market, unable to avoid crashing into a mail cart which kills the family’s only horse and thus livelihood by trade. Her exploitative mother snatches the opportunity to make the most of Tess’s beauty, identified by her luxurious hair, arranging for Tess to go to work at a manor now owned by the self-centred rake Alec d’Urberville, whose father purchased the ancient family name before it was demeaned into d’Ubeyfield, the current surname of Tess’s family. On a Saturday evening after a tired Tess has enjoyed the day’s fair independently from the other d’Urberville employees, she decides to wait to walk the three miles home with them for what she believes will be communal safety. Alec’s persistent and rather bullying stalking has led Tess to a disturbing mistrust of his presence. Even on this starkly moonlit night, when suddenly “[a] loud laugh from behind Tess’s back” is accompanied by “the red coal of a cigar” revealing “Alec d’Urberville . . . standing there alone”, Tess more adamantly than ever refuses his offer of a ride home on his horse (95).

I note how the ensuing rape evolves out of Hardy’s narrative entwining of another’s hair – or its semblance – with Tess’s own. Hardy’s portrait criticizing the realism of rural hierarchies catapults Tess into a fateful fight with her nemesis,

Car, another worker on Alec's estate who has been the sometime lover of Alec, now publicly pursuing Tess. The scene unfolds:

The basket being large and heavy, Car had placed it . . . on the top of her head . . . from the back of her head a kind of rope could be seen descending to some distance below her waist . . . [this] was *not* her hair: it was a black stream of something oozing from her basket, and it glistened like a slimy snake in the cold still rays of the moon . . . Treacle it was . . . By this time there had arisen a shout of laughter at the extraordinary appearance of Car's back, which irritated the dark queen into getting rid of the disfigurement by the first sudden means available . . . provoking the others' convulsions at the spectacle of Car gyrating horizontally on the herbage . . . [Tess], who had hitherto held her peace at this wild moment could not help joining in with the rest . . . To Tess's horror the dark queen . . . closed her fists and squared up to Tess . . . [the other inebriated women] also chimed in with an animus [against] Tess . . . [who] indignant and ashamed . . . was . . . about to rush off alone when a horseman emerged almost silently from the corner of the hedge that screened the road, and Alec D'Urberville looked round about them . . . [To Tess he whispered,] 'Jump up behind me . . . and we'll get shot of the screaming cats in a jiffy!'" (Broadview 96–98, emphasis added)

Away from the cats and into the wolf's lair, Tess is led through the tumultuous night into the fog-ravaged Chase, beneath whose trees the rider begs the maid rest so that he might prey upon Tess's locks strewn amongst Nature's strands of fern, as she lies deeply drenched in a sleep of exhausted despair (103–104). She names the child born of this assault, Sorrow, whom she feeds on the fields where she works, a mysterious recluse from the working company,

her bonnet . . . pulled so far over her brow that none of her face is disclosed while she binds [sheaths of wheat], though her complexion may be guessed from *a stray twine or two of dark brown hair which extends below the curtain of her bonnet*. Perhaps one reason why she seduces casual attention is that she never courts it, though the other women often gaze around them. (117, emphasis added)

Sorrow dies while still a suckling infant, refused Christian baptism by Tess's father and burial by the Vicar; mother and child punished by Guilt imposed and worn (125–126). Ofek historicizes the Victorian bonnet as emblematic of the "devotional" woman, further reinforced by Tess as Madonna, whose humanity and youth are tenderly visualized in that recalcitrant tress or two peeking out from the bonnet of virtuous concealment (Ofek 5).

For too short a time, Tess knows true love born of her own goodness when Angel meets her for a second time at Talbothays Dairy, she a milkmaid and he, a colonialist, studying the dairy trade en route to Brazil; he fetishizes Tess's hair, somewhat weirdly braiding the physical and the spiritual:

She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn . . . The brimfulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation . . . the sun slanting in by the window upon his back, as he held her tightly to his breast; upon her inclining face, upon the blue veins of her temple, upon her naked arm, and her neck, and into the depths of her hair. (191)

Ofek's tensions are visibly in action in this passage. Tess's coiled-up hair associates her with the Biblical Eve as both beguiling and beguiled by the serpent. Further, Tess's tamed hair is not worn loosely as we might expect a maiden to don her tresses, due most likely to the pragmatic demands of her necessary employment as milking maid. Her bound hair suggests that she is a maid no more, her controlled hair showing her bound to men. And while she in many respects is once again at the mercy of a man's gaze upon her, Tess's ethereal quality in this scene, liberates her from restrictive certainty as either young or old, and yields her nature a timeless essence refusing society's temporal limitations and ideals. Ofek remarks that Hardy's "portrayal of hair was informed by contemporary influential scientific and evolutionary models no less that it drew on old biblical, artistic and literary traditions" (131). As noted above, Angel's fascination with Tess is his vision of her as divinely untouched and also sagaciously modern.

In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, prior to the enraged serpent's deceitful descent on Adam and Eve, John Milton characterizes the couple in their relation to the Divine: "He for God onely, shee for God in him" (IV. line 299). This description is reminiscent of the religious Angel as first moved by Tess's natural purity, and she, in turn, by his god-like care for her. Milton's ensuing lines in his own passage reinforce Ofek's emphasis on Eve's hair as natural "unadorned gold'n tresses. . . in wanton ringlets wav'd [a]s the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd subjection" (lines 305–308). Milton, however, suggests his female protagonist as more knowing than Hardy's Tess, visible in Eve's hair performing as "coy submission, modest pride . . . Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame [o]f Natures works" (lines 310, 313–314; emphasis added). Prior to succumbing to the serpent's command and precipitating the couple's exile from Paradise, Eve's enticing locks are only "*seeming* pure" before she "banisht from Mans life his happiest life" (lines 316–317, emphasis added). Milton scholar Helen Darbishire perceives Milton's "indignant rush" in this passage of Eve's powerfully unruly hair as the poet's regard for Eve's disruption (note p. 296). While Hardy seems to find Angel culpable for demanding that Tess answer to his need for her perfection, bound up in the allure of her hair, he joins Milton in signifying female hair as the site of narrative tragedy. On Angel's and Tess's wedding night, when they each confess to a single earlier sexual encounter with another, the un-modern Angel abandons Tess, unable to accept

that the assault on her warrants compassion rather than misplaced moral judgment against her.

Two final glimpses of the beauty and beguile in Tess's hair underscore her own and others' awareness of how her tresses identify her, recalling Ofek's perception of identity in the tensions marked by hair. Years after Alec's rape and Angel's abandonment, Tess, a refugee migrating between hard labour and men's lascivious bullying and stalking, hides one night beneath a tree where she reflects:

If all were only vanity, who would mind it? All was, alas, worse than vanity. [She wakes to discover that she has shared the tree with pheasants] driven down into this corner . . . by some shooting party . . . where they . . . had fallen one by one as she had heard them . . . *With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess's first thought was to put the still-living birds out of their torture. She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature . . . and [so] Tess went onward with fortitude, her recollection of the birds' silent endurance of their night of agony impressing upon her the relativity of her own, if she could once rise high enough to despise opinion. But that she could not do so long as it was held by Clare . . . She . . . breakfasted at an inn, where several young men were troublesomely complimentary to her good looks. Somehow she felt hopeful, for was it not possible that her husband might claim her even yet? But she was bound to take care of herself on the chance of it, and keep off lovers. To this end Tess resolved to run no further risks from her appearance . . . with her little scissors, by the aid of a pocket looking-glass, she mercilessly nipped her eyebrows off and thus insured against aggressive admiration, she went on her even way . . . Tears came into her eyes for very pity of herself. . . 'I'll always be ugly now, because Angel is not here, and I have nobody to take care of me.* (287–290, emphasis added)

Ofek informs that “Christianity [in addition to Jewish and Islamic law] associated women's hair with sexual evil . . . indeed '[h]ead hair was not only concealed but shaved or plucked', and eyebrows 'were removed too'” (Cobb-Stevens, qtd. in Ofek 5). Tess's purposeful uglifying of self by cutting off her shapely brows underscores her Christian goodness, such evidence a cruel demand from a social culture Hardy perceives as complicit in Alec's rape of her.

When Angel belatedly reappears, he finds his abandoned beloved married to Alec, finally caving to the criminal's badgering for marriage to him in exchange for saving her widowed mother and siblings from starvation and homelessness. In seeing her disarrayed hair – a startling hybridity of married and unmarried woman – Angel's glimmering hope for their reunion dies immediately:

Tess appeared on the threshold – not at all as he had expected to see her – bewilderingly otherwise, indeed . . . Her neck rose out of a frill of down, and her well-known cable



of dark-brown hair was partially coiled up in a mass at the back of her head and partly hanging on her shoulder – the evident result of haste. (378)

In this image of Tess as both married (controlled) and maiden (wild and free), Hardy demonstrates that her society has left Tess without either genuine protection of the former or liberation of the latter. The shock of Angel's return, after believing he never would, releases a tormented madness in Tess; she murders Alec in intuitive frenzy because his accumulated violations of her sanctity have cost her the soul of her nature. We last see Tess waking from sleep on a sun-warmed Stonehenge monument of sacrifice, as Hardy concludes her narrative by uniting the only two individuals who have ever truly loved Tess – Angel and her sister Liza-Lu – to live her memory beyond her earthly death.

Why is that not enough for Hardy? Why resurrect Tess ten years later to speak to us from the other side? Ten years marks a period of significant time for a character's creator to spend with their creation. "Tess's Lament" – a poem or song espousing grief – carries a keening sorrow beyond her grave that Angel Clare was ever conscious of her. The mental setting of the lament is the Chase – the darkly secretive forest where Alec (the man whom Tess detests) rapes Tess. In her poem, Tess assumes blame, not for the rape, but for hurting Angel in being raped. She finds herself culpable for the harm she brings Angel (the man Tess loves with unabashed ferocity) on their honeymoon when she "confesses" her "sin" to him, following his own divulgence of an earlier escapade in which he gave into a one-night temptation with a woman. Angel proves mentally and morally unable to perceive that his own seduction is much less physically and socially traumatic than Tess's, identifying him for Hardy as not only more culpable than his bride, but also morally weaker than the truly violated long-suffering Tess, selfless in mourning how she has hurt Angel.

In her lament's ghostly persona, Tess grieves what she understands as her "sins" that lead up to and from the horrific night in the Chase where she is hunted and assaulted by the greedy arrogance of a rapist. Revenant Tess moans as much in shame for her vulnerability as for Angel's distress that provokes him to leave her on their wedding night. His belated return in the novel's final pages disturbs the dawn of a fateful morn, provoking Tess's repetitive cries, heard in the cadence of Tess's resurrected voice: "It is too late, too late . . . But I say it is too late" (379). Hardy insists that his readers remember these nights and dawns as temporal spaces theatrically exposing the sacrificial plight of Tess, her ruins tangled in her luxuriant, fateful hair externally adorning an indomitable noble spirit.

Listening to this short excerpt of Tess's mad dirge, we marvel that in her beseeching us to forget her, we only remember her more. Mourning Angel, Tess wails:

And now he's gone; and now he's gone; . . .  
                     And now he's gone!

. . . .  
 And it was I who did it all . . .  
 'Twas I who made the blow to fall  
                     On him who thought no guile.

. . . .  
 I cannot bear my fate as writ,  
                     I'd have my life unbecome;  
 Would turn my memory to a blot,  
 Make every relic of me rot,  
 My doings be as they were not,  
                     And gone all trace of me!

