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edited by

Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Bloomington and Indianapolis

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sexualities in Victorian Britain / edited by Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-253-33066-1 (alk. paper)

1. Sex customs—Great Britain—History—19th century. 2. Sexual ethics—Great Britain—History—19th century. I. Miller, Andrew H., date. II. Adams, James Eli.

HQ18.G7S473 1996

306.7'0941—dc20 96-5128

1 2 3 4 5 01 00 99 98 97 96

Miller, Andrew H, and James Eli Adams. *Sexualities In Victorian Britain.*
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ONE

Introduction

Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams

Twentieth-century accounts of Victorian sexuality—or of the Victorians and a sexuality they allegedly disavowed—have changed as dramatically as twentieth-century understandings of sexuality generally. What has remained strikingly persistent, however, is the unique prominence that our changing discourses of sexuality assign to Victorian culture. To be sure, many other epochs—classical Greece, early Christianity, and eighteenth-century Europe, most notably—have served as important points of reference, as have a variety of disparate present cultures explored by anthropologists. But it is the nineteenth century that produces the very concept of sexuality as an object of study, as well as the various enterprises of scientific (or quasi-scientific) investigation loosely grouped under the label "sexology." As a result, Victorian understandings continue to exert an influence on our ways of thinking about sexuality that exceed the effects of sheer historical contiguity; they have a formative place in contemporary discussion, amid all its contention and debate, akin to that of an originary framework, or foundational discourse. Changing accounts of Victorian sexualities, and of their relation to the present, thus place us at the center of ongoing reflection about the nature and history of sexuality.

Through much of this century, the Victorians were notorious as the great enemies of sexuality; indeed, in Freud's representative account, sexuality sometimes seems to be whatever it was that the middle-class Victorian mind attempted to hide, evade, repress, deny. So prominent was this agonistic construction of Victorian culture that soon after the very adjective "Victorian" came into widespread usage it tended to be sexualized, as a virtual synonym for "repressive." This emphasis tended toward the self-congratulatory; in Michel Foucault's arch phrasing, it gratified "something that one might call the speaker's benefit" (6). In a world increasingly resistant to Whig schemes of history, twentieth-century commentators might still find grounds for a Whiggish account of the development of sexual understanding. Thus Freud famously likened his intellectual advance—and its im-

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pact—to those of Copernicus and Darwin. For many critics (including Freud in his more sanguine moods) that advance promised more than intellectual satisfaction; the exposure of Victorian repression became a project of psychic liberation. Yet such triumphalist accounts developed lines of argument already staked out by dissident Victorians. Critics as varied as Matthew Arnold, Mill, and Wilde, for example, all had represented Victorian "respectability" as the opponent of the body, denouncing Victorian moral conventions as a form of "mutilation."[1] As the Victorians increasingly narrowed the scope of morality to the sphere of sexual regulation—a historical development of great moment in itself—resistance to the authority of Mrs. Grundy likewise became charged with sexual associations, and sexual reference became the most provocative mode of resistance. Hence mere frankness could become a mark of intellectual and moral daring—as in Virginia Woolf's account of a galvanizing moment in the formation of "Bloomsbury," Lytton Strachey's bold utterance of the word "semen" in mixed company (173).

Less picturesque understandings of "Victorian" antagonism to sexuality shaped even the most sympathetic and scholarly accounts of Victorian culture through much of the twentieth century. In Walter Houghton's landmark study, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957), for example, "sex" operates in an array of stark, symptomatic oppositions, as a biological force that finds no hint of accommodation in the structures of Victorian society. The index entry tellingly gives the term itself, adds "fear of" and "silence about," and then includes a list of related topics: "See also Adultery, Censorship, Evasion, Free love, Prostitution, Prudery, Sensuality." Roughly divided between crippling prohibition and varieties of transgression defined by that constraint, the list leaves no hint of a middle ground of satisfied desire. Moreover, Houghton's decision to confine every one of these topics to two of his 14 chapters, "Love" and "Hypocrisy," reinforces the pivotal transition in the chapter devoted to "Love": "From the fear of sex we pass directly to the exaltation of love" (372).

Despite Houghton's severe and apparently secure circumscription of sexuality to but two facets of the Victorian "frame of mind," the relation between love and sex that he sets forth is broadly Freudian. Indeed, in one of Freud's most famous maxims about sexuality, Houghton's view of Victorian culture becomes the human condition: "It is not possible for the claims of the sexual instinct to be reconciled with the demands of culture." This pronouncement, from "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," is turned back on Victorian culture as the epigraph of the single most influential account of sexuality in Victorian Britain before the work of Foucault: Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1966). As his title implies, Marcus set out to complicate clichés about Victorian repression by setting against "the official views of sexuality"—as enunciated by the physician William Acton—the demotic worlds of Victorian pornography and prostitution. As it aimed to recover a sexual culture largely written out of the official story, Marcus's volume was also true to the Victorian genealogy of its sponsor: *The Other Victorians* was the first publication in a series sponsored by the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, founded by Alfred Kinsey, whose work is probably

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the most influential twentieth-century descendant of late-Victorian sexology. For all Marcus's careful distancing of himself from Kinsey's empiricism—invoking Lionel Trilling's influential attack on "the Kinsey Report"—the famed "sex researcher" turns out to be a curiously appropriate tutelary spirit for a work whose central exhibit, *My Secret Life*, is an exhaustive and exhausting multivolume recounting of a prodigious number and variety of sexual experiences, by an anonymous author who disdains theory or analysis in pursuit of "facts alone" (Marcus 187).

Marcus's project, moreover, harkens back to a further Victorian enterprise informing the rise of what Foucault would call "scientia sexualis": his book, Marcus explains, is not only an exercise in literary criticism and history, but "an exercise in anthropology as well" (xiv).

> The subculture to be studied was "foreign," distinct, exotic; at the same time it was a human subculture and consequently relevant to our own humanity and culture. I could in addition fancy myself as being out "in the field": a new language or dialect had to be learned, preconceptions had to be rigorously put aside, and guidelines had to be laid down where none existed before. (xiv–xv)

This self-construction underscores the extent to which twentieth-century reflection on sexuality derives from the more headlong projects of Victorians like Mayhew and Dickens, who explored the streets and alleys of London in pursuit of what Marcus calls "the very underbelly of the Victorian world," likewise in ostensible search for a common humanity. Yet the encounter with the "exotic," then as now, is notoriously subject to "preconceptions," as well as to the condescension hinted at in the strange redundancy of "human subculture." Ultimately, Marcus's deference to Freud undercuts his anthropological imperative: the glimpse of a more complex and manifold sexual culture crucially inflected by class is obscured by the characterization of Victorian Britain as "an enduringly arrested world," in which medical discourse and pornography are alike the work of delusion, "worlds without psychology" awaiting the illumination of Freud.

A Victorian sexual culture of more varied and vigorous internal conflict emerged in the work of feminist critics and historians from the 1960s onward. The force of Victorian "respectability" weighed especially heavily on women, and the assessment of that burden and its afterlife became a central task of feminist writing, in and out of the academy. The importance of the Victorians in feminist self-definition is strikingly illustrated by the work of Kate Millett, whose 1968 essay comparing Mill's *The Subjection of Women* with Ruskin's then-neglected essay, "Of Queen's Gardens," was subsequently incorporated in her best-selling polemic, *Sexual Politics* (1970). To be sure, the political imperatives of "women's liberation" often reinvigorated monolithic schemes of sexual repression and political oppression. But feminist social history in the 1970s discovered increasingly intricate and frequently self-divided patterns of regulation at work in shaping Victorian sexual identities. Thus, for example, Nancy Cott's essay on the ideology of female "passionlessness" demonstrated ways in which what had been previously

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understood as a repressive imposition of patriarchal power had also been actively embraced and deployed by women.[2]

It is the work of Michel Foucault, however, that is most widely and influentially associated with the view that sexuality is best understood as a construction of regulatory systems, rather than as an elemental force subject to repression. The first volume of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1977), an "Introduction" to a subsequently reconfigured and never-completed project, sets aside "the repressive hypothesis" to reflect instead, in alternately bemused and excoriating fashion, on the satisfactions that commentators seem to derive from rehearsing it, even as they lament its burdens. Once again, the Victorians and their twentieth-century interpreters loom large. Indeed, Foucault entitles his opening chapter, "We 'Other Victorians,' " thereby launching a challenge not only to Marcus's Freudian premises but to the narrative of mastery within which, as we've noted, what Marcus frames as an introduction to an unknown "subculture" becomes an occasion to chart our own enlightenment. Herein, Foucault suggests, lies the most encompassing structure and appeal of "the repressive hypothesis": it postulates that truth is always opposed to repressive power, and hence that by speaking truth one is opposing power. Yet the strangest of the practices in *My Secret Life*, Foucault wryly remarks, is not the abundance and variety of the sexual experiences, but "the fact of recounting them all," which he takes to be emblematic of our own obsessive preoccupation with speaking "the truth of sex" (56). In this light, Foucault suggests, "this nameless Englishman will serve better than his queen as the central figure for a sexuality whose main features were already taking shape with the Christian pastoral" (22). Perhaps, Foucault continues, our discourse of sexuality is not opposed to power, but is in fact incited by power. From this hypothesis, he proceeds to redefine sexuality as "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology" (127). Sexuality thus understood is not a biological imperative but an intricately articulated array of political identities constructed out of imperatives to believe, to feel, to act. As such, the discourse of sexuality will confirm its normalizing force by specifying a variety of "aberrant" identities of increasing specifity; sexuality, that is, will invariably generate sexualities. We have come to assume that all of these varied identities are the manifestation of the fundamental truth that is "sex," "that agency which appears to dominate us and that secret which seems to underlie all that we are" (155). In Foucault's account, however, sex is "but an ideal point" within the discourse of sexuality that masks the operation of power in constructing the "truth" of sex. "Sex" as we have come to understand it is not a biological reality, but a construction of nineteenth-century "bio-power"; it is "the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality" (155).

The greatest impact of Foucault's work on historians has centered on its account of the nineteenth-century construction of "perverse" sexualities.[3] Here, Foucault argues, categories that had previously been attached to specific activities or sexual relations were transformed into designations of an essential identity, a sexuality;

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"the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (43). On this view, "the homosexual" is a being which does not exist before the nineteenth century. By the same logic, however, neither does "the heterosexual." Such provocative formulations have made Foucault a central figure in a far-reaching conflict between "essentialist" and "social constuctionist" views of sexuality and human identity—between, broadly speaking, the view that human identity is largely or entirely a function of innate attributes, and hence explicable in trans-historical categories, and the view that identity is shaped by social and cultural forces to such an extent that it can only be analyzed in historically-specific terms. The prominence of this dualism in recent debate is a striking development, particularly given the fact that "essentialists" have proved very difficult to find, at least within the human sciences.[4] John Boswell, one of the few historians actually cited as an "essentialist," points out that no one deliberately involved in the controversy identifies himself as such (Stein 133). As Diana Fuss notes, "essence as irreducible has been constructed to be irreducible" (4), and essentialism, similarly, must be constructed as such.[5] Indeed, it often proves difficult even to coherently define the position as it might bear on sexuality. Edward Stein, for example, who as the editor of a volume devoted to "sexual orientation and the social constructionist controversy" tries very hard to be even-handed, claims that essentialists

> hold that a person's sexual orientation is a culture-independent, objective and intrinsic property while social constructionists think it is culture-dependent, relational and, perhaps, not objective. (Roughly, an objective property is one a person has from a "god's-eye" point of view, while an intrinsic property is one that a person has non-relationally, i.e., "inside" him or her; in other words, an intrinsic property is one that a person could have even if she were the only person or thing in the world.) (325–26)

But what could it possibly mean to claim that an essentialist view understands "sexual orientation" on the model of a world evacuated of other human beings?

To be sure, if essentialism denotes the persistence of some human categories or concepts throughout history, some element of essentialism inhabits virtually all constructionist arguments. Foucault's work in this context has provoked a vigorous and ongoing debate about the premises of historical analysis. But given the extraordinary difficulty of identifying a rigorously "essentialist" position, why is its existence so vigorously proclaimed? In many respects the opposition draws on the familiar antagonisms of "the two cultures." The archetypal essentialist is the biologist in search of a gene that would determine homosexuality, understood as a neurophysiological imperative whose cultural configurations are mere epiphenomena. Over against such a view, the attack on "essentialism" reaffirms the authority of the human sciences by stressing the constitutive force of culture. This conflict is readily translated into the political oppositions associated with the dichotomies of nature and nurture. The embrace of a "constructionist" view, that is, seems to underwrite forms of voluntarism or freedom denied by "essentialism." In the ringing affirmation of Jeffrey Weeks, constructionist views make plain that "identity is not a destiny but a choice" (*Sexuality*, 209). To be sure, Weeks (like

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most commentators) quickly qualifies the proclamation of autonomy with a classical Marxist acknowledgement of the constraints the world imposes on our choices. But there is nonetheless a powerful and complex political investment informing virtually all invocations of the essentialist/constructionist dichotomy. This is one reason why Foucault's formulation of "perverse" identity has so overshadowed that of Mary McIntosh, whose 1968 article, "The Homosexual Role," is cited by most historians as the seminal essay in "social constructionism." As her title implies, McIntosh's sociological paradigm is dramaturgical, and as such less susceptible of ready extension to other disciplines than the loosely textual paradigm of Foucauldian discourse. But McIntosh's account of homosexual identity, although it centrally addresses a dynamic of social control, is also less overtly and completely entangled in the structures of power that figure so emphatically in Foucault's account. As it suggests that all sexuality is a political construction, Foucault's argument also seems to empower those who analyze the discourse of sexuality, to invest their work with a potentially liberatory effect.

Yet there is a pointed irony in invocations of Foucault to authorize appeals to social constructionism as a path to greater autonomy. For such invocations typically reproduce their own version of the repressive hypothesis. "Essentialism," that is, too readily figures as yet another hypostatized image of Victorian power implacably opposed to human capacity for self-definition, and to the vitality of human signification. Repeating Foucault's sardonic terms, what sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of essentialism "is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures . . . " (7). A thoroughgoing Foucauldian might well urge that, on the contrary, the current explosion of work on sexual identity is only a further multiplying of the eminently Victorian project of putting sex into discourse. For Foucault himself, as both Judith Butler and Jeffrey Weeks point out, the ultimate goal seems less the reconfiguration of existing sexual categories than "the happy limbo of a non-identity" epitomized by Hercule Barbin.

Ultimately, however, Foucault's influence has been in keeping with the highly schematic, provisional, and ultimately unfinished character of his "Introduction." His notorious inattention to the specificity of female sexuality—he was "a profoundly androcentric writer," notes Meaghan Morris—has made his relation to feminism especially problematic (26). Criticism of Foucault has been especially sharp in discussions of violence against women and the decriminalization of rape where the central Foucauldian concepts of "power" and "sex" graphically intersect.[6] But the sheer scope and suggestiveness of Foucault's reflections have prompted feminist revisions and extensions of his work that have generated important theoretical reflection as well as powerful studies of Victorian sexualities.[7] His writing, more generally, energizes current historical work as an especially provocative incitement to reflection on the complexity of human identities, and on the many different arrays of meaning inevitably informing those identities. Thus the contributors to this volume, rather than (wearyingly and ultimately unreward-

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ingly) arguing that human identities are constructed, instead emphasize the remarkable variousness of Victorian sexuality, and the complex specificity of those many particular identities—or sexualities—whose interrelations shape Victorian conceptions of themselves and others.

In beginning to distinguish among the mechanisms which recent constructionist practice have seen producing sexual identities, we can sketch out two general processes. The first is a particularly Foucauldian dynamic of normalization and discriminating exclusion by which a norm is produced and its status regulated through the construction of an isolated set of maligned identities. The potency of this form of power in the nineteenth century was part of Foucault's argument, as was the insistence that its formal consistency across cultural sites, disciplinary ventures, and historical moments only throws into vivid contrast the various sources of its power and the extreme differences within those behaviors qualifying as normative and perverse. Against images of (patriarchal, heterosexual, metropolitan) power as monolithic and oppressive, imposing itself on passive victims, this understanding traces a more intricate network of force and resistance that structures social relations.

Versions of this normalizing rhetoric are studied in many of the essays in this collection, as when Margaret Homans, for instance, argues that George Eliot's first two novels, set in the early decades of the century, retrospectively imagine the middle class as a natural phenomenon, "immutable and appropriate" (24), untroubled by the crises and contingencies of its actual historical emergence. The role of women in this revisionary project is central; their domestic distance from the public world of economic production and their definition "as a natural category" allowed them to be represented as transcending class more readily than men (28). The aim of sexual relations in the culture of these novels thus comes to be the acquisition by men of wives who can occlude the history of class emergence, thereby allowing the ostensible classlessness of women to appear as the signifier of middle-class status. As sexual differences seemingly supersede class differences, characters from the aristocracy and lower classes either are included in the middle-class norm or are defined as aberrant in their sexual practices. As Homans is careful to note, the regulation of "natural" sexual relations is selective: although characters like Hetty Sorel in *Adam Bede*, whose infanticide makes her unreclaimable, are cast out of the final tableau of middle-class harmony, others, like Mrs. Poyser and Arthur Donnithorne are included. To allow this flexibility, the representation of the "natural" varies: in *Adam Bede* it is emblematized by the awkwardly eroticized spiritual elevation of Dinah Morris; in *Mill on the Floss*, it finds its fullest representation in the consumer lust and commodification of Maggie.

The fluidity of this formal dynamic of normalization and discriminating exclusion, its availability for a range of social purposes, is central to its power. If Eliot's early novels reveal this process enabling "the representation of the middle-class as eternal, not *arriviste*, and the equation of its particular values with the universally human" (18), in Dickens's narratives of mid-century, sexual normalization is a

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project for the present and future, not the past, a means of escaping and redeeming a contagious social and maternal inheritance. As in Eliot's novels, the representation specifically of female sexuality allows the occlusion of class differences, but, in Dickens, as Deborah Nord argues, the occlusion of class by sexuality is perceived as a menace identically moral and physical. "The threat of disease from unsanitary urban conditions," specifically from the conditions of urban poverty, "and the spread of epidemic illnesses merged with the threat of disease and degeneration from exposure to infected female sexuality" (39). The hidden links between classes are made visible in diseases which must be regulated and redeemed; the expulsion of debased womanhood in *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* defines an uncorrupted womanhood which subsequently has, as its task, the expiation of the sins of those who have fallen. In this social vision, female sexuality is both the strongest contagion afflicting the social body and its most potent corrective.

Taken together, the essays by Homans and Nord demonstrate the varied powers of constructivist theory when put to use by feminist literary criticism. Examining especially resonant texts, the essays understand female sexuality as both a symptomatic convergence of immediate social contradictions and as a nexus for the culture's understanding of historical possibilities. Their rhetorical analyses of isolated textual moments and large narrative patterns tease out the logical problems, social dangers, and moral hazards which mid-Victorian writers addressed and avoided as they imagined sexuality. At the same time, both critics are attentive to the specifically literary nature of their texts; for both the intersection of the formal demands of romantic plots with social anxieties about female sexuality create generative narrative and ideological tensions. Feeling her attraction to Adam Bede, for instance, the angelic Dinah Morris resists being understood sexually. As Homans acutely observes, her repeated blushes mark both her awareness of her own sexual power and her ambivalence about it—and they allow the narrative suspense which culminates in her marriage to Adam. Like Dinah and Maggie Tulliver, Dickens's Esther Summerson must transcend sexuality and yet be the erotic object of desire. For both Eliot and Dickens, specific female sexual characteristics are essential traits of the middle class. But that sexuality is self-conscious and internally divided, a narrative opportunity and problem, a social hazard and possibility.

If these two literary essays, then, describe various forms of power produced by the social mechanisms of normalization and discriminating exclusion, Ornella Moscucci's "Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain" describes a second process of social validation, one similarly capable of organizing a range of ideological categories around the polarization of sexual traits. Victorian narratives of cultural progress chronicle sexual difference as an explicitly historical phenomenon; here, the progressive development of culture, rather than the recuperation and defense of normal characteristics, constructs the differences between the sexes and regulates their behaviors. Tracing the mapping of the female body by medical discourse, Moscucci argues that Victorian concepts of sexual difference organized representations of female genitalia: "If sexual divergence was an integral part of the evolutionary process, as Darwin

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claimed in 1871, in his *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, then it followed that civilization depended on women repressing their 'man-like' clitoris. The hypertrophied genitals of 'primitive' races," and the similar hypertrophy found in prostitutes, "stood as a warning that the whole process of evolution might go into reverse if gender roles were threatened" (72). Within this context, clitoridectomy could be seen to extend and support the evolutionary development of the race; if evolution was, as one writer remarked at the end of the century, "trying to do away with the clitoris" (72), then clitoridectomy was advancing this project. At the same time, however, the more numerous opponents of the practice also invoked evolutionary narratives to affiliate the operation with barbaric rituals: the doctors of London were by this light seen to "touch hands with the aboriginal spayers of New Zealand" (73). An evolutionary narrative, then, provides the armature for arguments both in favor of and against medical treatments for the "deviant" practices—masturbation and lesbianism most prominently—understood to derive from overdeveloped genitals. Sexual difference again is seen to establish norms of social behavior, but the construction of that difference is achieved through more distinctly evolutionary arguments.

Secure distinctions between these two narratives of social formation, the evolutionary and the normalizing, are difficult to sustain, and this difficulty is especially visible within Darwin's evolutionary narrative itself. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin adopts anthropological narratives which understand normative human behavior as a progressive development from uncivilized sexual behaviors understood as "savage"; again, the development of civilization, rather than the immutable verities of nature, is understood to form and authorize contemporary social and sexual arrangements. At the same time, however, Darwin attempts to forge a continuous biological narrative, one which again turns on sexual difference, stretching from animal activity through the behavior of savage populations to the sexual relations of contemporary human society. This biological narrative, like the literary tales told in Eliot's novels, naturalizes middle-class sexual relations by projecting them backwards in time; the continuity between animal and man centers on an anthropomorphic apprehension of animal sexual practices. Thus, as Rosemary Jann argues in chapter 5, the "patently 'unnatural' sexual behavior of primitive societies" proved to be a troubling and destabilizing phenomenon for Darwin, the category which displayed the tensions between the disciplinary narratives of biology and anthropology most acutely. More advanced than animals, according to the naturalizing narrative of biology, savage practices varied from what that narrative posited as natural behavior present in both civilized man and in animals.

The tension between civilizing narratives of progress, which construct sexual behavior according to norms of culture, and the normalizing process of discriminating exclusion returns in Jonathan Dollimore's "Perversion and Degeneration" which, like Moscucci's work on clitoridectomy, attends to the devolutionary trepidation inspired by sexualities labeled deviant. Arguments concerning *fin de siècle* degeneracy theory, like those popularized by Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, were based on the fear that the excessively civilized would fold over and into "the ex-

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cesses of the primitive" (97); the primitive, either retained vestigially within us or developing through the decay of an overripe civilization, thus propels both the narrative of development and the mechanisms of discriminating exclusion. What Dollimore has called the "perverse dynamic," in which "perverse deviation discloses something within or about (in proximity to) the normal which the latter must disavow in order to remain itself," describes in detail these mechanisms of discriminating exclusion. "The original proximity (or identity) of the perverse with the normal," he writes, "enables the latter to displace its own contradictions onto the former" (101). This displacement makes visible in the "perverse"—whether it is the "unspeakable" activities of Conrad's Kurtz, the homoerotic desire of Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, the primitive sexual behaviors of savage cultures or unlicensed female sexuality—the displaced contradictions within behavior and identities understood as normal. The contradictions of middle-class ascension, of male social power, and of civilized refinement, are transposed onto the aberrant characteristics against which they oppose themselves, allowing critics to see in those perverse elements the rifts within Victorian sexual norms.

These two broad lines of constructionist theory, marked by the attention to the construction of primitive and of perverse sexualities, have allowed, by a reflux action, a reconsideration of monolithic understandings of normative and dominant Victorian masculinity. *The Angel in the House*, cited by writers from Virginia Woolf on to exemplify the institutionalized inequalities of Victorian sexual difference, appears as a fundamental statement of what Joseph Bristow calls "the appalling absorption of femininity into a masculinist fantasy of mastery." While the angel in the house has as her task the moral elevation of man, her own value, status, and pleasures are both subordinate to and dependent upon his. The complex effects of naturalizing rhetoric seem reduced here into a more convenient narrative of simple male narcissism and self-aggrandizement. But, as Bristow indicates in chapter 7, Patmore's writing does not simply "bolster a punishing masculinity by denying the autonomy of its female object. Instead, the point would seem to be that the masculine subject can only retain his poetic identity by grounding it upon a principle of feminine grace" (132). Denying actual women the status of men, Patmore's verse nonetheless sees an ideal masculinity incorporating femininity within it. The *Angel* is, then, an "attempt by a male poet to be more feminine than any woman in his midst" (133). Patmore's frequent rewriting of the poem and the uncertainty and obscurity of its diction are seen in this light as effects of the destabilizing proximity of that femininity against which the male poet ostensibly defines himself.

The reconfiguration of normative masculinity by the incorporation of feminine traits during the 1860s proceeded in a graphically different fashion in the art and literary criticism of Swinburne and Pater. Understanding homosexual desire in relation to other forms of social practice, Thaïs Morgan analyses the writing of both figures as elements in what she calls, following Eve Sedgwick, an "aesthetic minoritizing discourse"; "a minoritizing discourse," Morgan writes, "is one in which the solidarity—and the essential alikeness—of a group that perceives itself to be in a minority position is presupposed and invoked at the same time as it is

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being constructed in the discourse itself" (141). For Swinburne this solidarity is built on an ideal of masculine androgyny which "incorporates qualities culturally associated with femininity while subordinating them to a fundamentally masculine figure" (143). For readers interested in expanding the "possibilities for gender identifications and sexual practices for men," as Morgan writes (143), Swinburne associates the image of the androgyne with the poetry of the French avant-garde (and Baudelaire in particular), thus presenting forms of sexual identity in aesthetic terms. Heterosexuality is displaced by this aestheticizing maneuver and male-male desire made central within an inclusive hierarchy of gendered traits. In his writing of the same period, Pater, by contrast, tactfully encourages his readers to imagine a "diaphanous" form of male beauty which, while reminiscent of Victorian femininity in its modesty and "moral expressiveness," ostensibly transcends sexuality. Like the ideal of Victorian femininity seen in Dinah Morris, this ideal uses sexlessness to allow a reconfiguration of gender; but that reconfiguration finally is one which exalts "diaphanous" beauty above the beauty of women and places a specifically homoerotic sexuality above a heterosexual one. In this fashion, Morgan's essay usefully demonstrates the rhetorical means by which the tensions that form around sexual discourses—here the tension between the aesthetic and the moral—can be exploited by minority groups to expand and render more flexible the normative standards of behavior.

The broad reach of the power of these regulatory mechanisms is graphically revealed in Herbert Tucker's study of the gendering of the soul by a series of nineteenth-century poets. As both the inspiring source of these representations and their object, the soul turns out to share the desires of mainstream heterosexual Victorian culture. In poems by Mary Tighe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emily Brontë, and Patmore, "the soul's gender finds ultimate expression in imagery of heterosexual union, which (perhaps because it is heterosexual, certainly because it is imagery) represents the soul's reintegration with itself on terms of hierarchically structured difference rather than conceptual identity. . . . If imagining the soul meant putting it into a body, then by the same token embodying it meant putting it into a system of cultural power" (164). The means by which this imagining was achieved differed; Tucker distinguishes between a fundamentally dualist allegorical position (characteristic of Brontë, for instance), in which the soul inevitably remains at a distance from the body and from perceptual representation, and a symbolic position (as in Patmore) which sees the soul as an "indwelling principle" (168), immanent and inevitably embodied. In either case, however, the soul was understood as feminized, either a besieged, vulnerable spirit trapped within the alien material of the body or harmoniously engaged in middle-class domesticity. And with this feminizing of the soul comes a sexualizing of the process of its poetic representation.

This sexualization of representation, visible both in the embodiment of the soul and in the ways that, through practices either abrasive or tactful, Swinburne and Pater negotiated among various readerships in order to reconfigure sexual desire, is the methodological focus of the final two contributions to the volume. These essays, by Martha Vicinus and Camilla Townsend, attend to the responses to and

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consequences of masculine impersonation as it was performed on the stage and in the streets of Victorian England. Vesta Tilley, the most famous male impersonator, epitomized turn-of-the-century respectability, carefully pruning away questionable material from the poignant roles of male vulnerability she performed in the music hall. The beautiful youths she portrayed—distantly recalling the diaphanous beauty Pater imagined—would have attracted the subculture of male homosexuals, but, as Vicinus notes, her strongest admirers were women who insisted upon seeing her in character; her sexual undecidability was the main source of her attractiveness for them (195). Sarah Bernhardt articulates an alternative erotic image, affected, overstated and more readily available to varied interpretations; while male homosexuals also saw in her a cult figure, her lesbian fans, including Natalie Barney, imitated her in dress and manner. There was a "dense web of cross-references between . . . lesbians and male homosexual" aficionados (201). Finally, in Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins*, the erotic, if unfocused, love between the cross-dressed female Tenor and "The Boy," as the Tenor's companion is dubbed, expresses a desire either man-boy or lesbian. The convoluted erotics of their scenes together, like the cross-dressed performances of Tilley and Bernhardt, produced a range of responses from readers. For each of them, as Vicinus demonstrates, the possible consequences of the sexual roles they adopt are diverse but not indefinite, and each distinct role carried with it its own valences, produced its own varied responses.

The subversion implicit in the varieties of cross-dressed women depicted on stage and in novels became explicit when they exited onto the street; the rhetoric with which turn-of-the-century reporters described "mannish" suffragists, associating them with lesbians, demonstrates these writers' fear that suffragists were usurping male power. An equally complex reception of a non-theatrical cross-dressed role is recovered in Camilla Townsend's chapter on Sarah Geals, a working-class Londoner of the 1860s. Living as the husband of a woman known only as Caroline, Geals's cross-dressing was detected by her employer, a shoemaker who, on making the discovery, forced her to dress as a woman—and then himself married Caroline. When, some months subsequently, Geals fired a gun at her former employer, the entire drama entered the criminal records. One fascination of the narrative Townsend reconstructs lies in the lack of interest exhibited by reporters in the violence which was the immediate cause of Sarah's fame; maintaining a respectable working class and Christian mode of living until her attack on Giles, Sarah was of interest primarily as a woman living as a man. The attitude adopted by members of the press towards her cross-dressing varied sharply, depending on the readership of the newspaper: large respectable middle-class papers like the *Times* condescended and condemned her, while local working-class papers like the *Shoreditch Observer* and *Shoreditch Advertiser* explicitly sanctioned her actions.

Both the sympathetic attention paid by local papers and the censorious remarks in the national press provide little information about the sexual relation between the two women. Townsend divides her analysis of Sarah's case between an empirical narrative of Sarah's life and a systematic cultural analysis of the gender rela-

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tions involved in mid-century cross-dressing. But neither of these analytical models allows for the recuperation of the specifically sexual relation between the two women. Other social historians have similarly remarked on the "huge evidentiary gaps and absences" that beset the historical study of sexuality (Seidman 55); "the bedroom," as F. M. L. Thompson remarks, "is a largely unrecorded area" (57). The practical reasons for this elusiveness—the limitations of the historical record—are compounded by the methodological debates which we have charted through this introduction.[8] As Carol Vance writes in reference specifically to gay and lesbian history,

> to the extent that social construction theory grants that sexual identities and even desire are mediated by cultural and historical identities, the object of study—sexuality—becomes evanescent and threatens to disappear. If sexuality is constructed differently at each time and place, can we use the term in a comparatively meaningful way? More to the point in lesbian and gay history, have constructionists undermined their own categories? Is there an "it" to study? (quoted in Chauncey, 6)[9]

As the topics included in this collection suggest, the highly visible elusiveness of sex as a discursive production and historical topic has stimulated responses from scholars working in a wide range of disciplines. Because sexuality is a topic which, in the current intellectual discourse, escapes easy classification, a range of discourses are being deployed to trace out its nuances; and those discourses then must negotiate their own differences, speaking to each other across disciplinary boundaries, comparing methods and conceptual assumptions. Sexuality encourages multidisciplinary ventures, and this collection of essays, like the special issue of *Victorian Studies* from which it emerged, was inspired not only by a desire to bring together some of the best work being done on this particular subject but also because we recognized that the subject, more than many others, offered an opportunity to consider current work in a range of related topics and through a variety of methodologies. Of course the topics represented in the essays that follow do not exhaust those being considered by critics of Victorian sexuality; the practical and conceptual difficulties which we have detailed make even claims of representativeness impossible. While the methods of some fields, English and Cultural Studies most notably, dominate work being done, there remain several topics which have only begun to get the attention they merit: studies of sexuality as represented by colonial or "hybrid" subjects; studies of lesbian history; gay history in the mid-Victorian period; working-class sexuality. We hope that this collection will encourage further study in those fields.

NOTES

1. In *On Liberty*, *Culture and Anarchy*, and *Picture of Dorian Gray*, respectively.

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2. In addition to Cott's essay, see, for instance, that by Davidoff and the collections by Vicinus, and Hartman and Banner.

3. For a variety of histories specifically responsive to Foucault's account of the construction of the homosexual, see Weeks, Dollimore, and Cohen; for studies of Victorian sexu-

alities more generally indebted to Foucault's reconfiguration of sexuality as discourse, see Walkowitz, Nead, and Mort.

4. See Padgug for an initial and influential statement of the constructionist position; Halperin and Stanton provide more recent arguments and valuable sets of references. Steven Heath's famous suggestion that essentialism must sometimes be "risked" provides perhaps the earliest suggestion that the theoretical purity of constructionism obstructed immediate political ends. Similarly, in reviewing the work of the Subaltern Studies group, Gayatri Spivak wrote of the value of "a *strategic* use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible interest" and associated such a strategy with Foucault, among others (205). Finally, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick presents her categories of "minoritizing" and "universalizing" discourses as an attempt to reformulate the terms of the constructivist/essentialist impasse.

5. Wayne Dynes similarly notes that "the odd thing is that this is a battle in which only one army is engaged" and this leads him to suggest that the "essentialist" may be a construction of the social constructionists (Stein 217).

6. See Plaza and Woodhull.

7. The contributions to *Feminism and Foucault*, for instance, are remarkable in their generally admiring attitude toward Foucault's work. For an early and more critical view, see Balbus.

8. For various views on the scarcity of documentation, see Chauncey, Freedman, Stearns and Seidman.

9. The arguments within lesbian history around Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* underscore this point: the varying political stakes in defining lesbianism as an affective and romantic relationship or as a specific collection of sexual and physical acts are clarified (though not resolved) by considering the issue historically. See Vicinus's useful essay, " 'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong'," and Jeffries.

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TWO

Dinah's Blush, Maggie's Arm

Class, Gender, and Sexuality in George Eliot's Early Novels

Margaret Homans

Beginning in the 1830s, it was possible for British writers to represent the middle class as the only class. Henry Brougham famously stated that "by the people . . . I mean the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name" (qtd. in Briggs, "Language" 11). With a deftly deployed tautology, Sarah Ellis in 1838 defends her decision to write about "the female population of Great Britain" (16) by writing only about the middle class:

> In order to speak with precision of the characteristics of any class of people, it is necessary to confine our attention as much as possible to that portion of the class where such characteristics are most prominent; and, avoiding the two extremes where circumstances not peculiar to that class are supposed to operate, to take the middle or intervening portion as a specimen of the whole. (18)

"Class of people" in this passage refers, ostensibly, to "the female population," but by denominating them a "class" Ellis implicitly equates all women with one particular social class. Moreover, in order to assert that the characteristics of the women of England are "most prominent" among the middle classes, Ellis has already, tautologically, determined that middle-class characteristics are what is typically British.

Although at this date the middle class is not a numerical majority of Britain's population, Ellis can make it seem so:

> [W]hen we consider the number, the influence, and the respectability of that portion of the inhabitants who are, directly, or indirectly, connected with our trade and merchandise, it does indeed appear to constitute the *mass* of English society, and may justly be considered as exhibiting the most striking and unequivocal proofs of what are the peculiar characteristics of the people of England. (18)

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"Respectability," that prototypically middle-class virtue, is slipped in here among other more clearly objective measures of hegemony (influence and number) to suggest that her bias toward the middle class is merely a matter of numbers. She enlarges the middle class by appropriating to it a term usually reserved for the working classes, "*mass*." Ellis goes on to explain why neither the aristocracy nor the "indigent and most laborious" are typical of the British, because they lack what she has already decided is "typical." She writes that we cannot "with propriety look for those strong features of nationality" among the poor, because "the urgency of mere physical wants" makes England's working class much like those in other countries. Although she uses "propriety" here to mean "appropriateness," the word's connotations of "properness" mean that, again, a middle-class virtue masquerades as an impartial rule of observation. Looking *with* propriety, Ellis will only *see* propriety, and from here on, she essentially erases the upper and lower classes.

Adam Bede and *The Mill on the Floss* work in much the same way. Not only generalizing mid-Victorian middle-class qualities to other classes but also projecting them backward in time, Eliot's early novels universalize the British middle class and, in so doing, align themselves with other efforts to consolidate middle-class hegemony in the nineteenth century. Eliot, having internalized middle-class norms, universalizes the middle class by making its peculiar characteristics appear natural, generically human ones, and she naturalizes those characteristics, much as Ellis does, by naturalizing Victorian middle-class womanhood as womanhood itself. When she herself wants to make more money from the publication of one of her novels, she relabels her class aspirations as the natural sympathy of a selfless Victorian woman: "I may say without cant—since I am in a position of anxiety for others as well as myself—that it is my duty to seek not less than the highest reasonable advantage from my work" (*Letters* 3: 219; 30 Nov. 1859). In constructing her heroines as in writing about money, Eliot represents partisanship for the middle class as supposedly classless domesticity and morality, a morality specifically identified with woman. For Eliot, whose career took her from the bottom of the middle class to the top, from estate manager's daughter to wealthy Londoner with her own carriage and pair, middle-class life encompasses all the possibilities of life itself, and her novels make class and gender work together to consolidate middle-class hegemony.

In undertaking to read Eliot's fiction in this way, I am taking part in a recent widespread feminist endeavor to articulate the relation of gender to class. In 1984 Cora Kaplan argued that class and sexual difference "reciprocally constitut[e] each other" and that "to understand how gender and class . . . are articulated together transforms our analysis of them" (148). Among others, Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong have been prominent in beginning to reveal what that reciprocal constitution of class and gender might mean in nineteenth-century Britain. Of the Victorian separation of spheres into the highly artificial constructs of public, political, marketplace male and domesticated, moralizing female, Poovey writes: "de-

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ployments of the domestic ideal helped depoliticize class relations at midcentury, partly by translating class difference into psychological or moral difference" (9). She adds that the "rhetorical separation of spheres and the image of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power" (10). Representing the constructed and volatile divisions of social class through, and as, the immutable division of supposedly natural sexual difference enables the representation of the middle class as eternal, not *arriviste*, and the equation of its particular values with the universally human.

Like Poovey, Armstrong sees the emphasis of nineteenth-century fiction on individual psychology as a displacement of class politics: "over time the novel produced a language of increasing psychological complexity for understanding individual behavior . . . as fiction progressively uncovered the 'depths' of individual identity, a complex system of political signs was displaced" (253). In Armstrong's view, the middle class, to make itself appear eternal and universal, represented its version of the self as a classless subjectivity that would appear not constructed but "natural, [and it] also removed subjective experience and sexual practices from their place in history" (9). For Armstrong it is the domestic, psychologically profound, sexual female self whose construction as natural and universal is the key to middle-class ascendency, and that is where Dinah's blush and Maggie's arm come in.

Armstrong's study, focusing as it does on fiction from the eighteenth century through the 1840s, can only hint at the particular ways in which the privatizing and psychologizing of the female self come to represent middle-class ascendency in the novels of the prosperous mid- and late-Victorian period. Neither the pattern she traces in novels of the 1840s, in which she finds that the replacement of a monstrous, sexual woman by a domesticated one represents the taming of the threatening working classes, nor her oblique representation of later Victorian fiction through *Shirley* and Darwin, where Armstrong sees the middle-class woman civilizing *aggressive* males, quite fits Eliot's novels of 1859 and 1860. Although Hetty and Maggie are lower class (in Maggie's case, only relatively so) and intensely sexual women, and although both die, I will argue that the working class, like the aristocracy, is not so much expelled in these later novels as included in a vision of all-comprehending middle-class ascendency. Moreover, I will argue that the sexual woman—in the case of *The Mill on the Floss* a threateningly sexual woman—and the civilizing middle-class woman are one. Dinah becomes a signifier of domesticity only when she acquires self-conscious sexuality; Maggie signifies middle-class values, paradoxically, by way of her excessive sexuality.

Unlike most of the novels on which Armstrong focuses (the exception is *Wuthering Heights*), both these novels are set in the past, demonstrating that middle-class habits and values are present not only in all levels of British society but also at all times. Armstrong argues that representations of the middle-class female self predate the economic grounding of that self by at least a hundred years, because they begin in the eighteenth century. Eliot's retrospective novels complement the project Armstrong argues for in the earlier novels: written at a time when that

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middle-class female self is a social reality as well as a fictive construct, Eliot's novels authoritatively project backward an actual condition that Armstrong claims earlier novels could only imagine.

I

Adam Bede closes with a tableau, dated 1807, striking for its phantasmic representation of a Victorian middle-class family long before that social form became dominant and in the kind of rural location where it took root the slowest. Adam, formerly a wage-earning artisan, has taken over Jonathan Burge's carpentry business and his substantial house, and he also earns a salary managing the Donnithornes' woods. Adam and Dinah live with their two children, and Uncle Seth is a familiar visitor. Almost certainly their household includes at least one servant; in Burge's day a servant worked there, and earlier Adam has assured his mother that they can afford one. Seven years after the events recounted in the last chapter, Dinah's face has grown "plumper" (Adam's term) "to correspond to her more matronly figure" (583, 581). Entirely domesticated, Dinah has ceased preaching in public, because of a methodist decree against female preachers, with which Adam (explicitly) and she (tacitly) agree. She no longer works in the cotton-mill nor, it seems, does productive home agricultural work like Mrs. Poyser, for Dinah's house is not a farm. We learn that Hetty, who never left the agricultural working class, has died while returning from her seven years' transportation. The family party is waiting for Adam to return from greeting Arthur Donnithorne, who has come home "shattered" by fever (582) from his own voluntary exile. Hetty gone and Arthur diminished, this prosperous nuclear family fills the picture frame of Eliot's purportedly realist portrait of rural life, having taken up all the space previously occupied by the "extremes" (Ellis's term) of upper and lower classes.

With this sweet family picture of what Philip Fisher calls "the new center of power" (65), the novel presents a proleptic image of the middle-class family triumphant. Although Adam's home is still, in the old way, his workplace, the narrative's focus on a moment when he returns home to his family creates the illusion of a Victorian separation of home and work.[1] By the standards not of 1807 but of 1859, Dinah at home, straining her eyes to catch sight of her entrepreneurial husband, is the chief signifier of what will be the Victorian middle class, at least its bottom rung. Sarah Ellis defines her middle-class readership (and subject) as women in households supported by "trade and manufactures." Adam's ambitious carpentry business, in which he invents and builds new devices to market, is a form of manufacture, even if it is not industrialized and would not be for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Joan Burstyn defines the middle class as households with over £100 of annual income, and since Adam earned a guinea a week superintending the Donnithornes' woods when he started the job in 1799, he may well earn something like £100 annually now. Ellis further defines the middle-class household as "restricted to the services of from one to four domestics" (24), very

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likely the case in the Bedes' household. That household, then, is a forerunner of the Victorian middle-class home, a sentimentalized image projected backward from Eliot's day onto Adam's.

After the publication of *Adam Bede* Eliot received a letter of praise from Jane Carlyle. Of this letter Eliot writes to John Blackwood that "I reckon it among my best triumphs that she found herself 'in charity with the whole human race' when she laid the book down." She adds: "Will you tell her that the sort of effect she declares herself to have felt from 'Adam Bede' is just what I desire to produce—gentle thoughts and happy remembrances" (*Letters* 3: 23–24, 24 Feb. 1859). As Mary Jean Corbett points out, citing Carlyle's letter and similar comments, this is a remarkable response to a novel that includes cross-class seduction, infanticide, and so much emotional suffering. Middle-class readers like Carlyle loved the nostalgic, pastoral mood of the novel and its workers ennobled through suffering who make the reader from another class feel "that we are all alike—that the human heart is one" (E. S. Dallas, qtd. in Corbett 292). The cumulative effect of such goodwill is, I would argue, concentrated onto the final tableau and the ideological program that becomes explicit only there: the idyllic picture of Adam and Dinah's domesticity filling the frame, all disharmonious elements—that is, those who belong to other classes—expunged or pushed to the margins.[2] For the middle-class reader and writer alike, the epilogue would represent the ascendency, not of something narrowly defined and marked as one class rather than another, but of middle-class values masquerading as universal values. Carlyle's phrase, "in charity with the whole human race," makes this equation with particular effectiveness; the term with which she denotes the transcendence of class boundaries, "charity," names a leisure activity of middle-class females. The middle-class family becomes the norm, and that makes the middle-class reader "happy."

This "ideologically induced Victorian blindness to the operation of class dynamics" (Corbett 292) is, paradoxically, achieved through a plot that details the subtle gradations of class difference and class mobility with extraordinary care. Readings like Carlyle's and Dallas's, as Corbett points out, reflect a vision of the novel in which Eliot "stabilizes [the] historical past," preferring "static order" to "the process of historical change" (288), a vision shared by as recent a reader as Sally Shuttleworth. The process leading to the static vision of the epilogue, however, involves an extraordinarily complex negotiation of historical change. And even if the ending is itself static, it represents a world very changed from that of the opening. Poised between the old and new, the novel, like *The Mill on the Floss*, traces the process of transition even as it compresses that transition by locating it backward in time.

How does the novel arrive at its final tableau? Ostensibly, Adam's deliberate and clearly marked economic rise determines his family's status. He starts out a wage-earning carpenter living in his parents' house, earns extra money by his own carpentry business, gets promoted to manager of the Donnithornes' woods, and eventually buys out his former employer's business and establishment. He is a self-made man, just as the middle class as a whole manufactured and traded itself into

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existence. And yet his self-construction is represented in a peculiar sort of harmony with the feudal order of the countryside, an order that is so old as to seem natural, like the hereditary "ranks" Eliot celebrates in "The Natural History of German Life."[3] F. M. L. Thompson demonstrates that the building trades were not susceptible to mechanization and remained very little changed over the course of the nineteenth century while industrialization was transforming such industries as cloth or iron manufacturing (45–46). *Adam Bede*, in thus representing middle-class aspiration and the work ethic through a static trade, fosters the view that the middle class was always there and associates the inclusive middle class with an unthreatening form of work. Carpentry involves none of the dangerous factories and rebellious factory operatives that generate class conflict in industrial novels such as Gaskell's *Mary Barton*.

The novel in other ways encourages the view that Adam's rise threatens no one by naturalizing the social ranks of the neighborhood. Daniel Cottom points out that the novel associates Arthur and his family with classical divinities (Arthur is Jupiter, or Eros to Hetty's Psyche; Mrs. Irwine is Ceres), thus suggesting that their rank is timeless, even though, as Cottom points out, Eliot also exposes the constructedness of their class by deriving these associations from the literatures of Arthur's gentlemanly education (87). Similarly, to extend Cottom's line of argument, in the very first scene Adam speaks admiringly of "Arkwright's mills" and other products and agencies of modern industry, but he does so while "carving a shield in the center of a wooden mantelpiece" (49; see Shuttleworth 24). This work signifies both his superior skills and his desire to uphold, to refresh and renew, the aristocracy whose coats of arms are a bit faded; in the next chapter the weatherbeaten sign at the Donnithorne Arms inn is illegible. Adam is extremely proud of Arthur's high regard for him, and he owes his first major rise in status to Arthur's patronage. This rise is elaborately staged at Arthur's birthday feast as Adam's ascent from the ordinary tables at ground level to the "large tenants' " tables on the second story, an ascent physically contained within the structure of aristocratic dominance.

Part of the happy feeling at the end of the novel comes from this conciliatory representation of Adam's rise. The aristocracy is not overturned, merely trivialized or diminished, as Cottom argues. Middle-class ascendency must be made to seem gradual and organic, not revolutionary; otherwise it would invite its own overthrow. It occurs to no one, for example, that Arthur might give away the Donnithorne estate in penance or in recompense for his violation of Hetty and her family. He ends the novel still in control of the estates that Adam still manages for him, even if he is also a much diminished presence. That class structure remains as it was makes middle-class ascendency, endorsed by the class it supersedes, all the more secure. In this regard Eliot's novel almost completely covers up its own contradictoriness about the relation of class to nature. On one side, the view that rank is natural and timeless (the view crystallized in the essay on Riehl, but embodied also in the portrayal of Loamshire) would suggest that members of the peasantry or artisan classes, such as Adam, have no business ascending into the

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middle class, and that the middle class is as stable as any other. On the other, the middle class is made to seem equivalent to "nature," to human life itself, and thus to be the most or even the only "natural rank," thus violating the boundary that the first sense of "natural rank" would seem to draw around the middle class. Adam's rise is made to reconcile even while it exposes these contradictions, to accrue by sleight of hand the authority of opposing senses of "natural rank."

Adam's rise and Arthur's decline are naturalized not only by being incorporated into the more apparently natural old rural order, but also through gender. Arthur's aristocratic assumption that he can always pay for damage to a lower-class person's life—the mental safety net he creates for his guilt about seducing Hetty—is refuted by Adam, who insists on confronting Arthur "man and man" (354). Through this refusal to let Arthur pay, the novel deprives him of his class superiority. Says Adam, "I don't forget what's owing to you as a gentleman; but in this thing we're man and man, and I can't give up."[4] "Man and man" means that their shared gender is more important than their class difference, which is to say that shared gender supersedes and neutralizes class difference. For Adam at that moment, there is no class, only gender—two men fighting over a woman. If only "men" (and women) now populate a world undivided by other social categories, and if Adam is entitled to create the moral definition of "man," then, as in the epilogue, Adam's middle-class values, such as hard work and chastity, have been naturalized as human values.

Adam's status is naturalized in these ways, but still his career includes a change in class that calls attention to class itself. To construct the naturalness and universality of the middle-class family in a way that does away with class markers altogether, the novel turns to the career of Dinah. Armstrong, Davidoff and Hall, and others have argued that Victorian wives' most important job was to act as signifiers of their husbands' status, and this is true of Dinah as well, in her achievement of something that looks like middle-class status, in her natural classlessness, and in her skill at merging these two characteristics.

From the start Dinah's class position is less distinct than Adam's, and for reasons directly attributable to her gender. Whereas Adam's status is determined by his work and changes sequentially, Dinah occupies two different niches at the same time, one determined by family, one by work, as the following exchange early in the novel makes clear:

> "Poyser wouldn't like to hear as his wife's niece was treated any ways disrespectful. . . . Seth's looking rether too high, I should think," said Mr. Casson. "This woman's kin wouldn't like her to demean herself to a common carpenter."
>
> [Wiry Ben says in response] "what's folks's kin got to do wi't?—Not a chip. . . . This Dinah Morris, th' tell me, 's as poor as iver she was—works at a mill, an's much ado to keep hersen. A strappin' young carpenter as is ready-made Methody, like Seth, wouldna be a bad match for her." (65–66)

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By family a member of the old agricultural middle ranks, but by her own exertions a mill-worker, Dinah occupies two stations.

This status ambiguity corresponds interestingly to Sarah Ellis's account of women's class position, or rather their lack of any certain one. In a world in which the boundaries of rank are becoming less and less clear, because wealth is now as important a determinant of status as birth, she warns her readers that in their dependency on unstable commercial fortunes, they may suddenly be "compelled to mingle with the laborious poor." Therefore she recommends "a system of conduct that would enable all women to sink gracefully . . . into a lower grade of society" (25). All women, Ellis argues, because of their special susceptibility to status changes, should know how to work with their hands and how to perform the moral work of sympathy, which are two of Dinah's cross-class specialties.

For indeed Dinah is made to represent values that cross all class boundaries. As Cottom writes, "Dinah possesses a gentility . . . entirely superior to the misleading distinctions of social rank" (88). But it is especially Dinah's spirituality that carries her across class lines. As a preacher, she can go anywhere and speak as an equal to anyone, from the poorest laborer to the Rev. Irwine (see Beer 63). Says Mrs. Poyser, "You look like the statty o' the outside o' Treddles'on church, a-starin' and a-smilin' whether it's fair weather or foul" (124). Lisbeth Bede, when Dinah appears unexpectedly, takes Dinah for a "spirit," perhaps an "angel" (153–54). "Ye've got a'most the face o' one as is a-sittin' on the grave i' Adam's new Bible." Elsewhere the novel associates Dinah with Mary and with St. Catherine. Dinah herself argues for transcendent values; in response to Lisbeth's idea that people at Snowfield differ from those at Hayslope, Dinah says, anticipating responses to the novel like those of Jane Carlyle and E. S. Dallas, "the heart of man is the same everywhere" (157). What Dinah calls divine inspiration, her angelic ability to say just what suffering people need to hear, the novel naturalizes as her human goodness, her womanly tact. Her class positions could be said to cancel each other out and to be superseded by her spiritually elevated woman's nature.

Although Dinah works in a cotton-mill (probably a spinning mill) as well as preaches, it is worth noting that the narrative, which lingers at Adam's workplace and dwells lovingly, too, on the hand spinning that still goes on at the Poysers', never details that determinant of Dinah's lower and more distinct class position. Factory spinning, in contrast to the unmodernizable building trades, is part of the threatening modernity from which Eliot seeks to protect her idealized image of the middle class. In any case, by the end of the novel Dinah's social mobility has been contained. She no longer either preaches or works in a factory, and she appears at the end as matronly wife and mother. Plenty of married women and mothers continued to work in the mills; in Dinah's case, owing to her new class status, marriage excludes such work.

Having simply erased Dinah's work in the mill, the novel carefully delineates the course of Dinah's progress from preacher to domestic woman, those of her roles that are more compatible with each other. At the Poysers', the children "had managed to convert Dinah the preacher, before whom a circle of rough men had often trembled a little, into a convenient household slave" (533), and during her stay with them Dinah, who was already an expert housekeeper when she visited

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Lisbeth Bede early in the novel, "had made great advances in household cleverness" (534). Among her last public appearances—significantly, narrated by Seth to Adam at the moment when Adam has decided to marry her—is an episode in which her preaching serves chiefly a domestic function. Seth describes how a "naughty" little boy is silenced and stilled by the sound of Dinah's voice,

> "and presently he run away from 's mother and went up to Dinah, and pulled at her, like a little dog, for her to take notice of him. So Dinah lifted him up and held th' lad on her lap, while she went on speaking; and he was as good as could be till he went t' sleep—and the mother cried to see him." (547–48)

Dinah's cross-class natural womanliness has been captured into the service of middle-class values—the angel lives on in the matron—but, importantly, without being marked as such. Because the domesticity of the epilogue must appear natural and normal, not marked as middle-class, the novel creates in Dinah a deliberately cross-class or classless figure to serve as its presiding genius. As a wife, she marks Adam's success as also transcending class; his own rise may be clearly middle-class, but marriage to her allows the novel to claim universality for both of them.

The novel also naturalizes middle-class values by replacing class hierarchy with gender hierarchy, in a way that Armstrong, Poovey, and others have taught us to be alert to. Arthur's birthday party represents a ritual mixing of classes that serves to confirm class boundaries. While Arthur entertains his tenants and workers with food and drink, they provide the entertainment of spectacle for him and his friends and relatives. In this picturesque, nostalgic episode, rank is maintained through the placing of tables and the degree of Arthur's attentions. Adam's nearly feudal deference toward Arthur at this point in the novel helps reinforce this sense that class boundaries are immutable and appropriate. Once Arthur has been discredited for seducing Hetty, however, and Adam and Arthur have become "man and man," the novel shifts its focus to hierarchy in other locations.

Dinah and Adam have never been differentiated along class lines. The conversation between Mr. Casson and Wiry Ben about Dinah's ambiguous class position, both higher and lower than Seth Bede, covers her status relative to Adam as well, and the novel in any case never dwells on the subject. Toward the end of the novel appears a little scene between Adam and Dinah that does place them in a hierarchy, but a hierarchy of gender, not of class. By now transformed from angelic preacher to domestic woman, Dinah is a woman self-consciously in love, not the neutral friend Adam takes her for. Dinah is visiting Lisbeth Bede prior to leaving Hayslope, and the narrative humiliatingly and sentimentally dwells upon Dinah's obsession with housework:

> if you had ever lived in Mrs. Poyser's household, you would know how the duster behaved in Dinah's hand—how it went into every small corner, and on every ledge in and out of sight—how it went again and again round every bar of the chairs, and every leg, and under and over everything that lay on the table, till it came to Adam's

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> papers and rulers, and the open desk near them. Dinah dusted up to the very edge of these, and then hesitated, looking at them with a longing but timid eye. It was painful to see how much dust there was among them. (535)

Who could say whether her strongest emotions are for Adam or for dusting? Desire and domestic servitude are one.

Adam catches her pathetic struggle between fear of disturbing his things and eagerness to dust, and offers his help:

> "Come then," said Adam, looking at her affectionately, "I'll help you move the things, and put 'em back again, and then they can't be wrong. You're getting to be your aunt's own niece, I see, for particularness."
>
> They began their little task together, but Dinah had not recovered herself sufficiently to think of any remark. . . . He wanted her to look at him, and be as pleased as he was himself with doing this bit of playful work. But Dinah would not look at him. (536)

For Adam, who does manly work with his head and hands, dusting is a "playful bit of work," but it is Dinah's vocation, at least her only remaining one. The scene exaggerates the distance between them as male and female, in contrast to earlier representations of them as more or less equals. As at Arthur's party, the carnival aspect of the scene, the temporary overturning of hierarchy, in effect confirms it, but here it is gender rather than class hierarchy. Adam's participation in cleaning, because it is only play, points up how entirely separate his sphere is now from hers.

The harvest supper at the end of the novel revises the class hierarchy of Arthur's birthday party, at which rank is maintained through the placing of tables and the degree of Arthur's attention. The Poysers put on their annual roast-beef feast for their workers, just as Arthur annually invites his tenants to eat with him. And again, the mingling of classes accentuates their difference. Mr. Poyser presides in the place of Arthur, and the scene at first appears simply to replicate relations between the gentry and the lower classes in terms of the relations between the middle and lower classes, so as, like the epilogue, to dramatize the subtle displacement of Arthur's class. But there are important differences of another kind. At Arthur's party the sexes mingle; women (including Hetty) sit at the tables in the upper hall as well as below; what is marked is class distinction. At the harvest supper, gender categories are just as marked as class. The feast is only for the men, excluding Nancy and Molly, and the women serve. The condescending description of the festivities emphasizes the crude, rowdy masculinity of the working men. Moreover, the scene ends with a very peculiar and unresolved battle of the sexes between Bartle Massey—the novel's personification of misogyny—and Mrs. Poyser, over the relative intelligence and merits of men and women.

> "Ah!" said Bartle, sneeringly, "the women are quick enough—they're quick enough. They know the rights of a story before they hear it, and can tell a man what his thoughts are before he knows 'em himself."
>
> "Like enough," said Mrs. Poyser; "for the men are mostly so slow, their thoughts

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> overrun 'em, an' they can only catch 'em by the tail. . . . Howiver, I'm not denyin' the women are foolish: God Almighty made 'em to match the men."
>
> "Match!" said Bartle; "ay, as vinegar matches one's teeth." (568–69)

The debate continues for a few more exchanges, with other participants intervening. Mrs. Poyser is preparing yet one more rejoinder, however, when her voice is simply drowned out by the din of the working men drunkenly singing. An ellipsis marks the interruption after Mrs. Poyser's last words. The debate is unended, terminated only by masculine force.

The lack of resolution, as well as the abstract terms in which it is conducted ("men" and "women," not particular individuals), makes this confrontation archetypal, as if it were part of a debate going on beyond the confines of the novel and beginning and ending nowhere. This curious exchange, which has no plot function, typifies the novel's shift of emphasis from class to gender hierarchy. Adam's conflict with Arthur over Hetty stems from class differences, yet when he knocks Arthur unconscious, Adam insists that he does it simply as a man. Class is not allowed to be the source of violence, in this novel that produces in its readers "gentle thoughts and happy remembrances," but gender is. Apparently, gentle thoughts are not compatible with working-class *ressentiment*, but they are compatible with, and perhaps require, male violence toward women, which underwrites the status quo.

The debate between Mrs. Poyser and Bartle Massey also returns to an earlier scene of Mrs. Poyser's verbal aggressiveness and revises it so as again to emphasize the substitution of gender for class. Although the narrator seems generally to approve of Mrs. Poyser's "hav[ing] her say out" (393) against the despicable Squire, her revolutionary outburst also creates some anxiety, since it may lead to the Poysers' eviction and an unsettling of the old order. She threatens the Squire as an economic subordinate as well as a woman; her authority for speaking rests on the fact that, as dairywoman, she "make[s] one quarter o' the rent, and save[s] th' other quarter" (394). At the harvest supper, Mrs. Poyser confronts Bartle strictly as a woman, since class difference is not an issue between them. Whereas she could be said to win the confrontation with the Squire, the violence that cuts off her debate with Bartle would seem to vanquish her absolutely, because it is physical, and as a woman she is not physically strong. What seems a matter of anxiously and fruitfully complex negotiation earlier in the novel becomes a simple matter of male dominance at the end.

The shouting down of Mrs. Poyser makes a rather unhappy prelude to Dinah's wedding, which follows swiftly. The final scene, with Dinah as wife silenced and contained within the home, suggests how the apparent simplicity of natural gender hierarchy displaces the disturbing arbitrariness of class hierarchy. That the eccentric painfulness of the Poyser-Massey exchange, with its concluding ellipsis, remains a loose end in the novel reminds readers of the cost, in female comfort, of that displacement.

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Silenced though they may be, neither Dinah nor Mrs. Poyser is expelled from

the world of the novel; both are lovingly contained within it. The harvest supper chapter ends not with the violent cutting off of Mrs. Poyser's speech but with Adam's affectionate defense of her to Bartle. Co-optation and inclusion—even of "a terrible woman!—made of needles" (570)—seems more desirable than expulsion.[5] Hetty, however, is excised from the novel's safe conclusion, and her crime of infanticide surely qualifies her as monstrous. Unlike Mrs. Poyser and Dinah, too, she never ceases to be a figure for both femaleness and class subordination, never becomes simply a woman. Hers is distinctively a woman's crime, but she commits it not just as a woman but as a working woman who is too class-proud to consider going to the poorhouse. Like Dinah's, Hetty's class position is ambiguous. She is a farm worker by occupation, but higher up by family situation, so that her ambition to rise—in terms of occupational status—by becoming a lady's maid is viewed by her uncle as lowering her status. And like Dinah too she is represented as transcending her class position, even if strictly through her looks. At Arthur's party the upper-class women comment on the beauty which it is "a pity" to see "thrown away on the farmers, when it's wanted so terribly among the good families without fortune!" (319). Nonetheless, Hetty's love of Arthur is always explicitly mingled with her desire for luxury and her hope that he will make her a "grand lady" (196), and this insistent classing of her desire is part of what makes her a culpable and therefore expendable character (see Clayton 41). She cannot—unlike Dinah, Mrs. Poyser, and, as we will see, Maggie—be completely naturalized as woman, and that means she cannot be completely incorporated within the universalizing middle-class ideal.

Hetty's sexuality, much more openly expressed than Dinah's, is part of her representation as working class. Her uncontrolled desires distinguish her from the angelic Dinah, part of whose characterization as class-transcendent is her complete lack of self-consciousness about herself as a sexual body. Yet here the novel nearly founders on a paradox. Because the novel's strategy for universalizing middle-class values depends on equating class transcendence with angelic transcendence, Dinah must not be sexual; and yet to marry Adam so as to become the signifier of his rising status, Dinah must become sexualized over the course of the novel. The novel must construct for her a sexuality that can appear as classless as her asexuality once did. Indeed, the narrative is particularly emphatic on the point that Dinah's self-conscious desire for Adam predates his for her by many months. Moreover, Dinah must also acquire self-consciousness and have desires for herself, the hallmark of bourgeois individualism (in "The Natural History of German Life" the peasantry contains no individuals, only types; individuality is the hallmark of the middle class), even while she remains aloof from any particular class, so that she can represent simultaneously middle-class ideology and classlessness. Dinah says that to let herself love Adam would be to risk becoming a "lover of self" (553), and this she resists, seeing an opposition between selfishly loving Adam and continuing her selfless ministry. How does the novel manage to represent her as having a self and being selfless; how can it show her as sexual and angelic at the same time?

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Dinah is sexualized in the most ethereal way. Whereas Hetty's introduction includes ample, even fetishistic descriptions of her dimpled body and curling hair, Dinah's sexualization is restricted to blushing. Descriptions of her body and hair stress her pallor, refinement, and purity. Although Dinah is far from unerotic in early scenes, the emphasis on her lack of bodily self-consciousness seems to guarantee her sexlessness; the novel tends to link sexuality with self-concern. The first sign of her erotic interest in Adam is "a faint blush . . . which deepened as she wondered at it" (162), a blush that links unaccustomed self-consciousness with sexual awareness. The dusting scene discussed above begins with Dinah hearing Adam's voice and feeling as if she had "put her hands unawares on a vibrating chord; she was shaken with an intense thrill . . . then she knew her cheeks were glowing" (535). She continues to blush and tremble in subsequent scenes and in Lisbeth's astute description of her at breakfast with Adam. Perhaps on the model of Milton's Raphael (who blushes "Celestial rosy red" [8.619] while describing angelic sex to Adam in *Paradise Lost*), blushing is the way Dinah's sexuality is made compatible with her transcendence. Lisbeth initiates her attempt to convince the dense Adam of Dinah's love by comparing her to the picture of an angel Adam's Bible is opened to (543). Moreover, Dinah's love for Adam is repeatedly characterized as natural; it is like the turning of the seasons, like water, like sunshine (545–46). Just as Dinah is converted from a particularly if ambiguously classed woman into "woman," to represent her sexuality as divine or as part of nature is to represent her as annihilating class boundaries. Thus the novel deftly conceals its suturing of contradictory claims about Dinah, just as it nearly conceals its suturing of the contradictory claims that both class stratification and the expansion of the middle class are natural. When she marries Adam and gets plump, Dinah is simultaneously a bourgeois sexual self and a selfless angel.

II

Whereas in *Adam Bede* the angelic heroine's sexuality poses a potential problem for the narrative project to represent middle-class values as class-transcendent ones, *The Mill on the Floss*, governed by the same ideological program, turns the heroine's trembling, vibrating sexuality into the chief source of her identification as simultaneously middle class and class-transcendent. The close association between sexuality and nature, like the definition of woman as a natural category, makes Maggie's sexuality—which might seem to be as "coarse" and uncontrolled as Hetty's, or as any of the female monsters in Armstrong's novels of the 1840s—into the marker of her cross-class womanliness.

The Mill on the Floss is set in a time of transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The novel traces the decline of Mr. Tulliver's Dorlcote Mill—with its picturesque buildings, its long history of operation by one family, its close ties to agriculture, and its small, quasi-familial work force—and the complementary rise of the trading concern Guest and Co., with its bustling scenes of wharfside

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business and its vast distance between rich employer and depersonalized employees. This shift in economic power marks the passing of an apparently timeless, pre-industrial social formation, a distant precursor of the Victorian middle class, and its replacement by a newer middle class that would have been more recognizable to Eliot's contemporaries.

By the same sleight of hand with which she projects the Victorian middle class backward onto rural 1807 in *Adam Bede*, Eliot in this novel, set in the 1820s and 1830s, manages to make the transition from a pre-industrial to a mercantile economy stand in for the transition to Victorian industrialism in its prime. Guest and Co. is primarily a trading concern, which identifies it as part of late eighteenth-century mercantilism. Its wharves are the busiest and most extensive in St. Ogg's, and yet the ancient town's trading economy is described in nostalgic terms. The products traded are primarily agricultural, not manufactured: "fir-planks . . . oil-bearing seed, [and] coal" come in (11); "inland products . . . cheese and soft fleeces" (127) go out. Nonetheless, some of the goods Guest and Co. trades, some of its ancillary enterprises, and above all the lifestyle of its owners make it simultaneously high Victorian. Guest and Co. owns, in addition to its nostalgically described wharves and sailing ships, a linseed oil mill, which typifies its position on a borderline of economic history. Linseed oil is an agricultural product (derived from "oil-bearing seed"), and its mill would seem akin to rustic Dorlcote Mill, yet linseed oil is used in modern industry (e.g., to waterproof the towers of steam-powered factories) and in the manufacture of paint and ink.[6] Moreover, Guest and Co. has apparently modernized its mill, "the largest" in St. Ogg's (378) and much newer than Dorlcote Mill (259), by powering it with steam. (Later, Wakem and Guest compete for the purchase of Dorlcote Mill, which both view as a "capital investment" [269], not an outgrowth of nature, and the successful bidder plans to modernize its operation with steam power.) The narrative constructs in Guest and Co. a business that crosses through a broad timespan of economic and social formations, and in so doing it represents the Victorian middle class and its economic base simultaneously at its moment of emergence and in its full flowering.

If Tulliver's mill represents a pre-industrial economy and Guest and Co. simultaneously represents mercantilism and industry, the novel's women characters signify the two different middle-class ideologies that accompany these economies, the dying and the new. The earlier is represented by the Dodson sisters, the later by Maggie Tulliver. Like Mrs. Poyser in *Adam Bede*, who makes a quarter of the family income with her dairy and saves another quarter, the Dodson sisters represent the pre-industrial woman of the middle rank who had not yet been sequestered in her own Victorian "private sphere" but who still participated in an integrated family economy. As girls, they all had independent earnings and made their own purchases of much-cherished plates and teapots, and they all spun their own linen (again like Mrs. Poyser) and had it woven by an itinerant hand weaver, an occupation that suffered complete extinction because of industrialization.

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The rise of one particular kind of middle class and the fall of its pre-industrial precursor can be measured by the rise and fall of the four Dodson sisters and their

husbands. Of the four sisters, Mrs. Glegg most zealously preserves the traditional Dodson ways. "Allowed to keep her own money" (138) and to invest it herself, Mrs. Glegg still makes her own (inedible) pastry and damson cheese, keeps her money at home, not in a bank, and loves bargaining with the packman, a figure familiar from her childhood. While Mrs. Glegg and Mrs. Pullet started out with a higher status than that of Mrs. Deane, the success of Guest and Co. means that Mrs. Deane is, when the novel opens, the highest ranking because the richest of the sisters. Mr. Glegg, who "save[d] money slowly" as a wool-stapler, an occupation from the days before the rise of cotton and industrialization, and "retire[d] on a moderate fortune" as a deliberately anachronistic gentleman farmer, is old-fashioned. His way is superseded by that of Mr. Deane: to "get a situation in a great house of business and rise fast" (239), as Tom admiringly puts it. Mrs. Deane can afford to demote the things she once purchased with her own money to second best, while Mrs. Tulliver has sunk lower and lower as her husband's business declines and fails. Dorlcote Mill represents everything that Guest and Co., and its modern linseed oil mill, are not: Mr. Tulliver has no idea of modernizing his equipment and is the enemy even of modern agriculture, as his lawsuit against Pivart—who is using water upstream from Dorlcote to irrigate his fields—attests. His economic failure means that Mrs. Tulliver loses the china and linens that her wealthy sister can disdain.

Maggie Tulliver is not normally read in class or economic terms. Critics, especially feminists including myself, have tended to find in her localized autobiographical referents, or the representation of struggling and impassioned womanhood in a culture without educational and occupational opportunities for women, or the representation of timeless female sexuality.[7] Indeed, she would seem to be the novel's most fully realized representation of the natural, of that which is resistant to socio-economic construction. A creature of impulses, she is likened to a Shetland pony and to a terrier in early scenes. Mary Jacobus, reading Maggie through Luce Irigaray's associations of liquidity with femaleness, sees Maggie's drowning

> releasing a swirl of (im)possibility. . . . It is surely at this moment in the novel that we move most clearly into the unbounded realm of desire, if not of wish fulfillment. It is at this moment of inundation, in fact, that the thematics of female desire surface most clearly. (221–22)

Because the narrative represents her interiority so compellingly, Maggie's fall into school-teaching poverty and her temporary rise, as Lucy Deane's guest, into lace and luxury seem, in readings like Jacobus's, external to her characterization.

Indeed, the only approximation of a class marker that the novel ever explicitly gives her is the epithet "queen" or "queenly." She wants to be queen of the gypsies, and with her hair done up in a "coronet" she "showed a queenly head above her old frocks" (310). Cathy Shuman has shown that because "queen" does not actually name a class, but rather a unique individual who transcends class, Victorians used the term to denote an ideal of femininity that supposedly crossed class

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boundaries. For Ruskin, for example, all British women are "called to a true queenly power," which means providing sympathy and moral guidance within the domestic sphere. But of course he can't mean all British women, only those who have a domestic sphere to preside over and a husband both to fund it and to benefit from it—that is, married middle-class women. And Queen Victoria's own project, so far as one can tell, was to model herself after, and by her example to encourage the further creation of, the ideal middle-class housewife. When Maggie seeks to be queen of the gypsies, what she really wants is to teach them the value of imperialism (she offers them a lesson on Columbus) and to be served her tea. What seems class-transcendent about the term "queen," when used about Maggie, is actually middle-class ideology masked as a universal. It is precisely the amorphousness of Maggie's class position, her apparently cross-class or natural femininity—her way of seeming to represent "woman" or "female desire"—that makes her the novel's chief signifier of the new economy and the new middle class, a class that seeks to efface the fact that it is a class and strives instead to consolidate its predominance by generalizing its tendencies as human nature.[8]

When Maggie is swept away in scenes of the kind of passionate liquidity with which Jacobus associates Maggie's "unbounded . . . female desire," it is worth noting that signifiers of middle-class industry are always present too. "Borne along by the tide" (479) with Stephen, Maggie spends the fateful night with him on board "a Dutch vessel going to Mudport," where she is spotted by Bob, traveling on business. In her death scene, when again Maggie is swept away on the river, the actual agency of her drowning is "huge fragments" of "[s]ome wooden machinery [that] had just given way on one of the wharves" (545). These fragments are described as "the hurrying, threatening masses," words that could well describe an industrial riot of the 1840s and that forecast the modern economy that both enables and delimits the middle-class culture that Maggie and Tom represent. That the floating agencies of Maggie's downfall—her disgrace and death—are also agents of commerce is a shorthand way of identifying Maggie's passion with her representation of the middle class. Like *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* borrows on the credibility of nature—natural passions, but also Maggie's participation in the continuities of rural life—to authorize the construction of middle-class ascendency.

It might seem perverse to argue that Maggie stands for the ascendency of the middle class; after all, she begins as a member of the old agrarian order and descends from that into poverty, where she remains to the end of her days. In no technical sense does she actually join the new middle class, except as its guest. Lucy Deane, with her sweet demeanor and fashionable clothes, is a more obvious figure for stable middle-class womanhood, but Maggie is the one who does the novel's work of representing the middle class precisely because, unlike Lucy, she must transcend class boundaries in order to embody it, and because her values are apparently timeless. As Lucy herself puts it in what only seems to be a different context (their emotionally charged last interview), "Maggie . . . you are better than I am" (535).

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It is important to note here that although Tom's modest, hard-earned business successes entitle him to a place in the lower echelons of the new middle class, the narrative is much less kind to him than it is to Philip Wakem or even to Stephen Guest. These are men whose fathers are so wealthy that they can purchase for their upper-middle-class sons the leisure that mimics aristocratic style. Stephen and Philip know as little about business as does the decorative Lucy, with whom they are linked as consumers of culture and beauty. The irony and pity with which the narrative displays his self-restraint and his naked ambition distances it further from Tom than from Stephen, whose technically more reprehensible laxity is given conventionally moral judgment. Perhaps one reason for this difference is that Tom so openly exposes and embraces his narrowly class-bound aims (and sacrifices Maggie to them), whereas Stephen and Philip, having already arrived, are not associated with the machinery that brought them there. Paradoxically, the novel's ironic distance from Tom ultimately underscores its endorsement of the values he represents. For Stephen and Philip, as for Maggie, the individual who effaces the marks of membership in the middle class most successfully represents it. But Maggie is the focus of my interest here, because her transcendence of class boundaries, something she does specifically as a woman, exceeds theirs.

When Tom seeks to shift his economic loyalty from his father to his prosperous uncle Deane, he says, "I should like to enter into some business where I can get on—a manly business where I should have to look after things and get credit for what I did. And I shall want to keep my mother and sister" (243). Speculative trade in industrial commodities is "manly," and manliness is further defined by the dependency of women, here commodified by their equation with the "things" that Tom seeks to "look after." Moreover, the speculations that make Tom a budding capitalist and that he is "proud" to engage in on behalf of Guest and Co. (340), investments in "Laceham goods," presuppose a growing class of female consumers. Manliness also means profiting by middle-class women with money to spend on luxuries and the time in which to spend it. (Adam too sells his cleverly contrived cupboards to housewives.) Maggie's "womanliness" will thus help not only to denote but also to create Tom's "manliness," that is, his membership in the new middle class.

Maggie, we know, resists being such a signifier in Tom's case; she sews for money and later teaches school rather than let Tom support her. Yet, as in the case of Dinah, we never see her at such menial work. The narrative leaps from Mr. Tulliver's death to the pleasant oasis of Lucy's plushy parlor, where Maggie is soon to visit on holiday from work. The novel both acknowledges and evades her poverty in other ways as well. Discussing plans for the charity bazaar, Lucy in Stephen's presence describes Maggie's plain sewing as "exquisite," worth displaying as the sort of "fancy work" women of leisure do (395). As with the prospect of dependency on Tom, Maggie resists this effort to appropriate her working life to middle-class leisure: "Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by; so I was obliged to try and do it well," she says, making Lucy blush (395). Nonetheless, the novel does in large part recuperate Maggie's loyalty to the facts of her

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poverty as part of her distinctive charm in her new setting: her pride makes her all the more unusual and desirable to the awestruck Stephen. Against her will, she becomes an ornament to middle-class manliness.

Surrounded by upper-middle-class luxury, her chief experience at Lucy's is of her own desires, both those that can be indulged and those that cannot. But her desire, constructed to seem natural and thus, as with Dinah Morris, a sign of cross-class womanhood, is never as simply natural as it appears. Maggie's thoughts of Stephen always mingle erotic attraction with desire for luxurious surroundings. She imagines "Stephen Guest at her feet, offering her a life filled with all luxuries, with daily incense of adoration near and distant, and with all possibilities of culture at her command" (457). Just as the novel doesn't forget but rather recuperates Maggie's poverty, it reveals that the gratification of her emotions is economically contingent. The music to which Maggie loves to "vibrate" in a way that sounds sexual and therefore natural must be paid for, and she couldn't afford it before her visit to Lucy. The novel has earlier registered in less personal terms the cost of such pleasures: "good society, floated on gossamer wings of light irony, is of very expensive production, requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories" (307). Although in this passage Maggie is identified with the working poor through their shared "emphasis of want," when at Lucy's Maggie is among the female purchasers who will enrich investors in "Laceham goods" and their like. By identifying her desire for expensive pleasures with her love for Stephen, the novel glamorizes middle-class consumer lust as natural desire. Here Maggie's desire resembles Hetty's for Arthur, except that whereas the material base of Hetty's desire is always laid bare, Maggie's is simultaneously revealed and concealed. Maggie's desire—whether for music and beauty or for Stephen Guest—carries her across class boundaries, and thus makes her signify the self-universalizing middle class. Maggie is sympathetic, emotional, impractical, decorative, and morally queenly—in every way the opposite of the Dodson sisters, a signifier of leisure that must be purchased by others.

As Rachel Bowlby has shown, middle-class women are consumers in large part because they are themselves objects to be consumed, and two episodes in particular explore the simultaneous naturalization and commodification of Maggie's sexuality as it both demarcates class status and generalizes that class status as human nature. The charity bazaar put on by Lucy and her friends, described in "Charity in Full Dress," dramatizes the distance between the economy of the Dodsons and that of their modern counterparts. Selling "effeminate futilities" (451) to male purchasers for charity is only play-selling, an elaborate game whose actual function is to mark the high status of women who do not actually need to sell anything. At the bazaar, Maggie (who really does need to earn) nonetheless appears with Lucy as one of her kind, and she inadvertently exposes the game's logic a little too clearly. It is the women themselves who are on sale, as class markers and, in her case, as beautiful bodies. Middle-class men do not ordinarily function as conspicuous consumers; it is the wife's role to consume the luxuries her husband's earnings make possible, and at the bazaar the men don't take seriously

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their purchases of bead-mats and wrist-warmers. What they are consumers of is women's sexuality. The rapid sale of the gentlemen's dressing-gowns at Maggie's table is understood by all to derive from her attractiveness to men. Standing at her booth, she is on display for Philip, Stephen, Philip's father, and indeed for all of fashionable St. Ogg's, who will later recall (or rather construct in retrospect) the "coarse" style of her beauty that day. Again, what powerfully marks Maggie as a signifier of the new middle-class womanhood is not easy residence within the middle-class pale (like Lucy) but rather the fact that she has crossed class boundaries to be there. The lingering traces of her poverty make visible her active incorporation into the middle-class value system, just as her simple dress accentuates her beauty.

Maggie's sexuality—what would seem to be most natural about her—is further commodified and channeled into the work of class demarcation in a sequence of passages about her arms, which serve as genteel metonymies for her breasts. Euphemistically described as "broad-chested" as an adolescent, Maggie irritates her Aunt Pullet by having shoulders too broad to fit into her old clothes. " 'Her arms are beyond everything,' added Mrs. Pullet sorrowfully, as she lifted Maggie's large round arm. 'She'd never get my sleeves on' " (400). Just prior to this scene Maggie has begun to fulfill her desire to learn how to row. Maggie becomes a strong rower, as befits a miller's daughter; her arms express not only sexual energy but also her connection to the older economy in which women of her class were not afraid of manual work.

In her encounters with Stephen, by contrast, relying on his firm arm is one of her intoxicating pleasures. The sensation of relative weakness defines her desire for Stephen as a signifier of leisure class status. Maggie's pleasure at Lucy's house mingles and identifies her relief at no longer having to work with her attraction to Stephen. At the dance, Maggie wears the hand-me-down that had to be altered to expose her too-large arms, sometimes strong, now deferentially weak, and Stephen passionately kisses one of them in a passage that defines his desire too as that of the leisured consumer (of things, and also in his case of women, or rather of women as things). As they walk in the conservatory, itself a sign of conspicuous consumption, the narrative fetishizes Maggie's arm on Stephen's behalf:

> Stephen . . . was incapable of putting a sentence together, and Maggie bent her arm a little upward towards the large, half-opened rose that had attracted her. Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm? The unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow, and all the varied gently lessening curves down to the delicate wrist, with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness. A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the timeworn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's arm was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life.
>
> A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted towards the arm and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist. (462–63)

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Note here that the object of Stephen's desire is not Maggie, or Maggie's arm, but "the arm," and that this arm is further objectified by comparison with statuary, headless at that. The fetishizing of this arm shows both that Maggie's sexuality is no longer for her use but for Stephen's, and that her sexuality has become a marker of her and Stephen's rank as consumers. Philip too, as Kristin Brady points out (98), views Maggie as a commodity he has "earn[ed]" (322).

The fetishizing of Maggie's arm combines aspects of commodity and psychoanalytic fetishisms. Like the manufactured object that conceals the labor required to produce it, and like the female body part that both reveals and conceals, for Freud's male viewer, the lack or wound that is castration, Maggie's arm conceals and reveals both the labor and the wounding effect of women's work as class signifiers. Rhetorically detached from her body, and distanced too from the productive labor of which we know it is capable, Maggie's arm serves a function here similar to that of the violent silencing of Mrs. Poyser in debate with Bartle Massey, a cutting off of words that exposes the cost to women of displacing class divisions onto gender hierarchy. It is worth noting here that at age nine Maggie was a powerful fetishist, using a disfigured doll that the narrative calls a "fetish" (34) to work through—to acknowledge and to cover up—her anger about her powerlessness within her family. Her transformation from active fetishist to passive fetish parallels Dinah's transformation from preacher to domestic wife.

It is an important feature of the class meanings of this scene that Maggie protests against the kiss. To accept it uncomplainingly, much less to reciprocate it, would be the act of a lower-class woman such as Hetty, and Maggie's feeling of "humiliation" ("what right have I given you to insult me?") makes it clear that she wishes to be understood as Stephen's equal. Her sense of equality depends on a desired but impossible erasure of class boundaries; in actuality they can be equals morally or erotically, but not socially. That Maggie nonetheless imagines their social equality contributes to the novel's consolidation of middle-class dominance by representing middle-class values, such as the propriety and respectability Maggie adheres to, as cross-class ideals. Her natural instincts are also middle-class ones. Stephen seeks to consume Maggie much as Arthur purchases Hetty, but Maggie's resistance makes her the middle-class—that is, classless—figure Hetty can never be. Like Dinah's blush, Maggie's arm identifies the sexual woman with the angelic and proper middle-class ideal.

Soon we learn that Maggie, despite the alienation of her arm, has nonetheless learned to "row splendidly," and thus can almost dispense, in Lucy's light phrase, with "the services of knights and squires" (482). But in the excruciating scene of "Borne Along By the Tide," Maggie's desire takes the form of languid passivity and fatigue, her failure to seize the oars and save herself (490–91). She is a consumer consumed, in an act that looks so little like consumption that it can be generalized as natural passion, and therefore removed from the register of the economic altogether. She signifies a new economy, and the new social formation that goes with it, by appearing to have nothing to do with economics.

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That we know this abdication of her arms' vitality is purely psychosomatic or symbolic is shown by her final action of rowing heroically across the flood back to the mill where she intends to rescue her brother and mother. Assimilated to the Virgin of St. Ogg's, she feels "a sensation of strength, inspired by mighty emotion" (542). When she is once more identified with her origins in agricultural work and with her life prior to leisured desire, Maggie recovers possession of her strength and of her passions. But this is only to say that Maggie's allegedly natural body is once again at the service of class demarcation. And in any case, as we have seen, the moment of her death rejoins her passion to her modernity, and makes that modernity timeless.

NOTES

1. But see Fisher 39–40, for the argument that the novel never divides work and home. Fisher makes a point about *The Mill on the Floss* that seems even more applicable to *Adam Bede*: by the end, social institutions have vanished and been replaced by the family (95).

2. Other readers have noted that the removal of "potentially disruptive elements" makes for a peaceful ending; see, for example, Shuttleworth 24, 42; Fisher 63; Brady 85. My point here pertains to the class as well as gender meanings of that stability.

3. This social harmony is essentially Shuttleworth's initial point about the novel (24ff). Wilhelm von Riehl writes, in Eliot's admiring paraphrase, that "there are three natural ranks or estates." She endorses Riehl's view that peasants are a "race" (274). Briggs points out that by the 1820s "class" had become the usual term; "rank" or "order" were anachronistic terms used only by conservatives who preferred to see social divisions as natural and immutable, not socially or economically constructed ("Language"). Eliot's use of "rank," and especially of "race," marks her essay's social conservatism. Fisher sees the novel exposing this stability as coercive (53ff).

4. Shuttleworth notes that in this scene "physical contact breaks down the social divisions" (39), but she sees the scene ultimately reinforcing those divisions.

5. What happens here illustrates the argument I have proposed about the difference between Armstrong's reading of novels of the "hungry forties," in which she sees the working class translated into monstrous females who may then be exercised from these novels' safe conclusions, and those of Eliot's more secure and prosperous day.

6. If Guest and Co. makes ink, one may speculate which of the two mills, and therefore which economy, Eliot the author really favors.

7. See, for example, Beer (97–103), who describes the ending as "orgasmic" (102) and writes that "the level of desire explored at the end of the book is *a-historical*" (99); or Miller.

8. Here I am following Armstrong's suggestion that the production of female subjectivity and the emotive, psychologized female self consolidate middle-class ascendency by displacing class conflict. Armstrong makes these suggestions about earlier novels, especially the Brontës', but not about *The Mill on the Floss* itself. Armstrong's paragraph on this novel focuses on Maggie as a woman punished and cast out of the novel for excess desire.

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THREE

"Vitiated Air"

The Polluted City and Female Sexuality in *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*

Deborah Epstein Nord

There is, however, a licentiousness capable of corrupting the whole body of society, like an insidious disease, which eludes observation, yet is equally fatal in its effects . . . the moral leprosy of vice.

—James Phillips Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes*, 1832[1]

She is a woman with half the woman gone, . . . a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she has access . . .

—William Acton, *Prostitution*, 1857[2]

In Dickens's early sketches and novels, tainted female sexuality is almost always located in the realms of urban poverty and among a class of women who, though essentially virtuous, can be sacrificed without harm to the structures of middle-class life. Indeed, the street prostitute Nancy in *Oliver Twist* carries the burden of any stain that might have shadowed the reputations of Oliver's dead mother or the chaste Rose Maylie and, in some profound sense, her death purges the novel of their taint. With *Dombey and Son* (1846–48) and *Bleak House* (1851–53), however, fallen female sexuality is introduced upwards into the middle class: here it cannot be located solely in the lower classes and identified as safely separate from the realm of the bourgeois family. The distinction between the woman of the hearth and the woman of the streets no longer holds: the "prostitute" has become a wife and, with her, urban pollutions of all kinds have invaded the preserves of middle-class life.[3]

Raymond Williams writes of connection—the "consciousness . . . of recognitions and relationships"—as the mark of Dickens's vision of London and identifies this vision as that which animates and gives form to his novels.[4] These connections, which determine urban existence and the structure of Dickens's novels alike, are "the necessary recognitions and avowals of society" and yet "they are of a

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kind that are obscured, complicated, mystified."[5] In *Dombey*, and more completely in *Bleak House*, those hidden connections that link apparently separate individuals, classes, and neighborhoods include not only moral and physical pestilence but tainted sexuality and its own accompanying legacy of disease. The prostitute—or the sexually suspect woman of the "respectable" classes—embodies and enacts sexual connection and thereby threatens the separateness, health and survival of the middle class.[6] She is associated in middle-class fears with what the French historian Alain Corbin has called a "process of degeneration that threatens to annihilate the bourgeoisie."[7]

In these two novels, and in much of the social and sanitary reform literature of the mid-Victorian decades, the threat of disease from unsanitary urban conditions and the spread of epidemic illnesses merges with the threat of disease and degeneration from exposure to infected female sexuality. In cultural imagery and scientific discourse, the prostitute was linked through metaphor and notions of contagion with the decay, contaminated waste, and insidious filth of the city. Corbin, in delineating the images associated with prostitution that fueled the demand for its regulation, finds the prostitute linked metaphorically with sewers, drains, stench, rotting corpses, and death.[8] Lynda Nead, in her work on Victorian myths of sexuality, shows how the "elements of sanitary debate . . . the tainted air and impure water, the miasma from metropolitan burial grounds" are marshalled in certain textual evocations of fallen women, among them Dickens's description of the prostitute Martha in *David Copperfield*.[9] In those passages from the works of the sanitary reformer James Kay and the venereologist William Acton that stand as epigraphs to this essay, the language of contagious disease helps to create a particular notion of the noxious, epidemic nature of "vice" and prostitution. In the case of Kay, whose book on the "moral and physical condition" of the industrial working class begins as an investigation into the causes and spread of cholera, a carefully established discourse of physical contagion is deployed to indict the moral contagion of sin. In the very name of the laws that regulated prostitution—the Contagious Diseases Acts—venereal disease is euphemistically lost in and merged with a generic contagion: embedded in the vagueness of the language is an association of the prostitute with cholera, typhus, smallpox, and other frightening epidemic illnesses.

Reformers and artists alike sought to elicit the disgust, sympathy, anxiety, and indignation of their middle-class readers, to comfort them with notions of their superiority to the debased and diseased poor and sexually fallen and yet to move them to social action by suggesting that they—the middle class—were not wholly safe from contamination from "below." Acton, while depicting the prostitute herself as a "social pest," also took pains to argue that the majority of such women were transients in their work and were headed ultimately for reintegration into respectable society: "there is . . . never a one of them but may herself, when the shadow is past, become the wife of an Englishman and the mother of his offspring."[10] Kay warns of disease which, though presently confined to the dens of the poor, "threatens, with a stealthy step, to invade the sanctity of the domestic

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circle; . . . unconsciously conveyed from those haunts of beggary where it is rife, into the most still and secluded retreat of refinement."[11] The disconcerting invisibility, the undetectability of this process of invasion and infiltration might inspire the reformer's audience to attack the social problems at hand *before* they overran the boundaries of the nether world. If the "conscientious parent" (i.e., father) would support the cause of regulating prostitution, argued Acton, "with what diminished anxiety would he not contemplate the progress of his boys from infancy to manhood?"[12]

In Dickens's novels the invasion has been achieved on all levels: disease, sexual sin, and moral corruption have made their way invisibly and momentously into the preserves of the respectable. The mercantile London of *Dombey* and the litigious, labyrinthine, fog-ridden London of *Bleak House* connect the high and low through analogy, metaphor, and outright contagion. I want to suggest that in these two London fictions various threats of moral and physical contamination are clustered around fallen female sexuality, that the danger to middle-class survival and renewal is posed in the form of debased womanhood, and that each novel prescribes the redemption of chaste, reproductive female sexuality as the antidote to middle-class barrenness and moral bankruptcy. What begins in *Dombey* as a tenuous link between the conditions of poverty and prostituted sexuality becomes in *Bleak House* a tight interweaving of slum-bred pestilence and the inherited taint of illicit sexuality. Florence Dombey, who rescues the "house" of Dombey by ensuring a healthy and reinvigorated family line, stands as a rehearsal for Esther Summerson, whose centrality to the personal and social redemption even tentatively envisioned in the novel is signaled by her role as one of its narrators. The only female character of Dickens to tell her own story, Esther carries out the paradoxical task of establishing an egoless "I," an articulated self befitting the existentially (and physically) disfigured but intrepid woman. Esther's powerful transcendence of the taint of inherited sin makes her the ideal female exemplar: to begin in sexual transgression and ultimately to represent what Ellen Moers called "Right Woman" is not just to enact the redemption of female sexuality but to offer a model for the redemption of society.[13]

In both novels the ascendancy of uncorrupted womanhood can only follow the expulsion of debased womanhood, and in both novels the real threat to chastity comes in the form of other women, especially women as mothers. Like the "sordid and rapacious" mother of the teenage prostitutes in "The Prisoner's Van" who had thrown them on the streets at an early age, the mothers of Alice Brown, lower-class thief and whore, and Edith Granger, her middle-class cousin and counterpart, are responsible for their daughters' debasement. Florence must be kept not only from Edith's mother but ultimately from Edith herself, and Esther Summerson, in a much more complicated process of acceptance and distancing, must free herself from the maternal inheritance of guilt. Victorian notions of the source of sexual defilement inform and corroborate Dickens's seemingly symbolic rendering of the threat to female chastity. In discussions of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the site of danger and contamination was imagined to be the woman, the prosti-

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tute: it was her body that needed to be regulated, her body that was the pollutant.[14] According to Sander Gilman, it was after the Enlightenment that women replaced men as the exemplary syphilitic patient in European iconography, "with the female as the image of the source of infection."[15] If women were imagined as the pollutants of men, they were also seen as a danger to other women and, most particularly, to their own daughters: Nead has pointed out that in some Victorian medical and legal discussions of adultery, female infidelity is defined as "a congenital disorder [that] may be inherited by the female offspring."[16] But if in Dickens, as apparently elsewhere, chaste womanhood is threatened by womanhood already defiled, it is also the case that only another woman can absolve, reclaim, and expiate the sins of one who has fallen.

In both of these novels a vigorous and moral bourgeois ethos is under siege and in need of defense: not the smarmy, hypocritical middle-class complacency pointedly exemplified by Mr. Vholes, who blathers about his devotion to respectability and to his father and three daughters while ruthlessly taking advantage of the weakness and dwindling fortune of chancery supplicants, but the energetic, efficacious and generative spirit of the Bagnets, symbolic of good family, healthy sexuality, even of sane and hearty empire.[17] Social and economic changes, changes in class relations and technology, promise improvement and simultaneously unsettle social equilibrium. The railroads, the new entrepreneurship, the obsolescence of old ways of measuring time and distance and of doing business in *Dombey*, the new power of industry, the political ascendancy of the industrialist, the fading of the aristocracy in *Bleak House*, are all viewed with hope and suspicion. At the same time, within this nexus of change, progress and loss, contagion and tainted inheritance—both moral and physical—threaten to enmire in the past a society that must go forward to renewal. It is here that the role of woman and of female sexuality is crucial: woman stands either to destroy or to recreate, to foster sterility or to make fertile, to cure pestilence or to be the agent of its circulation.

The London of *Dombey and Son* hovers between a bygone but exotic world of exploration and trade, represented by the antiquated nautical instruments of Sol Gills's Wooden Midshipman, and the new world of the powerful, demonic railroad: a world changing with ruthless speed as a result of what Gills calls "competition, competition—new invention, new invention—alteration, alteration."[18] Needing to negotiate but more often neglecting the economic implications of this change, Mr. Dombey doggedly pursues the production of a male heir and the continuance of his name according to an ethic better suited to a would-be aristocrat than to a businessman of the upper bourgeoisie. Just as he ignores the insidious results of his manager, Carker's, "extending and extending his influence, until the business and his owner were his football" (840), Mr. Dombey remains oblivious to the economic and spiritual value of his female progeny. As a consequence, he is impotent in business, in his overweening will, in his second marriage, in his ability to produce his own future. He must learn that a daughter, who had to him been "a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested," can indeed offer a return on

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his investment and redeem the moral and physical health of the family, the firm and, by extension, the life of the middle class.[19]

As a result of Mr. Dombey's failure to understand the power and place of redemptive femininity or the true nature of inheritance, he unleashes on his own family the treachery of debased (female) sexuality. After the death of Paul, son of Mr. Dombey's sickly and discarded first wife, he must find another suitable woman to produce another male child. Edith Granger, procured for him by the tumescent ("swollen and inflamed about the head") pander Joey Bagstock, promises to fit the bill: she has no money but does have aristocratic connections, "blood," and beauty, and she has proven herself capable of producing a son but is no longer encumbered with the child, who has drowned. She also promises to make no demands on Mr. Dombey's blocked and tightly restrained emotions, for her air of "exquisite indifference" gives his pride and coldness free reign. Because she has been bred by her mother to be bought on the open market—"hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within" (473)—she regards marriage as a business transaction in which she is commodity rather than buyer or seller: she expects and asks for no psychic sustenance from it for herself.

Mr. Dombey thus makes the error not only of valuing his offspring according to an outmoded economic calculus but of relying on the cash nexus to determine the realm of sexuality as well. He buys the maternal sexuality of Polly Toodles in an effort to preserve his son's life and then buys the reproductive sexuality of Edith Granger so that he can replace that son. Edith herself is from the first remarkably clear-eyed about her role in this process of buying and selling: " 'I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded and vended, to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets' " (845). And the novel is equally direct about the analogy between middle-class marriage and prostitution that is exemplified by Edith and her cousin Alice Brown, who explains that her mother, "covetous and poor, . . . thought to make a property of me" (847). I want to suggest, however, that the novel proposes more than a relationship of analogy or parallelism in its representation of these two women and of prostituted sexuality in two different classes. The women are linked to one another directly by blood, by the identical seducer, and by traits of debasement that make them both, however victimized themselves, a threat to the purity of individuals and society. Their fathers, we learn quite late in the narrative, were brothers, " 'the gayest gentlemen and the best liked' " that Good Mrs. Brown had ever encountered—two rakes, one of whom married Edith's upper-class mother, and the other of whom dallied with Alice's, a "fresh country wench," and left her with a child. The taint the women share is not just a parallel one engendered by grasping, corrupt mothers who act as bawds for their own daughters, it is the *same one*: inherited, congenital, physiologically borne. The stain on Alice's character is deepened by poverty and illegitimacy, and part of the novel's point is to suggest the unfairness of Alice's suffering as compared with Edith's prosperous, albeit exiled, survival. But the novel also points in

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another direction: both of these women are indelibly, dangerously marked—and in the same manner—so that to save the Dombey family and, above all, Florence from contamination, Edith, like Alice, must be removed.

Florence, although apparently incorruptible and unchangeable, is repeatedly exposed to women who threaten to infect her with their own depravity, whether by intention or by means beyond their control. The brief and seemingly purposeless kidnapping of Florence by Good Mrs. Brown early in the novel is paradigmatic of this ongoing threat to the child's purity.[20] The hag snatches Florence from her two good mothers, Polly Toodles and Susan Nipper, in Stagg's Gardens and takes her through a wasteland of brick-fields and tile-yards to a hovel surrounded and blackened by mud and cinders. There she removes the child's clothes and shoes and replaces them with rags and the "crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill" (130). She threatens to cut off Florence's long curls but spares her this because of the daughter far away who had been proud of her beautiful hair. Mrs. Brown's ostensible motive for terrorizing Florence is the desire for indirect revenge on Mr. Dombey's manager, Carker, the man responsible for ruining Alice; and she takes the girl's clothes—and would have taken her hair—for their marketable value. But on a more powerful symbolic and affective level, Mrs. Brown threatens to turn Florence into what her daughter has become and enacts this transformation in just a very few moments. Her fairy tale identity as the *bad* Mrs. Brown, the witch who might kill or devour the innocent princess, only heightens the sense that an emblematic defloration of the child is being threatened: "Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs. Brown coveted" (130–31).[21]

Florence continues throughout the novel to be exposed to predatory or dangerously polluted mothers. Later on, just as Edith Granger is about to marry Mr. Dombey, Florence must be protected from Mrs. Skewton, Edith's mother, who threatens her in precisely the same way Mrs. Brown had. Mrs. Skewton wants to claim possession of the girl and remarks too on Florence's resemblance to her own daughter when young. Edith, assessing the situation correctly, orders her mother to return Florence to her home: " 'It is enough,' " she admonishes her mother, " 'that we are what we are. I will have no youth and truth dragged down to my level. I will have no guileless nature undermined, corrupted, and perverted, to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers' " (514). Finally, it is Edith herself from whom Florence must be protected. As Carker begins to dominate and threaten Edith, she starts to withdraw from her stepdaughter, and as she is about to run off with him she warns the girl not to come near her or speak to her or touch her. Like "some lower animal" Edith crouches against the wall so that Florence cannot reach her, and then she springs up and flees, as if her touch would defile the girl. Even at their final meeting, when Edith assures Florence that she has not in fact committed adultery, she nevertheless acknowledges a guilt that must "separate [her] through the whole remainder of [her] life, from purity and innocence" (965). The novel suggests that, though not set on corrupting Florence in the way that her mother and her aunt had been, Edith would ultimately have the same effect by her

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very presence. Though Florence is her stepdaughter and therefore in danger of contracting the infection Edith cannot help but embody, she is not Edith's daughter and so does not automatically inherit a taint that must be actively purged.