(Stanza 3, ll. 17–18; Stanza 4, ll. 25–28; Stanza 6, ll. 43–48)

To further appreciate these seemingly self-effacing lines from the lament, I highlight Keith Wilson's brilliant study of Hardy's refusal to let go of Tess out of reverence for her moral consciousness. Wilson interestingly notes that a Hardy acquaintance remembered the writer speaking of Tess as if he knew her as an actual friend (46). We might recall Tess's care for the distressed pheasants in Wilson's insight that Hardy's definition of altruism in a diary entry for March/April 1890 reflects a consciousness that is Tess's very nature: ". . . the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves [leads us to understand] us and them as one . . ." (qtd. in Wilson 58). Wilson continues: "The capacity for human consciousness to share in the sufferings of others and in so doing to escape the self-reference of an Alec . . . or an Angel . . . is surely fundamental to the characterization of Tess [as responsible, selfless protector and redeemer]" (58). Wilson's essay notes Hardy's awareness of his own failures as a male of his era (he chose to witness a woman's hanging for killing an abusive husband and later experienced self-disgust for such voyeurism) and husband (he emotionally abandoned his first wife Emma and later wrote passionate love poems to her memory) (46). And yet, Wilson puts aside these personal realities as less responsible for the 1901 return of Tess's haunted voice than Hardy's insistence on "the paradoxes and contradictions of human circumstance, most particularly as manifested in the apparently chance evolution of human consciousness of that circumstance . . ." (47). Wilson further argues that Hardy sets Tess's consciousness against the larger world's unconsciousness as both moral and tragic (60). He asserts Tess's resurrection in her death, finding significance in the novel's closing: "[her] quiet 'I am ready' sets time in motion again. Thus she is made to reconcile in the quiet dignity of her capture both the impotent suffering of the victimized and the stoical and enduring assertion of human agency in the face of the inevitability of injustice and death" (61).

Inspired by the importance Wilson perceives in Tess's moral and cognitive autonomy, I find her lament inevitable if not necessary to Hardy's purpose

in creating her. For the poem is Tess's spoken consciousness of the reality of circumstance that she experiences. For a blighted world to benefit from Tess's altruism, Hardy ensures that we listen to her long after she is hanged for killing Alec. Hardy would have us listen to Tess's ghost with an empathy that braves feeling anguished by her anguish. In accepting responsibility for causing her beloved Angel pain for her rape beneath the trees, Tess provides cathartic atonement for Victorian societal wrongs to women, thereby paradoxically but forcefully ensuring we remember her admirable and also sad self-effacement as a natural but intentional consciousness of the wellbeing of others.

In concluding this study on the importance of hair for Hardy's sacrificial but enduring women, a few reflections on Marty South situate this woodland labourer as Nature's unassuming goddess. Her unrequited love for the woodsman Giles Winterborne is in part due to his "marvellous power of making trees grow. Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots of the soil took hold in a few days" (74). Marty, who holds the trees for Giles while he covers their roots, echoes Tess's altruism in her homage to Nature's preservation. She finds her own (hair) roots vulnerable to an economic conspiracy between wealthy widow and village barber, oblivious to the value of what is natural and real. Her father's rich landlord, Widow Charmond, threatens eviction unless Marty sell her "luxurious tresses" to enable Charmond to have a wig made to hide her balding pate so that she might flirt with married men, notably one Dr. Fitzpiers whose infidelity devastates his young wife, Grace Melbury.

In the midst of this social duplicity and falseness, Marty endures the excruciatingly hard labour of scraping wood for thatching roofs, mostly performed at night in the woods to protect the pride of her incapacitated father. Perhaps even more than Tess, Marty quite fiercely loves her hair – her brilliant red tresses, evidenced in how she resists the barber's cajoling threats that Marty sell her hair in order to serve the wealthy and also ensure that she and her father won't be evicted:

'Why can't the lady send to some other girl who don't value her hair – not to me?' she exclaimed.

'Why, simpleton, because yours is the exact shade of her own, and 'tis a shade you can't match by dyeing . . . The lady is very rich . . . Marty, now hearken. The lady that wants it wants it badly. And, between you and me, you'd better let her have it. 'Twill be bad for you if you don't . . . You see, Marty, as you are in the same parish, and in one of this lady's cottages, and your father is ill, and wouldn't like to turn out, it would be as well to oblige her.' 'I value my looks too much to spoil 'em. She wants my curls to get another lover with, though if stories are true she's broke the heart of many a noble gentleman already . . . She's not going to get him through me.'

Percombe . . . looked her in the face. 'Marty South,' he said with deliberate emphasis, 'you've got a lover yourself, and that's why you won't let it go!' (Macmillan 31–3)

In Marty's natural honesty, Hardy recognizes her refusal to succumb to the falseness of society too willing to expend the labourer's rare natural beauty. Only a conversation overheard by chance and revealing that the woodsman she both reveres and romantically loves is bound to another precipitates Marty to "mercilessly" cut her "long locks, arranging and tying them with their points all one way as the barber had directed" (38). Forever dignified, Marty avoids the pain of looking into her mirrors above the hearth or in forest pool, "out of humanity to herself" (38). She then resumes the outdoor handiwork assigned to her father which Giles discovers as her own, exclaiming, "[Y]our father with his forty years of practice never made a spar better than that. They are too good for the thatching of houses, they are good enough for the furniture. But I won't tell. Let me look at your hands – your poor hands!" (39)

Rather than *extend* Marty's voice beyond her grave, for she does not die in *The Woodlanders*, twenty-two years later in his 1909 "The Pine Planters ~ Marty South's Reverie", Hardy *gives* Marty a voice and presence she is not granted in the 1887 novel. Though perhaps she can't match Tess's individual moral significance, Marty's consciousness exposes Hardy's appreciation of Nature's enduring meaning *because* of its fragility. While Tess cuts her hair to save her soul after her body is raped, in cutting her hair, Marty is in some disconcerting sense accepting society's raping of her soul so badly hurt that in this suffering, she resurrects the Natural world embodied in the forest trees. I invite Marty's unsilenced voice to conclude my essay. She sings in elegiac memory of the collaborative labour she and Giles enjoy in bringing trees to life that otherwise would have no song, no voice:

From the bundle at hand here  
 I take each tree,  
 And set it to stand, here  
 Always to be;  
 When, in a second,  
 As if from fear  
 Of Life unreckoned  
 Beginning here,  
 It starts a sighing,  
 Through day and night,  
 Though while there lying  
 'Twas voiceless quite. (Stanza II, ll. 33–44)

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**Abstract:** In our recent global pandemic, many lost their hair to covid fevers. Others, cautious of the dangers of public indoor spaces, forsook barbershop and salon, effecting self-cuts or disappearing beneath overgrown hair. Undeniably, the pandemic violated choice when it came to hair. This chapter studies the loss of Victorian woman's hair as deprivation of a natural beauty integral to her spirit. Thomas Hardy's well-known Tess and perhaps lesser realized Marty South of *The Woodlanders* are raped, the former

literally, and both by societies so careless of purity, they force these women to cut their locks to preserve the self. Tess, violated by Privilege in the chase forest, becomes an itinerant dairy and field worker. Escaping a possible second assault she catapults herself into a shade of wounded birds, where in desolation, she bandages her head and half her face as wounded, finishing her self-defacement by cutting off her eyebrows. Marty endures the excruciatingly hard labor of scraping wood for thatching roofs, mostly performed at night in the woods to protect the pride of her incapacitated father. In a forest glen, before a pond's mirror, she miserably cuts "mine own" luxurious tresses to sell, enabling a rich woman to disguise her balding skull in allures gone faithless more than once. Intriguingly Hardy gives resurrected voice to Tess ("lament") and Marty ("reverie") in post-novel elegies, further exposing his era's abuse of woman's worth – most especially a rural working-class woman whose largess of compassion emanates from a sculpted crown seized by greedy desires.

**Keywords:** Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "Tess's Lament", the symbolism of women's hair, "The Pine-Planters (Marty South's Reverie)", *The Woodlanders*, self-effacement

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## **“A whole cat world”: Domesticity, Consumerism, and Insanity in Cat Paintings of Louis Wain**

The cat paintings of Louis Wain, recalled by the recent film *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (2021, dir. Will Sharpe), have been presented as commentary to changing artistic tastes and pet-keeping practices of the late-Victorian and Edwardian society, as well as the expression of deepening psychological problems of the artist himself. While the originality of Wain’s work is evident, I would like to argue that he was neither the sole author of depictions of cats in Victorian graphic arts nor the originator of their appreciation as companion animals, single-handedly transforming the popular perception of the feline form “from a malicious creature to a cuddly playful house cat” (Mondragon 411). The intense, if largely short-lived, commercialised fashion for his images can thus be seen as a result of pre-existing trends rather than some newly-emergent cultural phenomenon.

The genre of animal paintings has been popular in Britain since at least the eighteenth century; however, the dominant subjects had long been horses and dogs. George Stubbs (1724–1806) depicted valuable, prize-winning horses belonging to the British nobility, and other artists, like Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), portrayed dogs as symbols of high status and emblems of fidelity, depicting landowners with their hunting dogs and occasional lapdogs accompanying fashionable ladies. Animals were also an important part of the art of William Hogarth (1697–1764), although he used them predominantly to convey symbolic messages about his human subjects. If cats appeared in art at all, they were seen as essentially untameable animals with strong predatory instincts, e.g., in Hogarth’s *The Graham Children* (1742) where a cat looks menacingly at a caged bird, or Gainsborough’s unfinished double portrait of his daughters (1760–61) accompanied by a rather fierce-looking feline. Alternatively, a female cat in the third plate of Hogarth’s *Harlot’s Progress* (1731–32) symbolises the human protagonist’s moral decline and promiscuity, while in *The Distressed Poet* (1736) a she-cat with kittens is a metaphor of female fecundity that threatens the struggling poet’s family budget.

The predominant practical purpose of keeping cats was pest control. As rodent-catchers, they were tolerated rather than cherished, they were rarely allowed inside

the house and, following a long-standing association with witchcraft and magic, they frequently fell victims of sadistic or superstition-driven persecution. Unlike horses or dogs, cats brought their owners no prestige, and so they were often disregarded as companions of paupers and women. As Ingrid H. Tague notes in her book on 18<sup>th</sup>-century pet keeping in Britain, there was a particularly strong association of cats with spinsters, a darker and more misogynistic version of a popular stereotype linking felines and femininity (Tague 100).

Artistic images of girls playing with kittens were often perceived as warnings that something “unnatural” might happen if the play was allowed to last too long. Such may be the meaning of Joseph Wright of Derby’s (1734–1797) *Two Girls Dressing a Kitten by Candlelight* (c.1768–70), in which two girls attempt to put doll’s clothes on a miserable-looking young, and presumably male, cat. The casual cruelty of the scene and its secretive nature are emphasised, allowing all kinds of interpretations, including those of the premature sexualisation of the girls and even allusions to prostitution (Leach 44). On the other hand, preoccupation with pets, and especially cats, was ridiculed in popular culture as one of the hallmarks of spinsterhood, as “adult women with adult cats revealed a failure to accept the realities of growing up” (Tague 116). The derision combined thinly veiled sexual innuendo, accusations of wasting valuable resources on mere animals, and misplaced nature of affections of women whose unmarried and childless state prompted them to look for an outlet of their emotionality in pets rather than children. An old maid with her cat became a figure of cruel jokes or patronising pity (Vickery 397).

As Laura A. Vocelle notes, the stereotype began to change after the publication of the multi-volume *Le Description de l’Égypte* (1809–1829) following Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign in 1798–1801, which acquainted the broad reading public in Europe with ancient beliefs that saw cats as embodiments of deities (Vocelle 235). The independent and unpredictable nature of cats must have also appealed to writers and poets, as a significant number of them were known to be cat lovers, even before the fashion spread to other strata of the society. A list of nineteenth-century authors who admired cats and wrote about them would include William Wordsworth, John Clare, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Algernon Swinburne, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters, to name but a few (Torrey 74–75). Moreover, Florence Nightingale owned around sixty cats in her lifetime (Howard), and even queen Victoria, who personally preferred dogs to cats, insisted on including an image of a feline on the Queen’s Medal for Kindness awarded by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Rogers 72).

The industrialisation and urbanisation of Great Britain that followed the Industrial Revolution, together with the steadily increasing dominance of the middle classes, resulted in the rapid growth of the popularity of pet keeping among the bourgeoisie in their attempts to mimic the customs of the gentry and to establish their own class values through a complex system of status symbols. A Victorian home would not



be complete without potted plants and tame animals, often including exotic birds and fish. Pet keeping provided middle-class city dwellers with an opportunity to maintain contact with nature even in the urban environment and symbolised their ability to control its wilder aspects. Well-behaved pets embodied their bourgeois owners' values of cleanliness, order, and rationality (Kete 138). Cats were invited into the parlours. In their prettiness and innocuous liveliness, pets, especially kittens, resembled children, and their role in Victorian genre paintings often suggests that their symbolic status was situated somewhere between pampered toddlers and their adult caretakers; on the one hand their pranks were seen as delightful, on the other, they were role-models of elegance and personal hygiene for the human children to observe.