All of these women threaten Florence with the "unnaturalness" to which the narrative keeps circling back in a variety of ways. Mrs. Skewton's affected devotion to "Nature" combined with her absolute and total artificiality signals the beginning of an exploration of the connection between the commodification of sexuality and its perversion. Both Alice and Edith display characteristics that mark them as unnatural, if not demonic. When Alice weeps at Harriet Carker's kindness to her, she is described as "[n]ot like a woman, but like a stern man surprised into that weakness" (564). Her hair, once her pride, as her mother told Florence, is now the object of her rage, and she seizes it "as if she would have torn it out," then flings it back "as though it were a heap of serpents" (565). Not only Alice, however, is evoked as a gorgon: Edith, after her marriage to Dombey, is likened to a "beautiful Medusa" who would strike dead an unnamed "him" had she the charm (741).

Although the text suggests Alice's unnatural mannishness (like Miss Blimber she is unsexed, albeit in a radically different way), it need not indicate the debased nature of Alice's sexual relationships, because such relationships in the life of a prostitute are by definition perverse.[22] In the case of Edith, however, a careful case is constructed to signal the frigidity of her relations with Dombey on the one hand and the sado-masochistic qualities of her strange tie to Carker on the other.[23] When Dombey and his second wife return from their continental honeymoon, the question of whether Edith will produce an heir is all but answered by the news that they both had found Paris cold and dull (583). Repeated references to Edith's bosom, which throbs, swells, and causes her diamonds to rise and fall, bespeak a passion that is thwarted, locked in, the source of no pleasure to herself, and out of reach to her husband (650–51). The marriage is barren in its failure to produce a child and sterile in its sexual—as well as emotional—coldness. The sexual passion that lies stifled and restrained but still discernible beneath the diamond necklaces, erupts in Edith's response to Carker's sadistic advances and takes the form of pain inflicted upon herself. At her husband's discussion of Carker's growing role in the marriage, Edith turns a bracelet "round and round upon her arm; not winding it about with a light, womanly touch, but pressing and dragging it over the smooth skin, until the white limb showed a bar of red" (653). The jewelry that plays such an important role in the representation of Edith's sexuality suggests in a graphic and literal way the symbolic effect Mr. Dombey's wealth has had on his wife. In addition, the emphasis on the *unwomanliness* of Edith's gesture with the bracelet again underscores the distortion of "natural" sexuality that his wealth and its uses have engendered. Still unable to unleash her loathing for Carker at him directly, she continues to cause pain to herself, striking the hand he has just kissed against a marble chimney-shelf rather than against his "fair face" and causing the hand to bleed (692). Carker, the predator, the wolf, smells blood with pleasure and associates the "mystery of [her] gloved hand" with the promise of sexual passion (735).

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What might be lightly dismissed as melodramatic excess in the depiction of these relationships seems rather Dickens's careful portrayal of a sexual pathology that is specifically the result of buying and selling what he believes ought to be given naturally. He wants to create a nexus of unnatural desires and responses that are not simply symbolic of but organically and profoundly tied to making people into property. The organic nature of these disturbances further establishes Edith Dombey's influence as unalterably insidious.

The novel's theme of the natural and the unnatural culminates in a long meditative passage in chapter 47, just before Edith flees with Carker and before Dombey, in angry and vicious response, strikes his daughter. The passage evokes a world in which unnatural humanity has become the "natural" result of the cruel conditions, "enforced distortions," and imprisoning monomanias of modern life. But the unnaturalness that Dickens's narrative voice addresses here is not only the perverseness at the heart of the Dombey-Edith-Carker triangle: it is also (and in a way that is implicitly linked with the unnaturalness of the rich) the unnaturalness of the poor, the sick, the slum-dweller, the convict. The movement from Dombey's "master-vice" to the "Vice and Fever" of dark haunts and "wicked cities" might seem almost gratuitous, a lengthy and artificial digression to strike a blow for sanitary reform, but it serves as a point of connection for the social, psychological, moral and physical pestilence that runs throughout and blights society.[24] The prose here shifts from moral taint to physical—the "noxious particles that rise from vitiated air"—and back to moral:

> But if the moral pestilence that rises with them [the noxious particles], and in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sin . . . overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. . . . Then should we stand appalled to know, that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed, *by the same certain process*, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but in suffering and guilt, blasted old age that is a scandal on the form we bear. (738; emphasis added)

These shifts between the moral, or the metaphoric, and the physical ultimately cancel themselves out, for in the end there can be no sustainable separation between spiritual and bodily taint or, for that matter, between the spread of cholera and the spread of evil.[25] The city breeds "Vice *and* Fever"; and the innocent are struck down by both inheritance and contagion. The passage alludes to Mrs. Brown's urban wasteland dwelling where Florence's purity was threatened, the "convict-ships" that took Alice across the sea, the sexual taint—both physical and psychic—that infects Dombey' s second marriage, the feebleness of body that Mr. Dombey passed on to his son, and the feebleness of both body and soul that Mrs. Granger and Mrs. Brown passed on to and nurtured in their daughters. The "disease" that entails itself on unborn children appears as a conflation of poverty-bred

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and sexually transmitted illnesses. The covert reference to syphilis here serves to connect the taint of the slums with the taint of the middle-class family in a way that recalls Blake's culminating vision of the blighted "Marriage hearse" in his "London" poem.[26] Although never explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the text, syphilis haunts the plot because of its association with the prostitute and her death on the one hand and the barrenness of middle-class marriage on the other.[27] This passage makes clear that the middle class is endangered not only by virtue of its wilful ignorance of the miasmic haunts that breed pestilence but because it has already assimilated into its ranks "perversions of nature" of all kinds.

The novel's carefully developed commentary on social sterility and disease, then, places sexuality at its center: but it is not sexuality conceived in a general way, touching on male and female alike, it is sexuality as it resides in woman. Although Carker is in some important sense the cause of both Edith and Alice's sexual fall and a creature of monstrous and predatory appetites who, like Bill Sikes, must be brutally destroyed, he merely exploits the weaknesses of which these women's mothers had been the origin. In the world of *Dombey*, as in certain strains of Victorian sexual mythology, men like Carker take advantage of what is already set in motion by maternal inheritance. The clearest indication of the need to root out dangerous female sexuality and replace it with its redemptive, reproductive form is, of course, the expulsion of Edith from England and the narrative alike and the reformation of Mr. Dombey—far guiltier of inhumanity than his wife—through the integration of Florence into his psychic and familial life. Given the discourse of contamination that pervades the narrative, Edith cannot be redeemed: the only partial rehabilitation she is allowed comes, of course, through Florence's ability to soften her stepmother, to make her weep and ask forgiveness. It is asking forgiveness of her father, the guilty party in their relationship, that makes clear Florence's Christ-like transcendence of the ordinary human need to understand justice as revenge. She must take her father's sins upon herself. And she must marry a brotherly figure, ensuring the chastity of their bond, as well as a man of the lower classes. Walter Gay offers Mr. Dombey's family and class not precisely the proto-Lawrentian energies of Mr. Toodles but the ancient, mythic energies of a Dick Whittington. Though chaste, the marriage of Walter and Florence is importantly reproductive, and it breaks the cycle of death and impotence that had plagued the line. They will present Mr. Dombey with two grandchildren, a girl he "hoards in his heart" and a boy to continue, in reinvigorated form, the house of Dombey. Through the daughter then, as Mr. Toots explains, " 'Dombey and Son will ascend . . . triumphant!' " (974). In order that patriarchy might flourish, a particular kind of womanhood must be recognized, celebrated, and absorbed.

On the "woman question" the novel appears to stand unapologetically against the powerful anger and bitterness of those women who have been society's victims. Edith Dombey and Alice Brown can serve as the means to mount a powerful critique of a proud and mercenary patriarchy, but the indelible stain they bear makes their continued presence in the narrative not only expendable but untenable.

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This enmeshes the novel in the tensions, not to say the contradictions, associated with a vision of women as dangerous, though not culpable, victims. The text wavers between the desire to marshall the spirit of reform and the need to protect the sanctity of middle-class life. That Dickens appears to be fully aware of the varieties of women's opposition to patriarchal order and to have chosen carefully which sort to rescue and which to reject can be confirmed in the person of Susan Nipper, the sharp-tongued mother of three daughters. " 'If ever the Rights of Women, and all that kind of thing, are properly attended to,' " her husband, the addled Mr. Toots, declares, " 'it will be through her powerful intellect' " (946). The novel can absorb Susan Nipper and her barbs, aimed repeatedly against the hierarchy of the sexes, but it keeps her securely on the margins, a bit-player whose class position and comic presence make her particular kind of rebelliousness instructive yet benign, no real threat to the ultimate health of the middle-class family. When Dickens next creates a female character explicitly devoted to the Rights and Emancipation of Women, it will be Mrs. Jellyby, whose position as a disastrous middle-class mother makes her not just a comic figure but a malignant one.

What is merely suggested about the connections between urban blight and sexual contamination in *Dombey and Son* becomes the very machinery that drives the text of *Bleak House*. The tainted sexual legacy of Lady Dedlock and the fever that spreads from the pauper's graveyard in London via Jo, the crossing sweep, to the protected middle-class preserve of John Jarndyce's home near St. Alban's determine the novel's plot and governing images. The opening paragraphs of the text establish the inseparability of urban pollutions and social sin: at "the very heart" of the fog that "rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city" sits the Lord High Chancellor, "most pestilent of hoary sinners."[28] Just as fog, mud, and gas invade all of London and its environs, so does the Chancery suit of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce taint all of its wards and supplicants, and so too does Lady Dedlock's past defile Esther's life and the life of the aristocratic family into which she has married.[29]

The unexpected connections between classes that in *Dombey and Son* are centered in the relationship of Alice Brown to Edith Dombey here become pandemic: identity, kinship, affinity, and correspondence can be said to define the very condition of social and spiritual life in this novel. In answer to the narrator's question, "What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together" (272), the novel answers: every kind. Chancery is but the most obvious connector of lives and stands, as many have commented, as an analogy to the condition of society itself. But there are also apparently insignificant blood-relationships—Sir Leicester Dedlock is, for example, related to John Jarndyce, Ada and Richard—and nearly gratuitous connections from the distant past—Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Barbary (now Mrs. Chadband), Boythorn and Lady Dedlock. The novel abounds in emblems of connection that reproduce and reinforce one another: the fever that spreads

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through Jo, the handkerchief that links Esther to the brickmaker's dead baby and ultimately to her own mother (also the mother of a "dead" baby), the clothing these two mothers—Jenny and Lady Dedlock—ultimately exchange, the veils worn variously by Lady Dedlock, Hortense, and Esther, and the "starry circle" of which Esther yearns not to be a part in her fever-induced delirium. As has also often been observed, the slum of Tom-all-Alone's is prominent among the novel's points of intersection: it signals a correspondence between the pestilential haunt that nurtures Jo and the case of Tom Jarndyce, for whom the slum may have been named; it is part of the property of the Jarndyce estate and linked to the house—Bleak House—where Tom's descendants now live; and it is also connected, the narrator tells us, to the "place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder," that is, to the Dedlocks and their own family secrets and inheritance.

Less obvious to readers of *Bleak House* is that Tom-all-Alone's also stands as a point of intersection for society's crimes against the poor and the inheritance of sexual taint. In a passage that personifies "Tom" and makes him a moving agent of contamination, the trope of marriage makes this hidden connection clear:

> There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. (683)

Like the long set-piece in *Dombey* that joins the pestilence of disease to moral pestilence, this passage collapses the distinction between real infection—like Jo's fever—and all the invisible corruptions for which disease ordinarily stands as metaphor. But it also collapses the distinction between the contagion of disease and the transmission of sexual taint: the "blood" of a Norman house shall be polluted through an alliance that cannot be prevented. The aristocracy—particularly those families that are, like the Dedlocks, "as old as the hills"—stand to lose their purity, their health, their fecundity as a result of exposure to the contaminated blood of "Tom," who is imagined as the carrier of all manner of disease. Inheritance and contagion know no separation, neither in the realm of epidemic disease nor in that of sexual corruption. The street of "perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out" (147) is echoed in Esther Summerson's blindness during her illness, an illness carried by Jo and linked to the blight she inherits from her mother. Lady Dedlock's dowry and legacy of sexual sin, then, have the same meaning, origin, and result as the plague that Jo, inhabitant of Tom-all-Alone's, transmits to her daughter.

I want to argue that the various threats to social health represented by the slum of Tom-all-Alone's are ultimately resolved in the novel in the realm of female

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sexuality. Inheritance and contagion reinforce one another and merge most forcefully in the text in the person of Esther Summerson, whose role as narrator signals the importance of her story to the working out of this double blight. Dickens creates and sustains a female narrative voice for the first and only time to illustrate *from the inside* and with considerable psychological complexity the trajectory of a threatened and ultimately efficacious female sexuality and to underscore the importance of this trajectory to the creation of a (re)productive and efficacious middle class. Donning the mask of female self-effacement, Dickens is able to assert the value of a female sexuality that falters but then succeeds. Florence Dombey never overshadows her stepmother, even after Edith is banished from the scene; but Esther Summerson, in part because she has been granted the voice that Florence never had, dominates the novel with her overworked modesty and supplants her mother's story of sin and pride with her own narrative of triumph. The argument has been made, most cogently by Virginia Blain, that even at the conclusion of her story Esther is sexually repressed, makes an asexual marriage and pays for her mother's errors by remaining essentially virginal, without desire.[30] I would suggest, however, that Esther's narrative carefully charts the evolution of a woman who begins in radical repression and ends in a state of what Dickens and the culture he helps to create would understand as healthy female sexuality. The problematic set out by the novel—how society will emerge from the corruption of tainted inheritance—finds its solution in Esther's ability to marry the reforming physician Allan Woodcourt, who promises as well to cure the ills of poverty and the infirmities of his own class.

At the outset of her narrative Esther is a reluctant storyteller and claims to have difficulty imagining herself as the subject of her own story: "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now" (73–74). Her reluctance to narrate and to tell her story is bound up, of course, with the notion her aunt worked hard to establish, that she bore the mark of her mother's disgrace and embodied it at the same time. She has difficulty beginning because, she says, she is not clever and has known this since earliest childhood. To write is to claim the legitimacy of her existence, and this she has been taught never to do. In spite of this professed reluctance—or perhaps because of its defensive powers—she finds herself "always writing about myself" when she "mean[s] all the time to write about other people" (162). The "little body" will not only not fade out of the picture, but it will become the very focus of Esther's narrative when her illness and disfigurement become central to her story.

Esther's wish that her body "fall into the background" also suggests discomfort with her femaleness and, ultimately, with her sexuality. The connection between her reluctance to narrate and her will to deny sexual desire expresses itself as a recurrent narrative tick in Esther's references to Allan Woodcourt. Her initial allusions to him are a maze of indirection: "there was someone else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. . . . I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes" (233). From

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a very early point in the narrative Esther starts to withhold information about Allan and, more specifically, about her feelings for him.[31] "I have omitted to mention . . . ," "I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned . . . ," are the phrases that invariably preface her codelike references to him, just as ellipses or dashes often conclude them (233, 255). Certain passages circle around her feelings of longing and leave a blank at the center: "I was wakeful and low-spirited. I don't know why. At least I don't think I know why. At least, perhaps I do, but I don't think it matters" (288). The language of the narrative makes clear that Esther's interest in Allan is neither belated nor lukewarm, but it does so precisely by representing that interest—or desire—as an absence. And it represents the absence itself as a pathological inability—or refusal—to narrate the sexual self.

For much of the novel, then, Esther can only narrate herself as the bearer of instinctive maternal powers joined to a perpetual celibacy. When she arrives at the Jellybys for the first time Caddy and Peepy are immediately drawn to her and recognize her as a source of the maternal comfort they have never found in their own mother. In a novelistic world populated by bad mothers, orphaned or neglected children and infantile, helpless men, Esther holds the "keys" to domestic peace. Equally apparent, however, is that Esther is fated to mother children not her own: to care for Caddy and Peepy, to shop for Caddy's trousseau, to tend Caddy's ailing baby, to participate in Richard and Ada's courtship as a maidenly observer. The nicknames given her by the inhabitants of Bleak House—"Little Old Woman," "Old Woman," "Mother Hubbard"—underscore a maternal yet sexually superannuated identity. Like the type of the Victorian spinster sister-in-law, who figured so prominently in Dickens's own experience, Esther is sexually out of the running. That maternal inheritance and its psychic scars have made Esther's biological maternity impossible is borne out by her response to Mr. Guppy's proposal. Though she doesn't want Guppy for a husband, his proposal nevertheless arouses deep sorrow in her, as well as the feeling that "an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it had ever been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden" (178). The long discarded hope of living the life of a "normal" woman makes even marriage to the law clerk impossible and ultimately makes a truly asexual and, in all likelihood, sterile marriage to the fatherly Jarndyce the only imaginable course.

Lady Dedlock's legacy to her daughter does not end with illegitimacy and the inheritance of guilt: she also passes on to Esther the blight of barrenness that here, as in *Dombey*, follows upon the taint of unlicensed sexuality.[32] Lady Dedlock herself is described when she first makes her appearance in the novel as "childless" and, although this identification is meant to resonate with irony later in the text and to establish the mystery of her past, she has indeed become, as a result of that past, a barren woman. Her marriage to Sir Leicester, like Edith Granger's to Mr. Dombey, is sterile and, like Edith too, she is icy and anesthetic: "having conquered *her* world, [Lady Dedlock] fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood" (57).[33] She is, indeed, the reincarnation and fulfillment of Sir Morbury Dedlock's wife, the ghost of Ghost Walk, who had neither children nor a drop of

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"the family blood in her veins." The "family blood" of the Dedlocks, understood as an undefiled male line, boasts the inheritance of gout, a condition passed down through the men and worn like a badge of honor by Sir Leicester. Unlike contagious diseases that suggest exposure to the poor or to tainted female sexuality, or an inherited venereal disease, or an illness that can be found among the hoi polloi, gout bespeaks class privilege and maleness: "Other men's fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive" (271). Women who marry into the family—Sir Morbury's wife, the current Lady Dedlock—are cast as the bearers of corruption, polluters of the "choice stream," and agents of sterility. Even Esther, the child to whom Lady Dedlock did give birth, has a stillborn shadow self that is identified with the brickmaker's dead baby through Esther's handkerchief, Lady Dedlock's assumption that her baby died, and the clothing Lady Dedlock wears as her final disguise. When Esther and Bucket finally discover Lady Dedlock at the culmination of their search, Esther records that she "saw before [her] . . . the mother of the dead child" (868).

Among Esther' s many alter egos in the novel, the one who connects her most definitively with the conditions of urban poverty and decay is Jo, the crossing sweep. But Jo is linked to Esther not only through the fever he brings to her home from the pauper's graveyard in London: he also signals her relationship to her father, Captain Hawdon, and the other half of her genealogy. Jo, the child of no one, is the spiritual child of Hawdon/Nemo and thereby stands as a kind of sibling to Esther. Like Nemo, Jo has no legal identity, no origins, no inheritance, apparently no last name: the legal copyist had been good to the boy and, as a result, Jo remains loyal, sweeps the passage and steps to the pauper' s graveyard where Nemo's body has been thrown, and wishes to be buried near him there, however a "place of abomination" it may be.[34] When Jo becomes infected with the fever and then contaminates Esther, he passes on to her her father's legacy. If the origin of the disease is not actually Nemo's corpse, it is at least the burial ground where he lies, the place "pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters" (202).[35] The fever, then, is emblematic both of the urban blight centered in the foulness and inhumanity of the pauper's graveyard and of the illegitimacy and guilt of Esther's birth: the fever joins the social and the personal plots, and not only as an agent of connection. A number of interesting investigations into the identity of the fever of *Bleak House* have focused on Dickens's choice of an illness—in all likelihood smallpox—that was contagious and not, as was believed of something like cholera, "miasmic," or environmentally caused. Although the communicable nature of the fever is essential to the plot and the symbolism of the novel, the connection of the disease to the hideous sanitary conditions of the lives—and deaths—of the poor seems equally important.[36] Just as Jo is a victim of both the conditions into which he is born and his exposure to the diseased corpses in the graveyard, so is Esther a victim of both inheritance and contagion.

When Esther falls ill, then, she suffers the full weight of the social crimes the

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novel wants to expose and the hereditary taint her own private story tells. The onset of her illness also marks Esther's initiation into a more penetrating vision of London, a vision more akin to that of the other narrator of *Bleak House* than to her own initial enthusiasm for the "wonderful city" she views on an early morning walk with Ada, Richard, and Caddy Jellyby in the novel's early chapters. On that morning she had "admired the long succession and varieties of streets, the quantity of people . . . , the number of vehicles . . . , the busy preparations . . . , the extraordinary creatures" (97). Now, just before she makes her fateful visit to the brickmaker's cottage, where the fever-racked Jo is staying, Esther looks toward London, where "a lurid glare overhung the whole dark waste." At that moment, unaware of what will soon happen to her, she nevertheless has "an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was" (484-85). Her face covered by her veil, she then enters the cottage and is greeted by a look of "surprise and terror" from Jo, who thinks her to be the veiled woman (Lady Dedlock dressed in Hortense's clothes) he had led to Nemo's grave. Into this moment the narrative compresses all of those elements that will come together in Esther's illness: the city as point of origin for the fever and all it represents, the transformation in identity she will undergo as a result of physical trauma and the shock of learning about her origins, the link with her mother the illness will bring about and symbolically reinforce, the suggestion of unregulated passion that Hortense, her mother's and now her own alter ego, embodies throughout the text.[37] Esther's illness and subsequent discovery of her history are part of the same process of deepening self-abnegation: she takes on the full burden of her inheritance of sin and wears it, as it were, unveiled on her face. She couples them in her thoughts: "my disfigurement, and my inheritance of shame," "the deep traces of my illness, and the circumstances of my birth" (667, 668). It is as if she takes her mother's sin upon herself and bears it as a physical manifestation, a stigmata. At this moment the barrenness of Esther's future seems to be assured and her woman's body definitively desexualized, or so it appears to her. When John Jarndyce then proposes to her and she agrees to marry him, she enacts the belief that no sexual future can come out of this sexually tainted and now physically marked past. In a paroxysm of self-sacrifice Esther dedicates herself to becoming the mistress of Bleak House, to a life of being "busy, busy, busy—useful, amiable, serviceable" (668). What might be read as heroic devotion to duty on Esther's part is, in the context of the narrative's inquiry into her evolving psychic condition, a mark of her nearly pathological will to self-suppression.

It is not, however, radical self-abnegation alone that results from Esther's double trauma. Her crisis also initiates a process of reintegration in which the pieces of her past, as of a puzzle, start to come together, and long-suppressed feelings are allowed to surface. As soon as she allows herself to look at her altered appearance in the mirror—something she does at her mother's home, Chesney Wold, rather than her own—she acknowledges for the first time in her narrative what the alert reader already knows: that she loves Allan Woodcourt. In a gesture that com-

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bines self-abnegation with a new narrative candor she considers throwing away the flowers he had once given her because she wishes to be "generous" to the man she "could have been devoted to" (559). Deciding finally to keep them only as a "remembrance of what was past and gone," she nevertheless incorporates into her narrative in a way she had previously suppressed the fact of her love for Allan. The "little body" Esther had tried to put in the "background" of her narrative now takes center stage by virtue of its stigmatization.[38]

Esther's transformed appearance both registers her tie to her mother and enables her to begin to exorcise her mother's ghost. Like Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock must be purged from the text she haunts so that a chaste but truly (re)productive female sexuality can prevail. Esther's pursuit of Lady Dedlock in and out of London with Inspector Bucket is both a journey toward union with her mother and a flight toward freedom from her.[39] Lady Dedlock enters the nighttime labyrinth of the city on her own, "need[ing] no further escort," and risking identification with the homeless women, the women by the river, the women who have drowned themselves in the Thames. Esther, on the other hand, goes in the protective company of Inspector Bucket, holder of secrets, who can traverse the city without danger. Tracking Lady Dedlock back to the city's fetid and polluted center—the pauper's graveyard, the source of Esther's illness and the home in death of Esther's father—Bucket and Esther follow her to her compulsory end. Now dressed as Jenny, the brickmaker's wife, she appears to Esther to be, as I have said, "the mother of the dead child," so that her death marks the end, too, of the dead child, Esther's shadow self. The veiled women—Lady Dedlock, Hortense, the brickmaker's wife—merge in the night, and Esther emerges, in Bucket's words, as "Queen."

With her mother's death then, Esther dies into life. The text—and in particular Esther's narrative—-is startlingly silent on the subject of Lady Dedlock after the discovery of her corpse. Even in Esther's final chapter, in which she sums up the fates of the major players in her story, no mention of the dead mother is made. Esther's own maternity takes its place: she is able not only to have Allan and to have children, but to have two daughters, suggesting that the taint inherited through the female line has been expunged. By careful contrast Caddy Jellyby's little daughter, at the conclusion of the novel "deaf and dumb," suffers the blighted maternal legacy initiated by her grandmother: at birth the child had curious dark marks under its eyes, "like faint remembrances of poor Caddy's inky days" (736). The healthy maternal body of Esther has replaced the "little body" that promised to absent itself at the beginning of her narrative. The "domestic mission," which Mrs. Jellyby and her friends revile, concludes—and seemingly takes the place of—the narrative mission that for Esther had proved so problematic. The narrative ends quite literally with Esther's halting admission of the possibility of her own beauty, suggesting that to be able to acknowledge but not necessarily to articulate her own attractiveness is the fulfillment of healthy sexuality for a woman. Called to domesticity and departing almost coyly in mid-sentence,

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the heroine signals that narration itself amounts to a necessary but interruptible mission for a woman like her.

Directly contradicting the proto-feminist ravings of Miss Wisk at Caddy Jellyby's wedding then, the novel prescribes for middle-class woman the "domestic mission . . . in the narrow sphere of Home" (478). When Mr. Jarndyce presents Esther with the second Bleak House he gives her a home and a husband—Allan, not himself—as the final step in his creation of Esther as the maternal solution to social evils. The reconstituted Bleak House is free from the taint of the Jarndyce inheritance, from the legacy of stunted middle-class life, from the need for a growlery (the wind there is never in the east), from the shadow of London.[40] There in Yorkshire life undefiled will prosper, and the evils represented by Tom-all-Alone's will, as if by sleight of hand, resolve themselves in Esther and her doctor-husband's domestic happiness.

The unsettling middle-class romance of maternal sexuality that the novel offers as a resolution to deeply painful and problematic social suffering is linked to the enigmatic transformations that Sir Leicester Dedlock and Chesney Wold have undergone by the narrative's end. Clearly that aristocratic world has become moribund, like the mausoleum that houses Lady Dedlock's remains. Yet Sir Leicester's image after his wife's death has been radically sentimentalized, ennobled, and redeemed, especially by the devoted presence of Mr. George, who has chosen to remain as a companion to the broken aristocrat rather than to join his industrialist brother in the making of England's future. Earlier in the novel Sir Leicester's conviction that the ironmaster's candidacy for Parliament marked the decline of British civilization stood as an indictment of Sir Leicester's narrow-mindedness and class snobbery. Mr. George's decision to stay with Sir Leicester suggests a reversal of this earlier social vision and, at the very least, an unwillingness to abandon old England for new. It is as if Dickens's uneasiness about the philanthropic middle class—represented by Mrs. Jellyby—and the powerful entrepreneurial middle class—represented by George's brother, the ironmaster—leads him to imagine Esther's modest but fecund femininity, her husband's humanitarian professionalism, and their escape from a polluted and disease-ridden London as the basis for a productive middle-class life. But the replication of Bleak House in the provincial North has a double edge: it remakes the old Bleak House in a more salutary form, but it also marks both the present and the future of the house with an indelible connection to the legacies of the past and especially to Tom-all-Alone's, the slum "in Chancery" that nurtured Jo, and that breeds fever still.

In 1850, two years after the publication of the completed *Dombey* and three years before *Bleak House* appeared, W. R. Greg wrote a now much quoted review article on prostitution for the *Westminster Review*.[41] After a measured discussion of poverty as the chief cause of prostitution and a call for "more Christian feelings of grief, compassion, and desire to soothe and to save," Greg moves on to the subject of prostitute as social contaminant. Two things are worth noting in Greg's

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account: first, that the spread of syphilis is for him a "sanitary matter," a question to be considered along with "quarantines against the plague" and "precautions against cholera," and second, that the ultimate toll the disease will take is incalculable because of its spread, through procreation, to "innocent individuals in private life."[42] Nothing less than the "deterioration of public health and of the vigor of the race . . . in the course of a generation or two" is at stake. Like many of his contemporaries who wrote on the subject, Greg saw in the prostitute a threat to public and private life, a destroyer of health—like cholera or the plague—and a silent and invisible corrupter of apparently respectable families[43] Syphilis was the disease of the city, often alluded to in fiction by the substitution of other communicable diseases associated with urban life and, in particular, with the confluence of rich and poor. It raised the specter of a public threat that, like smallpox or cholera or typhus, might invade the private realm: it marked that point of convergence where the city streets and the middle-class drawing-room might meet.

Not only, then, did female sexuality become imaginatively central to representations of the dangers of the city, but the nature of the relationship between the woman of the streets and the woman of the hearth became a crucial social and symbolic question to ponder. The woman of the hearth might be innocent victim, heroic redeemer, or insidious reflection of her fallen counterpart. In Dickens's hands, this relationship became a means for exposing social hypocrisy, as in the cousinly connection between Alice Marwood and Edith Dombey, for expressing anxieties about the moral and physical health of the middle and upper classes, as in the barrenness of the Dombey and Dedlock marriages, and for imagining social redemption, as in the purging of Edith and Lady Dedlock and the ascendancy of Florence and Esther.

In *Dombey*, the use of female sexuality as a fulcrum for social criticism involves Dickens in a critique of patriarchal values that, at the same time, sacrifices possibly their most powerful, certainly their most dramatic and compelling, critic—Edith. As readers of the novel often feel, although Edith is indeed punished and purged, she leaves an indelible mark on the text. Dickens's investment in Edith—his use of her to make the statement that middle-class marriage can also be a form of prostitution, his endowing of her with passion, clear vision, and maternal tenderness—makes her sacrifice a gesture that vexes and rankles until the narrative's end. Never again, and certainly not with Lady Dedlock, did Dickens allow himself that overt identification with female rage and transgression.[44] In *Bleak House*, rather, the chaste daughter takes the center and successfully eclipses her mother in the narrative in a way that Florence Dombey never manages to do. But her chastity, because of the circumstances of her birth, is an ambiguous matter: in Esther Summerson herself Dickens can plot the entire movement from taintedness to purity, from a blighted female sexuality to the promise of nothing less than social regeneration. "[C]ontamination and foulness," as Acton wrote, might indeed be carried to every quarter but, through the transformation of female sexuality itself, the social body might be restored to health.

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NOTES

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1. James Phillips Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (Manchester: E. J. Morten, 1969), p. 62.

2. William Acton, *Prostitution*, ed. Peter Fryer (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 119.

3. Alexander Welsh, in *The City of Dickens* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1986), writes suggestively about the connection between sexuality and the city in Dickens's novels. He outlines an opposition between the "heroines of the hearth," associated with the domestic sphere, and the fallen, sexualized women, associated with the streets: the first appears as protector and savior, the latter as harbinger of death. Building on the kind of analysis Welsh offers, I want to suggest that in both *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* this safe distinction is powerfully threatened. See Welsh, chapter IX, "The Hearth."

4. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp. 154–55.

5. Williams, p. 155.

6. Lynda Nead, whose work on Victorian sexual mythology has been extremely useful and illuminating, writes that prostitution constituted an "*invisible* danger": "In this way the prostitute was the link between slum and suburb, dirt and cleanliness, ignorance and civilization, profligacy and morality; the prostitute made it impossible to keep these categories apart." See Nead's *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 121.

7. Alain Corbin, "Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations" in "*The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 212.

8. Corbin, p. 211.

9. Nead, p. 127. Nead emphasizes the degree to which the sentimentalization of the prostitute in literary and visual representation was a means for the middle class to control its fear of contamination. I am arguing here that in *Dombey* and *Bleak House* something beyond sentimentalization, beyond seeing the "prostitute" as victim, is going on in the representation of Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock: it is perhaps the case that the fallen woman of the lower classes can be safely sentimentalized, while her middle-class counterpart has already made inroads into the respectable domestic sphere and so cannot be managed merely with sentiment.

10. Acton, p. 756.

11. Kay, p. 12.

12. Acton, p. 27.

13. Ellen Moers, "*Bleak House*: the Agitating Women," *The Dickensian*, 69 (January 1973), p. 14.

14. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 146.

15. Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 252–4.

16. Nead, p. 50.

17. The Bagnet family is constructed as a direct contrast to the Jellybys, even in the matter of their respective attitudes to empire. The Bagnet children, born into a military

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family that has roamed the earth and now lives modestly, happily, and musically in London, are named for "the places of their birth in barracks": Malta, Woolwich, and Quebec. Mrs. Jellyby, who of course ignores her children while devoting her life to the settlement of English families and the education of the natives in Borrioboola-Gha, lacks the strong, nurturing, common-sense maternality and healthy adventurousness of Mrs. Bagnet.

18. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son: Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 93. All references to this text will hereafter be noted parenthetically in the text. In *Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), Steven Marcus calls his chapter on *Dombey* "The Changing World."

19. For a fascinating analysis of the relationship between lines of descent and business in *Dombey*, see Robert Clark, "Riddling the Family Firm: The Sexual Economy in *Dombey and Son*," *ELH*, 51 (Spring 1984). It is interesting to note that in the end Dombey is bailed out by Harriet and John Carker, inheritors of James Carker's fortune, in whose family the order of inheritance has also been subverted.

20. For a more fully developed exploration of the *centrality* of the episode with Mrs. Brown and for a fascinating discussion of its connection to *Fanny Hill*, see Joss Lutz Marsh, "Good Mrs. Brown's Connections: Sexuality and Story-Telling in *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son*," *ELH*, 58 (Summer 1991), esp. pp. 409–14.

21. For more on the uses of fairy tale, especially in Florence's story, in *Dombey* see Louise Yellin, "Strategies for Survival: Florence and Edith in *Dombey and Son*," *Victorian Studies* 22 (Spring 1979).

22. Paul Dombey wonders why Miss Blimber's hair doesn't grow long like Florence's and "why she was like a boy" (216). Throughout the novel Dickens signals "unnaturalness" in women by marking them as masculine. See Nina Auerbach, "Dickens and Dombey: A Daughter after All" in *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 5, ed. Ropert B. Partlow, Jr. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 95–114, for a discussion of the masculinity of Edith and Alice.

23. See Marcus, *Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey* (346–51), for a fascinating discussion of Carker as Dombey's double and of the two men as two sides of the author himself.

24. Norris Pope writes of this passage from *Dombey* that it was "conscious propaganda for the sanitary movement," written in the aftermath of a warning in the *Times* of the likelihood of a new cholera epidemic. See Pope, *Dickens and Charity* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 221–22. Indeed, it was after the predicted epidemic, which occurred in 1848–49, that Dickens used language very close to that of the *Dombey* passage in an address to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, in February 1850. See *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K. J. Fielding (London: Harvester, 1988), p. 106.

25. See F. S. Schwarzbach's suggestive article, "*Bleak House*: The Social Pathology of Urban Life" in *Literature and Medicine*, v.9: *Fictive Ills: Literary Perspectives on Wounds and Diseases* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Schwarzbach makes the important point that social reform movements of the period "treated the social, political, physical, and moral problems of urban England as symptoms of one underlying disease" (95).

26. But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.
—William Blake, *Songs of Experience*, 1789.

27. Gail Savage, in her essay " 'The Wilful Communication of a Loathsome Disease': Marital Conflict and Venereal Disease in Victorian England," emphasizes the association of venereal disease with sterility in establishing syphilis as grounds for divorce. See *Victorian Studies* 34 (Autumn 1990), p. 39. As to the absence of any overt reference to syphilis in the novel, William Acton reminds us at the beginning of *Prostitution* that as late as the 1850s

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the "subject of prostitution and the 'secret diseases' could hardly be mentioned outside the pages of the medical press" (7).

28. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 49–50. All references will hereafter be noted in the text. F. S. Schwarzbach makes the point that the fog of the opening chapter of the novel is a *literal*, not simply metaphorical, bearer of disease (95).

29. Richard, referring to the case and all that accompanies it, declares to Esther that "it taints everybody" (581).

30. Virginia Blain, "Double Vision and the Double Standard in *Bleak House*: A Feminist Perspective" in *Charles Dickens's 'Bleak House'* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987). In this same collection see Alex Zwerdling, "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated," for an analysis of the deft psychological portrait Dickens achieves in Esther' s narrative. Ellen Moers, in "*Bleak House*: the Agitating Women" (cited above), was the first to take seriously the degree to which this novel constitutes a commentary on the "woman question."

31. In a more sustained and complicated manner Charlotte Bronte creates a heroine with the same habit of obfuscation and suppression in *Villette* (1853). It would be interesting to speculate on Esther as a rewriting of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe as a revision of Esther.

32. See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1990) for a discussion of the presumed sterility of prostitutes and other "fallen" women during the nineteenth century. Laqueur stresses the economic meaning of the barrenness Victorian culture attributed to prostitutes: they were considered an "unproductive commodity," as contrasted with a "household economy of sex, which is quintessentially social and productive" (230–32).

33. Dickens enlists an anesthetic response to Paris to suggest the sterility of the Dedlock marriage just as he had done in *Dombey*: the Dombeys had found Paris, the site of their honeymoon, cold and dull, and Lady Dedlock in particular is so extremely bored in the French capital that she cannot get away from it too quickly (204). The narrative of the Dedlock sojourn abroad suggests that those who observe Lord and Lady Dedlock on tour think "he might be her amiable father," thereby signalling that the fatherly-daughterly relationship of Esther and Jarndyce replicates in an important way the marriage of Esther's mother to Sir Leicester (206).

34. In his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population and on the Means of Improvement* (1842), Edwin Chadwick remarks on the large numbers of parentless children living in poverty: there are, he writes, "a thousand children who have no names, or only nicknames, like dogs." See Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition . . .*, ed. M. W. Flinn (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1965), p. 199.

35. It is significant that Lady Dedlock does not fall ill after her visit to the pauper's graveyard to see her former lover's place of burial: she is perhaps immune from contagion because she is already tainted by sexual sin, the interchangeable analogue to contagious disease in the novel.

36. See Michael S. Gurney, "Disease as Device: The Role of Smallpox in *Bleak House*" and F. S. Schwarzbach, "*Bleak House*: The Social Pathology of Urban Life," both in *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 9, pp. 79–92 and 93–104. Crucial to Dickens's use of smallpox to represent, among many other things, cholera, was the general sense of the period that cholera was both contagious *and* miasmic, communicated through contact with other people and caused by exposure to a polluted environment.

37. See Virginia Blain on Hortense as Lady Dedlock's alter ego, an embodiment of "the fiendish powers of violent female sexuality" (149). Hortense's nationality is, as many have remarked, significant. Lynda Nead points to the iconographical importance of a Balzac novel in Augustus Egg's 1858 triptych, *Past and Present*, the pictorial narrative of a middle-class wife's sexual fall: the woman's two young daughter's build a literal house of cards on

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top of the novel, an allusion to the instability inherent in the sexual danger of French culture (73).

38. On this and other related points Helena Michie's superb article, " 'Who is this in Pain?": Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*," *Novel* vol. 22 (Winter 1989) is illuminating. Using feminist psychoanalytic and Lacanian theory, Michie writes tellingly of the significance of mirrors in Esther's rebirth. "In this configuration of mirrors," she writes, "Esther's refusal to be identical to and identified as her mother becomes the point in her text where a self begins to emerge. Like the female self in Wittig, Esther must enter the text through the scarring of her body; she moves from figure to body through disfigurement" (202).

39. Virginia Blain sees the pursuit of Lady Dedlock solely as Esther's definitive casting off of her mother through an alliance with her "father," Jarndyce, and with Bucket (153).

40. A passage from a speech Dickens gave before the Metropolitan Sanitary Association in May 1851 suggests that the wind in the east that disrupts Jarndyce's equanimity contains a reference to the polluting breezes that emanate from London's East End: "That no one can estimate the amount of mischief which is grown in dirt," Dickens began, "that no one can say, here it stops, or there it stops, either in its physical or moral results, when both begin in the cradle and are not at rest in the obscene grave, is now as certain as it is that the air from Gin Lane will be carried, when the wind is Easterly, into May Fair, and that if you once have a vigorous pestilence raging furiously in Saint Giles's, no mortal list of Lady Patronesses can keep it out of Almack's." See *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K. J. Fielding (London: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1988), p. 128.

41. In his piece on prostitution (*Westminster Review* 53 [1850]) Greg reviewed four works on the subject: Parent-Duchatelet's *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, James Talbot Beard's *Miseries of Prostitution*, Dr. Ryan's *Prostitution in London*, and Mayhew's *Letters in the Morning Chronicle—Metropolitan Poor.*

42. Greg, pp. 467–77.

43. Elaine Showalter has written that the culture of the fin-de-siècle imagined syphilis as a symbol of the disease of the family. While Greg's and Acton's warnings about the ingression of the disease into the middle-class home suggest that this began before the 1890s, I would argue that in the middle decades of the century syphilis symbolized the disease of the streets, of the city. See Showalter, "Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the Fin-de-Siecle" in Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ed., *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 89.

44. Laurie Langbauer writes of Dickens's identification with woman, and especially with Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, in terms of "his own identification with victimization but also of his desire to elude it." She reminds us in this context that Dickens was himself a walker of the streets. See Langbauer, *Woman and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 155.

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FOUR

Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain

Ornella Moscucci

As the new professional experts, medical practitioners in the Victorian period claimed medicine as the cornerstone of public morals. Working in conjunction with clerics and philanthropists, they elaborated a medico-moral discourse that extensively deployed a set of class and gender-related polarities: health/disease, virtue/vice, cleanliness/filth, morality/depravity, civilization/barbarity. Thus, while the sexuality of the laboring classes was linked with disease, filth, depravity and the threat of an alien and hostile culture, the identity of the middle classes was formed around the themes of health, hygiene, and moral restraint. Oppositional pairs such as normal/pathological and civilization/animality also underpinned the dichotomous construction of male and female that came to dominate medical thought in this period: a notable byproduct of this ideology was the development of gynecology, which crystallized deeply-held beliefs about the instinctual, pathological, and primitive nature of femininity (Moscucci, 1990).

Medical practitioners saw it as their task to promote the health and prosperity of the nation by, on the one hand, reforming the habits of the poor, and on the other preserving the middle-class monopoly over moral hygienics. Active participants in programs of sanitary reform aimed at tackling the evils of urban poverty, they never tired of preaching the gospel of moderation to their middle-class clientele. Warnings against the consequences of sexual excess abounded in the numerous books and pamphlets on personal health which appeared from the 1830s onwards; masturbation in particular became a subject of almost obsessive concern, the masturbator taking on almost sinister connotations as the archetypical sex deviant. One manifestation of the growing concern over the "solitary vice" was the controversial introduction of clitoridectomy as a cure for masturbation. Clitoridectomy was, and still is, part of a long tradition of religious ritual, mostly in Muslim parts of Africa. The term is loosely used to cover several different operations, the most basic of which involve either the excision of the entire clitoris,

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together with all or part of the labia minora, or the removal of the hood of tissue that surrounds the organ (circumcision). Until the mid-nineteenth century, the operation was occasionally done in Europe for severe disease of the organ, such as tumors and gross malformations; Western commentators widely rejected the African practice of clitoridectomy, which they regarded as a sign of the barbarity of the "other."

During the 1850s, however, both the removal of the hood of the clitoris and the more radical form of clitoridectomy, involving the excision of the clitoris and labia, were occasionally suggested by medical practitioners as a cure for masturbation. As early as 1848, the English obstetrician Samuel Ashwell recommended excision whenever an enlarged clitoris was "marked by exquisite sensibility of its mucous membrane," giving rise to sexual passion (708). The earliest account of a clitoridectomy I have been able to find dates from 1851; it appears in the collected works of the Italian physician Riberi, who describes a case of onanism successfully treated by the excision of the clitoris and nymphae. The late-nineteenth-century American physician Remondino, on the other hand, recommended cutting the hood of the clitoris. Much favored by American practitioners, who appear to have performed it well into the twentieth century, clitoridectomy never became established in Britain as an acceptable treatment for female masturbation. The majority of British practitioners had grave misgivings about the operation, which they regarded as sexual mutilation, and their opposition was plain for all to see in 1866, when Isaac Baker Brown's account of his clitoridectomy practice provoked one of the most heated medical controversies of the century. The outcome of the debate was that clitoridectomy was discredited in England, and soon fell into disuse; Baker Brown, a gynecologist who had enjoyed fame and acclaim as one of the most talented surgeons of his generation, lost his membership in the Obstetrical Society of London and was forced to resign from his private clinic.

Neither the medical profession nor the lay public, however, objected to circumcision when, from the early 1850s onwards, this predominantly Jewish and Islamic practice began to be recommended as a treatment for masturbation in the male. Indeed, so popular did the procedure become in English-speaking countries, especially among the upper and professional classes, that by the 1930s at least two-thirds of public schoolboys were circumcised, compared with one-tenth of working-class boys. A parallel development occurred in Africa, where by the twentieth century missionaries had given up their attempts to eradicate the practice; their residual worries were focused on its connection with initiation ceremonies, so they tried to have it done in infancy and in a hospital rather than at puberty and in public (Hyam 191).

The new mania for circumcision was truly remarkable, considering that circumcision had for centuries been unthinkable in Christian countries. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers were ambivalent about the practice, which was widely believed to diminish male pleasure, and hence procreative potency (Laqueur, "Amor veneris," 129); "Christendom," wrote Sir Richard Burton, the Victorian explorer, "practically holds circumcision in horror." It is a view which, interestingly, still has its subscribers in contemporary Britain and America. Recent de-

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bates over the continuing practice of clitoridectomy in Africa, for example, have prompted comments about the "mutilating" consequences of male circumcision, revealing a perceived analogy between circumcision and clitoridectomy. The American anthropologist Nancy Schepher-Hughes makes the case against circumcision as a mother who unsuccessfully tried to prevent the performance of the operation on her baby son. Writing in the *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* for 1991, Schepher-Hughes painfully recalls her fruitless opposition; seventeen years after the event, she still believes that her son was "sexually mutilated and violated as an infant and, as a consequence, that some part of his adult sexual pleasure was forever denied him" (Schepher-Hughes, 28). Similar sentiments were expressed by the English physician John Warren in 1994, when a mother whose son had been circumcised on his father's instruction, but against her wishes, won compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on behalf of her son. In a letter published in the *Independent on Sunday* for 29 May 1994, Dr. Warren wondered why female genital mutilation is illegal in Britain, while surgery on males is not. "Mounting evidence," he claimed, showed that circumcision was traumatic, and that men were permanently harmed by the loss of their foreskin. Dr. Warren invoked anatomical arguments in support of his views: "The foreskin," he said,

> is richly supplied with specialised nerve endings and is a major source of pleasure during sexual arousal. Furthermore it protects the glans, which when left exposed, gradually loses its sensitivity. The circumcised man also suffers mechanical sexual problems because he is often left with insufficient skin on his penis to allow the natural gliding motion of the skin over the shaft and glans during sex. In addition, many men are psychologically affected by this mutilation. They feel incomplete, and they often feel betrayed by their parents and the medical profession.

What light does all this throw on the mid-Victorian clitoridectomy controversy? It suggests that physiological or anatomical considerations cannot adequately explain why clitoridectomy should have been rejected as a treatment for masturbation. Historical accounts of clitoridectomy have been shaped by the notion of an "essential" but denied female sexuality; thus, for example, Elaine Showalter writes that the clitoris was expendable because "its sole function was female sexual pleasure" (130). I should like to argue very strongly against such essentialist approaches to sexuality, male or female, and instead explore clitoridectomy as a chapter in the history of the social construction of racial and sexual differences. At different times in the history of Western culture, both circumcision and clitoridectomy have been regarded as sexually mutilating operations, and a plethora of medical arguments has been put forward in support of this view, yet such concerns have not prevented circumcision from gaining widespread acceptance, whereas clitoridectomy still provokes fierce debate (Gordon, Boddy, Morsy, Sargent, Schepher-Hughes). Cultural factors must have been at work in this response, and I want to suggest that, by investigating the tangled relations of class and race, gender and sexuality, we might be able to elucidate the reasons why Baker Brown's operation so outraged the Victorian medical profession. The controversy over the propriety of clitoridectomy was a debate not only about the nature of female sexu-

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ality, but also about the normalization of sexual practices and the ethical codes to be observed by the doctor in treating his female patients. Exploring these issues will take us deep into the domain of sexuality mapped out by doctors in the Victorian era.

MALE MASTURBATION AND THE OFFENDING PREPUCE

Unease about masturbation began, as is well known, in the early eighteenth century, when a book entitled *Onania; or, The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* (1707–1717) appeared anonymously in Holland and met with great success. By the middle of the century Tissot's famous treatise, *On Onania: or A Treatise upon the Disorders Produced by Masturbation* (1760), had given a scientific veneer to the new anxiety about the "solitary vice." Drawing on ideas about the wastage of bodily energy, Tissot argued that physical illness resulted from loss of semen, leading to general debility, consumption, deterioration of eyesight, disturbance of the nervous system, and so on. From 1800 onwards, the evils of masturbation were widely discussed in medical and moralistic texts; although attitudes to the practice were not monolithic, much was made of its physically and mentally deleterious effects (see Hall; Hare; Engelhardt; Comfort). In essence, masturbation was less a vice than an antisocial activity, an egotistic enjoyment of pleasures that were the proper domain of heterosexual intercourse (Laqueur, *Making Sex* 227–30). Polluting and debilitating for the individual, it had a destabilizing effect on society, as it prevented healthy sexual desire from fulfilling socially desirable ends—marriage and procreation, which were the foundation of the social order.

Belief in the horrors of masturbation was shared by doctors and patients. As Lesley Hall has shown for a later period (the 1920s), a large component of men's "hidden anxieties" related to the sense of disgust and self-loathing induced by masturbation: "folly," "mistake," "disease" were the words employed by men writing to Marie Stopes, the birth-control pioneer, when they described their "addiction" to the pernicious habit of self-abuse. Such fears were easily exploited by a variety of groups with interests ranging from the religious to the commercial. Quacks were particularly active in the "treatment" of masturbation: posters, leaflets, handbills, and "anatomical museums" illustrating the dreadful consequences of onanism were widely used as marketing strategies, much to the concern of the medical profession, which was anxious to establish its own claims to the treatment of masturbation. In a letter to the *Lancet* for 1857, for example, an anonymous doctor railed against the "spermatorrhoea imposture" that lay behind the peddling of contraptions such as the "American remedy" recommended as an infallible cure for masturbation. Retailing at two guineas apiece, the device consisted of a metal ring "with a screw passing through one of its sides, and projecting into the centre," which was to be applied to the "part affected" at bed-time ("M. D.").

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Doctors on the whole favored less heroic means of stopping the habit. Strength-

ening the sufferer's moral and physical tone was the first line of defense; adjuvants included the avoidance of sexually arousing amusements, and temptations such as lolling in bed in the morning. Sometimes sexual intercourse was prescribed (with prostitutes if necessary) in order to redirect desire toward more constructive heterosexual ends (see, e.g., Cantlie, "Spermatorrhoea," "Masturbation"; Copland; "Quack advertisements" 124–26; 159–60; 224–25). Occasionally, however, the severity of the case required a more robust approach. The application of caustics to the urethra was recommended in the mid-Victorian period in order to remedy the consequences of chronic masturbation, such as spermatorrhoea and impotence; vasectomy and castration were also practiced, although such radical therapies appear to have been more popular in the United States than in England. In 1870, the use of blisters was recommended by the *Lancet* as a means of "keeping up slight soreness of the body of the organ . . . sufficient to render erection painful" ("Quack advertisements" 224).

Interest in circumcision as a treatment for masturbation began to emerge in the 1850s. As the medical discourse on sexual hygiene gathered momentum, attention was focused on uncleanliness as a cause of masturbatory activity. The English physician James Copland, one of the first to advocate circumcision in the Anglo-Saxon world, claimed that masturbation was essentially an attempt to relieve, by friction, the "local irritations" caused by smegmatic accumulations under the prepuce. He recommended circumcision as a means of maintaining genital cleanliness, adding that the great physical resilience of the Jewish people was due to the observance of this "salutary rite" (III, 442; 445). By the end of the nineteenth century, the medical pleas for circumcision had become more insistent. The American physician Remondino, author of a best-selling *History of Circumcision*, pitied the "unlucky and unhappy wearer of a prepuce": this "tight-constricted, glans-deforming, onanism-producing, cancer-generating" appendage, he claimed, was an "unknown, undiscovered, and therefore unexplored region for some thousands of years," until the medical profession, venturing at last into this "Darkest Africa," had revealed the malign influence it exercised on its unwary victims (255–56). Parents could not make a "better paying investment" for their sons than circumcision: it was like a "substantial and well-secured life-annuity," making for a greater capacity for labor, a longer life, less nervousness, and fewer doctors' bills (186).

Physicians such as Remondino had little difficulty in persuading their middle-class readers, who already appreciated the importance of hygiene and moral restraint: it was the observance of regular habits that ostensibly set the middle classes apart from the debauched aristocracy and the degenerate working classes, legitimating middle-class claims to cultural hegemony. By the early twentieth century, circumcision had become common among the upper and professional classes of Britain and America. In the 1930s, the earliest period for which statistics are available, two-thirds of public-school boys were circumcised as compared to one-tenth of working-class boys; the British royal family employed a Jewish *mohel* for the purpose as late as the end of 1948. By virtue of its association with filth and

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sexual excess, the prepuce had become a marker of inferior social status: already by the end of the 1890s an equation was being made in America between being "uncircumcised" and being "uncivilized."

As Ronald Hyam has noted, circumcision was central to the late-Victorian redefinition of manliness in terms of sexual restraint and "cleanness." As the purity campaign gathered momentum in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the meaning of manliness shifted from the ideals of moral strenuousness and integrity to a cult of athleticism and robust virility. The offensive on male lust and the double standard of sexual morality presented masculinity as a never-ending battle, requiring watchfulness and supervision: muscular Christianity was the goal, attainable through strict mental and physical discipline. Widely believed to dampen sexual desire, circumcision was seen positively as a means of promoting both the chastity and the physical health of the custodians of the empire ("Hygienic value," 271).

The emphasis on sexual hygiene no doubt also explains why a Jewish ritual like circumcision was adopted by the British ruling elite, notwithstanding the antisemitism of much Victorian culture: at a time of profound concern about the physical decline of British manhood, the resilience of the Jews in the face of adversity and persecution was held up as proof that sexual hygiene was the mainspring of a nation's vigor. While George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) opposed the sustaining values of Jewish culture to the shallow conventions of contemporary Victorian society, doctors and politicians noted with envy the longevity and sturdiness of the Jews, testifying to the rarity of venereal disease, tuberculosis, and cancer of the penis in Jewish communities, as well as to the low levels of infant mortality, illegitimacy, and criminality. Over and over again, commentators attributed the physical and moral superiority of the Jews to the religious rituals and prescriptions observed in their culture (Remondino 161–82). In an influential article published in the *Contemporary Review* for 1903, Major General Sir Frederick Maurice, one of the chief contributors to the turn-of-the-century physical deterioration debate, singled out childrearing practices as a factor contributing to the health and longevity of the Jews; although he did not recommend "stereotyped copying" of the Jews, he conceded that the rest of the nation had much to learn from them (Davin 16). The fact that circumcision had biblical sanction probably facilitated the spread of the practice in Christian Britain and America. The language of purity mobilized religious discourse, emphasizing the intimate connection between physical and moral health: circumcision showed that the divine law had scientific validation (Mort 109–12).

THE BAKER BROWN AFFAIR

The success of male circumcision contrasts markedly with the reception of clitoridectomy in England, where the practice proved extremely controversial, even in its mildest form. While circumcision was a central plank of the Victorian con-

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struction of bourgeois masculinity, clitoridectomy ran counter to prevailing middle-class assumptions about women's sexuality. This conflict became arrestingly clear when Isaac Baker Brown's practice of the surgery came to the attention of the medical press, and the profession rose in protest against this "questionable, compromising, unpublishable" mutilation ("Obstetrical Society charges" 431).

The son of a "country gentleman," Isaac Baker Brown was born in Essex in 1812. He began his medical career by serving a period of apprenticeship, after which he was entered as a student at London's Guy's Hospital. Upon qualifying in 1834, Brown took the popular career route that led from general practice to obstetrics and gynecology. He became an accoucheur of some repute and in the early 1850s he began to carry out his first trials of ovariotomy, a dangerous procedure widely condemned by the medical establishment. Though unsuccessful with his first three cases, he did not hesitate in 1852 to operate on the fourth—his own sister—who luckily survived. Two years later he published his work on *Surgical Diseases of Women*, which established his reputation as a bold and ingenious surgeon. During the 1850s Baker Brown took an active part in the foundation of St. Mary's Hospital in London. He worked there as surgeon-accoucheur until 1858, when he resigned his post and founded the London Home for Surgical Diseases of Women. This institution admitted patients on a fee-paying basis, and was intended for a class of patient a cut or two above the hospital population. Meanwhile, Baker Brown continued to develop his innovative surgical treatments. The Home's operating theater became a magnet for visiting medics, who invariably admired his technique and dexterity: he was said to be particularly skilful in the treatment of uterine prolapse, vesico- and recto-vaginal fistula, and fibrous tumors of the uterus.

Baker Brown was at the zenith of his reputation when, in 1866, he published his fateful remarks on the *Curability of Some Forms of Insanity, Epilepsy, Catalepsy, and Hysteria, in Females*. In this volume Baker Brown set forth his operation of clitoridectomy, which he had devised for the cure of disease originating from "peripheral excitement of the pudic nerve." Loosely based on the ideas of Charles-Edouard Brown-Séquard (the famous neurologist later complained that his work had been taken out of context), Brown's theory hinged on the belief that many nervous diseases in women were due to the "loss of nerve power" induced by masturbation. He thought that the habit was rife among young girls and that a vast array of symptoms gave the secret addict away. Patients became restless and excited, or melancholy and retiring, listless and indifferent to domestic life. There was often quivering of the eye-lids and an inability to look one in the face, as well as dyspepsia, sickness, and disturbance in the menstrual function. Sometimes a "great disposition for novelties" was displayed, the patient "desiring to escape from home, fond of becoming a nurse in hospitals, *soeur de charité*, or other pursuits of the like nature." In the married, a distaste for marital intercourse, sterility, and a tendency to abort early in pregnancy were also often observed (Brown 1866). Baker Brown had no doubt that, if left unchecked, masturbation induced a fearful train of ills, from hysteria through to epilepsy, idiocy, mania and, finally,

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death. The only permanent cure was to remove the "cause of excitement" by cutting out the clitoris and nymphae. Brown had performed the operation again and again, and he was so impressed with its results that he warmly recommended it to all "unprejudiced" medical men.

Curiously, it was a religious publication, the *Church Times*, which first noticed Brown's monograph. In April 1866 a rave review, subsequently reprinted in the *British Medical Journal*, drew the attention of the clergy to a

> little book, which will enable them to suggest a remedy for some of the most distressing cases of illness which they frequently discover among their parishioners. . . . Mr Baker Brown, FRCS, the eminent surgeon, has . . . published . . . a little volume of cases, which prove incontestably the success for the treatment, and which the clergy will be doing a service, especially to their poorer parishioners, by bringing under the notice of medical men, any of whom can, if possessed of ordinary surgical skill, perform the operation with but slight assistance. ("Spiritual advice")

Unlike the *Church Times*, though, the medical press was notably unimpressed with Brown's claims. The first shot was fired by the British Medical Journal in April 1866. In a review of the book, the journal could not help noticing that Brown's case histories failed to show how much of the cure was due to the operation and how much to the moral treatment that usually followed it. Brown's attempts to publicize the operation also came in for censure. Veiled references to clitoridectomy at fund-raising meetings smacked of impropriety, as did the typography of Brown's treatise: "We feel bound . . . to observe," wrote the journal, "that a serious medical work on the subject of Female Masturbation should bear on its outward *facies* none of those characters which belong to the class of works which lie upon drawing-room tables" ("On the Curability" 440).

The review served to focus medical unease about clitoridectomy, sparking off a fierce debate in the pages of the medical press: misgivings about the nature, implications, and supposed benefits of the operation were increasingly voiced during the course of 1866. The controversy intensified when, in November 1866, the eminent obstetrician Charles West entered the fray. In a letter to the *Lancet*, West rebutted Brown's claims about the extent and results of masturbation. Self-abuse in the female, West argued, was much rarer than in the male, and besides, its physical effects were no different from those of excessive sexual indulgence. Furthermore, West alleged that operations had been carried out without the knowledge and consent of patients: "I believe," he stated,

> that few members of the medical profession will dissent from the opinion that the removal of the clitoris without the cognisance of the patient and her friends, without full explanation of the nature of the proceeding, and without the concurrence of some other practitioner selected by the patient or her friends, is in the highest degree improper, and calls for the strongest reprobation. (561–62)

In December 1866, a paper on clitoridectomy read by Dr. Tanner before the Obstetrical Society of London provoked a discussion that the *Lancet* portentously

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described as "historic." Not only were doubts cast over the physiological justifications for and therapeutic value of clitoridectomy; Dr. Tyler Smith, an obstetrician of some considerable repute, alleged that Brown had obtained the consent of a patient by prophesying insanity and death if the clitoris was not removed. Another doctor reported that one of his patients had had her clitoris removed by Baker Brown without her knowledge or consent: she had expressed "great alarm" upon being told that the parts had been "mutilated" ("On excision" 668).

At the beginning of 1867 Brown got into even deeper water when an advertisement in the *Times* intimated that mental diseases were being treated in the Surgical Home, in open violation of the Lunacy Laws. Baker Brown lamely denied the charges in a correspondence with the Lunacy Commissioners, which was duly published in the medical press. The *Lancet* was not impressed. "Our strictures upon the alleged practice at the Home," wrote the journal in February 1867, "were not confined merely to the law of the case; we asked whether it were ethically correct to mutilate an insane woman who could not legally consent to any such operation, even if it were possibly useful. To this question we have received no answer" ("Lunatics").

These allegations shifted the terms of the debate from the efficacy of clitoridectomy to the manner in which Brown had performed it. From the legal point of view, Brown would have been liable at least to battery charges, but the profession was not worried about possible lawsuits; it was, in any case, most unlikely that a patient would have brought charges against Brown, since a public trial would have involved unpleasant revelations about her sexual habits. In the opinion of the medical press, the case was important because it raised "vital questions of moral and professional ethics" which the profession should fully investigate. Had Brown performed, as many believed, "a dreadful operation upon married women without the knowledge and consent of their husbands, and upon married or unmarried women without their own knowledge of the nature of the operation" ("Clitoridectomy" 1867, 420)?

Interestingly it was not to the General Medical Council, the profession's regulatory body, but to the Obstetrical Society of London, of which Brown was a member, that the question was put. A dossier of the charges against Brown, and Brown's replies to them, was assembled by the Council of the Obstetrical Society, and in February 1867, after careful consideration, the council recommended Brown's expulsion.

The resolution was discussed two months later at a special meeting of the Obstetrical Society. Long before the meeting began, members started filling the room, so that when Seymour Haden, vice-president of the society, rose to speak, there was no room to sit or stand. Haden's uncompromising condemnation of clitoridectomy set the tone for the whole evening. Brown was relentlessly attacked by the leading obstetricians of his day, and he had to justify his conduct amidst the shouting and jeering of the assembly. He defended himself as best he could, but he failed to convince the society of his *bona fides*. The overwhelming vote in favor of his removal came as no surprise at the end of four hours of bitter discussion.

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After his expulsion from the Obstetrical Society, Baker Brown resigned from the London Surgical Home. He continued to practise as a gynecologist, but his reputation was irreparably tarnished and his private practice sharply declined. Early in 1872 his health deteriorated, and an appeal was made to medical men to help him out of his financial difficulties. He died in 1873, of a brain hemorrhage, leaving a widow, three young children and a crippled daughter from a previous marriage—a tragic ending to a brilliant career.

THE DEVIANT CLITORIS

Over a century later, the Baker Brown case has been revisited by contemporary historians influenced by the writings of twentieth-century sexologists. Ever since Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson, published their investigations in the 1950s and 1960s, modern sexology has stressed the power of a "denied" female sexuality, bringing the "clitoral orgasm" to the forefront of the discussion. This postwar redefinition of female sexuality, eagerly pressed to the service of feminism, has led to the view that female sexuality is of necessity thwarted under "patriarchy." Historical accounts of clitoridectomy have been shaped by this belief, implicitly endorsing the notion of an "essential" but denied femininity (a mirror image of the conventional view). Ann Dally, for example, has argued that "the clitoris symbolised the aspect of women that men could arouse but not control. . . . Clitoridectomy was the surgical expression of an ideology that restricted female sexuality to reproduction" (163). As Thomas Laqueur has pointed out, however, "there is nothing natural about how the clitoris is constructed. It is not self-evidently the female penis nor is it self-evidently opposed to the vagina. Nor have men always regarded clitoral orgasm as absent, threatening, or unspeakable because of some primordial fear of, or fascination with, female sexual pleasure" ("Amor Veneris" 92). Laqueur shows how the "discovery" of the clitoris in the Renaissance was in fact still rooted in the one-sex model of sex difference that had dominated medical thought since antiquity. In this male-centered system, where the female genitalia were construed as a version of the male's, the clitoris was seen as the analogue of the penis. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was accepted that the clitoris was the seat of woman's sexual pleasure; medical writers were not worried about the potential of the clitoris for lesbianism or masturbation, nor about its size, which was seen positively, as a healthy mark of female lustfulness. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the clitoris had become much more problematic. As the emerging notion of two opposite sexes made heterosexual coupling "natural," the capacity of the clitoris for homo- and autoeroticism was increasingly perceived as a threat to the social order. Clitoral eroticism became synonymous with masturbation in the male, attracting widespread condemnation as the "solitary vice." Both male and female masturbation were seen to lead to self-destruction; however, in women the problem was further compounded, in that it also posed the danger of sexual inversion. Women who masturbated, it was

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maintained, made converts, and by exciting their clitorides enough, they developed a kind of penis themselves (Laqueur, *Making Sex* 227–30; "Amor Veneris" 118–19).

However, there is more to this history than the definition of gender norms: as can be seen from the medical/anthropological literature on clitoral enlargement in black races and in prostitutes, the work of sexual normalization carried out in the Victorian period was as dependent on the construction of racial and class differences as it was on the definition of gender categories. Since ancient times physicians and geographers had remarked upon the large size attained by the clitoris of women who lived in hot countries like Egypt. Women affected by this hypertrophy of the clitoris and labia were thought to be given to lesbianism and sexual excesses, and the routine performance of clitoridectomy in large swathes of North Africa was sometimes explained as a measure designed to keep female sexuality in check. By the late eighteenth century, the so-called "Hottentot apron" had come to be regarded as an emblem of the lascivious, ape-like sex appetite attributed to black women: their voluptuousness, said the comparative anatomist Virey in the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* (1819), was "developed to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites" (400). Virey, the author of the standard text on race in the early nineteenth century, was responsible for initiating a long line of anatomical investigations into the genitalia of the Hottentot woman. In his work, as in later studies by other comparative anatomists and anthropologists, the enlarged clitoris and labia of the Hottentot became an important criterion of racial classification, confirming the whole range of assumptions about the "primitive" nature of black races.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Saartje Baartman, the famous "Hottentot Venus," caused a medical and popular sensation when her grossly enlarged genitalia and out-sized buttocks (steatopygia) were publicly exhibited throughout Europe. After her death in 1815, an autopsy was performed on her and her genitals were subsequently presented to the Academy of Medicine "prepared in a way so as to allow one to see the nature of the labia" (Cuvier; see also Pieterse 180–81; Gilman, *Sexuality* 290–94). While contemporary caricaturists lampooned this interest as a kind of scientific voyeurism, anatomists and anthropologists were more concerned to provide data about the unity or plurality of humankind. With this object in mind, William Flower, editor of the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, included his dissection of the genitalia of a Hottentot in the first volume of the journal; he concluded that the remarkable development of the labia minora was "sufficiently well marked to distinguish the parts at once from those of any of the ordinary varieties of the human species" (293–94). The many discussions about the anomalous nature of the black's genitalia published during the course of the century were invariably racist arguments in favor of polygenism: by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it was widely accepted that the "Hottentot apron" was an inherent, biological variation rather than an adaptation. In Billroth's 1877 manual of gynecology, the overdevelopment of the clitoris in

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blacks was defined as a malformation, and it was claimed that the anomaly led to "excesses" called "lesbian love" (Hildebrandt).

The elongation of the labia took on still another signification during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when it became associated with prostitution as well as with blackness. This merging of the image of the black woman with that of the prostitute was already under way in 1870, the year in which Adrien Charpy's analysis of the genitals of 800 prostitutes examined in Lyons was published in the most distinguished French journal of dermatology and syphilology. The analogy between the prostitute and the Hottentot woman was made explicit in *La donna delinquente* (1893), by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, in which the "Hottentot apron" was shown alongside the enlarged genitals of prostitutes to demonstrate the atavistic nature of the prostitute. Both the black and the prostitute were associated with "primitiveness," unrestrained sexuality, and venereal disease.

Running like a thread through discussions of masturbation, lesbianism, prostitution, and blackness, the question of clitoral overdevelopment threw into sharp relief the central problem of the clitoris in the nineteenth century: sexual deviation. Sexual pleasure in women was pathological and socially problematic if it was the result of solitary, homosexual, or promiscuous sexual activity, healthy and socially constructive if it was pursued within the context of the marital relationship. *Pace* William Acton and his well-known views about the asexual woman, most Victorian medical men recognised that sexual pleasure formed an important part of conjugal love and companionship: indeed, the chief objection to clitoridectomy was that it rendered women frigid, thus undermining the stability of marriage (see also Moscucci, *Science of Woman*, 34; Mort 80).

What about Baker Brown's own views, though? His position may be inferred from the reply he gave to his critics, when they argued that clitoridectomy extinguished female desire. Speaking at a meeting of the Obstetrical Society in December 1866, he firmly rejected the accusation that women might be rendered frigid by the operation. On the contrary, he claimed, in five of his cases "from previously having disliked marital intercourse and preferred self-abuse, the state of things had completely changed after his operation" ("On excision" 669). Brown's claims look untenable in terms of twentieth-century physiological knowledge, but one or two of his contemporaries would not have found them so extraordinary. Dr. Tanner, for example, believed that clitoridectomy was the analogue of circumcision, since the excision of the clitoris only removed that part of the pudic nerve that corresponded to the dorsal nerve of the penis in the male, and which supplied the fraenum and prepuce (he added that clitoridectomy was useless as a cure for masturbation) ("On excision" 667). Even more interesting is the opinion expressed by "F. R. S." in a letter to the *Lancet* for June 1866: the clitoris, argued the writer, was of no importance to the female, not because sexual desire was irrelevant to her sex life, but because the seat of female pleasure was in the vagina—the part that did matter in the act of coition. If we put all this together, we are bound to conclude that Baker Brown was not interested in suppressing female pleasure, but

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in redirecting it toward an acceptable social end: heterosexual, vaginal intercourse. Within "normal" female sexuality, there could be no place for the clitoris, with its propensity for sexual unorthodoxy and forbidden pleasures. We really are not very far from Freud's theory of the vaginal orgasm, where he argued that the transition from infant to adult sexuality in woman was contingent upon the little girl putting aside her "childish masculinity" at puberty and transferring her "erotogenic susceptibility to stimulation . . . from the clitoris to the vaginal orifice" (99). Significantly, his pupil Marie Bonaparte saw a parallel between the African practice of clitoridectomy and the social pressures that forced the switch from clitoral to vaginal sexuality onto the little girl: "I believe," she wrote in *Female Sexuality*, "that the ritual sexual mutilations imposed on African women since time immemorial . . . constitute the exact physical counterpart of the psychical intimidations imposed in childhood on the sexuality of European little girls" (203).

Bonaparte's analogy suggests that the meaning of clitoridectomy must be recovered in the context of a wider reappraisal of the significance of the clitoris, which was just beginning at the time of the Baker Brown case. By the early twentieth century, the downgrading of the clitoris was complete, and the vagina had supplanted the "precious jewel" as the most important locus of a woman's erotic life. Even Havelock Ellis, the greatest of British writers on sexuality, played down the importance of the clitoris, and Freud's ambiguous recognition of its role was used by some of his followers to elaborate the idea that the clitoris was a "vestigial penis" (Weeks 148). Looking at the problem as one facet of the Victorian construction of gender, it is clear that the ambiguous clitoris could not be harnessed to a definition of male and female which hinged on the polarization of mutually related qualities. If sexual divergence was an integral part of the evolutionary process, as Darwin claimed in 1871 in his *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, then it followed that civilization depended on women repressing their "male-like" clitoris. The hypertrophied genitals of "primitive" races stood as a warning that the whole process of evolution might go into reverse if gender roles were threatened: in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, women's demands for access to male preserves such as medicine and higher education invariably raised the fear of hermaphroditism and sexual inversion (Moscucci, "Hermaphroditism"; *Science of Woman* 39–40).

Baker Brown's operation is thus part of a history in which the enforcement of heterosexuality and the maintenance of gender boundaries, rather than the suppression of female sexuality, have been the dominant themes. It is also an aspect of the history of Western attitudes to race and class. The enlarged clitoris that distinguished the habitual masturbator was also a mark of blackness and low-class criminality; it thus undermined the putatively biological distinctions between races and classes that served as the basis for the hierarchical ordering of society. As the American gynecologist Robert T. Morris argued in a revealing essay published in 1892, evolution was "trying to do away with the clitoris" in educated white women, leading to lessened female desire and greater independence from men. In his view, the proportion of white women with normal sexual organs was

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small, and surgery might be necessary to remove their clitoral adhesions. Baker Brown's mistake, he thought, was removing the clitoris rather than adjusting it: like so many pioneers, he had been "led astray."

CLITORIDECTOMY AND FEMALE PURITY

The arguments adduced in support of clitoridectomy suggest that medical consensus around the function of the clitoris was beginning to break down in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The strength of the opposition, however, does indicate that the majority of medical men were still firmly behind the notion that the clitoris was analogous to the penis: as two of Brown's critics put it, the operation left the patient "a different woman" and exposed her to the possibility of being treated as an "imperfect" person—like a kind of female eunuch ("Obstetrical Society" 439, 438). The physician Harry Moore could not have put it in stronger terms: "we have scarcely more right to remove a woman's clitoris," he wrote, "than we have a man [*sic*] of his penis." Like the removal of the ovaries, clitoridectomy "mutilated" women because it deprived them of an essential part of their sexual system, evoking the inhuman, barbarous practices of primitive tribes. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, opponents of gynecological surgery often used images drawn from missionary tales of heathen rituals and human sacrifice among the savages as a rhetorical device by which they sought to convey the sense of horror and abhorrence induced by the surgical violation of women. As the surgeon Spencer Wells, one of of the most scathing critics of "Battey's operation," thundered in 1891: "the oöphorectomists of civilization touch hands with the aboriginal spayers of New Zealand" (see also "Excision of the Clitoris" 667; Moscucci *Science of Woman* 157–60; Pieterse 69–75).

Not only did clitoridectomy violate the integrity and purpose of the female body; it also threatened deep-seated beliefs about feminine purity and morality. The operation left an indelible stigma on a woman's moral character. Its performance suggested sexual depravity and defiling bodily touchings. As a medical man, who signed himself anonymously "A Provincial FRCP," observed in the *British Medical Journal*,

> There is one question which must occur to everyone, and I put it with all professional propriety: What is the value, *in toro nuptiali*, of a woman on whom the "operation as usual" has been performed? I have heard of bachelors fighting shy of young ladies who are known to have consulted a certain celebrated physician who insists on a "digital exploration" in every case of illness, but this!

Quite apart from the moral objections to clitoridectomy, there were differences of opinion over the causes of masturbation and its role in the etiology of nervous disease in women. Some doctors still believed that masturbation was a moral disorder that should be treated by moral, rather than physical, means; others thought that it was not a cause, but a symptom, reflecting changes in attitudes to masturbation that would become manifest at the end of the nineteenth century. According-

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ing to Charles West, for example, the removal of the clitoris in cases of epilepsy, hysteria, insanity, and "other nervous diseases" in women was based on "erroneous physiology" (560). The physician Forbes Winslow claimed that the cause of epilepsy was in the head and that Brown began his treatment "at the wrong end." In the opinion of the *Lancet*, it was not necessary to invoke masturbation in order to account for the causes of female insanity: many physiological and pathological processes, from menstruation to uterine disease, caused sexual excitation in women, such as led to a wide variety of mental disorders (1866, 698). Although no careful data were kept by either side in the debate, the etiological models employed by the critics of clitoridectomy all pointed to the same conclusion: the operation did not stop masturbation, nor did it cure insanity and epilepsy.

These arguments reflected the wide range of beliefs and attitudes that underscored medical discussions of masturbation in *both* men and women; however, they also revealed a set of preoccupations that was specific to the female sex. The notion that women might practice masturbation was not in accordance with prevailing beliefs about female purity and sexual respectability, and doctors favored theories of female insanity that did not implicate masturbation. The reason why Baker Brown resorted to clitoridectomy with "lamentable frequency," wrote the *British Medical Journal*, was that he was "possessed with the idea of the universality of self-abuse, and its power of producing innumerable evils" ("Clitoridectomy" 1866, 664). Elaborating the point, Charles West stated that masturbation was "much rarer in girls and women than in our own sex" (1866, 560). Thus, although theories about masturbation applied indifferently to males and females, in practice there was an important asymmetry, in that female masturbation was regarded as the less salient problem. This resistance to the idea that women were capable of transgressing the norms of sexual behavior resonated in the different treatment of male and female homosexuality in the Victorian era.

Following the introduction of the famous Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, male homosexuality was subjected to new regulations; lesbianism on the other hand continued to be ignored by the criminal codes. An attempt in 1921 to introduce provisions against lesbianism similar to those of the Labouchère Amendment failed to get through Parliament, and the reasons are illuminating. In the words of Lord Desart, "You are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think that is a very great mischief." The same view was expressed by Lord Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor: "I would be bold enough to say that of every thousand women, taken as a whole, 999 have never heard a whisper of these practices. Among all these, in the homes of this country . . . the taint of this noxious and horrible suspicion is to be imparted" (Hyde 200 ff.). Paternalistic institutions such as the law and medicine championed the ideal of female purity and they thus had a special obligation to safeguard women's morals. As the *British Medical Journal* put it, clitoridectomy was a "dirty subject, and one with which only a strong sense of duty can induce professional men to meddle; and then it needs to be handled with an absolute pu-

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rity of speech, thought, and expression, and, as far as possible, in strictly technical language" ("Clitoridectomy" 665). By writing a popular monograph, Baker Brown had violated the taboos surrounding female masturbation, creating opportunities for moral corruption and bringing discredit to the medical profession. Physicians were shocked to find that the Report of the London Surgical Home, a publication widely circulated among would-be benefactors, contained a list of female diseases "enough to make the blood of any layman curdle. The curiosity of non-professional *men* I know this list to have excited," claimed a provincial physician,

> from having had to translate some of the hard names. And are we to suppose that feminine curiosity is either less, or seeks no gratification? . . . It seems to me that, if it be possible to suggest to the female mind thoughts which may result in the deplorable habits, the reference to which no euphonious periphrasis can conceal, it is most likely to be done by the circulation among families and non-professionals of publications that will be read chiefly by those to whom it will prove harmful. ("Provincial FRCP")

There were thus many different reasons why the medical profession objected to Baker Brown's practice of clitoridectomy. Brown had performed a "mutilating" operation of no clear therapeutic benefit, failed to disclose its nature to his patients, brought "secret" material into the public domain. Taken together, these misdemeanors amounted to quack practice in the eyes of contemporaries. As Seymour Haden explained to the Obstetrical Society, quackery was "the pretended cure of real disease by means which have a secret, unpublishable, compromising character." Clitoridectomy was, by definition, quackery, since it was "questionable, compromising, unpublishable, and therefore secret" ("Obstetrical Society" 430). These words illustrate the particular vulnerabilities of gynecology to both professional and popular suspicion. The traditional association of the treatment of sexual disorders with quack practice made gynecology a specialty with a particular need to cultivate its professional image; equally, gynecology received more competition from quacks and unqualified practitioners than any other medical specialty. Thus the appeal to quackery was the most rhetorically effective expression of opposition to clitoridectomy, and it is perhaps because it could be used as a screen for the sensitive sexual issues raised by the case that it ended up dominating the debate. Long lambasted as sexual predators by the opponents of male midwifery, gynecologists needed to be seen as paternalistic protectors of women's welfare if they were to retain the trust of their female patients and of their male relatives—especially husbands. As the *Lancet* commented at the end of the case, truth-telling formed part of a professional code which rested "partly upon the basis of time-honoured custom, but mainly upon the still more certain foundation of the honour and chivalry of English gentlemen" ("Clitoridectomy" 1867, 420).

Chivalry was, of course, especially relevant to the practice of gynecology, since it was bound up with the notion of devoted service to women. It also had an unmistakably aristocratic stamp which the upwardly-mobile gynecological profession found especially attractive. Gynecologists often depicted themselves as

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knights-in-armor rescuing damsels from the perils of unskilled midwifery: at a time when male violence against women was invariably represented as a working-class problem, woman-worship fostered patient confidence and bolstered claims to a higher social status. As Seymour Haden stressed in his harangue against Brown,

> we have to remember that in choosing the particular branch of medicine which we follow, practising as we do among women particularly, . . . we have constituted ourselves the true guardians of their interests, and in many cases in spite of ourselves we become the custodians of their honour. We are, in fact, the stronger, and they the weaker. They are obliged to believe all that we tell them. . . . We, therefore, may be said to have them at our mercy. . . . I think, under these circumstances, that if we should depart from the strictest principles of honour, if we should cheat and victimise them in any shape or way, we should be unworthy of the profession of which we are members. ("Obstetrical Society charges" 430)

Baker Brown had failed his patients and his profession: in the end he was someone who was going to give gynecology exactly the kind of bad name that the profession desperately wanted to avoid, and he either had to be brought into line or denounced and disassociated from the professional body. If medicine was to continue its advance into the domain of sexuality, it was essential that people like Baker Brown should not stand in the way.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to Bob Baker, Roy Porter, and Dorothy Porter for their helpful comments and suggestion. I am especially grateful to James Adams and Andrew Miller for their advice, encouragement, and support during the gestation of this paper.

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FIVE

Darwin and the Anthropologists

Sexual Selection and Its Discontents

Rosemary Jann

In the oft-cited conclusion to *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Charles Darwin replies to those who find their evolution from animals distasteful by arguing that he would as soon claim descent from

> that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper . . . as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions. (919–20)[1]

As I hope to make clear in the following discussion, this passage is caught in a rhetorical dilemma central to Darwin's treatment of primitive humanity in the *Descent*: having anthropomorphized animals in the image of modern humans to make evolutionary continuity more plausible, he had then to account for apparent violations of instinctual behavior in savages. By linking savage depravity to the breakdown of what are implicitly posited as natural family and social relationships, this passage also suggests the crucial role played by sexual conduct in Victorian (and later) attempts to construct the boundary that demarcates the fully human from the animal and to chart the progress of civilization. From the Victorian period on, such accounts have been dominated by two strategies: they have tended to make social power depend upon the ability to exercise sexual choice, and they have attempted to explain, and by implication to justify, specific gender roles by constructing a history for them. Taking the power relations of Victorian society as the end whose evolution needed to be accounted for, both Darwin and the anthropologists who influenced him made bourgeois gender roles a functional part of their genealogies while in the process writing Victorian conceptions of female nature back into the past as biological and cultural norms. Because of inherent conflicts between Darwin's conception of sexual selection and the demands of his-

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torical continuity, however, the *Descent* affords significant insights into the ideological contradictions that this kind of scientific explanation often conceals.

The exact nature of the continuity between animals and humans where gendered behavior is concerned has proved a complicated and controversial issue in the debate over the cultural meanings of evolutionary theory. Among the more recent contributors to the discussion have been analysts of domestic ideology, who have stressed the importance of female coyness and choice in Darwin's construction of animal mating behavior. Nancy Armstrong argues that Darwin needed to rule out force as a natural basis for human superiority in order to maintain the pre-eminence of a Victorian middle class shaped by the female domestication of male competitive instincts. For her the depiction in the *Descent* of female animals choosing the mates that most please them substitutes sexual exchange for competition as the basis for natural order. Having shaped animal behavior by domestic models, Darwin naturally prefers his heroic monkey to the vision of a primitive culture that is not a culture at all because it suppresses female choice (Armstrong 221–24). Although focussing more on female modesty than female prerogatives, Ruth Bernard Yeazell similarly argues that Darwin produced a "feminized narrative" in the *Descent* by projecting onto animal behavior a "courtship plot" drawn from domestic fiction (see 219–28). While contributing important insights about the shaping of Darwin's narrative, such analyses do not fully acknowledge the argument for woman's biological and intellectual inferiority and for male agency and choice, arguments that historians of science like Cynthia Russett and Evelleen Richards have identified as fundamental to the *Descent*'s reconstruction of human evolution (see also Alaya, Hubbard, and Mosedale for related critiques of the evolutionary biologizing of female nature in the nineteenth century).

Although I will draw more heavily on this latter position in the discussion that follows, it will become apparent that both views are made possible by Darwin's contradictory treatment of the continuity between animals and human beings where sexual selection is concerned. My argument will trace most of these contradictions to his attempts to impose a biologically consistent explanation upon an anthropological narrative of culture implicitly at odds with his. While treating Victorian conventions of sexual conduct as in some way natural to animal behavior, Darwin also relied on anthropological reconstructions of early human life that, as Elizabeth Fee has argued, glorified middle-class patriarchy precisely because it was the product of civilization, not nature ("Sexual Politics" 88–94). Where those anthropological narratives began their construction of culture on this side of the border between animal and man, and took savage depravity as the initial chapter in the human story, Darwin's origin myth, on the other hand, depended upon biological continuity to explain the derivation of cultural forms. By shifting his definition of instinctual sexual behavior in animals, he could project a version of the modern patriarchal family back across that border between animal and man. But this rhetorical move left him unable fully to explain what had subverted the sexual prerogatives of female animals or had produced the "unnatural"

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behavior of the earliest savage cultures. The result was a narrative implicitly fragmented into rival discourses of continuity and rupture, progress and regression.

After a brief summary of the anthropological narratives that Darwin relied upon, I will examine the rhetorical problems that resulted from his attempts to accommodate their history of sexual desire to his own conception of how sexual selection must have worked among human beings. The demands of continuity cut in conflicting ways across his narrative: the vision of primeval patriarchy, which guaranteed that human sexuality would eventually fit modern paradigms, undercut in significant ways the continuum he elsewhere tried to forge between animal and human courtship and between the advance of intelligence and the development of civilization. My analysis of the ways ideological assumptions control narrative reconstruction in this Victorian debate will end by considering its modern legacy in our continuing efforts to justify cultural order by tracing its sexual etiology. As Donna Haraway demonstrates in her analysis of the "family of man" constructed by modern science and of feminist counterpoints to it, the contestation of what it means to be generically human still relies on defining "universal man" in terms that make certain gender roles crucial to the transition from nature to culture, and that conceal ethnocentric interests in the guise of timeless truths (186, 197).

I

George Stocking has demonstrated how the ethnology of men like Edward Tylor, John McLennan, and John Lubbock responded during the 1860s to the issues raised by evolutionary thought (*Victorian* 145–69). Just as Darwin had in the *Origin* attempted to obviate the need for supernatural intervention in the development of biological life, so too their anthropological reconstruction of early society aimed to refute claims like those made by the Duke of Argyll and Archbishop Whately that humankind could not have made the step from savagery to civilization without supernatural help (and thus that modern savages must have degenerated from higher levels). Setting out with the assumption that social development, like the rest of the natural world, was governed by uniform laws, the anthropologists constructed a single scale of achievement by which all cultures had progressed from savagery to civilization (Stocking, *Victorian* 169–70). On this scale, contemporary savages (like the Tierra del Fuegians whose conduct so shocked the young Darwin, or the myriad other peoples whose "licentious" behavior never ceased to appal Victorian travelers) were taken, with few qualifications, to approximate stages of what all humanity must have been like in prehistoric times; they became cultural fossils in which Victorians could trace the origins left behind by the more progressive races (Bowler, *Invention* 120).

Central to defining human civilization was marriage and the construction of family relationships it implied. Confronted with ethnographic evidence that mod-

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ern patriarchy could not be considered timeless, innate, or divinely ordained, social anthropologists plotted the evolution of sexual relations as the triumph of self-control (read "civilization") over the natural (read "bestial") man. This is especially true of John McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865) and Sir John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870), the works Darwin cited most often in his discussions of primitive sexuality.[2] Both men took the obvious moral depravity of savage people (especially of savage women) as evidence that the earliest primitive sexual relations must have been similarly depraved. McLennan charted sexual relations from their origins in promiscuity to communal marriage, which made paternity difficult to establish and thus explained the reckoning of descent matrilineally (64–70). Female infanticide (inevitable since women's inability to feed or defend themselves made them a liability in times of stress [58]) caused a shortage of females, which was resolved by polyandry (the sharing of one woman by several husbands) in endogamous tribes, and by wife-capture in exogamous ones. Paternity became more certain as the "highest" development of polyandry affiliated one woman with several brothers (78) and as captured wives lost their matrilineal rights and became the possessions of individual men (99–101). With the growth of property, patrilineal systems naturally developed to control the descent of wealth to sons (98). Polygamy and finally monogamy gradually completed the sequence leading up to the enlightened present.

Lubbock generally endorsed these same stages of development, although insisting that polyandry could never have been anything but an aberration (153) and casting doubt on the prevalence of female infanticide (143); he instead considered exogamy and infanticide as consequences of marriage by capture rather than its cause (107–08). The simple desire for exclusive possession of women drove men from communal marriages to wife-capture. The obvious (to Lubbock) advantages to women of being sexually subject to a single man rather than to the tribe would eventually encourage them to embrace monogamous and polygamous relationships within the group as well (110–11). In Lubbock's meliorist history, male domination of individual women created the possibility of marital and paternal love that had triumphed in the compassionate marriages of his own day. For both men, the narrative of increasing male control did not inscribe the defeat of female power (as, for instance, did the matriarchal theories of J. J. Bachofen, which both rejected, or the socialist narrative of family origin constructed by Friedrich Engels out of a similar analysis), but rather celebrated the rise of that female prestige essential to advancing civilization, a prestige possible only when woman was removed from the public exercise of labor and sexuality (Fedigan 31; see also Fee, "Science" 191–92; Coward).

Darwin's relationship to such narratives in the *Descent* is a complicated one. In what Stocking describes as "an ultimate ambiguity in sociocultural evolutionary thinking," both Darwin and the anthropologists needed "a conception of man's precultural place in nature" as the starting point for explaining the origin of humanity's characteristic traits. But where Darwin reasoned forward from a pre-

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sumed animal ancestor, the anthropologists reasoned backward from modern men, using the comparative method to discern traits common in all savage cultures and projecting these back to create a "hypothetical precultural state from which to think man forward again." This extrapolation left a gap between man and the animal world and wound up stressing the psychic unity and uniform development of all humankind rather than the evolution of difference (*Victorian* 176–78). Moreover, where social evolutionists tended to make morality the product of human sociability, Darwin imagined our simian ancestors as already social and attributed the development of human morality to increasing intelligence (Bowler, *Theories* 157). Thus, although such ethnographic accounts served Darwin's purposes by accounting for human development without supernatural intervention, by relying on them in the *Descent* he found himself entangled in assumptions that were, in important rhetorical respects, antithetical to his own argumentative purposes.

The persuasive power of the *Descent* depended upon Darwin's ability to provide a completely naturalistic explanation for the origins of human nature—upon his success in showing that no supernatural intervention was necessary to fill up the "numberless gradations" (445) that separated human intelligence and emotions from those of animal life. Anthropomorphizing animal behavior certainly made his argument more persuasive; indeed, John Durant argues, doing so was the logical extension of Darwin's conviction of the fundamental continuity between animal and human mentality (291–92). Nowhere was this process more pronounced than in his treatment of animal mating behavior, which projected back into nature the conventions of Victorian sexuality: coy females who had to be courted by avid males, from whom they finally selected the most attractive—or perhaps simply the least distasteful (579). If casting animal sexuality in the terminology of courtship, marriage, and spousal fidelity—see, for instance, his discussion of "marriage arrangements" in fish (578), mating rituals among birds (750), or the romantic preferences of female dogs (837–38)—helped soothe otherwise disquieting reminders of how literally human sexuality was rooted in animal behavior, it also posed serious rhetorical problems when Darwin came to confront the patently "unnatural" sexual behavior of primitive societies drawn from Victorian ethnographic literature.

Having fallen into what Greta Jones calls "the trap of progressive developmentalism" in an effort to make plausible the continuity necessary for the evolution of human mentality out of animal faculties, Darwin readily endorsed the assumption that savage customs mirrored primeval life and that now, as then, such people occupied the positions closest to animals on a hierarchical scale of human societies.[3] Although positioning savages as a missing link made the incremental development of man out of animal a more plausible idea, savage sexuality offered a primal scene hardly continuous with his chivalrous depiction of animal courtship—a contradiction that never arose for McLennan or Lubbock, who considered "marriage" an inappropriate analogy for animal behavior and implicitly denied the psychic unity between humans and animals.[4]

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In a strategy that we shall find typical, Darwin early in the *Descent* salvages continuity by locating the origins of our sexual behavior in a historical moment in which "man" is somehow proleptically present without yet being fully human. When Darwin first confronts infanticide as a check to population increase among savages in chapter two, he imagines a liminal hominid stage where "natural" behavior still reigned:

> If we look back to an extremely remote epoch, before man had arrived at the dignity of manhood, he would have been guided more by instinct and less by reason than are the lowest savages at the present time. Our early semi-human progenitors would not have practised infanticide or polyandry; for the instincts of the lower animals are never so perverted as to lead them regularly to destroy their own offspring, or to be quite devoid of jealousy. (430)

He can only achieve this uneasy compromise, however, by making increasing rationality, elsewhere the engine of moral development, the cause of at least temporary regression once man becomes fully human. In chapter four, for instance, Darwin finds it highly probable that "any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or a conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man" (471–72). And yet in Darwin's analysis, it was precisely savage man's increasing reason that led him to violate the "parental and filial affections" that supposedly provided the basis for moral behavior.

In the *Descent*'s second edition Darwin himself oddly calls attention to the implicitly degenerative thrust of his interpretation by quoting, without comment, the *Spectator*'s response to his characterization of our "semi-human progenitors." The reviewer had argued that Darwin here reintroduced "a new doctrine of the fall of man" by showing that "the instincts of the higher animals are far nobler than the habits of the savage races of men" and that "man's gain of knowledge was the cause of a temporary but long-enduring moral deterioration as indicated by the many foul customs, especially as to marriage, of savage tribes." Silence seems to have meant consent on Darwin's part, even if he could hardly have endorsed the reviewer's further celebration of the *Descent* as a "far more wonderful vindication of theism than *Paley's Natural Theology*" ("Mr. Darwin's *Descent*" 320).[5] The conflicts between biology, morality, and rationality that problematized narrative continuity at this point would proliferate as he elaborated his theory of sexual selection.

II

The seemingly irrelevant intrusion of polyandry as a perversion of male jealousy into the discussion of population checks (quoted above) hints at what was most responsible for subverting continuity in Darwin's narrative of human development: his assumptions about sexual selection. A closer examination of the vari-

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ous purposes served by this kind of selection in the *Descent* will suggest why it had these disruptive rhetorical effects. Darwin uses this theory to explain dimorphism between the sexes of various species, arguing that among animals female choice of the more attractive males would give those males greater reproductive advantage and hence increase the incidence of their attractive traits in their male offspring.[6] Sexual selection provided Darwin with another means of demonstrating how the "progressive development of various bodily structures and of certain mental qualities" (918) could have been shaped through physiological processes. At the same time, sexual selection tacitly allowed some shaping influence to ideas, values, and will, rather than leaving human evolution exclusively to the apparent randomness of natural selection (Beer 184). Through its operation, Darwin notes, the influence of love and jealousy had produced male courage, strength, and size, and shaped the human body and musical abilities; the exercise of choice had developed the higher mental abilities necessary to discriminate difference (918). Sexual selection was also intended to explain forms not attributable to natural selection (particularly human racial difference, as noted below), and to take the explanation of beauty out of the hands of the natural theologians (Durant 298). But Darwin's attempts to use this form of choice to explain human gender roles wound up destabilizing some of the arguments for continuity that it was theorized to support.

As feminist scholars like Richards and Russett have argued, this instability arose from Darwin's attempts to derive a biologically consistent explanation for what he saw as woman's "natural" inferiority to man in the present. He could only achieve this by positing a significant reversal in the operation of sexual selection between animals and humans. Although females were imagined as coy and passive in both animal and human courtship, Darwin assumed that in the animal world final choice of a mate almost always rested with the females, which explained why among animals males were usually more physically distinctive than females. But by the same token, the greater physical beauty of women demonstrated that men must have since gained the power of choice in human society. Darwin's attempt at explanation—"Man is more powerful in body and mind than woman, and in the savage state he keeps her in a far more abject state of bondage than does the male of any other animal; therefore it is not surprising that he should have gained the power of selection" (901)—is implicitly contradictory in several ways.

First are difficulties with the analogy to animal behavior. Male animals, like primitive man, were also for the most part larger and stronger than females as well, and for the same reasons—the need to compete against other males for females. Yet male animals did not gain the power of sexual selection.[7] Indeed, Darwin was troubled by the lack of evidence for male choice among animals, as shown by his correspondence with Wallace on this point (Richards 70). In other respects, natural selection would favor strength and intelligence in male and female animals alike, given their similar struggles for existence. To make natural selection explain the manifest mental inferiority of the human female (proved by her historical failure to excel in any cultural achievement), Darwin had also to posit certain sexual

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relationships as intrinsic to human behavior. He argued that the tasks necessary to defend and support their families—fighting enemies, capturing animals, and fashioning tools, for instance—would have favored greater male intelligence (as well as maintaining men's greater physical strength even after women were no longer won through combat [873–74]). But as Russett makes clear, this logic assumes that among humans, the female of the species had already been exempted in important respects from the struggle for life (83–84); no longer responsible for feeding and protecting herself, she would be destined always to remain inferior to the male whose intelligence was constantly being honed by his need to care for her and their offspring. Darwin's reconstruction of the origins of male selection relied on a similar assumption. He imagined that from primeval times the ability of the strongest and most vigorous men to support and defend their families would have guaranteed them the power of sexual choice and greater reproductive success (899–900). Thus the construction of a biological rationale for gendered behavior required that he project a patriarchal model of the family, with its dominant males and dependent females, back into the no-(hu)man's land between biology and culture.

Although Darwin's logic about female inferiority is in keeping with that of the anthropologists and other theorists who equated the development of human civilization with the increasing social differentiation between men and women (and the female dependency it implied), it made more problematic his attempt to construct a continuum from his own idealized precultural past to the conditions of savage life as documented by anthropological accounts. For instance, the fact that savage women had to labor just as hard as, if not harder than, savage men provided a convincing example of cultural backwardness to anthropologists. But Darwin had to treat the contribution of savage women to their family's subsistence as a matter of mere strength, and not intelligence, in order to preserve the mental imbalance between the sexes that was necessary to his argument (872–73). Most problematic for his attempts to use savages as missing links were primitive sexual practices that contradicted his tacit assumption that male choice and the sexual control of women it implied were in some sense fundamental to becoming fully human. Some of the obstacles to sexual selection among savages that Darwin discusses in chapter twenty, like "so-called communal marriages or promiscuous intercourse," are instances in which savage men in a sense behave most like male animals, eager to take any female available, but where females lack the animal prerogative—if not the desire—to choose.

Darwin responds to this apparent discrepancy in his model of evolutionary continuity not by questioning the lack of "natural" female discrimination in savage women (which the anthropological account took as the sign of their obvious moral depravity), but by shifting his definition of what constitutes natural male desire. Side-stepping the issue of female choice among higher animals, Darwin uses quadruped behavior to exemplify a universal principle of male jealousy that casts doubt on the prevalence of "absolutely promiscuous intercourse . . . in times past, shortly before man attained to his present rank in the zoological scale" (895).[8] The hedging in this last phrase is significant, since it once again allows Darwin to ex-

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tend the principle of male selection and control of "the more attractive females" into that hazy borderland between biology and culture.

The incompatibility of his history of male desire with that of the anthropologists registers itself in the argumentative tone of his commentary on their models. His uneasiness about the inconsistencies that savage sexuality posed to his developmental scheme is evident in his vacillation over whether monogamous and polygamous marriages among savages represent a retention of custom from primeval times, or a return to "some form of marriage, after passing through a state of promiscuous intercourse" (896). He waffled in a similar way on the practice of savage polyandry, which presented the most obvious subversion of the patriarchal domination of sexual selection that he considered fundamental to human desire. Although agreeing with the anthropologists that it could only have resulted from a shortage of women, induced by female infanticide, polyandry struck him as indicating so perverse a breakdown of male jealousy that he considered it more likely to be "a natural stepping-stone to communal marriages or almost promiscuous intercourse; though the best authorities" argued just the reverse (899).[9] For Darwin, of course, as for his contemporaries, the preferred solution to population pressure was not infanticide but female chastity, which he believed would be "inculcated" by male jealousy as soon as "marriage, whether polygamous, or monogamous, becomes common" (488). Here he was certainly in agreement with Lubbock in making male possessiveness the engine of higher culture, although it is also worth noting that by tacitly accepting McLennan's argument that infanticide would naturally result from females' incapacity to support themselves, he implies that another indicator of male control (female dependency) in effect preceded, if not caused, sexual practices that at least temporarily subverted that very possessiveness.

The other obstacles to free sexual selection among savages that Darwin gleans from the anthropological record—infant betrothals, treating women like slaves, and marriage by capture—are also cases where the appropriate male desire for a specific woman was apparently blocked by cultural practice. He could argue on the basis of modern evidence that infant betrothals did not prevent the more attractive women from being later stolen or taken by force by stronger men, and insisted that even slaves would be chosen for their appearance (898). Although when capturing wives by force savages could exercise little choice over individuals, once this practice had been ritualized by barter, men would bargain for the most attractive women (897).