Paintings from the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century bear witness to this change. The re-appreciation of the cat was clearly an international phenomenon, as similar motifs of feline favourites feature in the works of, among others, French artists Charles Joshua Chaplin (1825–1891), Louis-Eugène Lambert (1825–1900), Charles Édouard Delort (1841–1895), Leon Bazille Perrault (1832–1908), Émile Munier (1840–1895), and Pierre Carrier-Belleuse (1851–1933), Austrian Karl Reichert (1836–1918), Belgians Goustaive Léonard de Jonghe (1829–1893), Georges Croegaert (1848–1923), and Charles van den Eycken (1859–1923), German Julius Anton Adam (1852–1913, known as “Katzen-Adam”), or Americans Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942), and John White Alexander (1856–1915). Their themes range from kittens asleep in a basket full of hay (Adam), through little girls feeding kittens on their beds (Munier), to fashionably attired women with languid cats on their laps (Carrier-Belleuse). Delort and Croegaert, both Academic painters with a penchant for historical scenes, developed a peculiar fondness for showing red-robed Catholic cardinals in humorous and informal situations, often accompanied by pets. De Jonghe's *Mother and Child with a Cat* (1866) features a well-dressed woman in a sumptuous interior looking admiringly at her daughter playing with a cat – likely an allusion to the perception of cats as good mothers and valuable role-models for girls learning their expected future gender roles.

One of the most prolific and successful European cat painters of the nineteenth century was a Dutch-Belgian artist Henriette Ronner-Knip (1821–1909). She was educated by her father, who was also a painter, and from an early age developed an interest in realistic depictions of animals. From the late 1870s onwards, she focused her attention almost exclusively on cats and painted feline portraits from life, using her many pets as models. As Madalina Lazen, a specialist at Bonhams auction house admits, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Academic cat painting became “a trend that snowballed”, and bourgeois collectors bought cat canvasses to enhance their “plush domestic interiors” (qtd. in Chayka).

Beyond the Academic mainstream, cats made frequent appearances in works of avant-garde artists on both sides of the English Channel. Pierre-Auguste Renoir

(1841–1919) included cats in many of his paintings, usually as symbols of sensuality and motherhood, and so did other Impressionists, like Édouard Manet (1832–1883) whose notorious *Olympia* (1863) depicts a reclining nude woman attended by a servant and a black cat.

Similar trends are observable in British art. An early portrait of Thomas Combe (1850) by the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais (1829–1896) includes a tabby cat peacefully sleeping on the sitter's lap – a rare example of a man, not a woman, with a feline pet. However, in William Holman Hunt's (1827–1910) moralising *Awakening Conscience* (1853), a well-fed cat toying with a helpless sparrow under a parlour table is chiefly a symbol of a seducer's predatory intentions towards a dependent young "kept woman". This stereotypical portrayal, in which the cat serves a purely metaphorical role, and his beastly nature is emphasised, goes out of fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century, replaced by positive connotations of cats with domesticity, femininity, complacency and comfort. In Ford Madox Brown's (1821–1893) *Nosegay* (c. 1867), the painter's daughter poses gathering flowers in a walled garden accompanied by a tricolour cat adorned with a ribbon. Walter Crane (1845–1915) included a cat sitting by a fireplace as a "final domestic touch" in his *At Home: A Portrait* (1872) showing his wife Frances during their honeymoon in Italy (Bugler 220). Millais's *Puss in Boots* (1877), possibly a comment on Wright's *Two Girls Dressing a Kitten*, replaces the sexual allusions and implied cruelty of children with Victorian domesticity and fairy-tale-inspired sweetness as a blond-haired girl puts a pair of doll's boots on a playful kitten.

Cats were clearly gaining popularity and prestige among the middle-class Victorians. In 1871, the first national cat show was organised in London's Crystal Palace by artist Harrison William Weir (1824–1906) and his brother, amateur naturalist, John Jenner Weir (1822–1894). H. W. Weir, named "The Father of the Cat Fancy" (Kalda 51), founded the National Cat Club and was elected its first President. In 1889, he published the first English book of cat pedigree, *Our Cats and All About Them*, which he both wrote and illustrated. In the preface to the second edition, he wrote: "Among animals possibly the most perfect, and certainly the most domestic, is the Cat" (Weir 1).

Consequently, some established artists, such as Charles Burton Barber (1845–1894), started adding representations of felines to their genre paintings depicting countless variations on the theme of children frolicking with their pets in richly decorated interiors. In *Playmates* (1885), a girl amuses a toddler sibling by playing with a kitten. In *Rival Attraction* (1887), a reading girl is distracted by a kitten climbing on top of her armchair. In *Coaxing is Better than Teasing* (1883), a cat fawns on a girl to get a bowl of milk. Barber, whose main specialty was painting dogs, started including cats in his pictures in the 1880s to correspond with a growing interest of the wealthy middle classes in keeping cats as pets. Both cats and dogs feature in his *The Little Violinist* (1887), as well as the undated paintings

*Any Port in a Storm*, *Monster*, *Curiosity*, and *Suspense*. The typical setup is a girl playing with a kitten and a terrier puppy (a painting entitled *Monster*, in which a child is dressed up in a tiger skin, features an anxious older cat and a pug). The dogs are presented as more obedient and tamer, waiting patiently for a treat and even “singing” to the music of the girl’s violin, while the kittens display cute, yet mischievous nature, in the case of *Any Port in a Storm* even climbing the girl’s back when the dog becomes too rough at play. Meaningful details, which can be observed in several of Barber’s paintings, are wild cat skins (notably tiger and leopard) used for fashionable interior decoration, symbolically asserting human dominance over nature and posing a veiled threat of violence if domesticated pets misbehave. A similar scene, of a girl playing with kittens while lying on a leopard skin in an opulent parlour, can be found in *Merry Goes the Time when the Heart is Young* (1892) by John Henry Henshall (1856–1928).

Another popular motive in Academic art was presenting pets, including cats, in idealised Greco-Roman surroundings, usually as companions of similarly domesticated women. Such scenes feature in the paintings of e.g., Charles Edward Perugini (1839–1918), *At Play*; William Clarke Wontner (1857–1930), *The Willing Captive* (1911); or John William Godward (1861–1922), *Idleness* (1900), and *The Favourite* (1901). The clearly ahistorical compositions, anachronistically referring to the custom of keeping companion animals in ancient Greece or Rome, serve as a metaphor for modern social mores. Attractive young women are shown as pampered pets, “willing captives” spending their time in luxury and boredom, teasing tame animals before their own male masters return home. Victorian depictions of scenes from imagined classical antiquity foregrounded female domesticity as a “natural” state of being, ostensibly unchanged over centuries of history.

Likewise, cats and domesticity were linked, often in a humorous manner, with the Regency period in the works of Walter Dendy Sadler (1854–1923), *The Suitor*; and Charles Haigh-Wood (1856–1927), *The Patient Competitors* (1892). In both these cases cats provide commentary to men’s attempts to court a woman. A house cat accepts the suitor by fawning on him at the door or shows a preference to one of the visitors to a young woman, while she remains strategically absorbed in her needlework.

If any connection between cats and the “lower orders” remained, by the second half of the nineteenth century it had been thoroughly romanticised in mainstream art by artists like Rosa Brett (1829–1882), *The Hayloft* (1858); Joseph Clarke (1834–1926), *Teasing a Kitten* (1876), *Three Little Kittens* (1883); Arthur Hacker (1859–1919), *Fire Fancies* (c. 1890); George Dunlop Leslie (1835–1921), *Her First Place*; Charles Edward Wilson (1854–1941), *Bubbles for Kitty*, *A Visit to Granny*; or Henry Edward Spernon Tozer (1864–1955), *A Willing Helper* (1911). The cats are presented as cared-for companions for the elderly and children, as well as bringers of comfort in the lonely lives of young servants. A radical change is visible

when compared with earlier depictions, such as Sir Edwin Landseer's (1802–1873) *The Cat's Paw* (c. 1824), an illustration of Jean de La Fontaine's seventeenth-century fable in which a monkey brutally forces a screaming cat to retrieve roasting chestnuts from the fire.

One of the artists who made painting cats his specialty was Horatio Henry Couldery (1832–1918), nicknamed “Kitten Couldery” by his contemporaries. Born in Lewisham, South London, into the family of a landscape painter Robert Hall Couldery (1806–1869), he initially trained to become a cabinetmaker, before he was enrolled as a pupil at the Royal Academy in 1857. He exhibited paintings at the Academy shows between 1861 and 1892, earning praise from critics including John Ruskin who called his painting entitled *A Fascinating Tail*, showing two young cats intensely observing a mousetrap with a captured rodent's tail visible: “Quite the most skilful piece of minute and Dureresque painting in the exhibition” (“Horatio Henry Couldery”). Couldery had a successful career producing commissioned works, illustrating books, and designing greeting cards (White 30).

However, arguably the most original and influential cat artist of Victorian and Edwardian Britain was Louis William Wain (1860–1939). His tragic life story of meteoric success, constant financial troubles, and failing mental health, recalled in the recent film *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* starring Benedict Cumberbatch, attracted the broad audience to his legacy. While, as the previously discussed examples attest, Wain was not alone in his interest in cats, his unique, anthropomorphising take on cat art has left a mark on popular culture. A frequently quoted praise from H. G. Wells posits that “[Wain] has made the cat his own. He invented a cat style, a cat society, a whole cat world. English cats that do not look and live like Louis Wain cats are ashamed of themselves” (Kalda 52). In the movie, the role of Wells is played by musician Nick Cave, a long-time fan and collector of Wain's pictures (Lavin). However, beyond a niche market, Wain's name was not widely known among the late-twentieth and twenty-first-century public.

Louis William Wain was born in Clerkenwell, London, on 5 August 1860, the eldest of six surviving children of William Wain, a textile trader, disowned by his family for his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and his wife Julie Felicite, a carpet designer of French descent. His birth was followed by five sisters: Caroline, Josephine, Marie, Claire, and Felicie. He was a shy and withdrawn boy, afflicted with a cleft lip, but from an early age he showed a talent for music and drawing. As his obituary in *The West Australian* attests, for a time the two interests ran parallel, but Wain's musical instruction was finally dropped in 1879, after he took courses at the West London School of Art (“Depicter of Cats”). He began working there as assistant teacher, until the death of his father in 1880 imposed on him the obligations of the sole breadwinner of a numerous family of women. Earning a living was a constant worry for Wain, as none of his sisters ever married. He quit his teaching job to become a freelance artist working for illustrated magazines,

including the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* and, from 1886, *The Illustrated London News* run by his friend, Sir William James Ingram. He mostly produced illustrations of English country houses and livestock presented at agricultural fairs (“Animal Therapy”).

Around 1882, Wain fell in love with Emily Richardson, a woman ten years his senior who was employed as a governess of his sisters. Both the age and class difference were considered scandalous at the time, yet, despite the opposition from Louis’s family, the couple married in January 1884 and settled in Hampstead (Haining 26). The marriage was to be tragically short-lived, as not long after the wedding Emily was diagnosed with breast cancer. She died three years later. Wain’s attempts to comfort his wife in her illness led him to discover the subject that would define his career. Louis and Emily acquired a black-and-white kitten whom they named Peter. The exact circumstances how the cat came to the Wain household are unclear; one version claims that he was a stray whom they found in the garden, another that he was a gift from one of Louis’s sisters (Haining 41). Wain began sketching Peter to amuse his wife; likely this was the first time he showed interest in drawing cats, as prior to that he had been a general illustrator (McGennis 27). On Emily’s advice, Wain showed his cat pictures to Sir William Ingram who understood their commercial potential. He commissioned a full-page drawing “A Kitten’s Christmas Party” for the 1886 Christmas issue of *The Illustrated London News*. The picture, composed of several individual panels showing a lively revelry of dozens of realistically depicted cats, was an overnight sensation, and the original was presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum (Haining 31). Emily Wain died on 2 January 1887, only a week after this breakthrough in Louis’s career.

Following his wife’s death, Louis Wain began to suffer from what appear to be symptoms of depression. Painting cats, which became something of an obsession for him, provided him with rare moments of solace. He moved to lodgings in New Cavendish Street with Peter, who would live for another decade before dying peacefully in 1898 (Haining 37). Wain’s artistic style started to evolve towards more fantastic and anthropomorphized. In 1890, he presented another Christmas drawing for the *Illustrated London News*, “A Cat’s Party”, in which his cats stood upright, wore clothes and engaged in fashionable human activities, such as playing musical instruments, chatting, and dancing. Wain was showered by commissions for his comical cats for years to come. His images both capitalized on and contributed to the popularity of cats (Rogers 152). He was an incredibly prolific artist, producing hundreds of works a year; he had a rare ability to paint and draw with both his hands, sometimes even simultaneously. Wain primarily worked as a press illustrator for various newspapers and magazines, but he also illustrated around 200 books, and designed more than a thousand different postcards, posters, calendars, and advertisements. Furthermore, he produced oil and watercolour works on commission (McGennis 27). Between 1901 and 1915, he provided artwork for the hugely

successful *Louis Wain's Annuals*, which became popular Christmas gifts for children and later collectors' items.

Louis Wain was elected the second President of the National Cat Club, he judged cat competitions, and was a member of charity organisations including the Society for the Protection of Cats, Our Dumb Friends' League, and the Anti-Vivisection Society ("Depicter of Cats"). Between 1907 and 1910, he went to America to work for *The New York American*. He enjoyed celebrity status there, but family problems and his own declining health forced him to return to England. Despite his artistic success, throughout his life Wain lacked any business sense and had a proclivity for investing his money in fantastic and doubtful ventures, often involving sham inventions. He was easily exploited by money-grabbing opportunists, and ruthless publishers who would enrich themselves by reprinting his works *en masse*, while his own copyright was not protected. Consequently, the Wain family had to endure almost permanent financial hardships and rely on the charity of friends such as Sir William Ingram who rented them his house in Westgate-on-Sea in Kent (Dale 112).

More tragedies followed. Louis's sister Marie, who had been struggling with her mental health for some time, was certified insane in 1901 and committed to an asylum, where she died in 1913. In 1910, his mother died, just before his return home from America. In October 1914, Wain sustained serious injuries when he fell off a moving omnibus; he was rushed to a hospital where he remained unconscious for several days. On regaining his faculties, he spoke of a vision of the future he had while he was in the coma. He tried to capture it by designing a series of Cubist ceramic decorative objects, which he called "Futurist Cats". Unfortunately, a ship carrying a load of Wain's designs was struck by a German U-boat in 1915 (Mondragon 418). In 1917, his sister Caroline succumbed to influenza during the first wave of the Spanish Flu pandemic.

Louis Wain's mental health, which had been in a precarious state for a long time, took a sharp turn for the worse. When he started displaying violent behaviour towards his remaining sisters, they called a doctor and eventually, in 1924, had him committed to Springfield Mental Hospital in Tooting. The impoverished family could only afford to put him in a pauper ward. Luckily, a year later, Wain was discovered there during a routine inspection by a compassionate official and bookseller – or, as the film version would have it, an old acquaintance – Dan Rider, who was shocked to find the man beloved for his cute cat drawings living in such destitute conditions. Rider initiated a fundraising campaign, which attracted the attention of various celebrities of the day including H. G. Wells and the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. They succeeded in having Wain transferred to a private room at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and securing a small Civil List pension for his sisters (Dale 116). When the hospital relocated in 1930, Wain was moved to Napsbury Hospital in Hertfordshire, which had a pleasant garden and

a colony of cats. Exhibitions of his works were held in 1931 and 1937 to pay for his medical costs. He spent the last years of his life in comfort and relative calm, before dying on 4 July 1939.

Louis Wain was not, as some commentators would later claim, the “original catfluencer” that single-handedly “gave us the Internet cat” (Hix). Neither can his legacy be reduced to a mere footnote in the discussion of the effects of insanity on human creativity. While he clearly tapped into the zeitgeist and profited, in terms of fame if not financially, from the rise of mass publication in the dissemination of popular culture, he remained an original artist with innovative, often unusual ideas. Rather than follow the mainstream and continue to produce picture-perfect images of realistic kittens, he developed a distinctive style, and never stopped experimenting throughout his life, despite his failing health.

Wain’s early depictions of realistic animals in time gave way to a new, recognisable look. His cats walked upright, wore clothes, had exaggerated, human facial expressions and large, cartoon eyes. They engaged in typical middle-class activities like making music, playing sports, smoking cigarettes, going to school, or polite socialising. In fact, they resembled human types and behaviours thinly disguised as felines, rather than real cats. While Wain’s pictures are not exactly social satire on Edwardian society, they remain within the tradition of animal fables made popular again in late-Victorian culture by reissues of classic tales, and then expanded in works like Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) or the illustrated stories of Beatrix Potter (featuring characters of endearing cats Tabitha Twitchit and Tom Kitten). In his later years, some of Wain’s drawings became less figurative and merged feline features with psychedelic, kaleidoscopic designs – sometimes to a point when the inspiration with cats became nearly impossible to identify. These drawings, undated and given a somewhat generic title *Kaleidoscope Cat* accompanied with numbers, are evidence of the artist’s “experimentation in colour and in pattern” (“Animal Therapy. The Cats of Louis Wain”), possibly recalling some of the carpet designs made by his mother. However, compared with his other pictures and arranged from the most realistic to the most abstract, they seemed to attest for the artist’s deteriorating mental faculties and progressive dementia (McGennis 28).

Soon after Wain’s death, his oeuvre was largely forgotten, but it retained a niche appeal among collectors of quirky Victoriana, resulting in the creation of his first published biography, Rodney Dale’s *Louis Wain: The Man Who Drew Cats* in 1968, reissued in 1991 and 2000. Another biography, entitled *Louis Wain’s Cats* (2021), was written by Chris Beetles, a gallery owner in London and a long-time admirer. The first comprehensive exhibition of Wain’s works was organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1971 (Beetles 8). The recent film certainly managed to rekindle some of the public’s interest. Bethlem Museum of the Mind responded to the premiere by organising a retrospective of Wain’s art

in 2021, viewable also in a digitalised form online (“Animal Therapy. The Cats of Louis Wain”).

In the light of recent research, the widespread perception of Louis Wain as a textbook schizophrenic artist, whose skill deteriorated over time in step with his worsening condition has not proven to be true. The documents held at Bethlem suggest that he remained creative almost until the end of his life, and even while hospitalised, he provided original, high-quality images that his sisters could sell. There is no evidence that in time Wain’s skill diminished, not even that his designs became consistently more abstract. At hospital, he produced works in various techniques and styles, from his signature happy cartoon cats to meticulously rendered fractal drawings (“Animal Therapy”). He was also involved in the organisation of two fundraising exhibitions of his art. Whereas Wain’s lifelong eccentricity and declining mental health have not been questioned, the diagnosis of schizophrenia has been challenged in the twenty-first century. Hypotheses of Asperger’s Syndrome (Fitzgerald 102), some other mental health issue on the autistic spectrum, or a brain condition caused by his accident (Yorston) have been posited. Alternatively, in people with compromised immune systems, a possible connection between psychotic symptoms and cerebral toxoplasmosis has been observed (Torrey 11–21), an illness which, if this was indeed the case, Wain could have contracted from his interactions with cats.

For the director and co-writer Will Sharpe and actor Benedict Cumberbatch, making the biographical film about Louis Wain meant transferring the public’s awareness of the artist from the realm of “vaguely familiar” to emblematic of the late-Victorian culture with its quirks and ambiguities (Davies). Cumberbatch describes Wain’s story as “a mix of the absurd and the profound – the cosmic joke of the human condition” (Davies). In the words of Emily Wain (played by Claire Foy), Louis is the first artist to notice that “cats are ridiculous. Frightened and brave... like us.” Sir William Ingram (played by Toby Jones) admits that Wain manages to capture something important about cats, because he himself is an outcast. Thus, Wain’s “world of cats” is in fact a deeply human world of isolated and struggling individuals looking for meaningful connections in an unstable, and constantly changing reality. Electricity, present in the film’s title and arguably depicted in some of Wain’s drawings as a field of electromagnetic waves radiating around cats, symbolises this complex web of interconnections, a spiritual energy, a force of life itself. “How you have managed to conjure images of such delight at such a dark time, I don’t know”, Sir William admits. In Sharpe’s view, on the surface, Wain’s cats are “innocent, playful, and the way he delighted in colour and pattern is glorious. But a detail or an inscription can suddenly open a window into such terrible underlying fragility” (Davies). A good example might be a picture from the last, tragic period of Wain’s life, showing the head of a smiling white cat with a caption “I am happy because every one loves me.”



The film’s *mise-en-scène* tries to capture the peculiar way Wain experiences the world, as well as his gradually deepening mental health problems. As the movie progresses, there is “an increase in the frequencies of camera effects and optical illusions [...] flashes, colorful floating orbs, fisheye-lens, and kaleidoscopic static” (Mondragon 416). The visual effects are matched by Arthur Sharpe’s musical score showcasing the eerie sound of the theremin, another unusual invention of the 1920s. While the term schizophrenia is not expressly used, Wain’s declining mental state is an important theme of the film, even though there is no attempt of a broader discussion of the condition of psychiatric medicine and insane asylums in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Nineteenth-century artistic depictions of cats attest for profound changes in the social perception of these animals in Western culture. By the end of the Victorian period, cats had moved from the position of lowly rodent-catchers to that of domestic companions. Academic, avant-garde, and popular artists in Britain and abroad started including cats in their works, both in the form of individualised pet portraits, and as recognisable symbols of domesticity, childcare, and carefree playfulness. Louis Wain’s prolific artistic output can be regarded as a culmination of a certain cultural tendency, combining idealisation of bourgeois lifestyle with commercialised, consumerist attitudes. These representations engage with Victorian stereotypes, especially those concerning class and gender, and increasingly foreground modern social behaviours, which are still relevant today.

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**Abstract:** Before being recalled from near-oblivion by the recent film *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (dir. Will Sharpe, 2021), the public's perception of the art of Louis William Wain (1860–1939) had largely been reduced to a footnote in medical articles on the effects of schizophrenia on human creativity. His quirky, anthropomorphized

images of cats involved in a wide range of human activities, as well as his later psychedelic drawings of cat-like fractal designs, were explained as evidence of Wain's declining mental health, finally resulting in his permanent hospitalization in the last years of his life. On the other hand, during the time of his meteoric rise to fame in late-Victorian and Edwardian England, Wain was credited by his enthusiasts for single-handedly changing the entire nation's appreciation of cats and elevating the felines' status from the position of lowly rodent-catchers to pampered family pets. The chapter attempts to argue that both these extreme views are probably ungrounded. There is no direct evidence of the decline in Wain's skill and style as his mental illness deepened. Moreover, while his work contributed to promoting cats, it also capitalized on the pre-existing wave of cat fancy, well visible in British art and culture in the nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** cats, Louis Wain, mental health, painting, Victorian culture



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## **Under the Influence: Charles Altamont Doyle and “The Fairy’s Whisper”**

For an unknown percentage of the population, the Victorian era’s fascination with fairies went well beyond enjoying illustrations of Fairyland and its inhabitants. Indeed, the illustrator, Charles Altamont Doyle (1832-1893), was not alone in believing in the existence of fairies, and their elusive presence in the daily lives of the Victorians. To state that Doyle believed in fairies begs many questions: 1) When did his belief in fairies begin? 2) What effect did his belief in fairies have on his life? and 3) Did his belief in fairies change over the course of his lifetime? Doyle was a prolific artist, and this chapter will focus on four illustrations that he created near the end of his life, i.e., “Self Portrait” (Figure 1), “The Fairy’s Whisper” (Figure 2), “Composing a Slandorous Letter” (Figure 3) and “Meditation: Self-Portrait” Figure 4<sup>1</sup> to reveal that his illustrations provide the answers to these questions. This study establishes that the infant in “The Fairy’s Whisper” is a self-portrait; that the infant’s expression can be seen as inebriated; and that the text accompanying the illustration is a sly self-reference to his severe alcoholism. The chapter examines the connections evident in Doyle’s illustrations concerning 1) his belief that the whispers of fairies influenced the behaviour of both children and adults; 2) his conviction that his family, due to the whispering of a fairy, was responsible for his incarceration in a mental asylum; and 3) his rationalization that his alcoholism was encouraged throughout his life by a fairy whispering in his ear. The chapter begins with a brief look at Victorian beliefs concerning fairies, and then examines three periods of Doyle’s life 1) from his birth in London until he moved to Edinburgh to work at the age of 17; 2) his life in Edinburgh until he retired – due to “poor health” – from his position as an architectural draughtsman at the age of 46; and 3) the final years of his life when he resided in a series of mental institutions until he passed away at the age of 61. The chapter concludes with a discussion concerning “Meditation: Self-Portrait” regarding the relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O113449/meditation-self-portrait-watercolour-doyle-charles-altamont/>.

between Doyle's belief in fairies, the effect this belief had on his mental and physical health, and his Catholic faith at the end of his life.