The shifting logic in Darwin's argument about the constitution of human sexuality, and how far back in our prehistory it could be projected, was rooted in implicit differences he had with the anthropologists about the "natural" shape of human desire. McLennan, for instance, made clear that the self-control of a naturally promiscuous male desire was the hard-won fruit of cultural development. In his response to a letter from Darwin on the ordering of primitive sexual development, he argued against Darwin's model: polygyny and monogamy enforced by jealousy; female infanticide inducing polyandry, leading to promiscuity and an

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eventual return to polygyny and monogamy. McLennan used examples of lower-class male behavior to demonstrate that a relative indifference to specific women (and a capacity for combination with other men to gain their sexual ends that animals lacked) would have made primeval promiscuity more likely than monogamy (*Studies* 50–55). Both he and Lubbock considered savage promiscuity the obvious sign of inadequate moral development and treated the monogamous marriage of a dominant man to a dependent female as a cultural achievement that only certain civilizations—and certain classes—had proved capable of attaining by learning to control their "natural" impulses. As we have seen, however, in order to maintain a naturalistic continuity between animal and man, Darwin needed to model male jealousy and female dependency as already the "natural" shape taken by prehuman sociability.

The importance of insisting on the primeval purity of male sexual choice and control was reinforced by a significant subtext in the *Descent:* Darwin's desire to explain the origins of racial difference. Being able to assign no survival value to at least the physical differences among the various races of mankind, Darwin argued that sexual, rather than natural, selection was the more probable cause of racial differentiation. A substantial portion of chapters nineteen and twenty, where Darwin focusses on sexual selection with relation to man, is devoted to demonstrating that different races have different preferences where beauty is concerned; for instance, the great vanity shown by savage women is taken as evidence of how important their appearance is to their men (884), although examples of male concern with appearance also offered the possibility of some female choice that would in the long run reinforce tribal preferences (887–88). Once groups of humans had begun to disperse and become isolated geographically, the continued selection of mates according to these preferences would have molded physical diversity into distinct races.

However, sexual selection could only have produced such effects in that era before man came to practice infanticide and infant betrothal or to view his wives as nothing more than slaves (908), and so it was all the more imperative to project that idyllic stage of patriarchal choice further back into the evolutionary past. Pushing racial division into a "very remote epoch" (908) of human life allowed Darwin unconsciously to accomplish the same end as A. R. Wallace: to accommodate racist polygenist ends to his own monogenist argument for racial origins.[10] He could consider "the so-called races of man" subspecies of a common progenitor while still rooting their origin in a time so distant that it was impossible to say just where in "the series of forms graduating insensibly from some ape-like creature to man as he now exists" the term "man" became appropriate (541). "Man" was thus always already racially distinct; race could remain a prerational, precultural essence so long as the principle of (mainly male) sexual selection (and the family structures it presumed) predated the naming of the species.

Darwin's response to the anthropological evidence of savage sexual "perversion" discussed in chapter twenty is summed up by his reassertion of the same rhetorical move he made in chapter two: he conjures up an edenic hominid state

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before advancing reason had distorted natural sexual instincts. "At a very early period," he argues, "before man attained to his present rank in the scale, many of his conditions would be different from what now obtains amongst savages. Judging from the analogy of the lower animals," he would be a monogamist or polygamist, and the most powerful of his number would freely choose the most attractive females and would not treat his women as mere slaves. Insufficiently advanced in intellect to foresee the strain that rearing many children, especially females, would place on the tribe's struggle for life, primitive parents would be governed less by reason and more by instinct, especially "one of the strongest of all instincts, common to all the lower animals, namely the love of their young offspring." There would therefore be no female infanticide and none of the sexual perversions that result from it and subvert (male) sexual selection in savage society once advancing intelligence has made foresight possible (898–99).

Ultimately, Darwin could only maintain the continuity between animals and primeval man by undercutting the continuity between primeval man and savage. He is once again left with the contradiction that parental and filial devotion had been sacrificed in savages as the price of the transition into human reason, even though he elsewhere posited advancing intelligence as the faculty that creates higher morality out of just such social instincts. Having argued that the development of moral behavior is spurred by a higher mental ability to anticipate the effects of conduct on the welfare of the individual and the group, when he continues his narrative into modern times Darwin finds himself in the position of having to conclude somewhat lamely that "with the less civilised nations reason often errs, and many bad customs and base superstitions . . . are then esteemed as high virtues" (913). His narratives of natural desire and of advancing reason could finally not be joined seamlessly together.

III

When Darwin turned his attention away from the past to the functioning of sexual selection in modern human beings, his argument continued to be destabilized by conflicts between the demands of nature and those of civilization. He had wrestled throughout the *Descent* with the dilemma that although natural selection strengthened the social sympathies, their development blocked the functioning of natural selection and thus endangered further progress (Greene 106). At the end of this work, similar concerns led him to address the ways human sexual behavior threatens to subvert the survival of the fittest, and to call for those "in any marked degree inferior in body or mind" to abstain from marriage (918).

The relationship of property to fitness is a complicated one in Darwin's analysis and breaks down along gendered lines that can be traced back to his assumptions about patriarchy. The ethnological construction of history had of course treated the accumulation of property as essential to advancing civilization, and Darwin seems to assume that the impoverished are by definition less fit (919). But he is also

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troubled by the way property subverts sexual, and by extension natural, selection in human society. "During primordial times . . . both sexes, if the females as well as the males were permitted to exert any choice, would choose their partners not for mental charms, or property, or social position, but almost solely for external appearance," thus allowing sexual selection to operate in its purest form. Although he believes that civilized man is "impelled by nearly the same motives as in the lower animals, when they are left to their own free choice" in choosing a mate—that is, by physical attraction—and that he is superior to animals in his regard for woman's "mental charms and virtues," Darwin still laments that modern man is "strongly attracted by mere wealth and rank" (918) in his prospective bride.[11]

It is important to note, however, that this attraction is considered a problem only for men choosing women, for reasons related to Darwin's assumptions about the way natural selection insured female weakness. Wealth and rank in women were not in themselves conducive to fitness, since they had done nothing to earn them. The same was not true in the case of wealth and social position in men, since these were the fruits of those men's "intellectual powers or energy" or those of their fathers, gained in the struggle for life (891). Thus marriages based on such preferences by women would tend to improve the race by passing on the strength of body and character of which wealth and status were the signs. When Darwin notes exceptional cases where savage women do have some power of choice, he also argues that they would "generally choose not merely the handsomest men . . . but those who were at the same time best able to defend and support them" (903) so that their exercise of choice would have similar adaptive benefits, notwithstanding the rather questionable evidence of "support" for women in savage societies. In short, he could only conceive of sexual choice by women as operating within the constraints of the patriarchal gender relations his account of human evolution had deemed necessary.

Although Darwin does acknowledge that "in civilised nations women have free or almost free choice" (891) of whom to marry, in practice he speaks almost exclusively of the effects of male choice. His most explicit example of selection by human females is reserved for the lower classes, by implication closer to the behavior of lower animals like birds:

> If an inhabitant of another planet were to behold a number of young rustics at a fair courting a pretty girl, and quarreling about her like birds at one of their places of assemblage [for mating], he would, by the eagerness of the wooers to please her and to display their finery, infer that she had the power of choice. (750)

On the other hand, he assumes male choice was the agent of that process of selective breeding that had brought the European upper classes to the highest level of at least physical perfection within civilized nations (892), agreeing with Francis Galton's view that the English aristocracy had become more handsome as a group than the middle classes by having free choice of the most beautiful women over many generations (Galton 165). Although female choice is an important part of domestic courtship fictions and animal mating behavior, in practice Darwin treats

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it in the *Descent* as subordinate in importance to the role played by male discrimination in shaping the power relations of modern human culture, just as it has been in creating human nature in the first place.

IV

The ways in which savage life resisted Darwin's attempts to generate human sexuality from consistent biological principles exposed the artificiality of trying to construct bourgeois domesticity as the "natural" form of human sociability. If twentieth-century thought has proved more wary of the pitfalls of ethnocentricism and more appreciative of the power of culture to shape human behavior, it has remained obsessed with the same urge to justify a desired order as natural by writing it into the origins of human nature. The dynamic of sexual selection and control that originated in Victorian accounts has cast long shadows over modern origin myths, notwithstanding our increase in scientific and ethnological sophistication. The "traffic in women" remained central to the kinship systems constructed by Claude Lévi-Strauss and was fundamental to psychoanalytic theories that extrapolated the effects of kinship into the life of the individual (see Rubin). It comes as no surprise that Marianna Torgovnick has detected in the work of Freud and Lévi-Strauss ambivalence about the universality and otherness of the primitive that are similar in ways to Darwin's own (see Torgovnick 194–223). Advances in our understanding of inheritance and evolutionary process have revealed the role of natural selection in shaping many factors that Darwin attributed to sexual selection, but have not provided a biological rationale for the overthrow of female choice in humans.[12] Nor have they done much to discredit new theories that continue to project back onto animals culturally constructed sexual behaviors in an attempt to justify male aggression and female coyness as innate (see Dawkins 151–78) or to redefine them as sexually differentiated investment strategies in reproduction (see Trivers). Although purged of its Victorian ethnocentrism, the anthropological celebration of man the hunter as the decisive catalyst in the transition to full humanity still depends upon the passivity and dependence of women (see Washburn and Lancaster). In both primatology and ethnology, a human family defined primarily by the presence and dominance of the Father has continued to define and to guarantee the limits of human nature (Haraway 220–21).

In addition to identifying the patriarchal biases of such theories, feminist scholars have countered them with alternative histories. In her sociobiological model of mating behavior, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy restores female agency to the evolutionary record by emphasizing the matrifocal organization of primate groups and the significance of female sexual pleasure. Nancy Tanner and Adrienne Zihlman offer the first major reinstatement of woman the gatherer in the foreground of human evolution. By emphasizing the influence exerted by female choice of the more socially skilled males on the development of primate sociability, Zihlman's early work in effect credited females with an updated version of those very domesticat-

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ing powers that informed Victorian idealizations of woman. Insofar as such accounts continue to imagine the origins of human nature in terms of sexual choice and control, however, they share in the logic of patriarchal explanations.

For as Haraway's analysis has demonstrated, these feminist narratives accentuate the boundary disputes between science and ideology without being able to transcend them (see 331–67). We live in an intellectual world in which science can no longer be taken as guaranteeing such transcendence. Nowhere is this clearer than in those sciences that construct "natural histories," explanations almost inevitably shaped by narrative conventions that reinforce our tendency to seek the meaning of present phenomena in their origins and to equate continuity with legitimacy. Acknowledging the extent to which the imposition of order on events is necessarily dependent on the ideological positioning of the observer who interprets data and fashions stories from them need not rule out the possibility of satisfying scientific standards of proof and logic in our reconstructions of the past; still, we must recognize that the truthfulness of such narratives inheres not in their objectivity but in the self-consciousness of their relativism. These Victorian origin accounts should serve as cautionary tales, reminding us of the political choices we have already made when we try to make nature justify culture and when we expect historical continuity to validate present order. By recognizing the way our own ideological assumptions help to write the narratives that explain order in our world—and our interpretations of those written in the past—we can perhaps begin to take more responsibility for the role we play in constructing that order in the first place.

NOTES

1. Notes are to the second edition, revised and augmented. I have noted a few places where this edition differed from the first in ways significant to my argument.

2. Darwin's footnotes also show his familiarity with the work of other important theorists of primitive marriage like A. R. Wallace, C. S. Wake, and the early writings of Lewis Henry Morgan. See Greene for a more general consideration of Darwin's pre-*Descent* reading on the processes of social evolution.

3. Jones argues that by adopting an associationist, inherently progressive theory of mental evolution, Darwin committed himself to a model implying a necessary kind of progress that was at odds with his understanding of natural selection, and one that inevitably reinforced contemporary assumptions about savage inferiority (10–11). For further discussions of how arguments for social evolution depended upon savages as links, see also Bowler, *Invention* 94–96, 120; Stepan; Stocking, *Race* chap. 6; and Greene, chap. 5.

4. Both McLennan (*Studies* 52–55) and Lubbock (*Origin* 88n) exclude the possibility of animal "marriage" by stressing the importance of a contract recognized by public opinion in defining the term. Lubbock, who objected to using "morality" to describe animal behavior (*Origin* 416–17) did, on the other hand, endorse a continuity between animal and human where nonmoral functions like tool use or shelter building were concerned; see *Prehistoric Times* 572–73.

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5. Darwin's reference incorrectly dates the review 12 March 1871; the actual date is 18 March.

6. Darwin also assumed that the "better endowed" males were likely to be the more vigorous and healthy, and to be chosen by the more vigorous females (572–73). His inheritance theory hypothesized that traits (like secondary sexual characteristics) developed in maturity tend to be transmitted exclusively to offspring of the same sex (587–89). See Richards 72–73 for a discussion of how this theory helped guarantee the continued inferiority of women.

7. Part of the contradiction arises from Darwin's blurring of the effects of male beauty and those of male strength; to the extent that the latter allowed male animals to fight off competitors, it would tend to limit the range of female choice, although not ruling it out completely. But such cases might be better subsumed under natural selection (Mayr 94–95).

8. This explicit emphasis on male jealousy was added after the first edition, as was Darwin's comment that he was glad to find that Lubbock agreed with him that there had never never been a time of "absolutely promiscuous intercourse" (as opposed to communal marriage) among primitives; compare 894–95 with the 1871 1st edition (published in London by Murray; 2:360–61).

9. It is worth noting that Engels, starting from rather different ideological assumptions, found polyandry an important advance toward the evolution of human beings precisely because it represented an overthrow of the jealousy that in male animals would deprive the family of the protection of the herd, a protection necessary to promote further development in the earliest stages of human society (30–31).

10. Darwin cites the "celebrated" 1864 paper to the Anthropological Society in which Wallace presented his argument for racial origins (see 432n and elsewhere). See Stocking (*Race* 46) and Stepan 62–66 and 70–72 for discussions of racialist thinking in Darwin and Wallace.

11. Armstrong's exclusive stress on woman's domestic virtues obscures the fact that Darwin's call for eugenic breeding (918–19) treated the cultivation of physical and intellectual traits as equally important to the advancement of the race. To the extent that he consciously acknowledges the adaptive benefits of "mental charms" in women, it is because he assumes that beautiful and charming women must also be mentally and physically healthy and thus more likely to produce superior offspring (503).

12. Mayr provides a thorough analysis of the relative roles of natural and sexual selection as theorized in modern biological research. Zihlmann's review of the anthology in which Mayr's essay appears notes that its contributors leave unexamined the discontinuities of Darwin's theory, assuming female choice in the essays devoted to animal behavior and male choice in those on human society.

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SIX

Perversion, Degeneration, and the Death Drive

Jonathan Dollimore

Degeneracy theory has always drawn on notions of the perverse, but not confidently; this essay is about how perversion disturbs and draws into contradiction the theory which appropriated it.[1] Notoriously, perversion was at the same time being appropriated by two other theories, sexology and, later, psychoanalysis. In fact, in the late nineteenth century perversion was transformed from a mainly theological to a mainly psycho-sexual category. This was indeed a momentous shift. This essay is also about how the earlier category remains obscurely active within the latter, again disturbingly so.

Max Nordau's *Degeneration* was published in 1892, an English translation appearing early in 1895, the year of the Wilde trials. Nordau's notion of degeneracy is thoroughly implicated in the notion of perversion; following the pioneering theorist Benedict Morel, he defines it as a morbid deviation from an original type or normal form (*Degeneration* 16). Deviation has been the essence of perversion, from Augustine and before to Freud and beyond. Those such as Nordau and Morel believed degeneration could be transmitted through heredity, although its origins could be environmental. One environmental cause was modernity itself, especially its frantic pace. Modernity could induce, for instance, narcotic abuse or nervous illness, which would result in debility, which might then be transmitted through the father. And once degeneration takes root, its effects accelerate and magnify in each generation, quickly producing insanity and extinction. Whereas biological and social evolution had proceeded slowly across millennia, degeneration could disintegrate the highest evolved forms in a moment. Obviously, degeneration theory articulated fears about the failure of evolution, and notions of progress generally, most apparently in its obsession with atavism. But in the way it focused on the eruption of the primitive *within* the civilized it also expressed a fear that evolution was going into reverse. Even more even than that: this was evolution simultaneously accelerating forward out of control and regressing backward out of control; a terrifying forward *and* backward unbinding of the arduously achieved

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higher forms of civilization and biology. In this general sense of resisting internal forces which are imagined to unbind and disintegrate relentlessly, degeneration theory can be regarded as a reaction formation to the death drive. Hence Nordau's advice: "the march of progress is characterized by the expansion of consciousness and the contraction of the unconscious, the strengthening of will and weakening of impulsions; the increase of self-responsibility and the repression of reckless egoism" (554). Arguably, the more evolved a culture regards itself, the more it fears its own internal dissolution—fears, to paraphrase Freud, that the social body is finding its own way *back* to death, and *in* a way which suggests that civilization was only ever a detour on the way to death.

Today degeneration theory is sometimes regarded as absurd and unworthy of attention. It is true that it was sufficiently irrational, obsessive, and persecutory to explain every kind of evil, from individual illness to national economic decline to the decay of an empire, and to demonize any group or individual perceived as threatening or merely different. But degeneration theory also swept across Europe: Max Nordau's *Degeneration* was one of the most popular of all texts in Europe in the 1890s. Moreover, degeneracy theory was a manifestation of anxieties present in Western culture from its beginnings and persisting today.

I will consider Nordau's work alongside two novels, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902)[2] and Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912). All three texts speak to a widespread contemporary fear that perversion and deviation are agents of degeneration, a fear most vivid when the civilization in question is thought to be declining. These texts also reveal that it is the perverse that forces the oppositions on which degeneration theory founds itself into unstable proximity. One such opposition is that between the barbaric and the civilized. Perversion in these novels not only accelerates civilization into decadence (the over-civilized), it simultaneously regresses it back to the primitive (the pre-civilized). Through mediating concepts like obscenity, the excessively civilized is seen to have an affinity with the excesses of the primitive.

If this paradoxical double movement—decadent forward decline, and regressive return to the primitive—is what degeneracy theorists identify and warn against, it is also what subverts the narratives deployed to explain it.

Consider this example. There is one familiar narrative which warns that we are not as civilized as we think; that remnants of our primitive history may always resurface, usually in acts of barbarity. An instance of this: Meg Greenfield in an article in *Newsweek* (Dec. 4, 1978) about what has come to be called the Jonestown massacre, remarks rightly how commentators on the political right and the left immediately jumped in to make political capital from that event, each blaming it on the diverse political and religious values which they opposed. But, continues Greenfield, all such "political" accounts were axe-grinding evasions:

> I think we don't want to acknowledge that the aberrational behaviour we have witnessed is at least dimly familiar to us in an individual, human way, that in some respects it represents not an antithesis of our own behavior, but rather a parody or caricature of it.

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She adds that the horror of what occurred was not the consequence of any particular political position but stemmed from

> the dark impulses that lurk in every private psyche, the impulses whose control and channeling into constructive humane acts is the very definition of civilization. What made the Jonestown affair such a disturbing metaphor and called forth so many diversionary "explanations" was its reminder that the jungle is only a few yards away. (132)

That Greenfield can use this kind of analogy in an article whose very thesis is that we must not simplify evil is telling indeed; so too is the article title, "Heart of Darkness," and Jeffrey Burton Russell's remark in his wide-ranging study of "evil," that Greenfield's piece conveys a profound truth about the nature of evil (15). Alan Sinfield describes this myth of universal savagery in the following way: as an aspect of the European intelligentsia's crisis of self-esteem, precipitated by the expulsion from empire, there occurred a reluctant abandonment of Western "Man's" claim to superior rationality and a universal culture; this in turn involved a readjustment of imperialist and humanist ideologies whereby the savage is relocated inside all of us as an aspect of the incorrigibility of human nature.

> The myth of universal savagery is the final, desperate throw of a humiliated and exhausted European humanism. It is informed by both an anxiety about and a continuing embroilment in imperialist ideology. . . . When it was just the natives who were brutal, the British were enlightened and necessary rulers. But if the British are (have been) brutal, that's human nature. (140–41)

The savage is no longer the absolute other—that which we are not and against which we conveniently define ourselves—but the cautionary exemplar of what we obscurely were and might frighteningly be once again. The insights which desublimate the racial and sexual repressions of the civilized, and demystify its exploitation of the savage other, nevertheless reintroduce a revised self-justifying "necessity" and mystification. Hence the charge of racism in *Heart of Darkness*.[3] But, as I will suggest shortly, even as civilization shores itself up through the internalization of its primitive other, it becomes more vulnerable to being internally undone by the same, especially by that contradictory double movement which it involves: a regression into primitive origins, and a progression, even an acceleration, into decadent decline. Before (i.e., behind) is the scandal of its origins, while before (i.e., ahead) is the scandal of its destiny, to become everything which it is not yet, yet always was.

In both *Heart of Darkness* and *Death in Venice* perverse desire is the focus for this dynamic; desire is simultaneously in the grip of regression and progression, both of which drive it deathwards. In each novel a brilliant subject of an "advanced" culture makes a fatal deviation from that culture's normative trajectory, embracing in the process what it defines itself over and/but also against. The deviation is seen to be neither an accident, nor entirely a consequence of the inherent instability of the solitary genius/pervert; each has deviated because he has followed one of his culture's most advanced trajectories. In *Death in Venice*, resurgent "homosexual" desire, the most feared of all the sexual perversions, is the

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vehicle and focus for this terrible paradox.[4] This novel dramatizes the sexualizing of perversion, perhaps the single most significant development in the creation of "modern" sexuality.

In both novels, as well as Nordau's *Degeneration*, perversion also renders degeneration chronic and potentially catastrophic, rather than manageable. Whereas the view of degeneracy as manageable saw in it something like a natural internal decline, or a containable external threat, the view of it as chronic identified degeneracy as irrupting within that from which it should be most removed from—for example, progresses—and with an intensity which threatened nothing less than social death. Daniel Pick, in the fullest recent account of European degeneration theory, and with due regard to his own caution against underestimating the diverse and incompatible forms in which it emerged, finds a repeated tension between these two views. While regarding degeneration as manageable meant that the agents of degeneration could be isolated through, for example, segregation, transportation, or castration, regarding it as chronic meant that it was uncontrollably everywhere, a problem of and for whole populations. Thus

> the shared problematic of degeneration across the period could perhaps be summarised as follows: was degeneration separable from the history of progress (to be coded as "regression," "atavism," or "primitivism"), or did it reveal that the city, progress, civilisation and modernity were paradoxically, the very agents of decline? (106)

If the manageable view sees degeneration as a problem of the other, the chronic view sees it as a problem of both the same and the other; civilization is threatened from without, but also from within, by the other, but also by the proximate. Once again it is perversion which forces an antithesis into an unstable proximity; the very definition of degeneracy as a morbid (perverse) deviation from within involved a simultaneous insistence on, and confusion of, the inside/outside separation. Hence the fears which Pick identifies—"fears of inundation, the subject overwhelmed at every level of mind and body by internal disorder and external attack" (44; cf. 43 and 235–36).

The confusion between inside and outside corresponds to the tendency for degeneracy to shift disconcertingly from being a manageable problem of the individual (for example the cretin and the criminal) to a chronic one of modern society as a (disintegrating) whole; from individual pathology to a sense of social death (4). Thus Nordau writes: "We stand now in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it is natural that we should ask anxiously on all sides: 'What is to come next?' " (537). Mapped socially and psychically, the perverse degenerate is both outside and inside; mapped teleologically, both behind and before.

"CONNECTING LINKS ABOUND": USING PERVERSION

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Degeneracy theory imagined extensive evolutionary connections between sexual perversion, primitivism and race; the sexual pervert was identified with the primitive and vice versa. Thus the sexuality of primitives was represented as

quintessentially excessive, flooding over indiscriminately into the perverse, while (as Mosse indicates in his study of nationalism and sexuality) the over-cultured decadent pervert was said to be marked by an excess of libido which links him or her with the primitive.[5] Freud vividly attests to the seductiveness of this association between the perverse and the primitive:

> I am beginning to grasp an idea: it is as though in the perversions, of which hysteria is the negative, we have before us a remnant of a primeval sexual cult, which once was—perhaps still is—a religion in the Semitic East (Moloch, Astarte). Imagine, I obtained a scene about the circumcision of a girl. The cutting off of a piece of the labium minor (which is even shorter today), sucking up the blood, after which the child was given a piece of the skin to eat. . . . Perverse actions, moreover, are always the same—meaningful and fashioned according to some pattern that someday will be understood.
>
> I dream, therefore, of a primeval devil religion with rites that are carried on secretly. . . . Connecting links abound. (Letter to Fliess, January 24, 1897, in Masson 227; see also Pick 228)

Freud eventually rejected degeneracy as an explanation of perversion, and with important consequences.[6]

Degeneracy theory also made explicit the connections between sexual perversion and race (already implicit in the connections between perversion and primitivism). In fact, the sexual stereotype of the degenerate was "transferred almost intact to the 'inferior races.' "[7] Identifying the way anti-Semitism associated Jews with sexual perversion, Richard Plant cites the following passage from Hitler's official newspaper in August 1930:

> Among the many evil instincts that characterize the Jewish race, one that is especially pernicious has to do with sexual relationships. The Jews are forever trying to propagandize sexual relations between siblings, men and animals, and men and men. We National Socialists will soon unmask and condemn them by law. These efforts are nothing but vulgar, perverted crimes and we will punish them by banishment or hanging. (49)

Foucault regards "the medicine of perversions and the programs of eugenics" as the two great innovations in the technology of sex in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the theory of "degenerescence" making it possible for them to refer to one another. This theory

> explained how a heredity that was burdened with various maladies . . . ended by producing a sexual pervert (look into the genealogy of an exhibitionist or a homosexual: you will find a hemiplegic ancestor, a phthisic parent, or an uncle afflicted with senile dementia); but it went on to explain how a sexual perversion resulted in the depletion of one's line of descent—rickets in the children, the sterility of future generations. The series composed of perversion-heredity-degenerescence formed the solid nucleus of the new technologies of sex. (118)

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Foucault's influential account stresses the way such theories gave scientific credibility to new forms of social control, and, specifically, created new types of devi-

ants whose study and containment would legitimate new technologies of power. However, such connections between sexual perversion and degeneration are only part of the story, and a relatively recent one at that. Degeneracy theory is also indebted to older, pre-sexological notions of perversion, especially theological ones; to understand the power of the theory we must recognize its origins in older beliefs and their mutated survival in later ones.

PERVERSE DYNAMICS

I remarked earlier that deviation is the essence of perversion. But it is a paradoxical deviation. Why is the prima facia innocent activity of separating or departing from something felt to be such a threat to it; why does deviation become a subversion, corruption, or contradiction of that from which it departed (which we will call the norm); why, for theology, was *perversion* the antithesis of *conversion*?

The answer lies partly in the origin of deviation within that which it perverts. Literally so: to deviate from something presupposes an antecedent point of congruence with it, either as the identical or (much more worrying) the proximate or indistinguishable. Typically this means that perverse deviation discloses a split, a contradiction, a difference within or about (in proximity to) the normal which the latter must disavow in order to remain itself; this is one reason why perversion is regarded as dangerous. However, this original proximity (or identity) of the perverse with the normal also enables the latter to displace its own contradictions onto the former; proximity is a condition of displacement which in turn marks the same or the similar as radically other. Mythologically and historically, politically and medically, the category of perversion bears the violence of this displacement, but also the potentially subversive knowledge both of what is disavowed and of what is displaced. The perverse has the potential always to return along the very route of the deviation/displacement, to subvert the normal. I call this the perverse dynamic.[8]

One of our culture's founding narratives, that of the Fall, is rife with the perverse dynamic. It is pertinent to see briefly how—not least because Benedict Morel based the theory of degeneration on his reading of Genesis, recasting the Fall narrative in pseudo-medical terms. In that narrative evil not only erupts from within a divine order which (in virtue of God's omnipotence) should have precluded it, but also originates with those beings closest to God—Satan and then "Man"—who allegedly pervert their most divine attribute, free will, becoming in the process the source of *all* evil (Augustine). Original sin is thus more aptly regarded as original perversity, the means whereby evil is displaced via Satan onto Man and then onto woman. At the same time evil remains so subversively implicated in divinity that a whole branch of theology (theodicy), has grown up to explain the fact. But these explanations are never successful; the problem of evil remains intrinsic to divinity. Either God is omnipotent, in which case he created evil, or evil is not God's fault but is independent of and opposed to him—which means he is not omnipotent.

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CIVILIZATION AND DEGENERATION: MAX NORDAU

Defining degeneracy as a morbid deviation from an original type or normal form, Nordou elaborates the concept in terms of movement, both of acceleration and retardation. The accelerated pace of modern urban life in the second half of the nineteenth century produces fatigue, aberration, decadence, and mental disorder. Culturally and aesthetically, these conditions are manifested in different forms, including mysticism—"the expression of the inaptitude for attention, for clear thought and control of the emotions [caused by] the weakness of the higher cerebral centres"—ego mania, which is characteristic of, among others, decadents and aesthetes (for instance, Wilde), and "false realism," exemplified by Zola and others. In all of these tendencies, "we detect the same ultimate elements, viz., a brain incapable of normal working, thence feebleness of will, inattention, predominance of emotion, lack of knowledge, absence of sympathy or interest in the world and humanity, atrophy of the notion of duty and morality" (536). Though from a clinical point of view these pathologies are "somewhat unlike each other," in fact they are only "different manifestations of a single and unique fundamental condition, to wit, exhaustion" (536).[9]

Exhausted and unable to maintain their place in the evolutionary ascent, degenerates regress to

> the most forgotten, far-away past . . . they compose music like that of the yellow natives of East Asia. They confound all the arts, and lead them back to the primitive forms they had before evolution differentiated them. Every one of their qualities is atavistic, and we know, moreover, that atavism is one of the most constant marks of degeneracy. (555)

An acceleration forwards producing a regression backwards; degeneracy and atavism, decadence and primitivism. When some of Nordau's critics pointed to these apparently opposite characteristics of the degenerate, he replied that the contradiction was only apparent, and rested on "the stubborn superstition which sees in disease a state differing essentially from that of health" (555). Nordau insists, or rather has to concede, that disease and health are much more closely connected than is imagined—not a difference of kind but of quantity, sharing the same "vital activity." Sometimes this activity is accelerated, sometimes retarded, "and when this deviation from the rule is detrimental to the ends of the whole organism, we call it disease" (552–53). So, what would count as a diseased state now, would include a return to what was, at the primitive stage of the organism's development, a perfectly appropriate and therefore healthy state of things. Though medically conventional, this is a compromising admission, given Nordau's ethical and political project. What separates the healthy from the sick, the normal from the diseased, the natural from the unnatural, is not a difference of kind, but merely the intensification or retardation of a "vital" process that they all share in common. And what determines whether someone or something is diseased or healthy is re-

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markably relativist: "the circumstances and purposes of the organism." Thus, "according to the time of its appearance, *one and the same state may very well be at one time disease and at another health*" (555, my emphasis). The witch-hunting paranoia of some advocates of degeneracy derives from this fact: those who now carry the seeds of social death within them embody a condition which was once normal and healthy and which leaves them barely distinguishable from the normal.[10]

Nordau's theory resembles a medical version of Augustinian privation/perversion, with the crucial addition of progress as itself disease-producing; degeneracy is caused not only by falling away from the higher, *but by the very effort of reaching toward it.* Because it is a question of "more or less," says Nordau, it is impossible to define the limits of the degenerate: "extreme cases are naturally easily recognised. But who shall determine with accuracy the exact point at which deviation from the normal, i.e. from health, begins?" (553). Who indeed? One group called upon by Nordau to make just this decision, and to do so with a certainty impossible by his own account, is psychiatrists. He urges them to identify and publicly denounce the degenerates, to "unmask" their imitators as enemies to society, and to caution the public against their lies (559–60).

It is partly the indeterminacy in Nordau's theory between the normal and the degenerate that makes the latter so terrifying, and leads him to declaim, in the closing pages of *Degeneration*, that "whoever looks upon civilisation as a good, having value and deserving to be defended, must mercilessly crush under his thumb the anti-social vermin," i.e., degenerates (557). For all its 560-odd pages of unflaggingly confident denunciation of the degenerate, and its equally confident affirmation of the truly, self-evidently, civilized, this is a book written in the knowledge that the two are in a terrifying proximity and are often indistinguishable.

In one respect, Nordau is only complying with the thesis which Georges Canguilhem considers so revealingly in *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966). Generally adopted in the nineteenth century, this was the medical principle "according to which pathological phenomena are identical to corresponding normal phenomena save for quantitative variations." This positivist conception of disease should be contrasted with the ontological conception which insisted on a qualitative difference. Whereas the positivist regards disease as a deficiency or an excess of the normal, and thereby posits a relationship of homogeneity or continuity between the pathological and the normal, the ontological sees it as a fundamentally different condition, obeying laws completely different from those governing the normal state (35, 275, 49, 56). The positivist conception of disease rejected what Canguilhem calls "medical Manichaeanism" whereby "Health and Disease fought over man the way Good and Evil fought over the World" (103)—health being associated with salvation and goodness, and disease with sickness, evil, and sin. The refusal of the ontological conception of disease is a refusal to confirm evil medically. Canguilhem cites Claude Bernard, who wrote in 1876: "These ideas of a struggle between two opposing agents, of an antagonism between life and death,

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between health and sickness, inanimate and living nature have had their day. The continuity of phenomena, their imperceptible gradation and harmony must be recognized everywhere" (72).[11] In *Degeneration*, Nordau seeks to advance a socio-political vision based on the old Manichean dualism, by recourse to the positivist medical model which repudiated the most basic tenet of that dualism. It is hardly surprising that Nordau is pressed into one contradiction or inconsistency after another. For instance, he deploys his own criterion of degeneracy in the very campaign which he advocates to eliminate it: it is possible, he says, "to accelerate the recovery of the cultivated classes from the present derangement of their nervous system" (550). In this very affirmation he acknowledges explicitly that, for all the talk of the primitive, his real concern lies in the degeneracy of the cultivated classes (the over-cultivated). And while on the one hand he declares that degenerates will perish of their own accord, on the other he insists they must be ruthlessly exposed and crushed. Further, he insists that exhaustion is the essence of degeneracy, yet sees actual degenerates as full of a wilful, perverse energy. This final contradiction is particularly apparent in his thoughts on the degenerate basis of contemporary geniuses who exert a powerful but invariably baneful influence on culture, their brilliance disintegrating and perverting the social, psychic, and sexual orders (6, 22–24, 260, 317*ff*).

A RIOTING INVASION OF SOUNDLESS LIFE: *HEART OF DARKNESS*

A great man, whose brilliance is quintessentially civilized—"All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz"—deviates into his savage antithesis. And this because, not in spite, of being a supreme instance of the civilized: having all of Europe within him included being a "great musician" and being entrusted to produce a report to "the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs (71 and 103).

Of Kurtz, Cedric Watts has remarked his "unforgettably perverse individuality," oriented toward what the novel describes as monstrous appetites and passions—"sexual, sadistic, avaricious, megalomanic" (Watts 151, 114). Conrad does not make sexuality the key to Kurtz's perversity; his "unspeakable rites" (71) include the sexual but they cannot be explained exclusively, or even primarily, by it. There is a more inclusive dimension to his deviation, as befits a text which, though chronologically only just prior to Freud's first and major work on the sexual perversions (*Three Essays*, 1905), might be described as pre- or non-Freudian in conception. Watts sees Conrad as more reminiscent of Nordau than anticipatory of Freud (133–34). Both Kurtz and the narrator of the tale, Marlow, are described as wanderers (Conrad, *Heart*, 8, 80). But it is Kurtz who wanders perversely, deviating from his assigned task; Marlow only follows, seeing and understanding a great deal more than most, but never as much as Kurtz, whose deviation becomes the focus for a radically paradoxical narrative full of dangerous knowledge (see Watts

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3–4 and Miller, esp. 172). In the process, a desolate affinity between the primitive and the civilized emerges.

"Going up that river," says Marlow "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world . . . we penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (48, 50). Discovered there are not so much the distant, obscure origins of civilization, as its present identity: "all of the past is still in the mind of man." Culture and civilization are merely a "surface truth," involving a necessary disavowal of this other, always-present truth of present origins (52, 55). But this other truth *is not clear*; it is, rather, "deeply" obscure. Marlow discovers a deserted hut, inexplicably vacated and (equally inexplicably) containing a remnant of its civilized inhabitant, a tattered book called *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship*. The surface of things, including this hut and this book, does not confirm by contrast a deeper truth, but on the contrary becomes increasingly indecipherable and disorienting. This is the truth—a kind of desublimation which is not yet Freudian.

An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship, as its all too apt title proclaims, is a purposeful rather than a remarkable book; it reminds us of the chief accountant encountered earlier who, elegantly dressed and even slightly scented, "in the great demoralisation of the land . . . kept up his appearance." His books are in apple-pie order; Marlow encounters him in the middle of the colossal and dark jungle "making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions" while "fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the grove of death" (28). Like this accountant, the book expresses "a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work" (54); both present the obsessively narrow, undeviating civilized quest as it was supposed to cut through the jungle. Marlow subscribes to the same; to be preoccupied with the mundane tasks, to keep the ship going, is the wise person's blinkered choice; attending to "the mere incidents of the surface" keeps the "reality," the "truth" of the "mysterious stillness" almost hidden: "There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man" (52). Thus the preoccupation with the rivets—"to stop the hole" (40). Civilization itself is only an intensity of concentration, a blinkered adherence to the straight and narrow, which is also therefore an inevitable and not an accidental blindness, epitomized by the "civilized" quest itself, the collecting of ivory: a brutal, industrious, determined operation executed by agents oblivious to all else.

But there occurs the fatal swerve into knowledge, the more terrifying for being only a knowledge of the falsity of what "counts" as knowledge, and of the assumed difference between the civilized and the primitive upon which the operation depends. In civilization's frenzied, blind expression of its own acquisitive dynamic (the quest for ivory), it becomes disorganized, unraveled, confused; in the very process of defining oneself over and against, superiority (over) is invaded by the other through the proximity (against) it both presupposes and disavows.

Kurtz deviates from the "singleness of intention" into the obliterating silence which it disavows, a wilderness which whispers to him things he did not know, which "echoed within him because he was hollow at the core . . . " (83). Yet it is

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from within this hollowness that "forgotten and brutal instincts" are also awakened, "the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest . . . had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" (94–95). For his part, Marlow returns to civilization, maintaining its necessary pretence to the last, lying to Kurtz's "intended."

What Marlow was unable or unwilling to speak to her is hardly revealed, or revealed only as that which confuses what we thought we knew: in the foreground a mindless contemporary civilization scarcely removed from its origins in a frenzied primeval anarchy; and behind both of these, something into which both the contemporary moment and the primeval past fade indistinguishably—from it, and from each other—the oblivion, the sea of inexorable time, the great solitude which dissolves all into an entropic oblivion (105, 97, 83). The perverse frenzy of the "primitive" is both the energetic antithesis of death, and its intimate familiar, its prime mover.

What disturbs Marlow is perhaps less Kurtz's perverse frenzy of the primitive resurfacing within the blind plundering energies of the civilized, than the forces of oblivion inside both: the sea of inexorable time and the great solitude are not only that into which we eventually dissolve but also that which pervades the present and the identity of the living, flooding it with a past which can be neither known nor escaped in the future—that *is* the heart of darkness.

All of this inheres within Kurtz; he is the quintessentially "civilized" subject who discovers not only the "savage within" but a deeper hollowness, the subjective counterpart of a universal emptiness which surrounds and informs all. Kurtz's existential angst cannot plausibly be read as an affirmation of authentic selfhood; it is much more like the appalled recognition of a subjectivity at once informed and rendered utterly insignificant by what has preceded, what surrounds, and what will survive it.[12] But this is not merely regression, because the historical narrative which regression presupposes is also obliterated by that "rioting invasion of soundless life" (43).

This movement is not yet, not quite, Freud's death drive. A profoundly regressive encounter with almost-oblivion—that *is* reminiscent of the death drive:

> We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms. . . . We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories. (51)

It is not yet the death drive because it occurs in the shadow of "the incomprehensible frenzy" of the primitive. It is not that the primitive signifies or affirms the life-force; it too is ultimately as insignificant as the civilized along "the interminable miles of silence" (53). It is rather that Marlow remains fascinated by it all: "wondering and secretly appalled" (51). As for Kurtz's sense of horror, there can be no horror, only relief, in the silence which the death-drive delivers us to. For Marlow and Kurtz, there is residual terror in the encounter with non-being.

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Conrad is more interested in the metaphysical than the social implications of

this, which means that even if this darkness "is shown to be the same in London as in Africa," it nevertheless conceals the fact of a "non-European world *resisting* imperialism" (Said 33). But if the darkness really is also there in the drawingroom of Kurtz's "intended" (105–106), so is this other world.

THE DECADENT AND THE PRIMITIVE: *DEATH IN VENICE*

Separated from Conrad's novel by a decade, Mann's *Death in Venice* is also about another excessively civilized subject who deviates. An intellectual, von Aschenbach, is wrecked by his obsession with a 14-year-old boy. And now deviation is specifically and irrevocably sexual.

Mann clearly experienced homoerotic desire, and inclined toward a Platonic rationalization of it. It seems he planned and possibly wrote a more lyrical, affirmative treatment of Aschenbach's homoerotic desire in *Death in Venice*, one explicitly sanctioned by extensive and precise Platonic allusion. This Platonic conception of homoeroticism, "necessarily infused with *mind*" (*Letters*, 102), enabled Mann to describe the project in 1911 as "serious and pure in tone, treating the case of an elderly artist's passion for a boy. 'Hm, hm!', you say. But it is all very proper" (cited in Reed, 150). Retrospectively, an important letter in 1920 to Carl Maria Weber reveals he intended the novella to be a reconciliation of "the difference between the Dionysian spirit of lyricism, whose outpouring is irresponsible and individualistic, and the Apollonian, objectively controlled, morally and socially responsible epic. What I was after was an equilibrium of sensuality and morality" (*Letters*, 102–103).

In the novel, Platonic idealization fails. Perversion destroys the idealization invoked to justify it and wrecks the rationalization which would contain it. This is true not only of Aschenbach, but also the writing of the novel—which is not at all to say that Mann is Aschenbach. It might be truer to say that Mann disowns Aschenbach because he also identified with him. Such speculations derive from the trouble that Mann had in finishing the novel. He spoke of being "tormented" by the work calling it an "impossible conception"; and on another occasion of being "terribly strained and worried by it." Before beginning the novel, he wrote of suffering from fatigue. T. J. Reed, who records these difficulties, also shows how they are related to a change of emphasis in the work. Somewhere in the writing, and under great strain, he changes from the Platonic redemption of Aschenbach to the more judgmental ending we have, drawing on Lukács's more pessimistic view of Platonism (Reed, 150–54, 163, 166). In a letter to Weber he indicates why he made this change, quoting lines from the introduction to *Gesang vom Kindchen*:

> Amid tears the struggling spirit
> Pressed forward to speak in song. But alas there was no change.
> For a sobering effort began then, a chilling command to control.
> *Behold, the intoxicate song turned into a moral fable.*
>
> (*Letters*, 103)

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Are we to conclude from this that *Death in Venice* is the intoxicate song turned moral fable? If so then, on the face of it, the moral is straightforward, as Reed suggests: Aschenbach's disaster stems from his failure to suspect passionate motives in his interest in Tadzio. But Reed misses a crucial point, or perhaps takes it too well—takes the narrative voice at its own rationalization—when he writes: "Despite the ambiguities which are rooted in the genesis of *Der Tod in Venedig*, at least the direction of development is clear: in what it implies about the Artist, the story constitutes a moral victory which is nothing to do with the morality of homosexual love" (177). Reed sees the novel as marking the creation of an ambivalent style, the breakthrough in Mann's long-standing program to elevate the genre of the novel, and to move the novel of ideas beyond allegory; hereafter ambivalence is the central technique of Mann's art: "Less permanent than the acquisition of this technique was Mann's commitment to critical intellect as the watchdog over human aberration. This had been reaffirmed after a testing experiment" (178). But it is not that simple, as the story's complex genesis and composition make clear.

Explaining in the same letter to Weber his attitude to homosexuality and its part in *Death in Venice*, Mann said that he originally wanted to deal with nothing "homoerotic at all" but "Passion as confusion and as a stripping of dignity" suggested by the aged Goethe's determination to marry a little girl who didn't want to marry him. However, "what was added to the amalgam at the time was a personal, lyrical travel experience that determined me to carry things to an extreme by introducing the motif of 'forbidden' love . . . " (*Letters*, 103–104). Here, intriguingly, the letter to Weber breaks off. Speculation as to why takes us back to the novella, a "personal lyrical travel experience" which Mann also had trouble finishing, in which simply the act of traveling is represented as a kind of deviation; the solitude of the traveler encourages thoughts which are "wayward, and never without a melancholy tinge," and which give birth to the original, the beautiful, and to poetry, but also "to the perverse, the illicit, the absurd" (25).

Resuming the letter—"I had to put this letter aside for a while"—Mann declares: "I see nothing unnatural and a good deal of instructive significance, a good deal of high humanity, in the tenderness of mature masculinity for lovelier and frailer masculinity." He respects this mode of feeling because it is "almost necessarily infused with mind," a point reiterated later: "in spite of its sensuality [it] has very little to do with nature, far more to do with mind." How simultaneously confident and implausible this attitude was can be glimpsed in a 1934 diary entry where Mann reflects upon, and rationalizes, homoerotic attraction as aesthetic and requiring no fulfillment. That day he has been "pleasurably smitten by the sight of a young fellow working . . . very handsome, and bare to the waist":

> The rapture I felt at the sight of such common, everyday, and natural 'beauty', the contours of his chest, the swell of his biceps, made me reflect afterward on the unreal, illusionary and aesthetic nature of such an inclination, the goal of which, it would appear, is realized in gazing and 'admiring'. Although erotic, it requires no fulfillment at all, neither intellectually nor physically. This is likely thanks to the influence of the

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reality principle on the imagination; it allows the rapture, but limits it to just looking. (*Diaries*, 207)

Mann's biographer, Richard Winston, claims that Mann's "understanding of the homoerotic urge" was something that he never admitted openly because he considered it a "defect in his nature." However, continues Winston, Mann nursed that secret as "a source of pleasure, of interest, of creative power." He cites a diary entry in which Mann says "For myself, there is no doubt in my mind that even the *Betrachtungen* [*Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*] is an expression of my sexual inversion" (see *Letters*, 105). Winston describes this as "a startling admission, and one we might expect him to enlarge on. But he said no more on the subject" (273–74). Other diary entries indicate a strong homoerotic appreciation of male beauty and acknowledgment of homoerotic desire (see, for instance, 118, 119, 207). Some days after writing the letter to Weber, Mann notes in his diary a "stimulation failure" in relation to his wife which he attributes to "the customary confusion and unreliability of my 'sex-life' " and accounts for it "by the presence of desires that are directed the other way. How would it be if a young man were 'at my disposal'?" (*Diaries*, 101).

In contrast to this diary entry, the letter to Weber affirms a sublimated homoeroticism, referring appreciatively to Hans Blüher's *The Role of the Erotic in Male Communities* (1917). In this and another book influential in the formation of the German youth movement (*The German Youth Movement as an Erotic Phenomenon*, 1912) Blüher argued that it was the homosexual who created communities and held them together through male bonding which was libidinally invested, but, crucially, in a sublimated form, and hence spiritual rather than physical (see Mosse, 56–58, and Plant, 42–43). Mann describes Blüher's ideas as "greatly and profoundly Germanic" (*Letters*, 103).[13] The important point for Mann is that this idealized, intellectualized, homoerotic love is not allied to "effeminacy." It is further distinguished from what he calls its "repulsively pathological" forms, as in degeneracy and hermaphroditism. In short, while Mann repudiated the idea that homoeroticism is unnatural, and refused to denounce it, his public defence of it was as sublimated desire, a mixture of Greek idealism, Freudian sublimation, and contemporary German advocacy of what is now called the homosocial. *Death in Venice* is partly about how all these sublimations are wrecked by that which they would contain.

THE PATH OF PERILOUS SWEETNESS

Aschenbach, quite unlike Kurtz, is a compelling incarnation of the tormented Freudian subject, strung out somewhere between desublimation, repression, and neurosis. We encounter him at a point when his creativity is haunted by neurotic conflict consequent upon the failed attempt to repress sexual perversion and sublimate it into art. The two main types of sublimated activity described by Freud, artistic creation and intellectual inquiry, both apply to Aschenbach, and in a way

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which closely follows Freud's further contention that perversion is sublimated in the service of civilization: Aschenbach is a hero of the cultural establishment, having written books like *The Abject*, "which taught a whole grateful generation that a man can still be capable of moral resolution even after he has plumbed the depths of knowledge" (9). But not the depths of repressed desire, which—and again this is a Freudian idea—returns with exquisite irony through the mechanism of its initial cultural repression: Platonism. According to those such as Nietzsche, Plato is one of the founding fathers of Western repression. Aschenbach repeatedly invokes Plato to rationalize his desire—only to desublimate it even further.

This is because the sublimation is so very fragile; Aschenbach is "the poet-spokesman of all those who *labour at the edge of exhaustion*; of the over-burdened, of those who are already worn out but still hold themselves upright" (12, my emphasis). The psychic cost is terrible; Aschenbach is "consumed" by "high fatigues, the sacred and fasting service" of his art (43). Forever on the edge of this neurotic exhaustion, he bears out Freud's contention that repression is not a one-off event but a consuming, interminable struggle:

> the process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place once, the results of which are permanent . . . repression demands a persistent expenditure of force, and if this were to cease the success of the repression would be jeopardized . . . in obsessional neurosis the work of repression is prolonged in a sterile and interminable struggle. (*Repression*, 11.151, 158)

Death in Venice begins at the point where Aschenbach is not just exhausted by, but apparently losing, the struggle: "art was war—a grilling, exhausting struggle that nowadays wore one out before one could grow old" (60). As the novel progresses, perversion increasingly undergoes desublimation, and civilized achievement gives way to an overwhelming, self-destroying desire.

The blank nothingness, which in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* saps and dissolves social and psychic organization, here becomes something much more like Freud's death wish. According to Freud, whereas Eros is a binding force for unification, coherence, and integration, the death drive is exactly the opposite: a force of disintegration, discoherence, and unbinding which seeks to dissolve living substance itself, to bring its units back "to their primaeval, inorganic state" (Freud, 12.310). Crucially, the death drive does not come after Eros but is in some paradoxical, seductive sense always already before it; the death drive animates Eros—in a sense death drives life. Hence one of Freud's more shocking contentions, namely that "*the aim of all life is death.*" This is from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 1919—some 8 years after *Death in Venice*.

In Mann's novel the death drive operates at three related levels: first there is the overwhelming subjective desire to *become unbound*; that is, the desire for oblivion, for a dissolution of consciousness, the irresistible desire to regress back to a state of zero tension before consciousness, before life. Second, the death drive figures as the unbinding or disintegration of the fragile, artificial unity which is human iden-

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tity, especially sexual identity, a disintegration which occurs in and through the return of the repressed, which is to say *from within*. Third, the death drive figures as the unbinding of civilization itself, the degeneration or unbinding of life's highest cultural forms on a scale which threatens nothing less than social death. Aschenbach is death driven in all three senses. He gravitates to the (literary) archetype of the degenerate city, Venice, his identity chronically destabilized by the returning repressed, and overwhelmed by a desire for oblivion:

> His love of the ocean had profound sources: the hard-worked artist's longing for rest, his yearning to seek refuge . . . in the bosom of the simple and vast; and another yearning, opposed to his art and perhaps for that very reason a lure, for the unorganised, the immeasurable, the eternal—in short, for nothingness. (*Death* 32)

It is the price of maintaining civilization over, which is to say through, repressed/sublimated desire.

If Aschenbach exemplifies the desublimation of that perverse desire which, in its sublimated form, helps hold civilization together, *Death in Venice*, much more so than *Heart of Darkness*, is amenable to a psychoanalytic reading[14] not least because, unlike Conrad's novel, where perversity includes sexuality but is not reducible to it, Mann's novel does in fact render perversion essentially sexual. Yet it is precisely because *Death in Venice* is so susceptible to that reading that I would suspend it, approaching the novel from a different perspective, and with a different question, which is also a question for psychoanalysis: Why should—how can—resurgent homosexual desire become the ground of so very much? Here it is at the center of an extraordinary narrative of terrifying acceleration into decline and an equally terrifying regression to a primitive past, and in both, homosexuality is also the permanent focus for what is so much more than sexual while always remaining at heart "deeply" sexual. Both Freud and Mann (in this instance) center homosexuality in this way. But rather than use the first to "explain" the second, we should see both as aspects of a development whereby homosexuality is centered and invested to an astonishing degree, becoming not only the source of intense ambivalence, but also the aesthetic vehicle of that ambivalence as it epitomizes fundamental social, psychic, and aesthetic conflicts which it precedes and exceeds. In short, *Death in Venice* emerges from something larger, something of which psychoanalysis also is in part an effect, and of course a critique. Further, to assimilate this novel to the psychoanalytic narrative which it undoubtedly incorporates would be to leave unexamined its other equally significant representations of deviant desire, including the Platonic one.

Aschenbach rationalizes his desire for Tadzio by comparing the latter's beauty with his own art—both the artist and nature work with discipline and precision to create perfect form (46); Tadzio's beauty is the physical counterpart of the beauty of the spirit. In pursuit of this ideal, Aschenbach invokes the Platonic ideal of the same; in the words of Socrates, as invoked in the novel, beauty " 'is the beauty-

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lover's way to the spirit—but only the way, only the means, my little Phaedrus' " (48). Perverse desire is rationalized into the service of civilization in and through one of its most influential founding narratives. This recalls Mann's declaration that what he wanted to achieve was "an equilibrium of sensuality and morality such as I found perfected in the *Elective Affinities*, which I read five times, if I remember correctly, while working on *Death in Venice*" (*Letters*, 103).

But isn't it precisely the impossibility of such an equilibrium that the novel discovers? Maybe this is why it is from inside the Platonic rationalization that the "truth" of Aschenbach's transgressive desire is suggested. Socrates again: "do you believe that such a man can ever attain wisdom and true manly worth, for whom the path to the spirit must lead through the senses? Or do you rather think—for I leave the point to you—that it is *a path of perilous sweetness, a way of transgression, and must surely lead him who walks in it astray?*" (76, my emphasis).

It is Mann's achievement to give Aschenbach his most fully redemptive moment, one which briefly achieves that equilibrium, though in the form of its perversion, at just the point when his appropriation of the Platonic integration of the sensual and the spiritual is blown apart—when desublimation is agonizingly complete and he has recourse to the least philosophical, the most "hackneyed phrase of love and longing" simply, "I love you." This is uttered after Tadzio smiles at him—"a speaking, winning captivating smile." It is the smile of Narcissus; curious, coquettish, and faintly uneasy, "enthralling and enthralled." Aschenbach literally collapses and rushes into the dark night "composure gone to the winds." Yet the collapse, the desublimation, and this cliche in all its radical *un*originality, confirm him as momentarily more alive than at any other time in his life:

> He leaned back, with hanging arms, quivering from head to foot, and quite unmanned he whispered the hackneyed phrase of love and longing—impossible in these circumstances, absurd, abject, ridiculous enough, yet sacred too, and not unworthy of honour even here: "I love you!" (55)

In this extraordinary passage the equilibrium is achieved, but precariously and unsustainably; it is as if desublimated desire meets with and momentarily animates the repressed ego before shattering it. To be wrecked by a winning smile—from such moments as these there might yet be told the truth, pleasure, arrogance, vulnerability, and pathos of desire and its inflection by masochism.

But not by Mann; or not quite. To have allowed Aschenbach this far was necessarily also to regard him, or at least his desire, as unredeemable. From here on a third representation of homosexual desire comes into prominence, one which renders that desire pathological, and identifies it with degeneracy, decadence, and the primitive. The homoeroticism which Mann wanted to defend he also insisted on distinguishing from its "repulsively pathological" forms. He was, he says, compelled to see Aschenbach "*also* in a pathological light" with the consequence that "in *Death in Venice* the highest is drawn down into the realm of decadence" (*Letters*, 103). He was also compelled to write the novella from a perspective described as

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> the altogether non-"Greek" but rather Protestant, Puritan ("bourgeois") basic state of mind not only of the story's protagonists but also of myself; in other words our fundamentally mistrustful, fundamentally pessimistic relationship to passion in general. (*Letters*, 105)

In a word, ambivalence: Tadzio radiates a beauty which is said to be noble, "virginally pure and austere" (35); yet, almost immediately, he is observed to have unhealthy teeth, a sign of the chlorotic, the delicate and the sickly. Aschenbach reflects that the boy will not live to grow old, but "did not try to account for the pleasure the idea gave him" (36). This is not exactly the heroic, romantic, or tragic refusal of age and failure through early death; more the decadent pleasure of realizing that the object of his desire will succumb to an inherent degeneracy.

It is the "progressive" city, much more so than "timeless" nature, which bears the traces of the primeval. Marlow, moored on the Thames at Gravesend, London, remarks, "this also has been one of the dark places of the earth" (*Heart of Darkness*, 7). Before arriving in Venice, a city built on swamps, Aschenbach's "desire projected itself visually" and he saw "a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank—a kind of primeval wilderness-world" (5). Desire projected visually: again, homoerotic desire becomes the focus and the medium for so very much, binding together disease, death, and the decadent city, and mediating between the primeval past and decadent present. "The city's evil secret mingled with the one in the depths of his heart.... Death unseen and unacknowledged was devouring and laying waste in the narrow streets, while a brooding, unseasonable heat warmed the waters of the canals and encouraged the spread of the pestilence" (57, 68). Forbidden desire, like disease, is at first latent, then spreads, then erupts: "Asiatic cholera had shown a strong tendency to spread. Its source was the hot, moist swamps of the delta and of the Ganges, where it bred in the mephitic air of that primeval island-jungle ... where life of every sort flourishes in rankest abundance, and only man avoids the spot" (67).

Disease here works as a metaphor for the resurgence of the primeval in and through the decadent, and homosexual desire is its trigger.[15] It culminates in a "fearful dream," an orgy of lust whose "theatre seemed to be his own soul" and which rapaciously overcame "*the profound resistance of his spirit; passed him through and left him, left the whole cultural structure of his life-time trampled on, ravaged, and destroyed*" (70, my emphasis). The Freudian narrative of desublimated perversion unites with the pathological narrative of degenerate perversion, while the platonic rationalization is shattered by both. The subtext of the dream may indeed be precisely homosexual: fear is mixed with desire and (fine touch) with "a shuddering curiosity." The desire is to some extent passive, again masochistically so: "shamelessly awaiting the coming feast and the uttermost surrender" (72), Aschenbach fantasizes fearfully about being annihilated or being fucked senseless, unsure of the difference. The sequence of the dream does indeed follow the process of violent desublimation: fear, resistance, beguilement, naked desire—"a whirling lust"—a craving "with all his soul to join the ring that formed about the obscene

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symbol of the godhead" (72). Aschenbach awakens and, "lost to shame," follows Tadzio through the Venetian streets, it seeming as though "the moral law were fallen in ruins and only the monstrous and perverse held out a hope" (73). If the death drive delivers oceanic dissolution, desublimated Eros drives toward Dionysiac self-destruction in a way, and to an extent, which bind together Eros and Thanatos more closely even than Freud imagined.

On desire as the ruin of identity, the shattering of self, *Death in Venice* is insightful, occasionally sublime. Fortunately, if unsurprisingly, its success in this respect wrecked Mann's rather banal original aim of affirming an equilibrium between sensuality and morality. But this made it all the more important to try to discriminate civilized homoeroticism from its degenerate and decadent forms. Aschenbach deviates from the one to the other with the result, in Mann's words, that "the highest is drawn down into the realm of decadence." And into disease and death.[16] But everywhere the novel speaks the other truth of perversion; the challenge, not so much of homosexuality per se, the definitive sexual perversion in the discourses of sexology and psychoanalyis, but of the perverse dynamic working in and through homosexuality. *Death in Venice* is evidence for what Guy Hocquenghem said some sixty years later in a different context: "homosexual desire is neither on the side of death nor on the side of life; it is the killer of civilized egos" (136). The return of the perverse wrecks its former disavowal with a vengeance made possible by the fact that the perverse is now deeply sexual and its disavowal an organizing repression of an identity, an aesthetic, and, increasingly, an entire culture.

That is what the novel explores. So do Mann's *Diaries*, and in ways which still apparently require censorship more than seventy years later. That is because yet again the perverse emerges in just the place it might least be expected—conventionally, and according to Mann himself—that is, inside the bourgeois family. Mann confessed himself divided between "bourgeois" family life and something else—"associations of men . . . eroticism, unbourgeois intellectually sensuous adventures . . . " (*Letters*, 105). Recall that Aschenbach reflects that passion is like a crime, welcoming "every blow dealt the bourgeois structure, every weakening of the social fabric, because therein it feels a sure hope of its own advantage" (56–57). Days after outlining his thoughts on homoeroticism in the letter to Weber, Mann records an experience similar to Aschenbach's, only now incestuous as well as homoerotic; it occurs in relation to his son, aged 14, the age of Tadzio in the novel (the bracketed elipses at the end of this quotation indicate a passage censored in the German edition of the *Diaries* on the grounds that it was too private):

> Am enraptured with Eissi, terribly handsome in his swimming trunks. Find it quite natural that I should fall in love with my son. . . . I came back Friday evening on the very fast new train . . . short conversation with the attractive young man in white trousers sitting next to me in third class. Very pleasurable. It seems I am once and for all done with women? . . . Eissi was lying tanned and shirtless on his bed, reading; I was disconcerted. (Sunday, July 25, 1920)

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Three months later, seeing his son naked:

> Deeply struck by his radiant adolescent body; overwhelming—[. . .]" (*Diaries*, 101, 103)

NOTES

1. Thanks to James Eli Adams, Rachel Bowlby, Andrew H. Miller, Alan Sinfield, Norman Vance, and Cedric Watts for their help with an earlier draft of this piece.

2. Conrad quite probably used Nordau as a direct source (Watts, *Conrad's* Heart of Darkness 132–34).

3. Most notably from Chinua Achebe in an article on the novel in *Hopes and Impediments*. Craig Raine disputes this in a review of *Hopes and Impediments* in the *London Review of Books* (22 June 1989, 16–18). This article gave rise to a dispute in the letter column extending to December 1989. See also Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, especially chapter 9.

4. The extent of these paradoxical fears is suggested by the way they apparently enabled the recriminalizing of homosexuality in Russia in 1934. According to Wilhelm Reich, two concepts of homosexuality crystallized during the preceding period of growing reaction: the first being that homosexuality was a "sign of a barbaric lack of culture, an indecency of half-primitive Eastern peoples," the second that it was a " 'sign of a degenerate culture of the perverse bourgeoisie' " (209).

5. See Mosse, chapters 2, 7, and 8, pp. 17, 25, 34, 36; see also Gilman pp. 73–74.

6. It is interesting to find in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, otherwise one of the most influential modern challenges to psychoanalysis, a recognition of the way it nevertheless "rigorously opposed the political and institutional effects of the perversion-heredity-degenerescence system" (119). But, still, Freud's idea of normality as a sequential, evolutionary development, and perversion as a fixation at, or regression to, an earlier stage warrants comparison with the basic principle of degeneracy, if only to indicate how otherwise divergent theories retain revealing connections, not so much through direct influence, but shared cultural contexts and interconnecting intellectual histories. Thus Max Nordau: "The disease of degeneracy consists precisely in the fact that the degenerate organism has not the power to mount to the height of evolution already attained by the species, but stops on the way at an earlier or later point" (556). Like psychoanalysis, though very differently, degeneration theory might challenge Darwinism in evolutionary terms. Edwin Lankester, in *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* contested the optimistic view that evolution and progress implied each other; on the contrary evolution could be a return from a complex to a simpler state—what he called a "progressive simplification of structure" (cited in Pick, p. 218).

7. On the connection between the perverse and the primitive see Gilman, "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration," pp. 73, 87–89. On the racist transfer of the sexual stereotype of the degenerate see Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, p. 36.

8. See my *Sexual Dissidence*, especially parts 5 and 6; for an article-length account see "The Cultural Politics of Perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud, Foucault."

9. As well as deviation and exhaustion, disintegration might also characterize degeneracy, especially when conjoined with decadence; compare Paul Bourget, who in *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* described decadence as the process whereby the separate units or cells—of for instance language or an organism—become independent; integration gives way to anarchic independence (see Nalbantian 12).

10. Some advocates of degeneration tried to prove it phrenologically, in for instance the shape and weight of the skull. Others, like Morel, also invoked the hidden workings of

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degeneracy. This tension between its visible and invisible workings is paralleled the representation of the degenerate urban classes: "Perceived as visibly different, anomalous and racially 'alien', the problem was simultaneously their apparent invisibility in the flux of the great city" (Pick, 51–52).

11. Compare William Hirsch, another advocate of degeneration theory, in 1887: "Between any form of disease and health there are only differences of degree. No disease is anything more than an exaggeration, or disproportion, or anharmony [sic] of normal phenomena" (73).

12. See also the suicide of Decoud in *Nostromo*: doubting his own individuality, unable to differentiate it from the inanimate world around him, and perceiving the universe as a "succession of incomprehensible images," Decoud shoots himself. The sea into which he falls remains "untroubled by the fall of his body"; he disappears "without a trace, swallowed up by the immense indifference of things," the proverbial, quantifiably indistinct and indiscernible drop in the ocean (409, 411–12).

13. But, characteristically, in the same letter Mann cites Blüher's definition of Eros as the "affirmation of a human being, irrespective of his worth," adding that, although this definition "comprehends all the irony of eros," the moralist replies "no thanks!" Compare the distrustful remark in *Death*: "in almost every artistic nature is inborn a wanton and treacherous proneness to side with the beauty that breaks hearts, to single out aristocratic pretensions and pay them homage" (27–28).

14. For a single-minded psychoanalytic interpretation of this type see Kohut.

15. See Tanner: "From the Aschenbach-Munich point of view, Venice is an oriental city where the East more than meets the West—rather, penetrates, suffuses, contaminates and undermines it. . . . Venice is notoriously a site where opposites begin to blur and distinctions fade" (354, 356).

16. Compared with one of his sources, Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Mann might be said to have tried to demonize some of his best insights. *The Bacchae* is a terse and brilliant dramatization of the perverse dynamic, the authoritarian Pentheus being destroyed from within by the selfsame forces he seeks to define and suppress as other. On this see Cedric Watts's brief but illuminating reading of Mann's indebtedness to Euripides in *The Deceptive Text*, 167–75.

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SEVEN

Coventry Patmore and the Womanly Mission of the Mid-Victorian Poet

Joseph Bristow

I

"Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure." So begins "The Wife's Tragedy" in the first edition of Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854: 125).[1] Here, only too clearly, is the expression of just the kind of masculinist sentiment for which Patmore has over time become notorious, and which twentieth-century feminism has done its utmost to subvert.[2] "Killing the Angel in the House," as Virginia Woolf memorably put it, "was part of the occupation of the woman writer" struggling to find her own distinctive identity in Victorian and Edwardian England (286). More recently, feminist criticism has drawn on Hélène Cixous's influential "Sorties" to illustrate how Patmore's poem demonstrates the punishing logic of the "Empire of the Selfsame" (79); the Angel, seen from the perspective of Cixous's powerful optic, emerges for Bina Freiwald as a "textual magnifying glass . . . through which the male poet-narrator's plenitude of self is magnificently redoubled" at the expense of obliterating the woman who enchants his gaze (542). Rarely, we might think, has a poem so brazenly celebrated masculine self-aggrandizement.

The received wisdom about the *Angel*, therefore, suggests that it is a work so quintessentially Victorian in its pious and distinctly male espousals of spiritual and amatory purity that it need only be cited to exemplify dominant beliefs from which we have safely extricated ourselves. Indeed, those who praise and those who blame the *Angel* so zealously have based their positions on a shared set of assumptions about Patmore's central concern: sexual inequality in marriage. Yet the difference between the sexes in Patmore's writing is far from clear-cut. Rather than presenting a fixed hierarchy where men are dominant and women subordinate, Patmore's poems present masculinity and femininity as such tightly interlocked structures

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that it proves hard to keep them entirely distinct. The intellectual difficulties into which Patmore continually ran no doubt account for both the inordinate discursiveness of the *Angel* and the exhaustive lengths he went to revise the poem between 1854 and 1886. In the *Angel*, as well as in his reviews, essays, and later odes, Patmore took the unusual move of making femininity a constitutive element of the male poet's identity. He did so, in part, so that this idealized figure of genius could maintain his artistic and intellectual—not to say sexual—prowess at a time when "woman's mission" and feminism were asserting forms of female authority as never before. But it was not "woman's mission" alone that confronted Patmore with doubts about the gendering of the male poet's vocation. The divergent critical responses to his work clearly indicate that perceptions of the gendered qualities of poetry were shifting profoundly at mid-century. The *Angel*'s highly feminine style and subject matter threatened to render this male poet altogether too womanly—to the point that his masculinity could not always be defended even by his most generous advocates.

Enshrining what appear to be the least palatable of mid-Victorian bourgeois sexual orthodoxies—where the self-abnegating wife's sole mission in life is to tend to her husband's each and every whim—Patmore's poetic celebration of domestic wedded bliss has become a touchstone in discussions of the far-reaching influence enjoyed by those ideologies of "separate spheres" for men and women propounded in the conduct manuals that proved especially fashionable during the late 1830s and 1840s. Such, indeed, was the success of Patmore's poem (the *Angel* passed into numerous editions, including "cheap" ones for an expanding popular market)[3] that John Ruskin was compelled to cite a short passage from it in his equally notorious "Of Queens' Gardens" (published in 1865),[4] his lecture that sketched an ideal of the complementary but opposed destinies of the sexes. There Ruskin memorably insisted that the "man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error." The woman, meanwhile, governs the home: "the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division" (*Works* XVIII: 122). This account, on the face of it, provides a neat summary of how womanly virtue ministered to the wounds of the male provider continually beaten and buffeted by the public world of work. Not surprisingly, then, no sooner had Ruskin received his copy of the first edition of the *Angel* than he made his appreciation known to Patmore. "It has," he wrote, "purpose and plain meaning in every line, it is fit for the age—and for all ages, and it will get its place." Ruskin's only reservation about the *Angel* was that its resemblance to Alfred Tennyson's well-established canon might prove to be a "retarding element" that could prevent the poem from achieving the celebrity it deserved (Champneys II: 278).

The poem won a host of admirers. In his review of 1858, Patmore's close Roman Catholic associate, Aubrey De Vere, claimed that the *Angel* appealed to the "fashion or taste of the present time," which valued "more calm and subdued expression of poetic feeling" than "the sublimer inspiration of Shelley and Keats" from a generation ago. "The delineation of home scenery, the reproduction of

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familiar emotions, the drama of domestic life," writes De Vere in Patmore's defense, "requires a more delicate sense of art, more finished execution, and more careful treatment than the poems which appeal violently to the emotions" (122). This attention to technical "finish"—a stylistic smoothness that would provide a pleasant surface to this most polite and affecting poem—was a quality that Patmore himself esteemed in the writings of Tennyson, and this particular preference ensured that he roundly condemned the Spasmodic poets—such as Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith—for their convulsive outbursts in much the same manner as Matthew Arnold had done in the Preface to his *Poems* (1853; see "New Poets" 342–43).[5] Of a similar cast of mind was William Barnes, whose lyrics in Dorsetshire dialect Patmore had praised in "New Poems" (*North British Review* [1859]). Barnes in turn commended the Angel as "a good wedding gift to a bridegroom from his friends" (*Fraser's* 131). For this poem, Barnes believed, offers "to woman herself a high pattern of gentle purity" in marriage while "helping man to a knowledge and feeling of the excellent in the true woman's mind" (133). For such readers, Patmore's morality was unquestionably an ideal entirely suited to the era.

Yet many Victorians found Patmore's work uninspiring; it seemed just as familiar, slight, unambitious—in a word, domestic—as the moral universe it sought to extol. In 1854, for example, having received the first part of the *Angel*, the *Literary Gazette* demeaningly remarked that "[w]ere it not for the seriousness of the poem, and the respectability of the publisher, we should regard the whole book as a burlesque, or a mischievous piece of waggery perpetrated on worthy people at Salisbury" where the hero's courtship and eventual marriage take place. Henry Chorley, with characteristic independent-mindedness, chose to parody Patmore's tripping Hudibrastic rhythms in a manner that Algernon Charles Swinburne would take to much more extreme lengths in "The Person in the House," contained in his *Heptalogia* (1880). In one uproarious line after another Swinburne exposes the preciosity of Patmore's style. "Idyl CCCLXVI" (the numerals reminding us of the Patmore's garrulity), entitled "The Kid," begins: "My spirit, in the doorway's pause, / Fluttered with fancies in my breast; / Obsequious to all decent laws, / I felt exceedingly distressed" (V: 403). Swinburne's parody captures perfectly the frequent incongruity between Patmore's slight vocabulary and his dignified sentiment. But these lines also respond to the pervasive unease of Patmore's poem. Throughout the *Angel*, the mind of the wealthy country gentleman, Felix Vaughan, the protagonist who subscribes to the highest Tory principles and the most "decent laws" of the land, is troubled by more than a little "distress."

That "distress," this essay argues, found its way into the stylistic idiosyncrasy of the poem, which worried even sympathetic reviewers. Welcoming the early Victorians' poetic treatment of "married life . . . as one of the most powerful influences at work upon the character and happiness of individuals and nations," George Brimley was struck by the "logical puzzles" of the *Angel* (234, 243). Richard Holt Hutton, casting a critical eye across the collected and revised first two parts of the *Angel* in 1858, opens his review with a survey of an emergent kind of "Pre-Raphaelite" poetry characterized by "microscopic or telescopic vision"

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(529), and a new attention to detail clearly exemplified in the *Angel*, which Hutton regards as a distinctly feminine poem. Having praised Patmore's "instinctive knowledge of the feminine cast of mind," however, Hutton suggests that this sign of poetic "genius" may well be inhibiting the poet's art. "His only fault," remarks Hutton, "is . . . that he has a tendency, not to make women too feminine, which is impossible, but a little too small" (537). Although denying that femininity in itself can be emphasized too much, this remark does hint at a lack of substance in the lady of Felix Vaughan's dreams. "We must," Hutton adds, "think poorly of Honoria. We should object to her for a wife. She is prudish, and her nature is on a petty scale." Ultimately, she strikes him as "altogether limited" (538).

To be sure, this "limited" femininity was regarded by some reviewers as a mark of distinction. It was in the home, the *Eclectic Review* declared, that "poetry comes into the face that is furrowed with the hieroglyphs of business, and the shut-up heart opens in the warmth of affection" (551)—a sentiment anticipating Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens." Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund observe that such commentary "suggests the marginality of home, poetry, and women to the world of men and business" (17). Yet, time and again, this apparently safe preoccupation with the domestic world made it difficult for contemporaries to take *Angel* seriously. Indignant at the harsh treatment Patmore received in the *Critic* in 1860, Ruskin remonstrated in a letter that the "entire familiarity and simplicity of portions of [this] great work" had been read too "hastily" (Champneys II: 280). But even Patmore's friend and associate, Edmund Gosse, remarked of the 1886 "fourth collective edition" that the poet was "the laureate of tea-table, with his hum-drum stories of girls that smell of bread and butter" (Champneys II: 256).

Moreover, the *Angel* clearly failed to meet with Patmore's own satisfaction. The four serially published parts of the poem—*The Betrothal* (1854), *The Espousals* (1856), *Faithful for Ever* (1860), and *The Victories of Love* (1861)—were drastically and persistently reorganized, structurally and verbally, in four editions during the course of three decades. There is probably no Victorian poem that underwent such rapid and drastic revisionary labor, and the very thought of a variorum edition of Patmore's poetical works must surely invoke dread in the ablest of textual editors. My concern is with how and why a poem that has been typecast as exemplary of its age remained so unsettled, so much at odds with the state of domestic contentedness toward which its multiplicity of cantos and letters are making their respectable way. Biographical information, particularly the *Memoirs and Correspondence* compiled by Basil Champneys, provides one commonsensical approach explaining Patmore's many revisions: his exchanges with Richard Garnett and Gerard Manley Hopkins clearly indicate that Patmore was highly responsive to sympathetic criticisms of his work. Patmore's changing marital circumstances also may have altered his perspective on the figure who inspired the *Angel*, his first wife, Emily: after she died in 1862, he converted to Roman Catholicism, shortly thereafter married the chaste and pious Marianne Byles, and after her death remarried again in 1890. But the *Angel* was transforming in scope and shape while Emily Patmore was still very much alive. Indeed, the uneasiness of Patmore's engagement with

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sexual difference emerged at the very moment he first turned his gaze upon his exemplary angel.

II

While the most obvious aim of Patmore's writing was to protect the angel-wife from the world outside the home, the *Angel* also served, in no small measure, to domesticate Victorian masculinity. Throughout his writing, his ideal of masculine desire can never separate itself from a femininity that proves to be a constant disappointment to him. Whenever he praises feminine sweetness and purity, Felix Vaughan articulates ambivalent feelings toward an angelic being who is, persistently and problematically, spiritual and debased at the same time. In "The Wife's Tragedy," for example, the title alone stresses that the angel is far from adequate to the husband's needs. "[D]own the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself: / How often flings for nought" (1854: 125). No matter how much she tries to comfort the husband—to soothe, in Patmore's characteristically odd idiom, his "condoled necessities"—she is in danger of failing, even if, as we are told several lines later, "She loves with love that cannot tire" (1854: 126). This whole section catches our attention in its rapid shift to a scene where the wife—in her unending tragedy—weeps at the husband's graveside. There, [t]hrough passionate duty," her "love flames higher." Somewhat in spite of itself, this line suggests that her sense of wifely duty is greater when her husband is dead than it had been when she flung herself "for nought."

It may not appear peculiar that Patmore found tragedy in the institution he sought to praise. Such, we might think, are the vicissitudes of all human relationships. Yet there is surely something highly conflicted in the work of a poet who devoted much of his life to celebrating a man's need to be pleased by a woman who could never, under any circumstances, be his equal. It is an unbending inequality: as Patmore remarked in an undated and unpublished note, "The worst men respect woman more than the best women respect themselves." From this premise, Patmore infers that a loveless marriage is less sinful than an adulterous relationship. In a pitiable situation such as this, he argues, the "blame is chiefly man's, for woman learns herself from him, and she will only begin to respect herself when she is made to feel that all available men reverence her person as something inviolable and divine" (Reid 163). This is a persistent sentiment in Patmore's prose: the object of the man's praise can only become divine at his command. The woman's failure to become angelic, then, stems from the man's inability to improve her abased condition. As Patmore puts it in "The Weaker Vessel" (1893), "The true happiness and dignity of woman are to be sought, not in her exaltation to the level of man, but in a full appreciation of her inferiority and in the voluntary honour which every manly nature instinctively pays to the weaker vessel" (*Principle in Art* 347). Of course, this sexism was shared by many Victorian patriarchs. But Pat-

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more undertook to explore this commonplace view in more elaborate, even obsessional, detail than any of his male peers.

One frequently revised poem in *The Betrothal*, entitled "The Daughter of Eve," vividly exemplifies Patmore's hierarchy of masculine and feminine attributes. Presented, in Patmore's rather rococo scheme, as an "accompaniment"—or, in later editions, a "prelude"—to a Tennysonian "idyl," "The Daughter of Eve" attempts to demonstrate that women must travel one of two paths—either to virtue or to vice (1854: 155–58). But the movement of this poem from the generous appraisal of the angel to the severe condemnation of the whore is far more opaque than this seemingly clear antithesis suggests. The specific textual problem is a striking confusion of agency. At several points, it remains difficult to infer whether it is Vaughan or Honoria who is taking up an active or a passive role in the intricate transaction of looks, smiles, and—notably—valuations that comprise their glorious love for one another. But the limber movement of the first sixteen lines does its utmost to mask the complex logic through which the man estimates the relative "worth" of the angel he desires:

> Though woman be the Child of Eve,
> Death-wounded to the dear heart's core;
> Shall man for her sad lineage grieve,
> Man, suffering less and sinning more?
> No: he whose praises do not pile
> The measure of her just desert,
> Impugns the logic of her smile,
> Which gives the balm and takes the hurt.
> For my part, when, rejoiced, I trace
> Her various worth, and how she is
> My most effectual means of grace,
> And casket of my worldly bliss,
> I, looking round, do nowhere see
> That second good which doth afford
> The like compulsion, urging me
> With a pure mind to praise the Lord.

Here Vaughan is claiming that a woman will be unable to recognize her "various worth" unless a man applies his "just desert" to her "smile." Rightly praised by him, this woman will come to embody his "grace" and his "bliss." He, therefore, may judge, read, and thereby estimate what she should mean to him as a perfect woman. Put another way, she becomes what he deems she should be; she is the tabula rasa upon which he impresses his character. She, then, enshrines properties that he cherishes because they are redoubtably external and alien to his manhood. But—and this proves to be a sticking-point in the passage—since he attributes these qualities to her in the first place, they must, at some level, form a part of himself. This arrangement, at first glance, looks like a blatant case of male narcissism—the "Empire of the Selfsame," in its most alarming form. For the labor of

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the male lover is such that the woman can only be raised to her angelic status with his help because she is, ab initio, a daughter of Eve—"Death-wounded to the dear heart's core." Yet the lines following this indictment of woman's fallen state reveal that it is man who is "suffering less and sinning more." So who, to begin with, is more at fault? The answer, unfortunately, becomes more—not less—opaque. Just at the moment when Vaughan seizes on the opportunity to contemplate why the sins of the fathers are visited upon the angel, it remains unclear why it is not his duty to "grieve." Leaving this matter unresolved, Vaughan's thoughts promptly adopt a new direction, indicating that the woman is his "effectual means" of happiness, his "casket" laden with treasure, now so full that he must praise the Lord.

More complications ensue, as the woman's predicament goes from bad to worse. The second section of the poem becomes conspicuously more troubled and evasive when Patmore's speaker seeks to make distinctions between the angel's innate imperfections and her completeness as a woman:

> Her meek and gentle mood o'erstept
>   Withers my love, that lightly scans
> The rest, and does in her accept
>   All her own faults, but none of man's.
> I have no heart to judge her ill,
>   Or honour her fair station less,
> Who, with a woman's errors, still
>   Preserves a woman's gentleness.
> Or fails she, though from blemish clear,
>   To charm to the full, 'tis my defect;
> And so my thought, with reverent fear
>   To err by doltish disrespect,
> Imputes love's great regard, and says,
>   "Though unapparent 'tis to me,
> Be sure this Queen some other sways
>   With well perceiv'd supremacy."

Although she is eternally scarred with "a woman's errors," such faults "still" preserve her "gentleness"—a quality that ultimately makes her into a "Queen." It is, however, worth hesitating over the adverb "still." Does it mean that her "gentleness" remains because of her errors? Or is her charming disposition maintained in spite of them? Similarly ambiguous is the quatrain which declares that her "meek and gentle mood" enables her to "accept All her own faults, but none of man's." These lines would appear to contradict the sentiments expressed in the previous section, where she dutifully "gives the balm and takes the hurt." Most striking, however, is Vaughan's puzzled attitude to those women in whom he fails to see the angelic potential. Why is it that each and every daughter of Eve cannot serve as his "most effectual means of grace"? Eager to explain that his sexual desire is not in any respect promiscuous or random, Vaughan is also obliged to admit that his power over women is to some degree limited.

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Yet the issue that needs to be addressed here does not simply concern the all too

evident contradictions that emerge in the superficially lucid grammar of the *Angel*. The poem is irresolute to a degree that often verges on incoherence—or "logical puzzles," in Brimley's phrase. Perhaps the most emphatic disjunction in "The Daughter of Eve" occurs in the drastic shift between the second and third subsections where he quickly turns his attention to the fallen women of Victorian England:

> Behold the worst! Light from above
> On the blank ruin writes "Forebear:
> Her first crime was unguarded love,
> And all the rest was mere despair."

The "blemish," it would seem, may manifest itself so dangerously that it results in "crime" and "despair." At this point, therefore, the woman has become an agent of desire, not its recipient. Earlier, though, it was man who was "sinning more" than woman, and woman's "various worth" that was wholly dependent on his "just desert." The fourth section elaborates her plight. Having fallen, now neither "maiden" nor "matron," the woman's only comfort is in grieving for her piteous state. Yet it is still not evident how and why a woman's "unguarded love" could of itself give rise to "crime." Instead, she remains vulnerable to being led morally astray. The male enables her to rise, it seems, while she has a tendency to fall. But if she has no innate will to be an angel, does not that make her always already—and forevermore—fallen?

By placing so much emphasis on the woman's "blemish," the *Angel* credits women with far less dignity than do the female ideologues of "woman's mission." The writers of advice manuals for women, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis and Sarah Lewis, celebrate womanly influence within the domestic sphere in a way that is, in many respects, radically different from Patmore's agonized, violent hierarchy of male over female. Far from propagating the notion that the domestic wife and daughter was a direct descendant of Eve, Lewis laid her emphasis on the "regenerating principle" that lay in the hands of women. If removed from the political sphere, argues Lewis, women are none the less the primary and most significant influences on their male charges, and since femininity is in its domestic confinement closest to moral purity, it is essential that society revere the maternal authority that is instrumental to "forming character" (19) in a patriarchal world that is terrifyingly corrupt. Ellis, too, while putting her own distinctive stress on the virtues of the middle-class—rather than aristocratic or working—woman, claims that the female rulers of the domestic realm are "distinguished by [a] strict regard to the properties of life [which] extends to every sphere of action in which they move, discountenancing vice in every form" (35). The "united maintenance of [the] social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace, which constitute the foundation of all that is most valuable in the society of our native land," according to Ellis, lies in the hands of her "countrywomen" (36). The kinds of claim that Ellis and her peers were staking on the moral, domestic, and—noticeably—national importance of the middle-class woman were thrown into relief by contemporary

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criticism, not only from radicals such as the Owenite feminists, but also from the avant-garde utilitarians connected with the *Monthly Repository*, and women writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose poet-narrator in *Aurora Leigh* deplores the "score of books on womanhood" duly given to her by her prudish maiden aunt (I: 427).[6] A conservative writer such as A. W. Kinglake also looked with suspicion on the moral high ground taken up by Ellis in *The Women of England*. Although Kinglake can see how "Mrs Ellis carefully disclaims the idea of giving her sex the slightest assistance in any attempts to 'manage' their lords," he promptly notes how such "works written by women upon the science of domestic government . . . make us remember that treatise on horsemanship which the tailor detected as having decidedly come from the pen of a chestnut mare" (112).

The claims of Ellis and Lewis embody a conflict stressed by feminist historians, such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall: "[t]he tension between subordination and influence, between moral power and political silence, was one which preoccupied all the protagonists of 'woman's mission.' " "If the moral world was theirs," they remark, "who needed the public world of business and politics?" (183).[7] Judith Newton extends this idea by observing how the "writers of women's manuals, in their tendency to place men at the bottom of industrial, capitalist, and domestic ills and in their tendency to isolate women like themselves as social heroes, challenged the power relations of their world and in the process entertained a view of mid-nineteenth-century society which middle-class men, by and large, did not share" (131). This persistent stress on women's morality, issuing from the middle-class woman's influential heart, was taken up, as the joint authors of *The Woman Question* remind us, by "Victorian feminists . . . to gain specific reforms especially in the area of education" (Helsinger et al. I: 20). It should come as no surprise, then, that the *Saturday Review* felt that the discourse of "woman's mission" was "by its vast grandiloquence" attempting to create "the notion that women have something sublime and mysterious to do which, until lately, no one ever heard" (377). Even Ruskin's angels were not destined for the type of subordination that Patmore had in mind.[8] In "Of Queens' Gardens," he desired that young girls would be "let loose in the library" to obtain a broader knowledge of the world (*Works* XVIII: 131). The more we examine the moral impetus guiding "woman's mission" toward increasingly vocal forms of feminist campaigning, the stranger it seems that it is Patmore's *Angel* which modern readers so frequently invoke to exemplify the mid-Victorian doctrine of "separate spheres."

The expressly female moral "influence" praised by Lewis would surely not have become so prominent were it not for the fact that, as Patmore notes, male sexuality was seen at this time to be "suffering less and sinning more." One only has to remember W. R. Greg's classic statement, dating from 1850, on the cardinal distinction between male and female sexuality. "In men, in general," writes Greg, "the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous, and belongs to the condition of puberty. In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent, till excited; always till excited by undue familiarities" (457). This account of how men comprise the "coarser sex" (457) would shape and guide the pernicious Contagious

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Diseases Acts imposed in the 1860s to eradicate prostitution in garrison towns. Male sexual coarseness was viewed by the authors of that legislation as an uncontrollable force that required a proper outlet in marriage. If, with this larger context in mind, we return to the anguished deliberations through which Felix Vaughan puts himself in the *Angel*, we can begin to see more clearly how Patmore's fixation on the domestic sphere might well be viewed as symptomatic of a desire to wrest moral power away from the proponents of "woman's mission," and to make man the sole arbiter of domestic management. But in making himself the exclusive index of a woman's "worth," Patmore's high-minded persona keeps coming up against the intractable problem that has already been identified in "The Daughter of Eve." The male sexuality that is supposed to discover its joyous and rightful expression in marriage is not only devoted to an object marred by a fundamental "blemish," it also stems from a source that Victorian commentators generally regarded as impure. No wonder the Angel strives to identify purity in the masculine authority of its protagonist, from which all evaluations of pure femininity proceed. But in espousing this view, the poem is obliged—given the binary logic that rationalized Victorian notions of sexual difference—to make femininity a constitutive element of the man. In other words, the pure man, since he is altogether superior to the blemished woman, must partake of his own type of womanly mission. This, in essence, is the project of Patmore's *Angel*: to construct a good woman out of a man. His aim is not simply to make the woman angelic. He must also ensure that her queenly status is the direct result of what Hutton called the man's "instinctive knowledge of the feminine cast of mind."

This ambiguous feature of the poem—one that is far more eccentric than received wisdom about the *Angel* would lead us to believe—has not gone entirely unnoticed. Carol Christ quotes at length from Patmore's tribute to angelic femininity to make incisive points about the conflicted relations between the seemingly active male and the supposedly passive female represented in the poem, emphasizing how Felix Vaughan's admiration for his beloved Honoria creates a realm of freedom "from impulses that man finds . . . difficult to accept in himself" (149). Yet that realm is not one where he can remain entirely liberated. For in locating in the house an angel whose worth depends on his own valuation, he must reside in very close proximity to her and her innate "blemish," an ineradicable stain from which the Tory man of principle can only recoil. The extensive revisions to "The Daughter of Eve" suggest as much: they try to iron out some of the extraordinary inconsistencies that suggest that his "sinning" is perhaps as dangerous as the inherent "blemish" that threatens to make any woman into a whore. In the second edition of 1857, "The Daughter of Eve" has become a single poem; there are no subsections, and a substantial proportion of the lines has been removed. The transition from the angel to the fallen woman therefore appears all the more seamless. In this instance, Patmore removes a previous accusation against the woman's "sad lineage." Having excised the reference to man's "sinning more," Felix Vaughan now more temperately admits that he, as a man, is "Godward erring" (1857: 131). Her "various worth" changes in its estimation to "her worth to

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me." So, all in all, the earlier implication that her value was inherently variable is altered to suggest that he is the stable measure against which her value may be gauged. It might be said, then, that this passage begins on a more positive note than before. Instead of starting fatefully with the "Death-wounded" condition of Eve's daughter, he begins this time with his prized image of her as his "casket" of "worldly bliss." There is an altogether clearer movement from the rise of the angel to the ruinously "unguarded love" of the fallen woman.

By the third edition of 1860, however, the poem is taking a somewhat different turn. This time "The Daughter of Eve" has been contracted even further by losing a substantial proportion of lines. References to the angel as a "casket of worldly bliss" and an "effectual means of grace" have disappeared. The poem now opens by referring to "The woman's gentle mood," and then makes a brisk transition to her "errors," which although preserving her "gentleness," forces him to consider those daughters of Eve who "disappoint" his high desire (1860: 135–37). The poem continues, as in previous versions, to his contempt and pity for the fallen woman. By way of these revisions, the 1860 edition places much greater emphasis than previously on the angel's potential defects. This is the version that Patmore would retain for the 1886 "fourth collective edition" which, once more, would reorder the contents of several of the twelve cantos.

In its transmogrification from 1854 to 1886, then, "The Daughter of Eve" has moved stage by stage to a more compact form, shifting attention from any contemplation of man's "erring" to a wholesale condemnation of "woman's errors." So the angel, in one edition after another, had to take more and more of the "hurt" for her always potentially fallen condition. Patmore, to be sure, never ceased to try to redeem his lady. But still his attempts to accentuate what attracted Felix Vaughan to Honoria—indeed, to make her far less dull than Hutton originally found her—had a tendency to undercut her angelic status.[9] In 1883, when Patmore was undertaking his final redrafting of the poem for the "fourth collective edition," Honoria's presence in the poem was still proving to be a problem. Questioning the shape and direction of one canto, "The Koh-i-Noor" (1890: II: 123–29), Hopkins puzzles over the female subjectivity that uncomfortably blurs the distinction between sexual vice and domestic virtue in so many of the fancily arranged "accompaniments" and "preludes":

> In particular how can anyone admire or (except in charity, as the greatest of sins, but in judgement and approval) tolerate vanity in women? Is it not the beginning of their saddest and most characteristic fall? What but vanity makes them first publish, then prostitute their charms? In Leonardo's famous picture "Modesty and Vanity" is it not almost taken for granted that the one figure is that of a virgin, the other that of a courtesan? If modesty in women means two things at once, purity and humility, must not the pair of opposites be no great way apart, vanity from impurity? Who can think of the Blessed Virgin and of vanity? (308)

Patmore, quite understandably, responded with an elaborate defense of Felix Vaughan's attraction to all that is "careless, talkative, and vain" in Honoria's man-

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ner, and categorized these qualities as virtues. And Hopkins retracted his criticism. But their exchange indicates only too clearly how the qualities that are supposed to enhance the angel reside in unsettling proximity to those which degrade her. It is at moments such as this in "The Koh-i-Noor" that the woman's sexual "blemish" clearly attracts rather than repels her male suitor. What Felix Vaughan seeks to condemn at one moment, elicits his praise at another.

III

Patmore is hardly unique among mid-Victorians in his enduring fascination—if not bafflement—with the demonic and angelic attributes so contradictorily ascribed to femininity. He is also among a host of male poets who were at this time attempting to come to terms with both "woman's mission" and women writers who appropriated its powerful moral claims to feminist ends. This phenomenon is so evident in the 1850s and 1860s that it cannot help but force us to think why it was that male poets—rather than novelists and dramatists—were persistently focusing their attention on feminine subjects. In her essay on this topic, Christ concludes that it was the fear of the "feminization of culture" that encouraged "the poet of the period . . . to make the female subject bear his name" (400). This view is borne out by the very titles of poems in the period. From Tennyson's much-criticized "Mariana" and "Claribel" (dating from 1832)[10] to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sensual "Jenny" (published in 1870), middle-class Victorian poetry by men gave a new centrality to femininity at a time when the woman poet was also coming into prominence as never before. Chorley, after all, championed *Aurora Leigh* by stating that Barrett Browning was "our best living poetess," her name enjoying "a higher renown than any woman has heretofore gained" (1425). The *Literary Gazette* was even more exuberant: "In it [*Aurora Leigh*] Mrs. Browning has thrown the whole strength of her most noble nature; and she has attained to such a mastery of expression, that she is able to make palpable to others the sublest as well as deepest emotion of her heart, the finest perceptions of her eye, the farthest sweep of her imaginative intellect" (917).

So troubled was Patmore by Barrett Browning's rising fame—*Aurora Leigh*, he confessed to William Allingham, made him "inexpressibly sick"—that he could only remain perplexed that such a "modest sensible little woman" could have produced this "strange book" (Champneys II: 185). The *Angel*, as De Vere's review implies, expressed exactly the limited ambition "to illustrate ordinary, not exceptional, modern life" that Patmore expected of a woman poet such as Barrett Browning (123–24). In December 1856, Patmore asked Allingham if he had read Barrett Browning's magnum opus: "Is it not strange that writers, and still more strange that readers—should prefer shrieking G or F to singing E or D? But the book abounds with 'fine things' and will be a 'tremendous success.' " Resentful of being pushed out of the limelight by a woman writer, Patmore adds: "We linnets must abide with time" (Champneys II: 183)—recalling Tennyson's memorable

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lines: "I do but sing because I must, / And pipe but as the linnets sing" (*In Memoriam* [1850] XXI: 23–24). This is one of several places where Patmore remonstrates that he can sing more sweetly that any woman poet can, while admitting that the voice of *Aurora Leigh* is commanding greater attention than his own.

Yet for all his rhetorical confidence, Patmore experienced great anxiety about the proper gendering of his art, as several of his periodical reviews of contemporary poetry make patently clear. For to be a poet, in Patmore's mind, is to ensure that one's own femininity—one's male femininity, as it were—is far sweeter and more resplendent in its technical "finish" than anything a mere woman might care to write. But this was not an idea easy to establish in the Victorian age. Such a view, admittedly, is not so extraordinary, since it conforms with the widespread belief that the highest poetry employed an expressive aesthetic: one that was lyrical, direct, and sweet. Between 1830 and 1870, as Isobel Armstrong observes, reviewers' "demands for clarity and simplicity of style, for 'distinct' language, are associated with demands for what is common and familiar"—and, in Patmore's hands, with what is feminine and domestic (26). Yet the gradual shift toward feminine styles and subject-matter occurred in a period when doctrines of manliness were also on the ascendant, and the clash of interests between the increasingly womanly mission of Victorian poetry and ideologies of a highly physicalized and hardened masculinity came to a head in the reviews of poetry written by Charles Kingsley. Discussing the Spasmodics, Kingsley believed that their rather jerkily organized "conceits" were symptomatic of "effeminate Nature-worship, without self-respect, without true manhood." In this dispiriting climate, such poets had become "puppets to their momentary sensations" (462). His demand was similar to Patmore's: to ensure that poetry retained its masculine strength.

But Patmore's method for converting the feminine sweetness of the expressive lyric into a distinctly masculine characteristic took a quite ingenious and complex form. It involved, to begin with, ensuring that a particular kind of lyric poetry by women could be praised—paradoxically—for its very inferiority. In his expansive review of Barrett Browning's poetry, he found space to champion her early narrative of female self-sacrifice, "Bertha in the Lane" (from *Poems* [1844]). But those works of hers that failed to conform to the strictly gendered confines of his world, such as "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (also 1844) portrayed the ultimate "mésalliance." The chief problem he identified in that poem was Barrett Browning's depiction of the poet-figure (Bertram) as one in the service of the daughter of an Earl (Lady Geraldine): "It seems to us, that Mrs Browning has not consulted the poet's true dignity" (444). In making his indignation known, Patmore is certainly more alert than most of his peers to the hegemonic fantasy embedded in Barrett Browning's ambitious explorations of female authority. Surveying her canon, he damns *Aurora Leigh* with faint praise, pointing to the "vital continuity" of the imagery, and yet concluding that the style is prosaic and full of "artistic defects" (462). Altogether more to his taste are Adelaide Anne Procter's *Legends and Lyrics* (which he reviewed in 1858), a collection that includes several poems that had attracted considerable attention in the pages of *Household Words*. In her "verses"—

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lesser things than poetry, so he argues—Procter can be admired for representing the "feminine character" with a "power and simplicity of language rarely to be found, except in the pages of the standard artistic writers" (406)—by which, of course, he means men. For art, he believes, is an exclusively male province, and it is there that the "feminine character" has its most distinguished place—in the voice of the man who is also a poetic "linnet."

The tension between female femininity (appropriate for "verses") and the stronger male femininity (emanating from the "standard artistic writers") comes most intriguingly into focus in Patmore's 1855 review of Tennyson's *Maud and Other Poems*. He prefaces his commentary on Tennyson's achievements to date with a cautious defense of the implicit homoeroticism of *In Memoriam*, a poem whose sexual interests had outraged a reviewer in the columns of the London *Times*, and which subsequently elicited a spirited defense of male homosocial bonds—bonds biblically declaring a "depth and vehemence of affection 'passing the love of woman' "—from none other than Kingsley (252). Reading the poem as more an intellectual than a sexual work, Patmore rebukes the suggestion that Tennyson has indulged in immoral sentiments: "On the majority of those readers who do not read 'In Memoriam' as an ordinary 'love poem' (and, incredible as this may seem, it was in more than one place reviewed as such on its first appearance), this work must necessarily appear as the superlative of love and grief in the wrong place." Yet he is none the less disconcerted that in portraying such a "passionate and absorbing personal affection" Tennyson regards " 'first love, first friendship' " as " 'equal powers' " between men. Patmore finds that he can excuse these seemingly aberrant affectional attachments by assuming that Tennyson "has as yet failed to find an equal partner for his heart among women" (503). Here, in other words, Patmore is trying to normalize as much as possible the decisive lack of contrast between masculinity and femininity that affronted some of the earliest criticism of Tennyson's elegy to Arthur Hallam. Yet, in doing so he is also desiring an equality between the sexes that the *Angel* denies.

Patmore strengthens this criticism of *In Memoriam* by arguing that the monodramatic *Maud* illustrates Tennyson's welcome change of heart, which has now found a true source of love in a proper female object. But—in an unexpected move—Patmore goes on to argue that, in singing the praises of the elusive *Maud*, the suicidal protagonist of this poem has discovered, not so much the sweetness of her sex, but the beauty of the feminine within himself. Having quoted from section I: 18 of the poem, Patmore rapturously declares:

> A sustained passage of this sort is perhaps one of the rarest if not highest triumphs of poetry, "that sweeter and weaker sex of truth." It is only after a very complete mastery has been obtained in the lower excellences of his art, that the poet can trust himself thus completely to the direction of his feelings and his instinct of rhythm. It is no argument against the high value of such results that "feminine grace and tenderness" is the fullest commendation which a single phrase can give them. Such qualities are utterly opposed to, and incompatible with, the "effeminate," and they as nobly and rarely distinguish the strongest manhood as they do the eminently "manly art"

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> of poetry,—an art in which no woman can be shown to have attained more than a second-rate rank. (512)

The passage is structured by the contrast of effeminacy and manliness, yet these seemingly opposing terms are brought into such close proximity that they almost collapse into each other. For while fervently praising the feminine "grace" of Tennyson's lyricism, Patmore struggles to defend the Laureate against the taint of being "effeminate." The boundary between the differently gendered qualities that Patmore wishes to praise is, at best, a precarious one. In the contorted reasoning of Patmore's review, *Maud* stands out as a truly remarkable achievement because Tennyson, in his manliness, has attained the "feminine" that crowns the glory of all great poetry. A privileged form of femininity consequently becomes the distinctive feature of the male poet—since he alone has the capability to be more womanly than a woman herself. This distinction was one which Patmore claimed right to the end of his life. In his essay on Keats, for example, he once again seeks to defend the feminine basis of male poetic identity:

> The femininity of poets such as these [Keats and Shelley] is a glorious and immortal gift, such as no mortal lady has ever attained or ever will attain. It has been proved to us how well a mortal lady may be able to read the classics; but, humbled as some of us may feel by her having headed the Tripos, it is still some compensation for those of our sex to remember that we alone can write "classics," even of the feminine order. (*Principle in Art* 64)

This statement underlines Patmore's belief that the creative femininity of great male poets constitutes a sovereign subjectivity to which no "mortal lady" may ever accede. More embattled than ever in the late 1880s, Patmore was driven to mark out poetry as a distinguished area of male genius that had the power to outfeminize those fallen angels who were acquiring masculine skills in the recently opened Cambridge colleges for women.