## The Victorians and Their Beliefs Concerning Fairies

Did the Victorians really believe in fairies? Scholarly opinions vary. For example, Jeremy Maas suggests that the Victorians "embraced belief in fairies as a reaction to the disenchantment of the world" (63). Similarly, Charlotte Gere attributes the Victorian interest in fairies as a reaction to "the growing industrialization and materialism of Victorian life" (Maas 63). These observations refer to the larger population, but what did the beliefs of individual Victorians entail? Pamela White Trimpe points out that "Darwin's observations made the possible existence of life forms like fairies seem a plausible concept" in the Victorian era (67). Consequently, as Mary Forbes notes, during the 1900s, "Believers in fairies were adamant in their claims about their existence. Believers included many well-educated people such as scientists, historians, folklorists, theologians, artists, and writers" (5). Regarding specific beliefs concerning fairies, Carole G. Silver remarks that Victorians believed fairies were "responsible for the naughtiness of infants", and, as proof, directs our attention to Doyle's illustration "The Fairy's Whisper" that is discussed at length below.<sup>2</sup>

In the present day, Allie Brandt, guest curator of the Huntington's exhibition, *The Unseen World of Charles Altamont Doyle* comments that

Many have pointed to Doyle's preoccupation with fairies as evidence of his madness. In fact, Doyle was part of a larger trend of fairy painting in Britain, which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Romantic artists such as William Blake and Henry Fuseli... The genre's popularity reached its peak during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just as Doyle was beginning his artistic career.

Indeed, Charles had grown up among artistic representations of fairies, most notably his brother Richard Doyle's illustrations for *Punch* magazine, for example, Richard's illustration for *Punch*'s 1844 cover "where the presence of fairies, demons, and goblins saturate the page. This cover was improved in 1849 but remained in use for the magazine's front cover for the next one hundred years" (*The Illustrative Career of Richard Doyle*).

Aside from his illustrations for *Punch*, Richard often drew fairies in his sketchbooks as a child and published *In Fairyland: pictures from the Elf-World*

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<sup>2</sup> Silver cites *Doyle's Fairyland* for "The Fairy's Whisper." However, "The Fairy's Whisper" illustration is in *The Doyle Diary* (Baker 16).

in 1870. The major difference between Charles’s depictions of fairies and his older brother’s illustrations is that Charles seldom locates fairies in the realm of Fairyland, but instead situates them within the gardens and household interiors of the Victorian era. In Charles’s illustrations, it is the size of fairies that establishes that they are indeed fairies, with a sense of scale supplied by representations of plants, birds, animals, and sometimes household furniture and humans, thus situating fairies firmly in the natural world. Charles depicted male fairies as resembling elves, i.e., wingless, which fits Ronald Hutton’s observation in “The Prehistory of Fairyland” that

Early and high medieval Britain did not have fairies, because the term had not yet been imported [from France], but the parts of it which spoke English and Scots had roughly equivalent beings called elves, who were later to be elided with the category of fairy.

Charles often depicted female fairies as floating or levitating rather than flying with the aid of wings and this is the key motif in the two self-portraits that this chapter discusses.

### **Charles Doyle’s Childhood in London and “The Fairy’s Whisper”**

Charles was the youngest of seven children whose mother, Marianna died in 1839 of heart disease at the age of forty-four, when he was seven years old. His father, John, was a prominent political caricaturist, who never remarried after the death of his wife. The seven Doyle siblings were homeschooled by a tutor and were instructed by their father in the art of illustration in the manner of his favourite artist Horace Vernet, who is said to have had a superb if not photographic memory (Engen 19). Their father required the Doyle children to observe people, events, etc. while on outings; to draw what they had observed strictly from memory, and to finish their illustrations by Sunday for their father’s inspection. An illustration by Richard Doyle depicts the children getting ready for the Sunday morning show (Engen 17). The youngest boy, i.e., Charles, is not drawing but is sitting on the floor observing one of his brothers. Richard’s diary/sketchbook reveals that he and his siblings experienced anxiety in their efforts to measure up to their father’s exacting standards (Pollen). His father’s decision to relegate his youngest son as an observer, might explain why Charles appears to have thought of himself as something of an outcast. He once signed himself in a letter to his father as “Your diminutive son Charles, who watcheth [sic]” and included a self-portrait (Engen 37). Andrew Lycett notes that Charles was the most withdrawn of the Doyle children and “even at the age of ten, gave the impression of finding childhood in an artistic hothouse overwhelming” (8). Doyle’s status in the family has been remarked upon by Engen who states that Charles was “the neglected if slightly shunned youngest member



Figure 2: Charles Altamont Doyle, “The Fairy’s Whisper.” Taken from *The Doyle Diary* (Baker 16)

of the family” (37). To be “slightly shunned” by his family members suggests that Charles adopted the classic strategy of neglected children who resort to bad behaviour to get attention.

Silver and other scholars agree that the illustration, “The Fairy’s Whisper,” documents the prevailing belief in the Victorian era that fairies encouraged naughtiness by whispering in the ears of infants. Charles was aware of this belief and appears to have taken it to heart as an excuse for his own naughty behaviour. In Silver’s words, the “sinister” scene depicted in “The Fairy’s Whisper” shows “a small adult fairy floating above the head of a large mischievously smiling infant” (188n3). Silver quotes, but does not comment on, the text below the illustration. Silver’s brief assessment of the scene overlooks two key details. The first detail concerns the fairy, whom Charles depicts as an adolescent fairy rather than an adult in contrast with the fairy represented in the illustration “Meditation: Self Portrait.” The second detail concerns the relationship between the infant’s expression and the note that Charles wrote beneath the illustration, “Any body[sic] who has nursed a baby as I have, will recognise the smile I think”, which is a sly reference to his life-long-problems with the bottle (Baker 16). It is not unusual for artists to use their own facial features when depicting faces of fictitious characters, and Charles did this on many occasions; however, in this case he was illustrating himself as an



infant.<sup>3</sup> Charles’s head shape was rectangular, and this distinguishing feature confirms that the baby in “The Fairy’s Whisper” represents a retrospective self-portrait. Consequently, the infant’s expression can be construed as inebriated as well as mischievous. Thus “The Fairy’s Whisper” confirms that Charles believed fairies began whispering in his ear when he was an infant, and “Meditation: Self-Portrait” confirms that he believed fairies continued to whisper in his ear throughout his life.

The depiction of whispering fairies occurs elsewhere in Doyle’s illustrations and provides further insights as to his beliefs concerning fairies and their interactions with humans. Doyle never shared what the fairies whispered to him, but it is quite likely that he used them to rationalise his weakness for alcohol. As Beveridge points out, Charles admitted to a doctor late in his life, i.e., at age 53, that he had “been weak minded & nervous from his youth, and... took refuge in alcoholics very early to give him[self] courage.” Thus, it was not his belief in fairies that resulted in his incarceration in mental asylums but rather his sensitive nature and his upbringing that ill prepared him to deal with the vicissitudes of his life.

### **Edinburgh: Working Life and Alcoholism**

For Charles to have started drinking “early in his youth” situates the beginning of his drinking problem soon after he moved to Edinburgh, or possibly while he still lived with his family in London. What was it in the family dynamics that caused the young man to need “courage” and to “take refuge in alcoholics” at an early age? There is no doubt that Charles was a talented artist, but it is also evident that his father did not believe that his youngest son could earn his living as an illustrator. In 1849, his father advised him to “abandon his artistic ambitions and take a job in Edinburgh as assistant to Robert Matheson, an architect in the Scottish Office of Works” (Allen). Baker comments that the quality of Doyle’s work in children’s books in comparison with his other illustrations demonstrates that he “was less at home when he had to tackle everyday realities” (90).

The tedious nature of a fulltime job as an architectural designer and draughtsman no doubt exacerbated the melancholy that he had suffered from since his childhood. He also lacked confidence in undertaking the commissions he was assigned, and according to Lycett would often write to his family for advice whenever he was presented with a new assignment (16). He remained in Edinburgh, and refused to entertain the idea of returning to London to a similar position when his family suggested he could find work at the London Office of Works. Charles had no intention

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Charles Doyle’s illustration of Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, the only depiction of Sherlock with a beard, and his depiction of the Norse god Óðinn in the first edition of *The Heroes of Asgard* (Keary 1857 31).

of following his father's advice and abandoning his artistic ambitions, despite his family's judgement he that lacked the necessary self-will and discipline to succeed as an artist. Charles soon had need of extra income to support a growing family after he married 17-year-old Mary Foley in 1855. The couple had their first child in 1856 and went on to have ten children altogether, seven of whom survived childhood including their oldest son Arthur Conan Doyle.

Despite his father's advice to abandon his artistic ambitions, Charles submitted illustrations for books and magazines from the very beginning of his employment for the Scottish Works Office, e.g., James Hogg's *Men Who Have Risen: A Book for Boys* (1850), and he was acknowledged as the illustrator. However, he also sometimes published his illustrations anonymously. Richard Doyle wrote to Charles on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1856, to congratulate him because Richard had recognised his brother's unsigned work in *The Illustrated Times*. Richard said that he had shown the illustrations to their father who he reported was "delighted with'em" (Engen 123). Richard advised Charles to "adopt some sign to put in the corner of your pictures so that people will begin to learn your identity though they don't know your name" (Engen 123). Charles appears to have followed his brother's advice immediately because it was around that time that he designed an enigmatic monogram comprised of his initials CAD that resembled a capital letter "A" inside of a capital letter "O".

Doyle's monogram preserved his anonymity to the point that he was not identified until the spring of 2021 as the illustrator of the first edition in 1857 of Annie and Liza Keary's classic work *The Heroes of Asgard*.<sup>4</sup> The fact that *The Heroes of Asgard* was illustrated was not indicated on its cover or on its title page, nor in its table of contents, and consequently its publication did not acknowledge the illustrator. Doyle's decision to publish his illustrations anonymously for a retelling of Norse mythology was influenced once again by his anxiety concerning his father's opinion. He would have been aware of his brother Richard's youthful anxieties noted in Richard's diary/sketchbook concerning the necessity of "making illustrations that will not be considered 'nonsense' by his father" (Pollen). Whether or not Charles signed his illustrations, his family would have recognised his work because, as previously mentioned, he often used his own features when drawing fictitious males, and he often used his wife Mary's features for females, e.g., the Norse god Óðinn and the goddess Frigg in *The Heroes of Asgard* (Keary 1857 31). The illustration of a winged Hermoðr bringing the dwarfs to Óðinn for judgement in *The Heroes of Asgard* is also of interest because it represents the first instance

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Baitsholts's research for the University of Victoria's website My Norse Digital Image Repository (MyNDIR) revealed that the publisher David Bogue's *Annual Catalogue* (January 1857) lists *The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jotunheim; or, Christmas Week with the Old Storytellers* "with illustrations by C. Doyle".

of the insertion of a fairy figure in the Victorian retellings of Norse mythology for children.