The logic of these excerpts is continuous with the sexual hierarchy governing the *Angel*: in all of Patmore's writings, the woman's divinity emanates from the male subject. But this leaves a somewhat vexatious problem for Patmore. For it is not so much that the "Empire of the Selfsame" has in this instance bolstered a punishing masculinity by denying the autonomy of its female object. Instead, the point would seem to be that the masculine subject can only retain his poetic identity by grounding it upon a principle of feminine grace. Yet the outcome of this analysis points to two conflicting conclusions. On the one hand, we might regard this structure as the appalling absorption of femininity into a masculinist fantasy of mastery. But, on the other, since Patmore's ideal of the feminine remains one of the highest virtues of the "standard artistic writers," and since it also operates as the principle that prevents angels from turning into whores, we might view his life's work as going against its better nature by acknowledging that the "feminine" stands supreme—in its sensitivity, sweetness, and divinity—above the man who must at times admit that he is "suffering less and sinning more." All of this would imply that if a narcissistic circuit of the "Selfsame" is present in his writing, it is

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of a perversely "feminine" kind, one that tries to spiritualize the hydraulic erotic impulses naturally stirring in those men whom Greg has no hesitation in calling the "coarser sex."

IV

If the *Angel* can be viewed as a unique mid-Victorian attempt by a male poet to be more feminine than any woman, it may well be thought that the "feminine grace" that Patmore arrogated to himself proved to be highly empowering. But the poetry that he produced after the *Angel* complicates rather than resolves the questions of sexual difference that energized such laborious revisions of his work. The odes that first appeared in the privately circulated edition of 1868, and which would be augmented to comprise *The Unknown Eros* the following year, place a special emphasis, as John Maynard remarks, on how one might "represent sexual union with God" (265). Apart from blazoning Patmore's ultra-Tory distaste for democracy—"1867," which rails against the Second Reform Bill and deplores the "orgies of the multitude" (1890 II: 31)—the odes largely concentrate on mystical experiences where relations between masculinity and femininity become more blurred than ever. And this coalescence of the sexes occurs largely because of the structural shifts achieved by the startling formal irregularity that characterizes the Pindaric ode. The pulsating style of Patmore's odes ensures that the connections forged between each idea are far from self-evident. "Sponsa Dei," for example, is a signally difficult poem in this respect. It is, to all intents and purposes, an eminently Roman Catholic ode in its sensuous celebration of erotic intercourse between the human and the divine (1890 II: 66–67). This strange poem pictures a mysterious "Maiden fair" whose enchanting "laughing" manner promises the male speaker the "marriage which exceeds / The inventive guess of Love to satisfy." She is, indeed, just the kind of "feminine grace" that "opes the heaven of heavens to more than her." Yet no sooner has her status as an angelic spirit been confirmed than the speaker raises questions about her true identity:

> Who is this only happy She,
> Whom, by a frantic flight of courtesy,
> Born of despair
> Of better lodging for his Spirit fair,
> He adores as Margaret, Maude, or Cecily?

Maynard—who holds this and many of Patmore's other odes in very high regard[11]—paraphrases these syntactically ornate lines by suggesting that the "Maiden fair" alerts the speaker to the fact that the man's desires belong to "a larger affair than that of some mere individual in love" (253). To "adore" such relative creatures as Margaret, Maude, or Cecily is, we are encouraged to believe, a far lesser thing than expressing one's altogether more substantial love for the Almighty. Only out of "despair" do men find this barely adequate "lodging" for their soul. Now it goes without saying that, even if we choose to read this poem

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in the spirit of the Church Fathers, we are nonetheless left with the view that domestic angels are little more than temporary residences for the yearning eros of man. But what is curious to observe is how, in the course of this ode, Augustinian teaching figures the speaker as a Bride, like Christ ascending the Cross, who wittingly produces a "sick fire[,] / A female vanity" that serves as "A reflex heat / Flash'd on thy [i.e., the man's] cheek from His immense desire." In other words, the speaker locates this "Maiden fair" in the soul of man, whose feminine "vanity" is both given and received by God as He sensually interacts with the wonders of His creation. In every respect, the spiritual, the sexual, and the male are in this context feminized. This bride-like subservience to the Almighty suggests that Patmore's idealized male poetic subject identifies so strongly and conflictually with the feminine that he seeks to appropriate it only for spiritually ennobling ends. But his feminine disposition in the eyes of God prompts a rather different thought: that the very division of the sexes may well be troublingly enfolded by the feminine itself. Here, after all, the feminine defines the man's subordination to the Creator so that he can become a figure whose "vanity" attracts His sexually charged "heat." So the poet, in finding a proper outlet for his erotic longings, becomes the "weaker vessel," conceding to God the very potency that he himself would physically impose on "Margaret, Maude, or Cecily."

It is worth bearing in mind at this point the moral conundrum that would be posed by Patmore suggesting that he could be loved by God as a man. For it is plainly the case that, in this Augustinian figuration, the sexual connection between God and man explored in "Sponsa Dei" avoids any homoerotic implications by feminizing the male poetic subject. Such, we might think, are the lengths to which Patmore would go to maintain his hierarchical understanding of sexual difference. Yet he could not consistently imagine placing his male subject in a completely subordinate role for the sake of preserving what might be called a "hetero" ideal. At times, we see how this vision of sexual difference is haunted by a dream of sameness that differs from the colonizing impulse implicit in the "Empire of the Selfsame." The thought of an erotic spirituality based on relations that were utopianly "homo"—that is, in a state of similitude—emerges in several of his later writings. In the essay, "The Bow Set in the Cloud" (1893), Patmore remarks that "some knowledge of Christian mysteries has been enjoyed in individuals at all times and place," and that one pre-Christian example of the "mystery of triple Personality in one Being" appears in the works of Plato. Seeing "triplicity" in every aspect of creation, Patmore remarks: "Nothing whatever exists in a single entity but in virtue of its being thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and in humanity and natural life this takes the form of sex, the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter, or third, forgotten sex spoken of by Plato." It is this third sex that acts as an "electric" current that charges the "fulfilment and power" of the male and female in their "embrace" (*Principle in Art* 263). This "third" sexual disposition—one which mediates the perfect integration of the two sexes—was enshrined for Patmore in the Christian conception of Man outlined in Genesis. And he revealingly calls this prelapsarian Man the "*homo*"—a concept that emphasizes sameness. "Man," he writes, "originally contained the woman, and was in his individual

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self the synthesis; and the separation into distinct bodies has been regarded by some theologians as a consequence of the fall" (263–64). The "*homo*," then, is at one level the ontological form that precedes difference, and whose splendor can be imagined in both the Augustinian vision of Christ as "the Bride as well as the Bridegroom" and the classical figure of Teiresias. But even if this account of the "*homo*" may once again be viewed as a sign of Patmore's desperate masculinism attempting to fashion woman into nothing other than a disposable spare rib (the "*homo*," if primordial, is nonetheless male), the "feminine" is necessarily an indivisible component of this "triplicate" Man. She is, once again, both Man's pride and downfall. Here he remarks that in the "*homo*" "the feminine nature, which is passive, humble, receptive, and responsive" does not "increase . . . at the expense of the masculine character," for "this latter is exalted into fuller strength, invincible courage, and greater wisdom to command all that is below him, especially his own feminine nature—whose rebellions, in his natural condition, are the cause of all his disasters" (264). The circular logic of this statement should be fairly clear: where the feminine is praised it is also blamed, since it simultaneously supports and undermines masculine authority. It is femininity—rather than the barely elaborated masculinity—that continues to trouble this account of the "*homo*," because here he places more pressure than ever on the idea that woman might in some way be sexually the same as man, for she has always inhabited his sexual identity.

This conversion of sexual difference into a model of sameness is very much of its time. There is historically some congruence between Patmore's own idealization of the "*homo*" and the gradual categorization of distinct sexualities on the basis of their "homo-" or "hetero-" object-choice in the 1890s. It is, furthermore, curious to think that a writer renowned for his emphasis on "separate spheres" for men and women should increasingly seek to integrate masculinity and femininity in a manner that bears more than a passing resemblance to the works of writers who were self-consciously fashioning a modern homosexual identity. His ode "The Three Witnesses" brings his speaker face-to-face in a dream with an angel who is clearly the threefold figure of the "*homo*"—"God, Youth, and Goddess, one twain, trine, / In altering wedlock flamed benign" (1890 II: 198). This "glorious" angel is sexually indeterminate—"With Man and Woman's beauties join'd." Such a vision not only blends the sexes, it also merges heaven and earth. This effusive ode strikes me as having a rather similar impetus to the works of those writers—such as Walter Pater, Simeon Solomon, and Oscar Wilde—who were developing counter-cultural images of subversively gendered males in order to produce a canon of work that celebrated same-sex desire.[12] In making this point, I would not want to suggest that Patmore's project is an as yet unrecognized part of a by now well-researched pattern of late Victorian homoerotic representation. But I would argue that his contemplation of the "*homo*" springs from a similar dissatisfaction with what could reasonably be called the heterosexual emphasis he himself placed on the primary distinction between the sexes.[13] For the "*homo*" assuredly gives the lie to the notion that woman was intrinsically unequal to man because, as the triune angel demonstrates, she was always already a part of him. Yet, even more than

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that, Patmore's late fascination with an androgynous spirit hints that a desire that is structured on a hierarchical conception of heterosexuality may well exceed, and deviate from, the forms in which it seeks to express itself.

In Patmore's eccentric body of work, then, we witness some unexpected consequences of what I have called the womanly mission of mid-Victorian poetry. The patriarch who adored the domestic "angel" as a "weaker vessel" finally had to come to terms with the idea that the gendered attributes he despised in women to some degree made him into the man he was. This revelation hardly transforms Patmore into a progressive or radical figure. But it should at least clarify how the dynamics operating within the embattled "Empire of the Selfsame" may well be motivated by identifications that are so strongly marked in relation to the feminine that the poet will make himself womanly in order to retain some vestige of power. At the same time, it is worth considering that nineteenth-century misogyny sometimes has at its heart a male desire not to have, but to be a woman. For, as "Sponsa Dei" indicates, the patriarch occasionally expresses a desire for his soul to be like an angel, one that would at last be kissed by a god. In Patmore's startling conclusion, the Almighty could not help but be attracted to the alluring "heat" of a female "vanity" that dwelt deep within every Victorian patriarch's soul.

NOTES

Three people, in particular, have offered special help with this essay. John Maynard drew my attention to the significance of "Sponsa Dei," Druuske Hawkridge kindly gave me a copy of the two-volume set of the 1890 Bell edition of Patmore's poems, and James Eli Adams offered painstaking editorial advice. My thanks to them.

1. Since my essay draws on several of the numerous editions of Patmore's much-revised poem, for the sake of clarity I have prefaced all page references to the various poems comprising *The Angel in the House*, as well as the later odes, with the relevant date of publication.

2. Maynard remarks that the *Angel* is "the chauvinist work chosen by feminist critics of all persuasions for a ritual jet-plane humiliation" (162).

3. For a complete listing of the confusingly large number of editions of Patmore's poetry, see Maynard: 359–64. One indication of the popularity of the *Angel* is given in De Vere's review: "Its [the poem's] merit is more than sufficient to account for its success, both among ourselves and in America, where, if we are rightly informed, twenty thousand copies of it are already in circulation" (123).

4. The lines that Ruskin slightly misquoted from the *Angel* were originally part of a "prelude" (entitled "The Prodigal") to canto VII, "Aetna and the Moon": 1857: 81–82. The passage in question—which scorns the "wasteful woman . . . who may/ On her sweet self set her own price"—is omitted from the "fourth collective edition."

5. Patmore's distaste for Dobell, Smith, and others writing in a similar vein is made equally clear in "Poetry—the Spasmodists."

6. In her imposing edition of *Aurora Leigh*, Margaret Reynolds suggests that "it would appear that EBB had works of a female author in mind, and the most likely candidate is Sarah Stickney Ellis (1812–72)" (594). Paul Turner rallies a good deal of textual evidence from the *Angel* to substantiate the idea that it is Patmore's poem that is the cause of Aurora Leigh's indignation. Barrett Browning's poem could, indeed, have both works in mind. Yet it is important to note that the resistance to patriarchal authority articulated by Aurora

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Leigh at this point has, in many respects, cultural sources similar to those defining the doctrine of "woman's mission" enshrined in the "score of books on womanhood."

7. For a complementary account of domestic ideology, see Hall.

8. The similarities between Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" and Patmore's *Angel* should not occlude the distinctions between their conception of "separate spheres." In revising Kate Millett's influential claim that Ruskin's lecture "recommends itself as one of the most complete insights obtainable into that compulsive masculine fantasy one might call the official Victorian attitude" (89), Dinah Birch reminds us that Ruskin was "keenly interested in the foundation of the first women's colleges in Oxford," and that he sponsored the careers of women artists, including Kate Greenaway (309–10).

9. In "Entombing the Angel," Hughes helpfully draws attention to the poem entitled "Rachel," one of the letters written by Honoria in the 1860 edition of the epistolary collection, *Faithful for Ever* (1860:195–99). Since this letter to her father, Dean Churchill of Salisbury, caused such a furor among Patmore's readers, it was removed from all subsequent editions. For here Honoria comes to life, in Hughes's words, as "an ordinary, nonsymbolic woman rather than a symbolic angel who inspires men" (157). Commenting on her husband's parliamentary career, Honoria somewhat patronizingly remarks that "if Felix chose to stir, / I am sure he might Minister," and she adds how she had advised him that after members of Parliament have "flung their strength from last and worst," then it is time for a "gentleman" to "stay at home / And let his rulers sometimes come / And blush at his high privacy"—suggesting, indeed, that the domestic realm, from this womanly point of view, is superior to the public world of politics. Honoria remarks that Felix was so teased by her comments that he scolded her for being a "Fierce white cat!" Garnett, somewhat taken aback, found such cattiness "quite failing to confirm the idea of the lady we have been led to form from the enthusiastic idea of love" (Champneys II: 344). This letter, as Hughes observes, was one of several poems that Patmore dutifully excised so that Honoria would eventually be more seen than heard.

10. Tennyson's poetry, of course, featured at the center of a significant debate about male writing and "sensation": see the early Victorian reviews collected in "Tennyson Controversy to 1842," in Armstrong: 71–150.

11. Maynard remarks: "Though some individual odes are abysmal, *The Unknown Eros* as a whole is a stunning, resplendent work, certainly the most important group of odes by an English writer after Keats" (161). Similar adulatory attention to the odes has recently been given by Wheeler (163–74). I feel that the high value that Maynard places on these poems is misjudged. The *Angel* and the odes strike me as technically and intellectually inept, as well as politically repugnant. Their value surely lies in how they manage to disclose some of the contradictions central to the gendering of mid-Victorian poetry, especially as they provide insights into the tortuous psychology of Victorian patriarchal rule.

12. The most developed study of male homoerotic representation in the period immediately antecedent to the epoch-making trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 is Dellamora.

13. Although a vast amount of research has been conducted on the categorization of homosexuality in the late-Victorian period, the historical emergence of the presumed nonnativity enshrined in heterosexuality has until recently been neglected. On this point, see Katz's "exploratory first pass at an historically-specific heterosexual history—a call for a complete rethinking and total historicization of heterosexuality, and for new research on that radical reviewing" (9).

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EIGHT

Reimagining Masculinity in Victorian Criticism

Swinburne and Pater

Thaïs E. Morgan

"He is never more present than when no image of him is there. He is a suggestion of a new manner."

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

In *A History of Modern Criticism* René Wellek calls Algernon Charles Swinburne "The first in England to apply purely imaginative standards to the whole range of literature" (381). He also suggests that Walter Pater became Swinburne's "closest ally and rival" in the British avant-garde which emerged in the 1860s. More recently, Linda Dowling has connected Swinburne and Pater as "the two great Aestheticist writers" who laid the groundwork for the 1890s (*Language* 176). Examining the "production of revisionary masculine discourses" among the male poets and critics associated with Victorian Aestheticism, Richard Dellamora also links Swinburne and Pater (5). Swinburne's exploration of a range of sexual "perversities" in his poetry lent support, Dellamora argues, to the homoerotic strain in Aestheticism. In particular, he maintains that Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, Series 1* (1866)—especially such poems as "Anactoria" and "Hermaphroditus"—were crucial in leading Pater "to reconsider sexual politics in his work" (69).

However, Dellamora only briefly mentions Swinburne's important role in the line of literary and art criticism that sustains "the tradition of *moral-aesthetic* reflection on desire between males" in the Victorian period (7). The interaction between Swinburne and Pater as leading Aesthetic critics during the 1860s merits further consideration. Equally important, I would suggest, is understanding how and why these two writers staked out and occupied distinctive terrains for their work in the context of the all-male sexual politics of Victorian Aestheticism. For, as allies, both Swinburne and Pater celebrated androgynous beauty and evoked homoeroticism in an attempt to reimagine masculinity at the margins of conventional middle-class notions of manliness.[1] But, simultaneously, as rivals, Swin-

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burne and Pater reimagined masculinity from different positions, with significantly different results.

Several critics have established the pervasiveness of a discourse about homoeroticism in Victorian criticism treating the art and literature of the ancient Greeks. For instance, Richard Jenkyns finds images and metaphors that "whisper some message that [their author] dares not speak aloud" concerning the beauty of the young male body in Swinburne, Pater, Symonds, and Wilde (149). More specific is Dowling's inquiry into recurrent words and concepts that constitute what she terms the "homosexual code" that is activated when Victorian critics talk about things Hellenic. Dowling makes the important point that this "hidden language or code" may differ in its connotative charge depending on the context, say, whether it appears in a public address by John Ruskin about the importance of Greek classics in British education, or in an art historical piece by Pater about the centrality of male friendship in ancient Greece ("Ruskin's" 1). In other words, the "homosexual code" in Victorian criticism has a double status: it is at once widely dispersed in the culture (Dowling's examples come from "the dominant discourse of scholarship" [5]) and preciously cultivated by a small "proscribed" group within that culture (1).

Due to its mode of existence in between dominant and minority discourses, such a "homosexual code"—or, more precisely, such a system of interlocked rhetorical figures and connotative subcodes—has a very precarious status and typically generates ambiguous representations (e.g., the androgyne).[2] In order to understand the provisionality of and the risk involved in reimagining masculinity in Swinburne's and Pater's criticism, instead of thinking in terms of a stable and definitely sexually oriented "homosexual code," I propose that we approach their essays as examples of an *aesthetic minoritizing discourse*. Briefly defined, a minoritizing discourse is one in which the solidarity—and the essential alikeness—of a group that perceives itself to be in a minority position is presupposed and invoked at the same time as it is being constructed in the discourse itself. In the case of Victorian Aestheticism, a group of male writers, some of whom already have authority within the dominant culture (for instance, Tennyson), share varying degrees of interest in homoeroticism, which they express in their work. As Eve Sedgwick explains in regard to identity, under a minoritizing view, "it is [considered] . . . the most natural thing in the world that people of the same gender . . . whose social needs and knowledges may have so much in common, should band together also on the axis of sexual desire" ("Across Gender" 58). Thus, as male Aesthetes interested in extending the boundaries of masculinity, Swinburne and Pater foster a minoritizing discourse about art and artists in which male beauty and male-male desire are validated and preferred over the heterosexual norm as the cultural ideal. However, as we shall see, aesthetic minoritizing discourse is inflected differently in Swinburne's and in Pater's critical essays, resulting in the construction of distinct kinds of alternative masculinity.

Equally important to understanding the enterprise and situation of aesthetic minoritizing discourse as practiced by Swinburne and Pater in their criticism is

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what David DeLaura has described as the emergence of "a new kind of reader, susceptible to [an] . . . aesthetic/sexual/stylistic synthesis" based on a shared "homoerotic sensibility" (8). Connecting the trajectory of Pater's reading to the ambiguous topics and address of his writing, DeLaura concludes that "*two* discernible sets of implied readers" are "appealed to more or less continuously in the key texts" (9). While "Pater overtly addresses cultivated . . . readers interested in literature, art, and philosophy," he also speaks to "a well disposed minority audience 'inside' his larger general readership" (8). This minority audience consisted of men who had varying degrees of interest in the relations of male-male sexual desire possible within the framework of masculinity—from homosocial friendship tinged with homoerotic attraction to male-male sexual contact or "sodomy."[3] Victorian Aestheticism is thus animated by a politics of sexuality and of gender, in which criticism on art and artists speaks a "double-voiced discourse."[4] Officially expounding on aesthetic questions to the majority of readers who are heterosexually identified gentlemen, these two writers also talk intimately with a minority group of readers who are interested in expanding the conventional limits of masculinity and its heterosexual practices by envisioning ties between the male body and beauty, homoeroticism and culture—in short, by imagining other ways of being a man in Victorian England.

Throughout his criticism and poetry of the 1860s, Swinburne develops a double-addressed rhetoric about art and the artist that stems from the dominant discourse of critical judgment but refocuses it on gender and sexuality, thereby initiating mid-Victorian aesthetic minoritizing discourse. For example, in his review of Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (1862), Swinburne uses familiar aesthetic standards while suspending the moral constraints that traditionally accompany them to justify as art what other Victorian (and many French) critics had declared to be "obscene" and "immoral" topics.[5] Describing poetry in terms of fine visual art, Swinburne praises one group of lyrics for "sharp individual drawing of character and form," and another for its "colour" (3:419–20). His central point of reference in the essay is "drawing": Baudelaire accomplishes through words what "great French artists" such as J. A. D. Ingres have accomplished through pencil and oil (422).

Addressing the general reader, Swinburne establishes in the language of art criticism that Baudelaire's artistry or technique is unimpeachable. But it is the extension of this claim into the stance of art for art's sake that the majority of contemporary readers refused: "His perfect workmanship makes every subject admirable and respectable" (419). Swinburne throws into relief what he knows will be the point of conflict between the moral majority of middle-class Victorians and the aesthetic program of the emergent British avant-garde by connecting the scandalizing perversities represented in the poetry (satanism, prostitution, lesbianism, necrophilia) to the life of the poet himself. In *Fleurs du mal* Baudelaire "has chosen to dwell mainly upon sad and strange things—the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure—the *perverse* happiness and wayward sorrows of *exceptional people*" (419, my emphases). The person of the poet himself, his bodily as well as

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his artistic practices, becomes the focus of attention: "The writer delights in problems, and has a natural leaning to obscure and sorrowful things" (419).

Paradoxically, according to Swinburne, the unspoken perversities of the man Baudelaire have produced an exquisitely beautiful and philosophically "weighty" style of writing. The artifacts that constitute *Fleurs du mal* bear "the special mark" of the artist's "keen and peculiar power" (419). But what is this "special mark"? Exactly where does this "power" come from, and whom does it affect? Such ambiguous oxymorons as these, strewn throughout Swinburne's essay, invite a different kind of reading besides the aesthetic one signalled by the application of analogies from drawing to poetry. This alternative reading would be performed by a small group of men interested in the way Swinburne connects the perversities of the poems to the perversities of the male author. Specifically, Baudelaire not only as a poet but as a man is imagined here as engaging in a range of alternative (non-heterosexual, extra-marital) practices. At the same time, he is imagined as something other than manly in the middle-class Victorian sense. His book has both "vigorous beauty" and "charm"; the poet avoids "rough or hasty handling" of certain proscribed topics; his style has a "beautiful gentle" quality about it (421, 420, 422). In sum, the character Swinburne constructs for Baudelaire is one of *masculine androgyny*; it incorporates qualities culturally associated with femininity while subordinating them to a fundamentally masculine figure. The phrase "vigorous beauty" captures this masculine androgyny: capable of creating a style so beautiful that it could almost be said to be feminine, Baudelaire nonetheless remains a virile genius, "exceptional" both as an artist and as a man.

Aesthetic minoritizing discourse in mid-Victorian criticism expands possibilities for gender identifications and sexual practices for men within a secure framework of masculinity. The contemporary male reader prepared to entertain such ideas would have been highly responsive to Swinburne's Aesthetic prose. Indeed, in the essay on Baudelaire, Swinburne provides several clues for such a minority readership to follow. One of these occurs at the end of the third paragraph: "From Théophile Gautier, to whom the book is dedicated, he has caught the habit of a faultless and studious simplicity" (419). As A. J. L. Busst has remarked in a widely cited study of the figure of the androgyne in the nineteenth-century European imagination, the cross-dressed heroine of Gautier's novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, is "[o]ne of the earliest and most important examples—and certainly the most influential—of the image of the androgyne" (41). Busst emphasizes the fictive status of the androgyne as a symbol of aesthetic perfection as well as of sexual fulfillment. " '*Rêve de poète et d'artiste*,' it is the product of pure art . . . and consequently far superior to anything that . . . reality has to offer" (42). By gesturing toward this French intertext, Swinburne links the aesthetic program of the mid-century avant-garde—initiated in France by Gautier, pursued by Baudelaire, and now championed in England by Swinburne (cf. Clements)—to androgyny as an alternative mode of masculinity. As a figure for art that transcends limiting considerations such as morality, the androgyne suits the campaign of Gautier and, in turn, Swinburne to "*épater le bourgeois*" and promote art for art's sake. As a

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figure in which masculine and feminine categories overlap, the androgyne is also suited to an aesthetic minoritizing discourse which specifically seeks to reconfigure masculinity. By imagining the persona of the French poet Baudelaire for English readers as a masculine androgyne, whose sexual perversities are transcended by his aesthetic genius, Swinburne enables "a relaxing of gender stereotypes for men, allowing them to stretch the boundaries of masculinity" (Weil 1).

One of the most savvy readers of Swinburne's work in the 1860s was the young Pater, who, in the essay entitled "Diaphanéité" (1864), develops the construct of the artist as masculine androgyne, perverse if judged in moral terms but transcendently beautiful if judged by the standards of art. Critics generally agree that "Diaphanéité" was originally fielded before an audience of a select few: members of the Old Mortality Society at Oxford, which included several of Pater's friends and the man with whom he was in love at the time (Levey 101–104; Dellamora 48–61). Pater's approach to the project of reimagining masculinity was therefore of necessity differently inflected and aimed than Swinburne's. In effect, Pater was writing not to confront and harangue a large public audience as Swinburne had in his essay on Baudelaire, but to seduce and persuade a small intimate audience of the rightness of male beauty and male-male desire under the new category of "diaphanéité."

Thus, whereas Swinburne begins his piece with a diatribe against establishment critics—"there [in France], as well as here," who "seem to have pretty well forgotten that a poet's business is" to create art and not "to redeem the age"—Pater starts with an apparently neutral, philosophical survey of major "type[s] of character" and then leads to the description of an entirely new type: the diaphanous man (217). The construct of the diaphanous man holds appeal across hetero- and homosexuality, and is wholly concerned with forging an alternative masculinity for its author and his all-male audience. (This continues to be true of the revised version of "Diaphanéité" as well.) Recalling three traditional types of manliness—the philosopher, the saint, and the artist—at the outset of the essay, Pater turns our attention to the markedly different style of manhood represented by diaphanéité. Located in between "contrasted types of character," this kind of person appears "colourless," a presence of "evanescent shades" (216). Although he habitually "crosses rather than follows the main current of the world's life," the diaphanous man remains "delicate" and possessed of an "unclassified purity" (216). Unlike the "strenuous masculine ideal" promoted in Thomas Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*" (1841), then, Pater's ideal for contemporary man lies just this side of femininity (Christ 20). Modest in his "desire for simplicity" and his manner of "indirect self-assertion," the diaphanous man has a "moral expressiveness" that is more reminiscent of the Victorian ideal of womanhood than of manhood (217).

Nonetheless, Pater's imaginative construct of diaphanéité remains very much a masculine state, and one explicitly attached to a young male body: "Often the presence of this nature is felt like a sweet aroma in early manhood" (221). Furthermore, the "thread of pure white light" emanating from the physical pres-

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ence of the diaphanous type of man leads the reader back to classical Greek sculpture, specifically to the "sexless beauty" of statues of youths and gods (220). Any suspicion of homosexual desire behind Pater's choice of analogy here—the "strange" "receptivity" of the diaphanous man compared with the "kind of impotence" and "ineffectual wholeness of nature" represented by the Greek statues (218–20)—is offset by his contextualization of these details in a philosophical disquisition on universal character types. Above all, Pater's essay operates within a traditional philosophical rhetoric that equates "sexlessness" with morality ("a moral sexlessness," 220) and beauty with the "ineffectual" ("sexless") "wholeness" of the androgyne, whose person combines the best attributes of masculinity and certain feminine ones into a perfect, "pure white" being.[6] Like the imaginary persona Swinburne creates for Baudelaire, Pater's proposal for the new character type of the diaphanous man challenges his readers to place aesthetic values above moral ones.

But the rhetorical tactics in these essays by Swinburne and Pater are quite distinct. As mentioned earlier, there is the confrontational tone adopted by the former and the persuasive tone adopted by the latter. Second, and equally important, is each critic's particular relation to the politics of Victorian Aestheticism. On the one hand, both "Charles Baudelaire" and "Diaphanéité" participate in an aesthetic minoritizing discourse whose project is to construct an alternative masculinity. Both writers aim to revalorize the category of effeminacy, which is culturally marked as negative, by aestheticizing it and thus remarking it in positive terms. On the other hand, the aesthetic programs of Swinburne and Pater do not necessarily aim for the same discursive effects on either majority or minority audiences. Rather, to take DeLaura's surmise one step further, we might say that Swinburne and Pater project and solicit different kinds of readers within both majority and minority groups. These readerships sometimes overlap, but not always.

What interests constitute these audiences and in what ways Swinburne's and Pater's criticism attunes itself to them can be grasped by contrasting the rhetorical orientation of Swinburne's defense of his *Poems and Ballads, Series 1* in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866) to that of Pater's extended meditation on the "sexless beauty" of young manhood as embodied in classical Greek sculpture in "Winckelmann" (176). Taking a cue from Gautier's Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Swinburne's *Notes* continues the contestation of the middle-class moralization of aesthetics that he began in his earlier essay on Baudelaire.[7] His stance is thoroughly polemical. He returns the Victorian critics' hostility to his poetry with irony—referring to "Anactoria": "What is there now of horrible in this? the expressions of fierce fondness, the ardours of passionate despair? Are these so unnatural as to affright or disgust?" (22); with scorn—referring to "Hermaphroditus": "Treated . . . as a serious 'thing of beauty' . . . it can give no offence but to the purblind and the prurient" (28); and even vituperation—referring to his critics in general: "I will not fish up any of the ephemeral scurrilities born only to sting if they can, and sink as they must" (18). Dellamora has discussed "the remarkable imaginative mobility" regarding homo- and bisexuality in Swinburne's "Her-

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maphroditus" (81–83), but I would underline the "parodic metaphor of marriage" and the subversive portrayal of the very concept of sexual difference in the text. Arguably, Swinburne's dissemination of the markings of sexual difference here is too "indeterminate" to support a construal of the poem as a solely homophilic document. Rather, the "voyeur[istic]" perspective of the persona gazing at the statue of the hermaphrodite, as well as the determined "iconoclasm" of the sonnet sequence overall as an attack on dominant heterosexual mores, place his poem squarely against the majority audience at which Swinburne targets his polemic in the *Notes*: "the English reader," as controlled by "the press" and "the pulpit" (18, 32).

Swinburne's criticism in *Notes* is primarily addressed to the majority of middle-class Victorian readers. However, *Notes* invites the attention of a second, minority group of readers as well. From this segment of the public, Swinburne seeks applause for his upholding of aesthetic standards against censorious moralists through irony and counter-argument. At the same time, he leaves the door open for those who want to read his work from a self-consciously homosocial perspective, one that entails homoeroticism and an appreciation of the male body as a "thing of beauty." In *Notes*, he often combines anti-moralist polemics with positive valorizations of the distinctive (male) beauty of the hermaphrodite. For instance, speaking of the special outrage "Hermaphroditus" caused, Swinburne comments: "I knew that belief in the body was the secret of sculpture [addressed to minority readers], and that a past age of ascetics could no more attempt or attain it than the present age of hypocrites [addressed to majority readers as insult and goad, with a knowing nod to the minority]" (27). In the same passage, he twits the self-righteous English public by reminding them that cultural history includes not only Praxiteles's Venus but "at once Othello and Hyperion, Theseus and Hermaphroditus" (27)—in other words, not only models of female-feminine beauty but also models of quite different male-masculine beauty: the manly but also the effeminate.

Ultimately, Swinburne's discourse on hermaphroditism—in "Hermaphroditus" and its defense in *Notes*—is a localized topic within his larger discourse on perversity, which can be found in *Poems and Ballads, Notes*, his letters during the 1860s, and his flagellation fantasies in prose. Perversity is the main platform of his aesthetic program, which, owing much to the French avant-garde, Gautier and Baudelaire, but also to Swinburne's particular positioning as a poet and a critic in relation to the Victorian art and literary establishment, is thoroughly transgressive. To Swinburne, as to many contemporaneous writers and to many present-day critics, androgyny (in "Baudelaire") and hermaphroditism (in the poetry and criticism) are alike: both serve to make the point, *contra* dominant ideology, that art should be judged on its own terms and that whether it appears perverse or not from a moral standpoint must be considered irrelevant to the art *qua* art. Consequently, androgyny and hermaphroditism, as represented in the genius of artists and the beauty of artworks, are for Swinburne interchangeable sites/sights that

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afford cultured men the opportunity of reimagining masculinity. For, what may seem perverse under one light may appear merely beautiful under another.

Situated as a secretly practicing homosexual, and therefore personally invested in homoeroticism as well as professionally interested in art displaying male beauty as a critic (see Levey and Inman), Pater would have been highly receptive to the aesthetic minoritizing discourse in Swinburne's writings of 1866. Whereas Swinburne emphasizes the transgressiveness of androgyny and hermaphroditism as perverse types of beauty, however, Pater downplays the perversity latent in "strange" art and also in art criticism that celebrates male beauty in his next essay, "Winckelmann." Moreover, instead of confrontation and transgression, which are Swinburne's characteristic modes as an avantgardist writer in the 1860s, Pater develops a persuasive rhetorical strategy for aesthetic minoritizing discourse: "tact." Elaborated in his famous essay on "Style" (1888), Pater's deployment of tact addresses both mainstream (heterosexual) and marginal (some homoerotically interested, some homosexual) audiences by embedding celebrations of male beauty and male-male desire within philosophizing and historicizing statements about art. Unlike Swinburne's excited polemics which assault the reader, Pater's steady tact persuades the reader through "a beautiful gentle justice of style" (Swinburne's phrase for Baudelaire) to consider the aesthetic qualities of male beauty and the justifiable pleasures to be derived from admiring it.

The representation of the hermaphrodite is a signifiant example of the several ways in which Swinburne and Pater differ in their approaches to aesthetic minoritizing discourse. In *Notes*, Swinburne rails against those Victorians who saw his "Hermaphroditus" as "obscene": "A creature at once foul and dull enough to extract from a sight so lovely, from a thing so noble, the faintest . . . idea of impurity, must be . . . below comprehension" (28). The aesthetic point—art transcends sexuality—tends to become lost here amid the vituperation. In contrast, Pater is determined to be heard: "In dealing with youth, Greek art betrays a tendency even to merge distinctions of sex. The Hermaphrodite was a favourite subject . . . [a] perfect blending of male and female beauty" (qtd. in Dellamora 64; see also 109–16). Besides assuring the majority reader that the bisexuality of hermaphroditism is perfectly proper because it belongs to art history, Pater also assures the minority reader that this idealized hermaphroditism is definitively associated with the youthful male (not the female) body. In short, Pater makes it respectable for either kind of reader—for all readers—to look upon and discuss the superior beauty of classical (male) nude sculpture.

On other critical business bound, Swinburne makes a connection between aesthetics and alternative masculinity; Pater foregrounds it. In *Notes*, Swinburne insists that when "[t]reated in the grave and chaste manner as a serious 'thing of beauty,' " the statue of the hermaphrodite remains beyond "such depths of mental sewerage" as those inhabited by his critics (28–29). His language depends on an implicit opposition between purity (epitomized by those who understand the beauty of the hermaphrodite) and filth (epitomized by the majority's "subterra-

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nean sloughs of mind" [29]). For his part, although fighting alongside Swinburne in the battle against moral philistines, Pater does not deign to even acknowledge the enemies of art but adopts an authoritative stance immediately. The way he slips a provocative passage from his earlier essay on "Diaphanéité" into "Winckelmann" offers a representative example of Pater's rhetorical tactic of tact:

> The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty; the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own. ("Diaphanéité" 220; "Winckelmann" 176)

In Richard Stein's opinion, "Winckelmann" is "far more subversive and unorthodox" than the notorious "Conclusion" to the *Renaissance* (257). This essay has a highly subversive effect because of the double-voicing of Pater's discourse: encouraging the homoerotic direction of their desire for a minority of men, his rhetoric enlightens a majority of heterosexually identified readers about art history, while yet seducing them into adjacent thoughts of the pleasures of male beauty. Seemingly less problematic because devoid of the potential conflict of male and female sexualities in the hermaphrodite, the young male nude in classical Greek sculpture has a "sexless" beauty reminiscent of that of the diaphanous man. In this later text, the "unclassified purity" of actions attributed to the diaphanous man is transferred to the physicality of the represented male body: emblem of "moral sexlessness," it is suffused with "a divine beauty." Moreover, just as the diaphanous type of character "crosses rather than follows the main current of the world," so this category of classical Greek art has a "significance of its own": it embodies a masculinity different—morally and aesthetically, but also, and significantly, erotically and sexually—from the manly Victorian norm.

As Kenneth Clark's *The Nude* reminds us, the representation of nude male bodies is canonical in Western art. While discussing Winckelmann's interest in the beauty represented by the sculptural forms of young men, therefore, Pater remains within the limits of an art historical discourse familiar to all of his Victorian readers. As part of high-serious rhetoric about art, philosophy, and history, Pater's description of the "sexless" beauty of the young male body might well be read as nothing more than a scholarly intervention in, for example, the 1860s debates over Hellenism. Additionally, Pater tactfully emphasizes the very "moral" quality of the nudes' "sexlessness" by equating first hermaphroditism (as cited above) and then androgyny with the idealization of aesthetic form in general.

According to the psychoanalytic historian Peter Gay, however, a passage such as this one in Pater's "Winckelmann" must be interpreted as knowingly homoerotic, since it would have been so both for its author and for that minority of his audience who were of "the antique persuasion." Gay maintains that appreciation of the art of classical Greek culture "permitted [homosexually-oriented Victorian men] to dwell on what obsessed them, and to be understood mainly by those equipped to understand [*sic*]" (239). This view lends further support to the notion of a double-voiced address in Pater's writing in particular and in mid-Victorian

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aesthetic minoritizing discourse in general. The homoeroticism in "Winckelmann" can always be passed off as unintentional, as morally "sexless," or as merely necessary to accuracy in description within the genre of art historical criticism. To take just one example, it is consonant with both a scholarly and a minoritizing discourse for Pater to observe that Winckelmann's close relationships with young men provided the necessary foundation for his work. "[N]urtured and invigorated by friendships," the great German art historian was able to understand classical Greek culture as no one else had before him (175). Like the statues themselves, Pater implies, Winckelmann's male friendships were innocent and beautiful. Consequently, the reader need feel "no sense of shame" as "he fingers those pagan marbles" (177).

By contrast, to the minority reader, Winckelmann's fascination with statues of and his relationships with young men would surely have had a "significance of its own."[8] At this point, if we review Swinburne's "Baudelaire," "Hermaphroditus," and *Notes*, and Pater's "Diaphanéité" and "Winckelmann," we can see that the aesthetic ideal proposed is consistently one associated with the male body's beauty and with a modality of masculinity in which appreciation, even desire, for male beauty is regarded as legitimate. This sheds light, in turn, on an important difference between the handling of aesthetic minoritizing discourse in Swinburne and Pater. Swinburne explores a range of transgressive perversities, including hermaphroditism and androgyny among sado-masochism, lesbianism, and necrophilia, as part of his avant-gardist agenda during the early and mid-1860s. But Pater is wholly committed to promoting male beauty, figured by hermaphroditism and androgyny, as an aesthetic ideal, thereby *legitimizing* it, from the mid-1860s onward. Thus, while Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus" may be male ("his") and/or female ("hers"), Pater is quite clear about how Winckelmann's life work ought to be interpreted; androgyny, which stands for the highest aesthetic state—"divine beauty"—is located in a *male* body, not a female one: "supreme beauty is rather male than female" (160).[9] Finally, Swinburne and Pater are not positioned identically toward either the majority or the minority group of Victorian readers. What they definitely share, though, is the project of reimagining masculinity.

Art criticism, oriented as it is to the visual and its interpretation, affords multiple opportunities for luxuriating in and for justifying desire for male beauty. The art lover's appreciation of technically superb representations of beautiful young male figures becomes a point of communciation between Swinburne, Pater, and the minority audience. Composed after a visit to the Uffizi gallery in 1864, Swinburne's "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence" (1868) addresses the reader in a leisurely and intimate manner that is strikingly different from his stentorious literary criticism. Swinburne half-apologizes for his "hasty memorial notes" on the Uffizi paintings—"For guide I have but my own sense of interest and admiration" (156)—but he is inaugurating a new style of criticism precisely by adopting this tone. Known as impressionistic criticism after Pater's elaborations of it in the *Renaissance*, Swinburne's "Notes" are "a first-rate piece of pioneering" in aesthetic minoritizing discourse (Lang xxxi).

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Preparing the way for Pater's theory of artistic "temperament" in the *Renaissance*, Swinburne in "Designs" focuses our attention on the author as an aesthetic site/sight. Like his imaginary projection of Baudelaire, Swinburne's portraits of major artists of the Renaissance mystify the origin and intention of each major *oeuvre* by opening up a series of unanswered questions about the men themselves. Most noticeable is the recurrence of the rhetoric of androgyny, which first appeared in Swinburne's "Baudelaire," to describe these artists. While Leonardo da Vinci and his paintings are endowed with an "indefinable grace and grave mystery" (156), Michelangelo's pieces are said to reflect some "grave and subtle sorrow latent under . . . [his] life" (158). By raising doubts about these painters' practices and what their work could mean, Swinburne appeals to the minority reader, inviting him to entertain an iconoclastic interpretation of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the other Old Masters discussed in "Designs." As in the "Baudelaire" piece, so here, an equivalence is posited between the love of art and "perverse happiness," "the sorrow and the strangeness of things" (158).

Androgyny is a crucial trope in aesthetic minoritizing discourse. Again and again, Swinburne finds himself attracted to minor paintings by Old Masters in the Uffizi because of the sexually ambiguous look of their subjects. For instance, after glancing at two conventional studies of the Holy Family by Filippo Lippi, Swinburne concentrates on some "small studies of separate figures; two of boys, very beautiful. One, schoolboy or chorister seemingly, is seated on a form and clothed in a long close gown; his face, grave and of exquisite male beauty, looking down as if in pain or thought" (166). Like Swinburne's Baudelaire or Michelangelo, these painted boys are distinguished by a special "mark." Emotionally, this mark is consistently identified as seriousness and sadness ("grave sorrow," "in pain or thought"); aesthetically, this mark appears to be a necessary accompaniment of "male beauty." That Swinburne may be expressing here not just his feelings for art but his feelings for boys is suggested by his comparison of one of the aesthetic figures to a real "schoolboy or chorister" such as he himself might often have seen at Oxford. Finally, the fact that the paintings Swinburne elects to describe in "Designs" are minor works is in itself significant: their homoerotic import may be titillating, even perverse, but it in no way threatens the artists' canonicity. In short, Swinburne implies that one can love "male beauty," as embodied by beautiful boys, and still be a man.

In "Designs," Swinburne's most intense pleasure as an aesthetic critic is located not in conventional religious topics such as the Madonna and the Holy Family, but in portraits of boys and young men. Showing little interest in Filippino's allegorical paintings, for example, Swinburne dwells on a single-figure study: "a beautiful head of a youth bent sideways, with curls blown back and eager joyful eyes . . . ; the lips parted with eloquent and vehement expression of pleasure" (172). This description has an unmistakeable homoerotic appeal, yet the art critic can plead that he is merely being faithful to his task of taking "notes on the designs of the Old Masters at Florence." In this way, by employing a double-voiced discourse, Swinburne establishes his art critical credentials for a majority of readers, simul-

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taneously as he signals a commonality of interest with a minority of readers who are homoerotically invested in art.

Imagining the young male body as androgynous, hence of an aesthetic value beyond sex and morality, is central to minoritizing discourse in Swinburne and Pater. However, Swinburne's "Designs" indicates a slight nervousness about the masculinity of aesthetic androgyny that distinguishes its rhetoric from that of perverse androgyny in "Baudelaire." Swinburne seems concerned to underscore the manliness of art and the artist in the conclusions he draws about the Italian Renaissance. The most "exquiste" works at the Uffizi, he declares, are those in which "beauty . . . lifts male and female together on an equal level of loveliness" (185). Paintings of beautiful boys and young men by great artists of the past justify the idea that masculinity is as perfect—even as desirable—as femininity, but for Swinburne the female-feminine counter must always be there. Not so for Pater, as we shall see.

In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Pater gathers several of his previous essays on major artists described in Swinburne's "Designs": Leonardo, Michelangelo, Giorgione. The complicated intertextuality that characterizes the constructions of alternative masculinity by Swinburne and Pater is epitomized by the frontispiece to Pater's book. This frontispiece may be read as Pater's response to Swinburne's contributions to Victorian aesthetic minoritizing discourse in the 1860s. Pater chooses a "little drawing in red chalk which everyone will remember," from the Louvre—a minor work, reminiscent of the paintings Swinburne prefers at the Uffizi (90). Like the classical male nudes whose "moral sexlessness" preoccupies Pater in "Diaphanéité" and "Winckelmann," this drawing displays "a face of doubtful sex, set in the shadow of its own hair . . . with something voluptuous and full in the eye-lids and the lips" (90–91). Pater systematically alters the details of Swinburne's description of the Florentine youth's head "bent sideways, with curls blown back and eager joyful eyes." An attentive minority reader of art criticism would notice that the Swinburneian intertext is present here but modified in order to meet Pater's requirements of tact. Because the face in the drawing is "of doubtful sex," its "voluptuous[ness]" is balanced out and so does not contradict the aesthetic purity of its beauty.

Tact notwithstanding, Pater purposes to celebrate the special beauty of young men, as figured by androgyny, in the *Renaissance*. In "Designs," Swinburne opened the way to evaluating male portraiture explicitly in terms of the homoerotic attractions it holds for the art critic. In the *Renaissance*, Pater follows suit, going Swinburne one better in the boldness of his verbal rendition of the beauty of one young man in particular: "[a]mong the more youthful heads" drawn by Leonardo is "the head of a young man, which may well be the likeness of Andrea Salaino, beloved of Leonardo for his curled and waving hair" (91). Here Pater names the love that dare not speak its name—or almost, for the beautiful body of the male youth, "which Love chooses for his own," is transcended by the beautiful image of male androgyny here. Rhetorically, sexuality is superseded by aesthetics as impropriety is avoided by art. In this way, Pater succeeds in legitimizing male

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beauty and male-male desire, placing both under the sign of Amor in the guise of Ars.

Dellamora has suggested that "womanly beauty" for Pater is summed up in the Mona Lisa, Medusa, and Salomé, all of which are "sign[s] of male-male desire in which self-awareness takes the form of a rhetorical wish to be woman" (130). Arguably, however, Pater aims not at imagining men-who-would-be-womanly in the *Renaissance* but men-who-would-be-another-kind-of-manly. Blurring boundaries of sex and gender, Pater proposes to see a "thread of suggestion" linking the frontispiece image, "of doubtful sex," with another drawing by Leonardo that "might pass for the same face in childhood, with parched and feverish lips, but much sweetness in the loose, short-waisted childish dress, with necklace and *bulla*, and in the daintily bound hair" (91). Taking all of his work into consideration—paintings of both female and male figures—Pater further maintains that we may "construct a sort of series" that defines "Leonardo's type of womanly beauty" (95). But this composite icon, like "diaphanéité" and the "moral sexlessness" of classical Greek statues, is not a "womanly" "type" in the conventional Victorian sense. Rather, it is another kind of manliness, one that Pater implicitly exalts above the womanliness of women.

Although their maneuvers within aesthetic minoritizing discourse differ in inflection, therefore, it is surprising to discover that the tactful Pater is actually more active in pushing at the border dividing respectability and homoeroticism than the vehement Swinburne. Moreover, Pater seems at pains to draw our attention to the absolute masculinity of his aesthetic ideal. In the essay on Leonardo, Pater notes that the frontispiece drawing by the same artist is "still more full of sentiment, but of a different kind" than the better known series of Madonnas (91). Is Pater implicitly correcting what he sees as Swinburne's overly conventional (heterosexually grounded) reading of beauty in the Old Masters? For, unlike Swinburne, Pater does not entertain male-male desire as just one among many transgressive perversities, and unlike Swinburne again, Pater does not "lift male and female together on an equal level of loveliness." On the contrary, in Pater's world, there is only one kind of true beauty, and it is male.[10] Perhaps this preference explains his provision of only one image—that of young male beauty, in the frontispiece—to guide the reader through the *Renaissance*. It certainly jibes with Pater's remark that this little drawing is "still more full of sentiment, but of a different kind" than his Madonnas. Lastly, Pater's commitment to male beauty and to male-male desire may be heard in his direct address to the minority audience, the "everyone [who] will remember" minor gems such as this "face of doubtful sex"—they who "ha[ve] examined . . . carefully the drawings by the old masters" with an eye for the beauties of masculine form and desire (90).

For contemporary theorizations of sexuality and gender, a nexus of questions about Swinburne's and Pater's differential participation in what I have termed aesthetic minoritizing discourse remains. Eve Sedgwick has most influentially framed this set of questions under the concept of "the closet" (see especially *Epistemology* 5). To be potentially classifiable as a homosexual or "sodomite," as Swinburne and

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Pater were, due variously to their writings and to their observed behavior, was a double bind in the intensely homosocial but also intensely homophobic culture of Victorian England. Even the suspicion of homosexuality was enough to condemn a man not only in the public eye but also to his closest male friends. Witness the case of the openly homosexual artist, Simeon Solomon, friend of both Swinburne and Pater, who, after his arrest for suspected sodomy in a street urinal in 1873, was abruptly dropped by his sometime patron, Swinburne. In a letter to his friend George Powell (6 June 1873), Swinburne takes his distance from Solomon in particular and homosexuality in general: "I suppose there is no doubt the poor unhappy little fellow has . . . *done* things amenable to law such as . . . would make it impossible for any one to keep up his acquaintance and not be cut by the rest of the world as an accomplice?" (qtd. in Lang 2: 253).