By 1859, Charles was struggling financially, and his family in London received troubling reports concerning him. His brother Richard made the journey to check on him and reported back that he was “surprised and saddened to find his brother’s family living in a shabby neighbourhood” (Engen 122). Richard was tactful and refrained from mentioning a drinking problem, but alcoholism must have been a factor that resulted in the need to live in reduced circumstances. Mary wrote a letter many years later to one of her husband’s doctors, Dr James Rutherford at the Crichton Royal Asylum, that very explicitly described what the situation was like by 1862. Charles was obviously an out-of-control alcoholic who frequently suffered from what Mary called “delirium tremens” but that were more likely the symptoms of Korsakoff Syndrome (Beveridge). In her letter, Mary looks back and describes the situation just three years after Richard’s visit,

Just thirty years ago – Decr. [December] 62 – he had such a bad attack that for nearly a year he had to be on half pay and for months he cd [could] only crawl and was perfectly idiotic, could not tell his own name. Since then he has been from one fit of dipsomania to another. Using the most awful expedients, many times putting himself within reach of the law – to get drink – Every article of value he or I possessed carried off secretly, debts to large amount contracted to our trades people, bills given etc. – all for goods which never entered our doors, but were at once converted into money (Beveridge).

In 1864, the family broke up due to his growing alcoholism and lived in various residences in Edinburgh. However, the family was back together by 1867 when his father came for a visit. Arthur Conan Doyle noted in his autobiography that Charles was “prey to bouts of uncontrollable emotion” and remarked that “one of these bouts” occurred during this visit, “Afterwards Charles was certain that he had helped to cause his father’s early death. He suffered in such a way that drink seemed the only answer, and he became an alcoholic” (Engen 169). Arthur was obviously in denial as to the long history of his father’s alcoholism. The “bout of uncontrollable emotion” that his father experienced during his grandfather’s visit strongly suggests a confrontation between the two concerning Charles Doyle’s alcoholism and his failure to live up to his father’s expectations. Despite his alcoholism, Charles continued to produce charming illustrations that were full of visual puns for books such as J. H. A Macdonald’s *Our Trip to Blunderland or the Grand Excursion to Blundertown and Back* that was published in 1877. Charles was forced into early retirement from the Scottish Work Office in June 1878 at the age of forty-six, due to his “poor health.”

## Asylums and Sketchbooks (1881-1893)

Charles continued to drink and his health continued to deteriorate after his retirement. Consequently, his “behaviour eventually became intolerable, and Mary recalls that friends urged her to have him removed from the home” (Beveridge). He was admitted to Blairerno House, i.e., a Home for Intemperate Gentlemen, in 1881. The illustration “Drunk Man on a Horse” in the Huntington Collection is not dated but was created sometime after 1881, and possibly when he was a resident of Blairerno House (Wark 44). Charles remained at Blairerno until he managed to get a hold of alcohol and subsequently became violent. It is tempting to see the illustration as another self-portrait, but the drunk does not bear a close enough resemblance to Charles. However, his comment “Hurrah! For the Jolly Night Mare!” coupled with the expression of the drunk man in contrast to the expression of the horse reveals that he was aware of his predicament and how others viewed his behaviour. Charles was sent to Sunnyside Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum following the violent incident at Blairerno, and he was optimistic that his illustrations would get him out of his predicament. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1889, he wrote on the frontispiece of his sketchbook,

Keep steadily in view that this Book is ascribed wholly to the produce of a MADMAN / Whereabouts would you say was the deficiency of intellect? Or depraved taste / If in the whole Book you can find a single Evidence of either, mark / it and record it against me. (Baker 78)

The illustrations that Charles created during this period provide evidence of his Victorian/Irish sense of humour regarding word play and visual puns, the nature of his belief in fairies, and his devout Catholic faith. The illustrations in his asylum sketchbooks often show interactions of fairies with birds and animals and, as previously mentioned, confirm his belief that fairies were part of the natural order of the world. His illustrations depict charming scenes in which fairies protect insects and worms, tease cats, ride on birds and animals, rescue hens from foxes, and interact with humans. Charles also believed that fairies whispered in the ears of birds as evidenced by his illustration of a fairy whispering to a heron. The expression on the heron’s face suggests that the fairy is inciting him to do something mischievous (Wark 41).

Charles was certain that his family was responsible for his commitment to the asylum. The illustration “Composing a Scandalous Letter” reveals that he also believed that fairies whispered into the ears of adults, or at least enabled other beings such as the snake to do so (Wark 36). The fact that he used his wife’s features to depict the woman writing the letter suggests that he was aware of Mary’s previously mentioned letter to Dr. Rutherford describing her husband’s



Figure 3: Charles Altamont Doyle, “Composing a Slandorous Letter.” Taken from *Charles Doyle’s Fairyland* (Wark 36)

“dipsomania.” The illustration represents a rationalisation that absolves Charles from accepting the consequences of his violent episode at Blairerno. His family did not have him committed because the authorities involved were not required to consult the family nor did they require the family’s permission to move him (Beveridge). The illustration also reveals that he believed the mischievous nature of a fairy’s whisper could have a dark side. Charles believed in fairies throughout his life but his watercolour, “Meditation, Self Portrait” (c. 1885 – 1890) clearly shows that he no longer desired their company at the end of his life. It is a departure from the charming depictions of fairies that he usually created.

Mary Forbes maintains in her 2015 thesis, *The Many Disguises of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Doyle (Sherlock Holmes, Fairies, and the Symbolist Movements in Art and Literature)*, that Doyle’s “Meditation, Self Portrait” was influenced by Henri Fuseli’s painting “The Nightmare.” A close comparison of the two illustrations establishes that the resemblance is superficial. Forbes suggests that the position of Doyle’s woman in “Meditation, Self Portrait” has the appearance of a female with “her arms are outstretched, and her legs are crossed as though she



Figure 1: Charles Altamont Doyle, “Self – Portrait.” Scottish National Galleries. Purchased 2012. Taken from <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/125983>

was asleep when elevated to her floating position” (28). However, “the levitating woman” in “Meditation, Self Portrait” is clearly an adult version of the adolescent fairy in “The Fairy’s Whisper.” Moreover, Doyle’s fairy is very much awake and far from tranquil, her hair, her limbs and her face all suggest movement and agitation. Fuseli’s woman is motionless, her head is twisted at an awkward angle over the edge of the bed and her arms are hanging down over her head; she does not look capable of movement. However, the flushed cheeks of Fuseli’s sleeping woman indicate that she is still breathing and she does not appear to be in distress. The creature sitting on her chest and the expression of the horse are the only indications

that the sleeping woman may be experiencing a nightmare. In contrast, while the expression of Charles himself in "Meditation, Self Portrait" is dejected, there is no indication that he is sleeping or dreaming. Forbes states that Doyle's hand "is against his face in a gesture of deep thought" (28). However, Doyle's hand is not simply against his face but is placed firmly over his ear. The direction of his gaze indicates that he is aware of the fairy shrieking at him, but he is determined not to listen to her. Arthur Hughes's illustration "Dark Thoughts" has far more in common with "Meditation, Self Portrait" in using sinister figures assailing a dejected looking man to indicate that his thoughts have taken a dark turn but lacks the inclusion of a female body floating above the man's head.

The dark turn of Charles's thoughts near the end of his life are evident in his comment under the illustration "Self Portrait (1888)" that is now in the National Gallery of Scotland. Charles wrote beneath the illustration, "That's his guardian angel over the left, utterly disgusted." The "guardian angel" has his wife's features and she is obviously unhappy. Charles often drew guardian angels watching over him, and depicted them with his own features, but this illustration is unique in referring to his wife as his guardian angel. Forbes states that "In addition to fairies, Charles had an unusual preoccupation with death, much like the Symbolist painters, and several pieces from his sketchbook contain skeletal spectres or angels ascending to heaven" (29–30). However, it is important to keep in mind that his devout Catholicism is clear in the illustrations that she is referring to, e.g., "Well Met." Moreover, the note that he wrote for his audience regarding "Well Met" is explicit: "Note. I do believe that to a / Catholic there is Nothing so sweet / in life as leaving it. Glory / be to God. / 19<sup>th</sup>[?] July 1899" (Baker 55).

A preoccupation with death is not unusual for a person of the faith in the circumstances that Charles was experiencing at the end of his life. Charles spent the last seven years of his life at Sunnyside Montrose until his health deteriorated to the point that he needed more care. He was moved to Crichton Royal Institution in 1892, where he was diagnosed with epilepsy, and died a year later in 1893 at the age of sixty-one. When Charles went to meet his Maker, he left behind the cares of this world, and for Charles that would have included his father's disappointment in him, his alcoholism, and the encouragements to bad behaviour he believed fairies had whispered in his ear throughout his life. Charles Doyle's belief in fairies inspired his art, provided a rationalization for his alcoholism, encouraged his paranoia regarding his incarceration, and contributed to the destruction of his physical and mental health.

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**Abstract:** Did the Victorians really believe in fairies? Scholarly opinions vary. For example, Jeremy Maas suggests that the Victorians “embraced belief in fairies as a reaction to the disenchantment of the world”. Similarly, Charlotte Gere attributes the Victorian interest in fairies as a reaction to “the growing industrialization and materialism of Victorian life”. Carole G. Silver remarks that the Victorians believed fairies were “responsible for the naughtiness of infants”, and, as proof, directs our attention to Charles Altamont Doyle’s illustration “The Fairy’s Whisper.” In Silver’s words, this “sinister” scene depicts “a small adult fairy floating above the head of a large mischievously smiling infant.” Silver quotes, but does not comment on, Doyle’s text below the illustration; “Any body [sic] who has nursed a baby as I have, will recognise the smile I think.” This study establishes that the illustration is a self-portrait. The infant’s expression is inebriated, and the text is a sly self-reference to Doyle’s severe alcoholism. The chapter examines the connections evident in Doyle’s illustrations to 1) his belief that fairies negatively influenced the behaviour of both children and adults; 2) his conviction that his family, due to the whispering of a fairy, was responsible for his incarceration in a mental asylum; and 3) his rationalization that his alcoholism was encouraged throughout his life by a fairy whispering in his ear. Despite his staunch Catholic faith, Doyle’s belief in the corporeal reality of fairies remained steadfast until the end of his life.

**Keywords:** Charles Doyle, fairies, alcoholism, Fairy’s Whisper



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**Between Musicality and Materiality: Harry Clarke's  
Illustrations for *Selected Poems of Algernon  
Charles Swinburne* (1928)**

The assessment of Algernon Charles Swinburne's poetry has always been a challenging task for contemporary critics. While some treated his oeuvre as the expression of his rebellious and iconoclastic character (Morley 145–147), other reviewers derided him, claiming that his poetry is solely “a carnival of ugly shapes”, “unclean for the mere sake of uncleanness” and that it exhibits nothing but “a mind all with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy” (qtd. in Pease 43). However, as Elizabeth Helsinger notes, Swinburne was fully aware of his status as a poetical dissident. For him, the excessive focus on passion, desire, and unfulfillment accompanied by highly metrical poetry testifies to his ambitious strife for poetical liberation (3). Subsequently, the scathing judgement of Swinburne as a literary troublemaker was transformed into a guarded appreciation of his ability to take advantage of the melodic aspects of language (Buchanan 137–138). Yet, some critics noticed that the rhythm of the poetry should not substitute for the message in the verse. As Oscar Wilde writes in “Mr. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads (Third Series)” for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Swinburne's works chiefly demonstrate the linguistic prowess of the poet but that is done at the expense of the content. For Wilde, Swinburne's “song is nearly always too loud for his subject” as it overwhelms the conveyed message in the poetry. Thus, the skilful use of assonance and alliteration overshadows the subjects of Swinburne's verse:

It has been said of him, and with truth, that he is a master of language, but with still greater truth it may be said that Language is his master. Words seem to dominate him. Alliteration tyrannizes over him. Mere sound often becomes his lord. (“Mr. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads (Third Series)”)

As Wilde succinctly puts it at the end of the review, the poet's works testify to his status as a “marvellous music-maker” but as far as the lyrical situation (“the soul”), Wilde advises to “go elsewhere”. In other words, Swinburne's poetry offers only the aesthetic experience of art, without any deeper exploration of the subject.

Wilde's observation clearly resonated across various illustrations accompanying Swinburne's oeuvre. The following study traces the relationship between Swinburne's poetry and modernist illustrations provided by the Irish stain-glass maker and illustrator Henry 'Harry' Clarke to *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1928). Crucially, the images produced by the Dublin-born artist ground the elusiveness of Swinburne's works and transform its vagueness into concrete illustrations, proving that Swinburne's extensive use of alliteration plays only a partial role in his verse. That is to say, Clarke's illustrations reveal that Swinburne's poetry relies heavily on the overall imagery, not only on the melodic and rhythmic devices. Additionally, I point out that the lingering notion of the dynamic between Victorianism and modernism remains rather complex and is based on what Jessica Feldman calls "preserv[ing] through change" (453). Simply put, modernism reconfigured Victorian poetry and recognised its impact through various modes of reinterpretation. Hence, the modernist illustrators did not steer clear from the commissions to illustrate Victorian poetry but took advantage of that opportunity to indicate the complicated relationship between the old and the new.

Previous research focuses mostly on Clarke's stained glass works (Lucy Costigan's *Dark Beauty. Hidden Detail in Harry Clarke's Stained Glass* (2019)) and the role of Clarke in the development of Irish modernism (numerous articles by Nicola Gordon Bowe and her incredibly informative book *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Art* (1983) as well as Kelly Sullivan's essay "Harry Clarke's Modernist Gaze" (2012)). Only one article by Elizabeth Helsinger "Harry Clarke's Swinburne" (2018) discusses the relationship between Swinburne's poems and the illustrations for them. I wish to extend Helsinger's reading, taking into account the transference between the image and the text, not historical or ideological contexts. Above all, Clarke's illustrations of Swinburne demonstrate that the division between nineteenth-century poetry and early-twentieth-century art does not operate on separation but it resembles an act of glancing in the rear-view mirror – looking back but from a different vantage point, with a different sensibility, and with slight distortions of the past.

My guiding methodological principles to explore the relationship between the image and the text are twofold. Firstly, I work with the assumption that there is no such thing as "'purely' visual or verbal arts" and "the sentiment to separate these media echoes the central utopian gestures of modernism" (Mitchell 5), thus the image can be read in the same way as the text (Kooistra 4). Such a strategy has been observed in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and art, particularly in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti since, for him, illustrations do not go against the text but they become "a parallel creation in another medium, with its own burden of meaning" (Helsinger 2). Secondly, my reading of the link between Swinburne's poetry volume and Clarke's images is supported by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's bitextuality framework. In her book *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-siècle Illustrated Books*, Kooistra posits

that the image and the text “co-produce meaning in dialogue with each other, with the larger cultural conversation in which they are embedded” (4), claiming that the dialogue between these modes of representation actively generates meaning within the cultural context and in the shared subject (11).

Kooistra distinguishes five dialogic relations between the image and the word: quotation in which “the artist produces a picture which is a visual double for the word in much the same way that literary critics copy a section of the work under investigation” (15); impression where “pictorial representation of the text is less important than critical interpretation and decorative embellishment” (17) so that it reflects the subjective impressions of the reading experience and emphasises as possible. Finally, Kooistra coins the term cross-dressing which “signifies the artificial, illusory nature of the wish for the two sexes or texts to be one” (21) and is typically produced by a single artist and writer.

These relationships between the image and the text can be traced in Clarke's pictures to Swinburne. In my analysis, I investigate in detail four illustrations that accompany the poems to demonstrate that Clarke creates a variety of pictorial responses: he answers to the poems, creates visual impressions based on his subjective reading, parodies the text, and sometimes even quotes the title of the poem. As my study shows, Kooistra's framework (despite being mostly directed towards the fin de siècle illustration) remains a useful tool to describe and investigate the trans-generational relationship between mid-nineteenth-century English poetry (Swinburne) and early twentieth-century Irish illustration (Clarke). Consequently, Clarke offers a compelling modernist reinvention of Victorian poetry, indicating that, in the process of book illustration, the illustrator becomes the main interpreter of the text.

Henry ‘Harry’ Clarke was born in Dublin, on St. Patrick's Day in 1889. He was an Irish stained-glass maker, illustrator, and an important figure in the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement. His pictorial works often incorporate the elements of Art Nouveau and French Symbolism. Arguably the single most significant influence on Clarke's work was Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), whose macabre, twisted, and grotesque imagery as well as the extensive use of black and white blank spaces reappear in Clarke's illustrations – as one of the reviewers remarked, Clarke's compositions reflect “the world of the psychoanalyst made visible” (quoted in Bowe 189). The contemporary reviews of the Irish artist reveal two facets of his works: the religious side which found its expression in stained glass and another aspect which expressed itself in black and white; “a mixture of the utterly beautiful and macabre ... a medieval delight in monstrosities, in abortion and devils” but always drawn with the perfection of line, minutiae of detail ... a subtlety and delicacy comparable with the work of the finest miniaturists” (quoted in Bowe 17). Throughout his career, Clarke provided numerous pictorial renditions of literary works: in 1913, he illustrated Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient*

*Mariner*, providing a rather sympathetic interpretation of the poem; he also created illustrations to W. B. Yeats's "The Song of Wandering Aengus", *Salome* by Oscar Wilde, Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales*, and most importantly, Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1919) which Clarke was particularly praised for in the review included in *The Bookman, Christmas Edition*:

The distorted visions of the stories assume another manner of life. They are not only arabesque, grotesque, the work of an imagination which bodies forth in unaccountable and sometimes terrible shapes the forms of things unknown, but the narratives which move in a mystery are encompassed here by a suggestion of things inexplicable beyond. One remembers nothing that counts like these creations. (Harrap 6)

Truly, Clarke's extensive use of macabre, grotesque, and uncanny sense of danger remains an important feature in his pictorial reinterpretations of Swinburne. More importantly, as noticed by Thomas Bodkin (one of Clarke's most prolific reviewers), Clarke's illustrations very rarely directly represent the poem but they are pictorial "variations upon a given theme" (quoted in Bowe 54), not a semantic translation from one medium to the other. As Bodkin writes about Clarke's illustrations of Poe's texts:

the setting of Poe's *Tales* was that of the author's time, but the artist has cast them into a bizarre world of his own fashioning, where strange plants flourish and the people are clad in costumes of inexperienced richness and beauty. (Bodkin, quoted in Bowe 54)

Above all, the images come together with the content of the written work – it is not the world created only by the poet, yet it is built as a collaboration between the text and the image.

*Selected Poems of Algernon Swinburne* (1928), the edition with Clarke's illustrations, disclose a particular dynamic between the illustrator and the editor or, perhaps oddly, the lack of cooperation between them. The process of preparing the edition of Swinburne remains rather drawn-out. In 1926 Clarke was asked to produce illustrations for the edition (initially, the John Lane contract required some full-colour illustrations among the twelve full-page images; however, none of them were created in that form (Bowe 89)). Furthermore, due to Clarke's poor health and difficulties with managing his workshop, the process was delayed – the first illustrations were provided at the beginning of 1928. Overall, there are eleven full-page images to the poems, one double-sided spread, and twenty-four tailpieces (Bowe 89).

The collection starts with the personal recollections of the editor and a poet Humbert Wolfe who heard Swinburne's poetry when he was a teenager. As he describes, he was listening to Swinburne's poems and was immediately smitten by alliterations, assonance, and rhythm of the poems. Additionally, he mentions that

Swinburne deserved to be present among the greatest poets of the English canon – Tennyson, Arnold, Morris, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Notwithstanding recurrent praise of Swinburne's originality and lyrical skills, the end of the preface marks an intriguing commentary on the rift between the illustrations and the poems, claiming that the illustration does not do justice to Swinburne:

It is, of course, a possible interpretation, and still a widely accepted one. But it has produced the result that the argument of the Preface is directly contradicted by the illustrator. I regret that, owing to my negligence in not asking to see the drawings in advance, this volume contains two opposing views of the meaning of Swinburne's work. (*Selected Poems* xxvii)

Surprisingly, the editor apologises to his readers for the discrepancy between the editor's interpretation of Swinburne's oeuvre and the pictorial interpretations given by Clarke. That apology appears relatively strange, given the fact that Clarke's illustration added value to the editions of poems, as was the case of his illustrations to Goethe (Bowe 83). Helsinger rightly posits that Wolfe's attack on Clarke stems from the fact that for him, Swinburne's power of poetry lies in the "masterful control of rhythm and rhyme". In contrast, Clarke concentrated on the "fascination with the hidden forms of desire" which are dominant rhetorical devices in Swinburne (4). Accordingly, it seems that the editor of the collection expected the illustrator to be closer to Victorianism than modernism since the poems reflect the turbulence and chaotic shifts in the nineteenth-century poetical scene ("Before 1860 the first revolt against the petrification of verse had begun with Rossetti and Morris" (*Selected Poems* xii–xiii)).

Still, Clarke's illustrations proved that the hybridity between Victorianism and modernism generated a more nuanced exploration of the image and the text. That allowed Swinburne to be appreciated not only because of his melodic poems but also because of his intriguing imagery and dramatic plots. More specifically, in *Selected Poems of Charles Algernon Swinburne*, the interplay between the visual and the written manifests itself from the very beginning – the opening page of the collection represents a hermaphrodite-like figure with stretched arms that resemble ovaries and exposed male genitals. The queer composition of combining the trope of hermaphroditism, popular in Swinburne's and Walter Pater's writings (Morgan 322–324), with the neoclassical tradition of the nineteenth century, clearly shows Clarke's cultural understanding of the late-Victorian period. Like Swinburne, who was fascinated by these themes, Clarke incorporates the imagery to signal the pervading themes in the poet's works – crossing the established boundaries like male/female; sacred/profane, passion/inertia; damnation/redemption, art as craft/art as a divine vocation. Thus, such an approach towards the opening of the book reflects Clarke's attempt to create a personal impression of Swinburne's oeuvre.

One of the examples of how Clarke responds to the text and creates its visual parody is the illustration of “Hymn to Proserpine”. Despite referring solely to “Hymn to Proserpine”, his pictorial rendition echoes Swinburne’s two poems that revise the Persephone/Demeter myth – “Hymn to Proserpine (After the Proclamation in Rome of the Christian Faith)” and, to a certain degree, “The Garden of Proserpine”. In *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866), Swinburne argues that “The Garden of Proserpine” intends to explore the intermediate state that contains “[a] brief total pause of passion and thought when the spirit, without the fear or hope of good things or evil, hungers and thirsts only after the perfect sleep” (13). Therefore, Swinburne depicts a particular brief moment when time freezes and the human spirit longs for the experience of stillness. Thus, he conceptualises the idea of death (Persephone) as an embracing force for the mortals. Swinburne’s intention is cleverly depicted in the illustration since Clarke uses black and white extensively and creates an aura of stillness and temporal suspension. The scene takes up the whole space on the page and there is a clear division in the illustration – in the upper part, there is a figure of Persephone, surrounded by two angels, with intricately laced-like wings and layered robes. They look upwards at the goddess, with their hands put as if they are praying. Despite showing an act of adoration, the presented situation appears oddly devoid of feelings since the line of their gaze looks misdirected. Truly, we cannot be sure whether the angels adore the child or Persephone.

While the top part of the illustration hints at the circular nature of Hades (which could echo Dante’s circles of Hell in *Divine Comedy*), the bottom part of the image presents the dead. Interestingly, while Swinburne describes them as souls of the dead, Clarke portrays them as flesh and blood creatures, with excessively elongated arms, legs, and gradually decomposing faces. Contrary to Swinburne’s rather subtle characterisation of the dead, the Irish illustrator creates a scene of bodily decay, located in the scenery that resembles a field loaded with psychedelic mushrooms, adding a sense of eerie comfort. The corpse appears to be embraced by the octopus-like creature that creeps up onto the body. Additionally, the whole design is filled with the imagery of poppies (the ornaments on the throne, the silhouette of poppy buds in the background) which, likewise, corresponds with Swinburne’s obsession with death and the narcotic state. In this way, Clarke amplifies the sense of macabre and hallucination that reverberates more in Swinburne’s “The Garden of Proserpine”, not “Hymn to Proserpine”.

While the scenery rendered in the illustration resembles that of “The Garden of Proserpine”, the portrayal of Persephone refers to Swinburne’s description in the “Hymn to Proserpine”. Here, the goddess acts like a pagan counterpart (or even a parody) of the Virgin Mary, as alluded to in Swinburne’s text. Yet, while Swinburne’s poem represents the passing gods as vital but thrashed by the Christian God, Clarke presents Persephone as a ruler of the Underworld. With the halo above her head, she is sitting on the high throne, holding a small baby on her lap.



Moreover, her royal dress reminds us of mediaeval courtly dresses, with the hair covered and tightly laced veil. Persephone looks incredibly calm and collected, as if lost in thoughts. Alternatively, as Helsinger demonstrates, Clarke depicts the moment when a still fleshly Proserpine is dethroned at the bottom of the image and “replaces her with the pale maiden mother and her child” (18).

Clarke's illustration of the “Hymn to Proserpine” is a response to Swinburne's reinterpretation of the Persephone myth and he uses a wide assortment of tropes that are present in Swinburne's revisions, instead of focusing on one poem. As a result, the illustration could be treated as a parody of Swinburne's revisions of Proserpine – Clarke's visual reinterpretation goes against the specific poem and it provides a general impression of Persephone symbolism in Swinburne's oeuvre. This reveals the artist's general sensitivity to the poet's works, proving that his interpretative freedom goes beyond the transfer from text to image.

Apart from the contrary pictorial responses to Swinburne's text, Clarke provides his subjective reading of the poem, which is relatively close to the contents of the lyrics. According to Kooistra, that visual response would be called answering. Indeed, this is particularly present in the response to Swinburne's retelling of the story of St. Dorothy, a martyr from the third century. In his rewriting, the story is told from the perspective of Theophilus, a lawyer and a hedonist, whose life is limited to “a sort of life of pleasurable days” (l. 17)<sup>1</sup>. As Antony Harrison observes, Swinburne's adaptation of the legend emphasises the erotic aspects of St. Dorothy's persecution and the sensory qualities of the characters' experiences (76–78) which are depicted in a fragmented, sensualised, and highly aestheticised way. Upon encountering St. Dorothy, the speaking I observes that she is “Clothed softly, with sweet herbs about her hair / And bosom flowerful” and her face appears “more fair than sudden-singing April in soft lands” (ll. 45–47). Having refused to take part in the pagan celebrations, she was ordered to be publicly executed. Harrison notes that St. Dorothy reveals “her own sublimated but ultimately aesthetic and erotic motives for a life of renunciation in this world” (75) and describes the afterlife as a beautiful garden where all her desires, both aesthetic and romantic, are satisfied. For her, “On the other side”, death remains “good and green” (l. 367) and plays the role of a lover whom she describes as with the “soft flower of tender-coloured hair / Grown on his head” (ll. 368–369) and his “red mouth as fair / As may be kissed with lips” (ll. 369–370). Similarly to the highly sensual descriptions of the afterlife, the speaker in the poem refers to the saint's beheading as the scene of aesthetic observation – “Out of her throat the tender blood full red / Fell suddenly through all her long soft hair” (ll. 413–414).

While the poem recurrently uses highly luscious language, Clarke's pictorial reinterpretation heads in a different direction. In comparison with the text,

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<sup>1</sup> All passages from Swinburne's poems, unless indicated, come from *Selected Poems by Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1928).

the illustration appears more subtle as well as more ambiguous. In fact, there is no direct indication of the poem's portrayal of martyrdom and sadism; instead, Clarke creates almost a religious depiction of the saint, highlighting her superior role in her tragic tale. As before, the illustration takes the whole page of the poem and, like Proserpine, the figure of the saint is elongated. Yet, in "St. Dorothy", the figure takes up the majority of the space – in the upper part of the picture, she is hovering above the city with an enormous double halo. What is more, the striped detail in the background is placed in such a way that it resembles an angel, thus referencing the traditional story that the angel is going to be a messenger sent by St. Dorothy to Theophilus. Her figure is fully clad, with an intricately decorated dress and a head cover that hides her hair. One of her hands points to her heart whereas the other holds a long wreath of flowers which, according to the legend, was her attribute. She does not look at either the city or the viewer – her stare appears regal and unaffected by anyone and anything. In the bottom part of the picture, we might notice the urban setting, with block buildings and heaps of beads on both sides of the illustration. What is particularly fascinating in this rendition are the episodes in St. Dorothy's life – on the right, we may see the premonition of her beheading and her gaining the status of the saint (the head already has a halo). On the left side, there is the episode after her beheading – according to the tradition, the angel visits Theophilus and gives him the basket filled with flowers from Dorothy and that event makes the hedonist convert to Christianity. Above all, Clarke's illustration refrains from employing the erotic and sensual motifs which are vividly described in Swinburne. Instead, he creates a more religiously oriented impression of the poem, incorporating the fascination with death and morbidity but still framing the poem as a hopeful vision of martyrdom. Clarke's St. Dorothy is focused on her solely, not on the speaker's impression of her – such a manoeuvre testifies to Clarke's familiarisation with the Catholic tradition of saints and his modernist reinvention of that aesthetics.

Contrary to "The Hymn to Proserpine" and "St. Dorothy" which take advantage of the poet's subjective interpretation of the poem, the illustration of "Satia de Sanguine" appears to be a direct quotation of the poem. The title of the poem translates into "satisfy your blood" and neatly encapsulates what imagery is present both in the poem and the picture – what we may notice is the trope of sadistic love ("I wish you were stricken of thunder / And burnt with a bright flame through, / Consumed and cloven in sunder, / I dead at your feet like you (ll. 37-40)), violence ("I wish you were dead, my dear" (l. 33)), and the disturbing images of inflicting pain ("You suck with a sleepy red lip / The wet red wounds in his heart" (ll. 59-60)). Overall, what permeates the poem is the morbidity of imagery that is accompanied by the language of unfulfillment, deferral of satisfaction, cruelty, and overwhelming emotions ("thrill", "cruelty", "death too bitter to fear", "hatred", "hunger"). To quote Anthea Margaret Ingham:

There is a feverish celebratory delight of the carnivalesque in the verbs, “thrill”, “brighten” and “warm.” Although Swinburne is ostensibly referring to the beloved, his or her identity is never mentioned, and the use of the pronoun *we* (“You are crueller, you that we love ...”) turns the beloved into a generalized force of the uncompromising nature of libido in general, an urge that is “crueller ... / Than hatred, hunger or death”. This is a celebration of the libido in all its aspects, and it pinpoints the unmentionable side of pleasure. (197; emphasis in original)

The imagery of morbidity that mingles with carnival is mirrored in Clarke's illustration. The picture shows a naked woman, sitting on the corpse of her victim, staring provocatively at the viewer. While the scene appears incredibly naturalistic (the background is supposed to resemble the sea shore and the characters are lying on the tall grass), there is a pervading sense of sadism present in the illustration. Like Swinburne who accentuates the pain and piercing of the body, Clarke's depiction of the victim directly refers to the text – the elongated arms are pierced by the nails and thorns (as Swinburne writes “Plant thorns” (l. 23)). What is more, the dominatrix in the illustration is holding the serpent, just like mentioned in the line forty-four, “If it were not a stone or a snake”, thus implying her desire to torture and kill through the culturally established symbol of serpent as a dangerous and deceitful animal. Additionally, Clarke quotes the poem by including the jewel that is hanging on her neck – as the speaker mentions, the woman “set pain like a jewel” (l. 23). The illustration highlights the necklace that is shaped like a dead body and, hence, points out the dominant motif of the poem. Clarke directly used the imagery present in the text and transferred them onto the illustration, without acknowledging the Sapphic motifs in the poem. In that case, we may observe that Clarke creates a quotation of the text, a visual double of the poem, without adding any subjective interpretation of the poem.

The last dialogic relationship that could be traced in Clarke's images to Swinburne is the impression of “Hesperia” which relies heavily on the subjective reading of the poem and the intimate understanding of its broader context. According to Elizabeth Prettejohn, Swinburne's poem amalgamates the defining features of his creativity – “Hesperia” displays Swinburne's merging “the alliteration, assonance, and consonance ... with the metaphors of cyclical rhythm” and his perception of art as a redemptive force that goes beyond the matters of life and death, form and content, soul and sense (69-70). In other words, the poet professes that devotion to Hesperia mirrors his devotion to art, stories, songs, and storytelling (Prettejohn 70). In the illustration of “Hesperia”, Clarke creates a clever echo of these notions – he portrays two lovers embracing tenderly, the woman with a transparent dress is juxtaposed with the figure of a man, fully clad in a black robe. While the scene may appear to be a depiction of a gentle and intimate moment, there is an underlying darkness involved in the illustration, which is marked by the presence of swirling

serpents on the woman's arm. In addition, the image may signal an interesting reversal of the roles – here, the muse is depicted as a man, creeping onto the woman artist. Furthermore, there is a strange minor scene in the woman's dress – two naked figures (the pose resembles that in Władysław Podkowiński's 1894 painting *Szał Uniesień*) riding horses but not holding reins of them. That episode might be Clarke's indication of how he perceives creativity and art, namely, that the attempts to control the creative process appear futile and the muse's calling equals surrendering to it. A similar notion of the muse who takes hold of the artist appears in the illustration to "Dedication" (the last poem in the 1928 collection) as the poet (or the painter) acts like a puppet who is dominated by the muse. Accordingly, it is the creative spirit that governs the individual, not the other way around.

In conclusion, Clarke's illustrations of Swinburne's poems serve as a modernist reinvention of Victorian poetry, indicating a profound relationship between the seemingly distinctive aesthetics. As the article demonstrates, the dialogue between the image and the text in the collection is not random – creating visuals that accompany the poems requires the illustrator to deeply understand the text and see the implications of the imagery present in the poems. As a result, the illustrator becomes one of the main and crucial interpreters of the poems who, simultaneously, influence the readers' reception of the text. To simplify, we read the text, create our own conceptions of that text, and confront them with the illustrator's vision and interpretation.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Clarke, he proves to be a better interpreter of Swinburne in comparison with Wolfe, confirming that Swinburne's poems do not solely take advantage of the alliteration, assonance, and melody of poetry. Instead, this revision is based on the richness and evocativeness of images. That, in turn, allows Clarke to approach Swinburne's nineteenth-century texts in a more provocative and modernist way. Finally, the relationship between Swinburne's poetry and Clarke's illustrations foreshadows the practices of visual responses which are present in the contemporary social-media-driven world, thus proving that studying relationships between the image and the text remains a fruitful ground for further research.

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<sup>2</sup> Worth mentioning are Roman Ingarden's ideas about aesthetic experience and its author-recipient relationship. In his works, Ingarden argues that the work of art is intentional, meaning it is a product of the author's conscious act and the existence of artwork depends on its reception in the audience's consciousness (Dziemidok, McCormick 13). Furthermore, he describes the process of "concretisation" in which the recipient completes the sphere of meaning of the artwork, either by selecting a specific meaning from the range of possible interpretations or by interpreting linguistic ambiguities (for example metaphors). Therefore, the author creates a scheme that the recipient completes. Ultimately, there is no single work of art; rather, there are only its concretizations, which vary each time depending on individual experiences, sensitivity, and aptitude (Ingarden 332-343).

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**Abstract:** Nineteenth-century British culture is an intriguing example of how text and image co-exist. More so, early twentieth-century illustrations often provide a counterpoint to English poetry of the nineteenth century, emphasising that the relationship between the visual and the written is more nuanced than a straightforward semiotic transfer of meaning. In the present chapter, I focus on the dialogue between the illustrations created by Harry Clarke to Algernon Charles Swinburne's poems, which were published in *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* in 1928. The following discussion is informed by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's bitextual theory that considers the special relationship between the image and the text in the context of book illustrations. Clarke represents Swinburne's works in a compelling way, as the illustrator's interpretative process not only parallels but also diverges from the lyrical narratives. Clarke's illustrations prove that Swinburne's oeuvre is not only based on rhythm but on distinctive poetical imagery. As a result, the example of *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* shows how a complex negotiation between the picture and the word produces new perspectives on how Victorian literature remains closely tied to early-twentieth-century art.

**Keywords:** Algernon Charles Swinburne, bitextuality, Harry Clarke, modernist illustration, Victorian poetry

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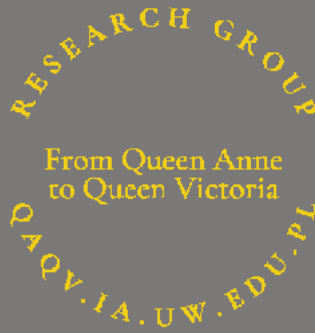
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