Pater's handling of his problematic friendship with Solomon—they were introduced by Swinburne—was distinctively other: he took the risk of continuing their friendship even after the sodomy scandal (and despite its close proximity to the *Renaissance*, which stirred up a scandal of its own). Yet Pater's position vis-à-vis homosexuality, Solomon's or his own, remains uncertain: Levey speculates that Pater kept "guarded the secret of his own emotional urges, possibly never revealing—even to someone like Simeon Solomon—the intensity of his yearning for the ideal male friend" (112). A "problematics of *identification with/identification as*" opens up here (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 62). Did Swinburne identify with the minority group of homoerotically inclined male readers which he addressed in his aesthetic criticism and poetry, but recoil in horror at the idea of homosexuality itself? Did Pater likewise identify with this minority group in his aesthetic criticism, and also invite a special understanding with homosexually active readers, but stop short of identifying himself as a homosexual because of the strong likelihood of blackmail?[11]

Whatever is decided about Swinburne's and Pater's sexuality, it is important to understand that aesthetic minoritizing discourse may be deployed as but is not necessarily tantamount to a rhetoric of the closet. As Sedgwick comments, homosexual panic, which motivates rhetorics of the closet, is not based on direct or sure evidence of the given subject's homosexuality. Rather, homosexual panic, or the suspicion and denunciation of homosexuality, is a parameter of normative (heterosexual) masculinity. It is "important not only for the persecutory regulation of a nascent minority . . . but also for the regulation of the male homosocial bonds that structure *all* culture" (*Epistemology* 184). Thus, aesthetic minoritizing discourse in Swinburne must be understood as oriented differently from its manifestations in Pater. The transgressive perversities including homoeroticism that are depicted in Swinburne's work are not equivalent to the full-fledged legitimization of homoeroticism and homosexuality in Pater's. Moreover, as can be seen from his letters, Swinburne is not at all committed to the project of legitimizing homosexuality, but rather to the project of aestheticizing all kinds of sexualities, which in turn forms part of his avant-gardist agenda. Pater stands, albeit very elusively, elsewhere on the entwined but distinct questions of homoeroticism and homo-

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sexuality. Given the biographical evidence, it is likely that Pater appreciated the advantages—and also experienced the disadvantages—of using a rhetoric of the closet in his work.

A major consequence for contemporary criticism is that what reads like "the rhetoric of secrecy is not inevitably the expressive veil of a specifically homoerotic *desire*" (Adams 454). Both Swinburne and Pater engage in building a minority audience for their aesthetic criticism within the majority audience of middle-class Victorian readers. Both Swinburne and Pater reimagine masculinity in terms of male beauty and along lines of homoeroticism as an aesthetic fact. But in sexual politics as well as in critical style, Pater remains both the "closest ally and rival" of Swinburne in Victorian Aestheticism.

NOTES

Research for this article was initiated under a Faculty-Grant-in-Aid from Arizona State University (1988). Further research was completed under a Visiting Fellowship at the Yale Center for British Art in 1992.

1. On the parameters of mid-Victorian middle-class manliness, see, for example, Mangan and Walvin. On the difficulties the norm of manliness posed for a Victorian poet, see Sussman. For a discussion of "not only the immense social authority of 'manliness' but [the] correspondingly acute contest in defining the norm" in Victorian culture, see Adams.

2. Theoretically speaking, a code consists in the recurrence of phonetic, syntactic, and/or semantic markers. The "homosexual code" that Dowling has detected in the recurrence of keywords in a range of Victorian texts is more precisely a "*hypercode*" or a gathering together of "various subcodes, some of which are strong and stable, while others are weak and transient" (Eco 125). The rhetorical overlap of criticism by Swinburne and by Pater, and also some of the points of connotative difference between them, may be understood in terms of their writing within the same hypercode but foregrounding different connotative subcodes in that system.

3. I am making a distinction here between what Dellamora calls "male-male desire," which implies sexual orientation, hence sexual identity, and masculinity, which entails a hegemonic cultural position dependent on gender assignment. In textual terms, this means that, for example, the lesbian couple in Swinburne's "Anactoria" does not necessarily signal the author's commitment to "male-male desire" as "a central imaginative fact" (Dellamora 218)—or his commitment to women's interests, either. See my "Male Lesbian Bodies."

4. The term "double-voiced discourse" comes from Bakhtin's theory of how language works in the genre of the novel. The "active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of a unitary language" (272).

5. Swinburne's review essay on Baudelaire appeared in the *Spectator* for 6 September 1862. On the centrality of Swinburne's criticism and poetry on Baudelaire to the work of Pater, Wilde, Symons, and T. S. Eliot, see Clements.

6. Jenkyns reads the imagery connecting light, whiteness, and Hellenic sculpture in Pater as a subtext about homosexuality: "as he slides around within his cluster of metaphors, a soft insinuating voice seems to whisper some message that it dares not speak aloud" (148). For a historical and theoretical discussion of the Platonic tradition of the androgyne, including its relation to the figure of the hermaphrodite, see Weil 17–30.

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7. On the sexual-aesthetic politics connecting Gautier's Preface to the androgynous heroine of his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, see Weil 113–42.

8. The pederastic structure of Winckelmann's friendships with young men would have been obvious to minority readers such as Swinburne, who, like Pater, studied Plato with Benjamin Jowett at Oxford. See Jenkyns, and Dowling, "Ruskin's Pied Beauty."

9. There continues to be quite a lot of disagreement over the distinction between hermaphroditism and androgyny in criticism today. Compare, for example, Black (the classical Greek ideal of beauty is sexually indeterminate) and Weil ("That androgyny has often functioned as a conservative, if not a misogynistic, ideal is evident in the . . . tradition of dual-sexed beings that can be traced at least as far back as . . . Plato and Ovid" [2]).

10. Analyzing the chapter on "Lacedaemon" in *Plato and Platonism* (1893), Dowling notes the way in which Pater "banishes the . . . feminine term in the opposition" between Ionians and Dorians ("Ruskin's" 4).

11. Fallen on hard times after the scandal ignited by his arrest for sodomy, Solomon did in fact during the 1870s sell off some of the letters about flagellation and other perversities which Swinburne had addressed to him from the mid-1860s to the very early 1870s. Consequently, Swinburne took the high moral ground in a letter to Edmund Gosse (15 October 1879): "As long as I can feel that I may count . . . on the steady friendship of honourable gentlemen, I will not for very shame's sake so far forego my own claim to a sense of self-respect as to fret my heartstrings . . . over . . . [Solomon] who is now a thing unmentionable alike by men and women, as equally abhorrent to either—nay, to the very beasts—raising money by the sale of my letters to him in past years" (*Letters* 4: 107). The strong claims of homosociality ("the steady friendship of honourable gentlemen") and the equally strong pull of homosexual panic ("a thing unmentionable" and "abhorrent") are especially clear here. On Pater's homosexual liaisons at Oxford and the specter of blackmail, see Inman.

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NINE

When the Soul Had Hips

Six Animadversions on Psyche and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Poetry

Herbert F. Tucker

Robert Browning's *Men and Women* (1855) furnishes two epigraphs it would be hard to improve on for apologetic purposes:

> Your business is to paint the souls of men—
> Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
> It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
> (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
> It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
>
> —"Fra Lippo Lippi" ll. 183–88

> And I have written three books on the soul,
> Proving absurd all written hitherto,
> And putting us to ignorance again.
>
> —"Cleon" ll. 57–59[1]

My topic, stated with all the bravado of an unrealizable ambition, is the physical representation of the human soul in the nineteenth-century imagination. My authorities are the British Romantic and Victorian poets, on whom it was particularly incumbent to carry out Fra Lippo Lippi's impossible mission: Find the soul a body. Supposing that body to be female—a fairly uncontroversial supposition, although my authorities sometimes confirm it in unpredicted ways—I have proceeded to ask how the dialectic of body and soul may correlate on the one hand with the dialectic of feminine and masculine gender, and on the other with the dialectic of figural and literal representation. My finding, that they correlate every which way, leaves me somewhere between Browning's gloomy Cleon and his manic Rabbi Ben Ezra. The best is yet to be: while I have not always known how to find it, I remain convinced that the topic explored below has much to disclose about gender, imagination, and their mutual bearings during the nineteenth cen-

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tury. So what follows is less the pursuit of a thesis than a set of *animadversions*, in an old and nonpejorative sense of that term: attempts to turn the mind toward certain aspects of the embodied form in which Romantic and Victorian poets figured the soul.

I

William Blake wanted to make one thing clear. Bound across the brow of his first masterpiece, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), gleams a proposition that not only exemplifies the clarity with which he saw everything but arguably grounds that clarity:

> Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that called Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.[2]

In perceptual terms—for Blake the only terms that mattered—the soul and the body were functionally identical. Whatever reduction or proportioning might be entailed upon the soul in any given "age," at that perceptual and historical moment the imaginative form of the soul *was* the human body. Or, rather, it was *man's* body, "Man" being adopted more or less for granted as an Enlightenment universal by Blake, his mentor Emanuel Swedenborg, and everybody else.

I dined in Eternity with Blake the other night and asked him about the gender bias in this passage. He frankly acknowledged it a piece of eighteenth-century astigmatism, but then hastened to show how neatly it illustrated his manifesto's main point: that ideology places limits on even the most discerning of us; and that it is the task of art in every age to make these limits apprehensible and thus expose them to evaluation and critique. The masculinization of the Enlightenment soul was a mistake, and so was the femininization of the Victorian soul.[3] Yet each of these, Blake concluded, was the right kind of mistake to make, for he had no doubt that the besetting error of his age lay in its refusal really to imagine the soul at all. The trouble with "all Bibles or sacred codes," from Mosaic scripture to Lockean associationism to Freudian psychoanalysis, was that they sought to *conceive* the soul but failed to *perceive* it, sequestering it instead with abstractions like "Reason" and "Good" that were disembodied and therefore, in Blake's view, did not exist. So pervasive were these idealist errors of his day that in the defense of his own counter-theses Blake would find a life's work cut out for him. Rewriting the sacred codes would commit him to the epic intricacies of a homemade psychomachia working out the permutations of a single contest: the struggle between a geometer's plan to secure the soul in a realm of thought, and a smith's hands-on labors to rescue the soul by recreating the senses.

Among nineteenth-century poets Blake's incarnationist psychotheology had no conscious adherents, although Swinburne and D. G. Rossetti, leading poets of the first generation to hail Blake as a master, worked along lines that were similar to his and nearly as systematic. The force of Blake's radical identification of soul with body resides instead, for my purposes, with the ancient truth it declares about

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poetic imagery and its tendency to blow the cover off ideas. Metaphysicians and theologians may dispute the soul's properties, substance, and accidents; and so they vigorously did across the nineteenth century. The century's poets, however, were its major *imaginers* of soul, and their most important thinking on the topic was done in tropes. Inasmuch as their figurations and myths bestowed on the soul an imagined form, they were of Blake's party, with or without knowing it and whatever their theological bent.

Next to Blake's, most nineteenth-century poets' representations of the soul look casual or furtive, reluctant or opportunistic. Yet the comparatively ad hoc character of those representations makes them apt inspection sites for evidence of cultural contestation. Whenever poetry catches the soul in a physical manifestation there occurs, as Blake realized there must, at least a tremor *within* sacred codes, and at best a collision *between* them. The soul being officially immaterial, its poetic embodiment is ipso facto irregular, and potentially subversive. Any image of the soul will have a way of lifting into consciousness the suppressed imaginary on which the official dogmas of psychic immaterialism may be seen to depend—an effect that is if anything strongest where the image in question is most impeccably conventional: the butterfly, say, on the tombstone. A strikingly original image for the soul, in contrast, will highlight sacred codes by transgressing them. Take for example "The rank saliva of her soul" from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1860 poem "Bianca among the Nightingales" (l. 107).[4] Such an image does not just infringe the taboo on unsanctioned soul-representation, but virtually jeers at it. What is most shocking is the breach such an image makes in the wall between ideologically distinct discourses, discourses whose unconscious coexistence may prop the general order pretty well as long as it remains unconscious, but whose logical incompatibility a transgressive trope can throw into sudden relief. Showing the soul in public, if only by glimpses, poets might force the hand of the culture within which they wrote: limn its prejudices, expose its naturalized constructions, and above all anatomize its inconsistencies.[5]

Much was at stake, then, when nineteenth-century poets obeyed Fra Lippo Lippi's boss and put souls in bodies. During an epoch of rapid change in biological and medical knowledge, and in attitudes toward the authority of scriptural and ecclesiastical traditions, when the contests of idealism with materialism among the learned were increasingly open debates conducted in journals of general circulation, and when spiritualist vogues arose within a public culture of equally conspicuous bodily consumption and bodily squalor—in such times the poet who brought soul to its senses was playing with fire. The cultural friction was if anything heightened when, during the hundred years or so from Wollstonecraft to Wilde, the physical imagination of the soul tangled with gender and sexuality. This happened with great regularity in the nineteenth century, and not only as an afterthought to the soul's embodiment, I believe, but as a precondition. With bodies comes sex, of course (witness Blake's gaffe): a poet committed to rendering the soul in a corporeal image will sooner or later find gender and sexuality entailed by that commitment—and will also, if a nineteenth-century poet, often stave off that

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entailment or contrive its suppression in interesting ways. But sexuality lurked thus at the end of the psychical-physical line because it haunted the beginning. The century's fundamental irresolution over the semantics (and priorities) of body and soul occupied an unsteady but unavoidable relation to the symbols (and hierarchies) of masculinity and femininity.

To ask which came first in the order of signification, the soul or the body—a question always implicit in poetic imagery that represents either one of them in terms of the other—was to call into play correlative orders of value. Among these cultural coordinates gender came to have pride of place in the nineteenth century, if not absolutely then at least where the embodied soul was concerned, and at least in Britain. For within British public discourse gender was the most conspicuous and least debatable among several cultural categories that were held to be lodged in bodily properties. This preeminence was due to the influence of sporadic but unignorable feminist agitation, and also to a combination of influences that diminished the prestige of those categories which might have rivaled gender: the notorious liability of ethnic or criminal insignia to dissimulation or disguise; the comparative subsidence of race as either a demographic or political issue once slavery had been abolished. Without this last development, the imagination of the soul in Britain might have focused more sharply, as one could argue it did in America, upon the racialized body. Blake had raised the issue on English soil in 1789 with the literally soul-blenching start of "The Little Black Boy": "My mother bore me in the southern wild, / And I am black, but O! my soul is white" (ll. 1–2). Half a century later, and after much liberal legislation, Barrett Browning's infanticidal "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1850) also conceived the politics of black and white in terms of body and soul, seeing in her baby boy's face "The *master's* look, that used to fall / On my soul like his lash" (ll. 143–44). Only now the scene was not English but American, as was the place of first publication.[6]

Pretend, for the sake of argument, that there is discovered in a Yorkshire attic a variant *Songs of Innocence*. This unique copy contains a new plate entitled "The Little Tom Boy," ornamentally illuminated with doll, thimble, football, and stick, and engraved with a quatrain poem whose first two lines run: "My father raisd me on the northern moors: / I am a girl, but O! my soul is male." It would be interesting to debate where Blake might have taken such a premise: the line that ends "The Little Black Boy" certainly bristles with new possibilities: "And be like him, and he will then love me." But never mind: it's the thought that counts here, because it is a thought that would have awakened echoes across the nineteenth century, from Grasmere to Wuthering Heights and the banks of the river Floss—echoes more responsive and insistent than awoke after 1800 to "The Little Black Boy." To the eye of reason the gender of the soul may be no more than a special case of the soul's embodiment; but to the eye of history surveying nineteenth-century Britain, it can seem the generic case, the thing itself. As the aesthetic problem of representing the soul became, with the advance of the decades, an allegory of the ontological problem of the soul's very existence, gender and sexuality set the terms in which it seemed most natural for that allegory to be framed.

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II

What makes the imagination of the soul so unstable an affair is an inescapable contradiction at the root of its conception, where a monistic self-identity confronts an originary duality. It should go without saying—although thanks to phonetic coincidence and the expediency of rhyme, poets say it all the time—that the soul is whole and sole: unitary, essential, and indivisible, the atom of life itself.[7] The trouble with this idea is that it evidently can *only* go without saying: once put into play as a proposition in an argument, a figure in a tale, or a trope in a stanza, the soul comes apart.[8] This basic dilemma, which the poetic discourse of the soul rehearses over and over during the nineteenth century, may be approached along lines laid down by two writers seldom compared, Blake and Herbert Spencer. In the terms of Blake's critique of orthodoxy, as we have seen, the soul is regarded as a "real existing principle" only through the definitive act which sunders it from its equally real opposite, the body. Thus defined, the soul can have no proper embodiment or objective correlative that is not hopelessly arbitrary.[9] Spencer's estimable *Principles of Psychology* indexes "feeling," "instinct," and "will" but has no use for "soul," which receives its due instead, along with other religious phenomena, under *Principles of Sociology*. Spencer nonetheless propounds the unknowability of "Mind" in terms that resonate with the psychopoetic dilemmas of his contemporaries:

> The substance of Mind escapes into some new form in recognizing some form under which it has just existed. . . . The expression 'substance of Mind,' if we use it in any way other than as the x of our equation, inevitably betrays us into errors; for we cannot think of substance save in terms that imply material properties. Our only course is to recognize our symbols as symbols only; and to rest content with that duality of them which our constitution necessitates.[10]

With this last advice no poet can be content who is not ready to follow Matthew Arnold, close up shop, and hang out a critic's shingle.[11] But the epistemological slipknot Spencer ties around the mind's bid to grasp itself finds a poetic analogy in the Romantic and Victorian commonplace that declared the soul the seat of poetic creativity. For reasons much like those Spencer adduced, the poetic imagination of the soul was a nineteenth-century quest doomed to infinite recursivity—or, as the lesser of two creative evils, doomed to ambiguity and self-contradiction. So, while the *concept* of the soul elicited from poets images of oneness and singularity, the process of the soul's *conception* bedeviled them and their images into cloven duplicities. Much that is strangest in a variety of nineteeth-century poetic representations of the soul may be ascribed to poets' athletic attempts to honor both the integrity of the soul and the impossibility of imagining it otherwise than in division. If the soul was the atom of spirit, it was an atom that kept getting split. Its ideational wholeness salved scars from the rift that had produced it in the first place as an object for consciousness; conversely the dipsychic or polypsychic com-

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plexities of the soul's difference from itself registered a certain bad conscience over the unforgotten dynamics of idealization.

Consider two passages on the soul composed circa 1800. One of them has never to my knowledge attracted scholarly notice, while the other has powered dissertations; yet each occurs at a climactic juncture within a long poem celebrating the soul, and each seems to undermine its celebration by perforating the soul into a riddle. First, from one of the last stanzas of Mary Tighe's neo-Spenserian allegory *Psyche* (1805), the epithalamial clinch everybody has been waiting for:

> Thus, in her lover's circling arms embraced,
> The fainting Psyche's soul, by sudden flight,
> With his its subtlest essence interlaced;
> Oh! bliss too vast for thought! by words how poorly traced![12]

Even making due allowance for the amorous decorums constraining a poetess of her day, one may find extraordinary Tighe's vaporizing of her given psychic allegory into what is in effect a higher, steamier power of itself. That Psyche *is* the soul constitutes the whole point of her fable, expressly underscored in a stanza-length gloss (VI.46) just a few pages previously. What then can it mean for Psyche to *have* a soul as well, and a neutered soul at that? Not only the aroused heroine but the poem itself has soared out of its skin, in a soulful communion which the reader is invited to join, somewhere beyond what "words" or even consistency of "thought" can trace. And yet no reader will fail to imagine the soul-interlacings of Psyche with Cupid every bit as physically as the arm-embracings Tighe rhymes them with. Much as Shelley will do years later in his soul-riving, language-bankrupting *Epipsychidion* (1821), Tighe solves two enigmatic problems for representation, the sublimed soul and the impassioned body, by making each the other's solution. The juxtaposition "his its"—a gender asymmetry evoking the excluded term "her"—gives Psyche back her female body without so much as mentioning the fact. The "subtlest essence" within the "soul" proves a kind of superfine carnality: the sex, as it were, that lies on the other side of gender, and is no less sexy for that.[13]

Soul gender also came to the poetic rescue of the least sexy Romantic, William Wordsworth, during his long-reconsidered negotiation of the Simplon Pass in the sixth book of *The Prelude* (1850; ll. 592–616). At this famous traverse—the theophany of an Imagination hitherto but a ghost in the epic machinery—Wordsworth like Tighe is expressively stymied, "halted" at the limits of language, the "sad incompetence of human speech."[14] For Wordsworth like Tighe here confronts the bootstrap dilemma that comes with the representation of the soul: how to speak *of* the inspiration he speaks *by*. A first recourse is to divide himself into subject and object, or rather speaker and addressee: "But to my conscious soul I now can say— / 'I recognise thy glory.' " This effusion beats being aphasically "lost" and "halted," but not by much. For it may be said of recognition, as Blake said of pity, that it divides the soul, introducing here a temporal abyss between a past of glorious imagination and a present "now" of mere commemoration. The belated poet

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can only chronicle the heroic mind that once was his and "recognise" there the "glory" of a majesty since alienated. Everything in the passage underscores this fractured subjectivity: lineation, punctuation, and most of all the rift that opens between "I" and "my soul," then cracks again into "I" and "thou."

The great writing that follows this breakdown draws energy from the poet's contending impulses to mend it and to live with it. And the field on which he plays this contention out to stalemate is gender. "Our destiny, our being's heart and home" sounds like a quite proper place for the domesticated (feminized) soul. Yet this place proves in the next line to be "with infinitude, and only there," that is, in a strenuous (masculinized) utopia of "Effort, and expectation, and desire." As if to acknowledge and cover for the tensions here displayed, Wordsworth goes on in a much revised passage to emphasize the gender implications of what has come before, as a means of conflict resolution that will let both sides claim victory. I reproduce for comparison the 1805 version, which is neuter-minded; and the version of 1850, which is unmistakably soul-sexed:

> The mind beneath such banners militant
> Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
> That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward—
> Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
> Which hides it like the overflowing Nile.

> Under such banners militant, the soul
> Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
> That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward,
> Strong in herself and in beatitude
> That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile
> Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds
> To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain.

In its eventual form this magnificent passage gives both the militant and the quietist in Wordsworth their due. But it does so only through a decisive subordination of the now expressly feminine soul, which begins in repose under chivalric banners, ends whelmed under a fecundating flood, and lies throughout under an implied injunction to accept a woman's part and count her blessings with a lady's grace. The same soul that was recognized in glory, ten lines above, is now bid to cultivate intrinsic self-perfection—an end which Wordsworth cherishes with nigh Arnoldian suasiveness, but only after issuing some coercive prohibitions first. "No trophies," thank you, "no spoils": the soul's is a secret glory, and she can do very well without merit badges. Meanwhile, her puny consort, the chronicling "I," has been usurped by a potent "he": the else gratuitously masculine personification of the seminal, imperial (and not long since Napoleonic) river Nile. Thus in the course of a virtuoso verse paragraph Wordsworth transforms writer's block into fluency, and revalues belatedness as originality: a trademark feat which no poet

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ever performed oftener or more cogently, yet which in this instance is built on the back of the gendered soul.[15]

In these passages Wordsworth and Tighe pursue different aims, but each addresses a writing problem through the same two-step process. The narrative interpretation of an event that is manifestly climactic within the larger poem places the normative concept of the unitary soul under high enough imaginative pressure to break it down. The soul divides into distinctly realized figures, which are then reorganized—not fused, but coordinated—under the aegis of sexuality. In each case the soul's gender finds ultimate expression in imagery of heterosexual union, which (perhaps because it is heterosexual, certainly because it is imagery) represents the soul's reintegration with itself on terms of hierarchically structured difference rather than conceptual identity. Furthermore, because the ultimate referent of all this process is none other than the processing agent itself, the creative soul, the resolution thus achieved represents metapoetically a negotiated settlement between the claims of ideas and of images as such: a settlement quite favorable to the imagination trade that is poetry. So favorable that even a Mary Tighe, and much more a William Wordsworth, consented for its sake to sanction the social relations of dominance and submission which attached during the nineteenth century to imagery of heterosexual union. We have just seen how Wordsworth's passage actively invokes sexual politics in reclamation of the poet's creativity. Tighe, likewise, purchases closure by depicting at the last minute a "fainting Psyche," whose "sudden flight" suggests the violence of rapture as well as its bliss, a flying but also a fleeing from circumstances which Psyche can no more escape than Tighe can. If imagining the soul meant putting it into a body, then by the same token embodying it meant putting it into a system of cultural power.

III

No nineteenth-century poet saw this logic more directly than Emily Brontë, or came to a starker perception of its consequences. Brontë's best poems center firmly on inspiration; and the organ of inspiration she, like her contemporaries, assumes to be the pure and virtuous soul. What gives the religious orthodoxy behind these poems such original force is the integrity of purpose with which they seek to bestow imaginative integrity on the soul. The holistic ideal of psychic purity is one which these poems repeatedly circle and probe—until, at the end of her poetic career, Brontë decides that the soul is contaminated past reclaim and throws the notion out. In "Aye, There It Is!" (1841), for example, the free pronoun "It" stands for inspiration itself:

> Aye, there it is! It wakes to-night
> Sweet thoughts that will not die
> And feeling's fires flash all as bright
> As in the years gone by!
>
> (ll. 1–4)[16]

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"It" having neither a grammatical referent in the poem nor a physical site in experience, Brontë fills the discursive void with a plethora of exhilarated tropes for a psychic ecstasy that is literally out of this world: "that glorious wind" (9), "a spirit" (13), "The essence of the Tempest" (15), which "Has swept the world aside" (10).

This diversity of windy figurations in the poem meets a matching diversity of grammatical persons. The opening stanza's scene of Wordsworthian recognition of and by the conscious soul yields in the second stanza to an I/thou scenario, which splits into distinct selves the duality implicit in re-cognition as such. This device situates the "I" of the poem somewhere between vicarious participation and clinical detachment, describing another's rapture by sympathetic inference from its symptoms: "And I can tell by thine altered cheek . . . " (l. 5). Although Brontë keeps this scenario pronominally neutral, the distinctness of its subject and object positions marks the "thou" as functionally feminine, the "I" as masculine. That the disposition to feminize Brontë's enraptured medium was as strong in her day as in ours appears from the gloss this poem drew from her sister Charlotte: "In these stanzas a louder gale has roused the sleeper on *her* pillow: the wakened soul struggles to blend with the storm by which *it* is swayed" (p. 165, emphasis added). This gendered comment suggests that, while Charlotte Brontë read "Aye, There It Is!" as a dialogue of the mind with itself—an I's extended apostrophe to the thou in a rhetorical mirror—it was second nature for her to code that observed mirror image female. Addressing the soul was of course a common device in nineteenth-century poetry, one that ranged from ornate invocation (O thou soul) to sotto voce aside (Be still, my soul), and that I suspect owed some of its popularity to the grammatical second person's capacity to mask gender. But to mask gender is not to do away with it, and this poem does not pretend otherwise. For in sustaining her apostrophe, in dramatizing the situation at such length, Emily invokes a social setting and a cultural context that in effect de-neutralize the imagined soul: Charlotte's "it," and the "It" of the title too.[17] Under a scrutiny whereby to be observed is to be patronized, the soul falls from subject into object position, and falls as a woman into natural place as a bit of rough weather: Ay, Ay, Sir, There She Blows. The "Aye" of corroborative witness has cultural as well as verbal priority over the "I" of self-identity.

Brontë's studied paean to singleness of being thus proves to be structured at levels of trope and address by self-division instead. In the final two stanzas the already fragile ideality of soul disintegrates further:

> A universal influence
> From Thine own influence free;
> A principle of life, intense,
> Lost to mortality.
>
> Thus truly when that breast is cold
> Thy prisoned soul shall rise,
> The dungeon mingle with the mould—
> The captive with the skies.
>
> (ll. 17–24)

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On the construction friendliest to Brontë's orthodoxy, the last stanza declares that the soul which is now imprisoned shall one day rise, that with the decomposition of its bodily dungeon the present captive shall go free. Yet the harder the poem tries to name its ineffable topic, the farther it strays, so that by the end Brontë seems to be declaring the opposite of what she means. "Lost to mortality" cuts both ways, against eternal life as well as for it; and the final line implies that the "prisoned soul" may have to look forward on its release only to another captivity, this time behind what D. G. Rossetti would soon be calling "the gold bar of Heaven."[18] Safeguarding the poem against these subversions requires us to force prolepsis to a crisis point: not only to abjure the corrupt body in the fallen present, but also to refuse the body of the text, what its images literally present.

To force this crisis—to dare double or nothing—may well have been Brontë's aim as a Protestant daughter of Milton. But we should appreciate how much is at stake in her poetics of disembodiment: even as the soul, in submitting to be imagined, shatters on the world, Brontë's iconoclasm turns away from imagination altogether and into a place beyond art.[19] The very late "Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle" (1845) features a female prisoner who, while in one sense she spins out more fully the feminine symbolism implicit in the "prisoned soul" from "Aye, There It Is!" in another sense lodges a vivid critique of ensoulment itself as merely thralldom by another name. For this speaker reports that her extremities of hardship have brought her to liminal experiences exceeding not just the body but the soul as well: experiences, we might guess, of what lies beyond the primal division which discriminates soul from body to begin with. "My outward sense is gone," the prisoner declares of these remembered threshold moments, "my inward essence feels" (82)—only to relapse from that pure essentiality back into the soul, which is but a version of the fallen body repeated in a finer tone. The soul is now the first cell of the prison that is life: "dreadful is the check" (85) to the prisoner's desire when the inevitable hour returns and it is time for (in bitter, crisp analogy) "The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain!" (88).[20]

At the end of this iconoclastic direction stands "No Coward Soul Is Mine" (1846): a poem most decisively terminal, and one that here invites an interpretation stressing not the adjective in its title but the noun. For the logic we have been tracing across Brontë's poems suggests that at last she is not so much asserting the bravery of her soul as forswearing the cowardly thing *per se*. "No coward soul is mine / No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere" (1–2): the trouble with the soul in Brontë's poetry hitherto has been precisely its vacillation, its crazy trembling between subject and object, its habit of temporizing with a world whose ephemera are so much frippery, "Worthless as withered weeds / Or idlest froth amid the boundless main" (11–12). Enough of such dithering slosh; if soul is to have any place at all in Brontë's austere final vision of "Immortality" (16), let it be no nominal image but have force instead in the divine power she knows she shares:

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With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years

Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears.
(ll. 17–20)

Brontë's God who is the Word is clearly a verb. Half the words in this stanza are verbs, and the most prominent, "animates," derives from the Latin word for soul (*anima*). This affirmative mode, and this alone, is finally spared by Brontë's severe eliminations: where "There is not room for Death / Nor atom that his might could render void" (25–26), that essential yet unstable atom the soul can survive only as dynamic "animation," pure willed energy.[21] Brontë thus undoes the compact we saw Tighe and Wordsworth making between the needs of imagination and the politics of sexual difference. For a poet of her rare and earnest lights, the gendered game of hierogamy was not worth the candle.

IV

Each poetic text we have looked at thus far has fundamentally assumed—for all the world as if its author had never read Blake—that soul and body do not mix. Even Tighe, whose agenda is least apparent, finds she must power-eject the soul from the body, albeit a body already allegorical, before it will serve her turn and be troped. More nineteenth-century British poets than not subscribe to some version of this dualistic assumption, thanks partly to its prominence within the Protestant tradition and partly to an unwritten but undying tenet of the Romantic tradition. This tenet identified the poet's cultural work with feats of representational prowess: first, with representation of the heretofore unrepresented (merging the appeals of creative originalism and political revolution); then, by later extension, with representation of the downright unrepresentable (a Romantic quest that led on to Decadence at the fin de siècle). So squarely did the immaterial soul fall into this latter category that, while the century was still young, and certainly by 1840, common opinion held that matters of the soul were the peculiar province of poetry—bodies being left to natural science, political economy, and, of course, the novel.

This division of literary labor reflected a prevalent dualism concerning the nature of the soul, which we might call the *pneumatic* perspective and which, with the bracing clarifications of Emily Brontë just behind us, we might summarize as follows. The human soul is a spirit trapped in an animal body: a *pneuma*, a *spiritus*. Its inaccessibility to imaginative representation constitutes a parallel in human psychology to the theological concept of divine transcendence; in this sense Coleridge's definition of Primary Imagination from *Biographia Literaria* (1817) reads as an apposite comment on the soul as well.[22] When the soul thus conceived appears not in a treatise but in a poetically imagined form, that form as we have seen tends to extremes: either it will be a conservatively allegorical form, along conventional lines laid down by received tradition (per Fra Lippo's instructions), or else it will be a form defiantly idiosyncratic. Both extremes are so highly eligible, and the

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middle ground between them so vacant, because within the structure of the sign the soul can only be a signified, to which its signifiers can have at best the arbitrary relationship which Coleridge called allegorical. In other words, the pneumatic soul may be indicated but never embodied; only by some sleight of hand can it be gotten, as I have suggested Mary Tighe gets it, to signify anything beside itself.

This is the majority position on the soul; but it is no more than that, as may be seen by contrast with a distinct minority position that adjoined it. This second view of the soul, which also boasts a distinguished pedigree and which we might call the *psuchic* perspective, runs as follows. The soul is an indwelling principle within organized life: a *psuche*, an *anima*. It is the self-realizing purpose that was known to the Aristotelian school philosophy as entelechy; or, in terms that were current among the disciples of Coleridge, the shaping agency of *forma formans*.[23] Within this conception the human soul, while divine in nature, is no less inherently enmattered than living matter is inherently ensouled. The soul's connection with the animal body it informs is no accident but is essential to its function. As the *pneuma* soul belongs with theological transcendence, the *psuche* soul belongs with immanence and has, especially in the age of Browning, Newman, and Hopkins, close relation to Christian incarnationist ideas. These associations keep the human body, and by extension the world's body or cosmos, legible in principle as signs for the soul that are not arbitrary but natural.[24] Having been informed by soul in the first place, material objects may signify soul in an organic or participatory fashion—according to the logic of the Coleridgean symbol, as opposed to the allegoresis of *pneuma*. Therefore the *psuchic* conception of the soul is as hospitable to imagination as the *pneumatic* is hostile.

I have dropped the name of Coleridge into both of the foregoing synopses in order to suggest that incompatible ideas about the soul could coexist in a modern mind of immense sophistication. In Coleridge they could even thrive together, to produce such finely tangled poetic effects as appear in the enigmatic fragments exacted by his darker years. Despite its name his epigram "Psyche" (1817) takes not *psuche* but *pneuma* as its muse: to valorize "the soul, escaped the slavish trade / Of mortal life" (ll. 3–4), is to imagine flesh and soul as antagonists, and the caterpillar and butterfly as phases sharply discontinuous.[25] Save for the fine last line "But to deform and kill the things whereon we feed" (which Oscar Wilde recalled in the Coleridgean soul-searchings of his *Ballad of Reading Gaol* [1898]), this lyric is of interest here chiefly as a reminder that the Psyche myth, having elements alike of incarceration and of erotic fulfillment, stayed current by remaining available to both parties.[26] But another vividly troubled epigram, entitled "Phantom" (1805; pub. 1834), tells a more spirited tale:

> All look and likeness caught from earth,
> All accident of kin and birth,
> Had pass'd away. There was no trace
> Of aught on that illumined face,

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Uprais'd beneath the rifted stone
But of one spirit all her own;—
She, she herself, and only she,
Shone through her body visibly.

A nightmare? Or an apocalypse of joy? Essence of ghost story, this piece balances between the horror and the beauty of a vision of soul embodiment; in so doing it balances, too, between the perspectives of *pneuma* and of *psuche.* The opening lines burn all the bridges to nature, à la Emily Brontë; and, although the source of illumination in line 4 cannot be specified as either inward light or celestial glory, the imagery of breakthrough clearly affiliates the poem with the pneumatic tradition. Yet the final couplet, which is where the poetic magic transpires, feels instead like a beatific revelation of *psuche*, the lucent apocalypse of a soul that has finally entelechized body, through and through, into a full image of its truth. *Pneuma* would shine "through" a body as across a visor or costume; *psuche* would shine "throughout" the body as a shaping energy now transformed to light—as if to make "visibly" literal the phrase "she herself," whose appositive redundancy is here at a stroke highlighted and abolished.[27]

V

With what unsettling power these contrasted views of the soul might bear on questions of gender during the nineteenth century is revealed in a letter Charles Kingsley wrote at its midpoint. Something of a Pauline epistle or position paper, this homiletic communiqué sent to an unidentified correspondent (and clearly intended for wider circulation) discriminates two "anthropological" definitions of humanity which will have, for us, a familiar ring:

> Now, there are two great views of men. One as a spirit embodied in flesh and blood, with certain relations, namely, those of father, child, husband, wife, brother, as necessary properties of his existence. . . . Those of them who are spiritually enlightened, have learnt to believe that these relations to man are the symbols of relations to God. . . .
>
> The second class . . . hold an entirely different anthropology. In their eyes man is not a spirit necessarily embodied in, and expressed by an animal; but a spirit accidentally connected with, and burdened by, an animal. . . . The ideal of man, therefore, is to deny, not himself, but the animal part which is not himself, and to strive after a non-human or angelic state. And this angelic state is supposed, of course, to be single and self-sustained, without relations, except to God alone.[28]

Even the casual passer-by at Kingsley's single combat with John Henry Newman a decade later will recognize the forging of the sex-tempered weaponry that champions bluff *psuche* against the epicene heresy of *pneuma* (which Kingsley not inaptly terms "popular manichaeism or gnosticism" [1:256]). By 1865 Kingsley will be denouncing the medieval monastics, in a university sermon, for "their un-

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natural attempt to be wiser than God, and to unsex themselves" (2:212). The same argument is already implicit here, and it becomes as explicit as could be wished before the letter is out. Citing with derision—and italics, and exclamation point—"Frank Newman's Unitarian book, 'The Soul, *her* sorrows and aspirations!' " Kingsley goes on: "You are as aware as I, that the soul is talked of as a bride—as feminine by nature, whatever be the sex of its possessor. This is indeed only another form of the desire to be an angel. For if you analyse the common conception of an angel, what is it, as the pictures consistently enough represent it, but a woman, unsexed?" (1:259).

Much might be said about this impassioned and ambitious letter, but its value here lies in Kingsley's exasperated insight that the soul in flight from its proper bodily and social "relations" was in his day clearly coded—imagined, "pictured"—as *feminine*; and that this feminine soul had the capacity to return out of the symbolic realm into social and institutional realms where it could do real damage. As Kingsley knew very well, the pronoun in Frank Newman's title might be satisfactorily explained by reference to convention or mere etymology, since both the Greek *psuche* and the Latin *anima* were feminine nouns. But Kingsley would never have been the cultural gladiator he was, had he not stood ready to insist that a great deal more was at stake than conventions; Coleridge's bloodhound and Maurice's bulldog in one, he sought the spoor whereby conventions led to vital social meanings. Whither led the feminization of soul Kingsley's letter leaves small doubt: straight to Mariolatry, priestly celibacy, and (chief of ills) erosion of the heterosexual, communally integrated clerisy's mission within the Anglican Church and so within the national life. Christ was the Bridegroom of the Church, in a relation symbolized for Kingsley by the physical conjugality of believers, and most particularly of clergymen. To regard Christ instead as " 'Bridegroom of each individual soul,' " in another phrase the letter disgustedly quotes (1:259), was to make the Savior a polygamist. Just as bad, it was to break the social authority of the Church in pieces. To Kingsley the feminization of the soul portended mutiny in the twin citadels of Home and Church, for it was at bottom a figuration of individual protest against collective control. "Woman, unsexed" was a phrase that said it all: this paradoxical caption of Kingsley's for the picture of the gendered soul signified trouble in the works, not least because it highlighted unfinished business within the very camp of liberal individualism.

With Kingsley it is never wise to discount merely personal obsession too quickly, yet in all this admonishment he discerned much that was truly there. At least as the poets imagined it, the nineteenth-century soul did consistently exhibit feminized traits, which did tend toward the disaffected alienation that Kingsley prophesied. The soul was far less acquainted with satisfactions and duties than with what Frank Newman had named "sorrows and aspirations." Better yet, pangs and yearnings; best of all, torments and ecstasies.[29] To judge from the epithets favored in Romantic and Victorian poetry, the daily fare of the embodied soul was a diet of violent superlatives. When not torn, pierced, chained, seamed, and scarred, it was quivering or scalding (naked or nearly so) in ice or fire. And yet

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things might look up, too: the soul could kindle, then glow; taking fire or wing, it could soar and exult, laved in bliss, trilling rhapsodies of joy as often as it shrieked out litanies of pain. Now, in all this metaphorical extremity there was doubtless some overcompensation for the immateriality which we have seen to be constitutive of the soul: a soul that by definition could not be perceived must as it were meet the reader more than halfway. There was as well, behind this rhetorical violence, some straining to retrieve and fix within the this-worldly imagination receding certainties about the actuality of Hell and Heaven.[30] Still, to a literary estimation, the fortunes of the soul recall nobody's so much as those of the Gothic heroine. And it is she whom I would nominate as *the* prototype for the poetical pneumatics of the nineteenth century. Incarcerated within an alien structure, a stranger rudely bruised but unbowed by incessant episodes of containment, strife, and escape, the soul thus employed may have been normatively feminine because its counterpart in Gothic fiction was. Living under siege, it lived under protest too; and, as Kingsley saw with alarm, that protest was accounted not as bad behavior but as righteousness. An ideal to begin with, the pneumatically imagined soul was an idealist, and was nothing if not critical, since its very conception implied a critique of the body and the material world. Perfect in itself, yet ever liable to the corruptions of compromise with its jailer, the soul as poetic heroine of what we might call Psychic Gothic rehearsed—nay, practiced as virtues—the very habits of contrariety, refusal, and individual assertiveness which made Kingsley the husband and priest so nervous, and with such good cause.[31] Kingsley's bullish genius let him understand that even the ascetic, iconophobic *pneuma* was gendered: not sexed, indeed "unsexed"; and yet, in its very unsexedness, a force for protest against the Victorian configurations that aligned biological determinants with the proprieties of power. The pneumatic soul may indeed, in its melodramatic sufferings, have been the first of the suffragettes.

Kingsley's remedy was a lifelong campaign on behalf of more and heartier *psuche*, which is not a bad alternative description of the nickname which that campaign acquired: "muscular Christianity" preaches a soulful frame, spirituality at home (and at peace) in a body.[32] The laureate of this endeavor was the Victorian poet now least in favor, Coventry Patmore; its manual the oftenest-cited and most-maligned among Victorian poems nobody reads anymore, *The Angel in the House* (1856). The poem's very title croons a countercharm to the Damsel-in-the-Dungeon, Madwoman-in-the-Attic plot we have just been considering. Strictly speaking, Love or Eros is the poem's angel of domestic blessing, not the figurine of a perfect wife Patmore is widely misprised for installing there. And yet, as with the invincible namesake "Frankenstein," the misprision is more right than wrong. For if Eros dwells in the house that Patmore built, it is only because Psyche dwells there too: one of the emblematic changes that can be rung on the titular allegory produces "The Soul in the Body," where the soul is a woman and the woman is at home.

As cordial in his Christianity as Kingsley was muscular, Patmore finds *psuche* a place within the bourgeois sanctuary of a countryside courtship and marriage,

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where beauty, desire, and comfort reconcile body with soul in a prosperous decency. The poet's demonstration that "No fruit can come of that man's faith / Who is to Nature infidel" (I, p. 161) makes constant appeal to the fruits of the body: physical pleasure and the bounty of children.[33] Through these natural evidences—symbols literally organic, in the tradition of Burke and Coleridge—Patmore intuits a heterosexualized physics running from micro- to macro-cosmology:

> Nature, with endless being rife,
> Parts each thing into "him" and "her,"
> And, in the arithmetic of life,
> The smallest unit is a pair.
>
> (II, p. 183)

> Our lifted lives at last should touch
> That lofty goal to which they move;
> Until we find, as darkness rolls
>   Far off, and fleshly mists dissolve,
> That nuptial contrasts are the poles
>   On which the heavenly spheres revolve.
>
> (I, p. 41)

The worlds and the atoms, like the spouses, revolve in a mutual attraction that perpetuates Nature's original assignment of sexual "parts."

This lovingly preserved polarity is worth pausing over as an anomaly among Victorian poems. The more ordinary course was to use marital union as a trope for one of the very few things Victorian writers held more sacred even than marriage: viz., the dialectical synthesis of opposites whereby present strife was accommodated as a developmental stage within a reassuringly unitary process. Witness the case of Victoria's hierophant of the ordinary, Tennyson. During the decade before Patmore wrote his poem, Tennyson had ended both *The Princess* (1847) and *In Memoriam* (1850) with spectacularly synthetic projections of marriage. In each of these the imminent union of an emblematic, procreant couple resolves on a symbolic level any number of contemporary conflicts, which are discounted as growing pains that, when rightly interpreted, will be seen to have bequeathed blessings to posterity. When the Epilogue to *In Memoriam* foretells how, with the conception of a new child, "a soul / Shall strike his being into bounds / . . . a closer link / Betwixt us and the crowning race / . . . No longer half-akin to brute" (ll. 124–33), Tennyson in effect merges the individual soul into the collective oversoul.[34] This Victorian absorption of present difference into eventual unity the heterosexual metaphysic of *The Angel in the House* declines to sponsor. Apparently that fulsomely charming uxoriousness of his let Patmore see how the *psuche* principle, if granted a sweeping historical charter and an evolutionary scale, would reduce to instrumentally provisional status a sexual difference which he deemed the axis of creation and an ultimate value in itself.

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Rather than trade sex for progress, with its nobler race of Hallam-typed superhumans and its dream of gender transcendence, Coventry Patmore clove to the Psyche he knew. Yet—as even those who have never read his bestseller will roundly confirm—just this loyalty to the familiar became in due time the great stumbling block between *The Angel in the House* and any imaginable post-Victorian readership. Eros would not be penned in a connubial nook, and so the Angel abandoned Patmore's house long ago. Having espoused a theory of cosmic heterosexuality, the bard of Victorian marriage then made a fatal mistake: he hitched his theory so confidently to prevailing social arrangements between the sexes that it could not weather any but the most superficial change in those arrangements.[35] Worse, given what the social face of normative heterosexuality was in the middle of the nineteenth century, cultural complacency on Patmore's scale had the effect of reintroducing into *The Angel in the House* the same unwholesome dualism that he, like Kingsley, had hoped to exorcise.

"Man misdeserves his sweet ally: / Where she succeeds . . . / He fails, in spite of prayer and vow, / And agonies of faith and force" (I, p. 79). Patmore's praise of woman's soul more than once hinges on denigration of man's, as it does in the continuation of this passage:

> Her spirit, compact of gentleness,
> If Heaven postpones or grants her pray'r,
> Conceives no pride in its success,
> And in its failure no despair;
> But his, enamour'd of its hurt,
> Baffled, blasphemes, or, not denied,
> Crows from the dunghill of desert,
> And wags its ugly wings for pride.
> (I, p. 80)

Our topic obliges us, not for the first time, to follow the pronouns. Division into His and Hers constituted the nature of things, Patmore testified in a passage just quoted; but when he comes to imagine the soul, an interloping It breaks in and wags some ugly wings. Whether purposely or by the tact of an instinctual chivalry, Patmore's core sense that the *psuche* soul must be female sheds a delicate gender ambiguity across the first quatrain above. Is the antecedent of "her" in the second line the same as that of "Her" in the first, or is it not rather "spirit" instead? "Its" in the next two lines may refer to her "spirit," but it need not: "prayer," a closer referent, draws off the "its" and keeps lady spirit intact. It is as if, the beloved being eternally feminine, her soul should be so too. No such niceties respect the soul of man, however, in the unequivocal quatrain that follows. Man's soul is a thoroughgoing "it"—but not from any sex neutrality in its behaviors. These are so grossly male that Patmore's calling the cock-of-the-walk in the last line an "it" constitutes a virtual confession that the soul of man, unless redeemed by the true soul that is woman, is a brute of a sprite and less than human.[36]

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VI

In 1863 Robert Browning looked back on his experimental fiasco *Sordello* (1840) and described it as "incidents in the development of a soul," adding, "little else is worth study" (1:150). Defensive as ever, Browning was also being characteristically canny about what kind of "development" he meant to defend. Did "the development of a soul" name a psychic entelechy that art was to render, or the processes of art itself? Probably both, given the reflexivities of *Sordello*, a (failed) poem about a (failed) poet. If so, then we may see Browning's career of poetic psychologizing as the gigantic elaboration of a theory Keats had hazarded once in a family letter:

> Call the world if you Please 'The vale of Soul-making' Then you will find out the use of the world. . . . I[n]telligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God—how then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each ones individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this?[37]

"The medium of a world," "the development of a soul": the poets' phrases are legible equally in terms of life and of art. Especially for the author of *Men and Women*, soul-making—the project of building modern character—was at least as much a technical as an ethical challenge; and in fact he typically enlisted the latter challenge in addressing the former.[38] Not only did Browning patent the dramatic monologue as a conscience-baited reader trap, through the moral outrageousness of "Porphyria's Lover," "My Last Duchess," and other early *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). Even within poems of a quite different genre, the self-editorializing narrative we find variously elaborated in *Pauline* (1833), *Sordello, Fifine at the Fair* (1872), and *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873), moral riddles of body and soul repeatedly top the discursive agenda. These riddles are never solved; in fact, when the poet for once forthrightly proposed solutions in *La Saisiaz* (1878), he wrote a dull poem. Browning at his best made generic Victorian discourse about the soul into a medium for a particularized soul-portraiture in which, as in the new art of photography, what counted was how things developed on paper.

Soul talk is particularly prominent among the dozen poems that Browning gathered under the rubric "Men, and Women" when reordering his work for the collected edition of 1863. Nearly all of these favored monologues—including my two epigraph texts—contain flashpoints at which talk about the soul, generally inconclusive in itself, develops the talker's own soul and brings it out with vivid distinctness. Karshish the physician, professionally pledged to keep souls in bodies, can hardly keep his own from bubbling forth over the Christian gospel; the Pictor Ignotus and Andrea del Sarto pay lip-service to the springings of the soul in Rafaelesque art but play their own so close to the chest that their doing so becomes a revelation in itself; the Bishop at St. Praxed's exposes his venality of soul

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through lavish fantasies of a perennial body of stone. To recur to a distinction introduced above: Browning's speakers are pneumatists all, yet he turns their pneumatism *psuche*'s way, which is to say that he implants it in the body of the text, saying to each of his monologists, "Thy soul is in thy face" ("Any Wife to Any Husband" [1855] l. 12).

To invoke "Any Wife" is to see something else about this inner circle of Browning's 1863 poems: that its ring of speakers does not have any wife in it, or any woman for that matter. So what did Browning mean by calling a collection that comprised eleven men, plus the emphatically maiden goddess Artemis, "Men, and Women"? The 1863 comma inserted into his already established 1855 title scores, with a pause of deadpan timing, an ironic recognition: that the soul talk going around his select male circle must, sooner or later, entail the feminine. No matter how gynophobic the Browning men's club, or how panicky their flights to a compensatory pneumatic "Transcendentalism" (the first title in the group), their dramatically and bodily contexted discourse is of woman born, and to her they must return.

Maybe any wife would have known as much; that Robert Browning's wife did is past question. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was as notable a contortionist of soul as her husband: his *Pauline* and her *Aurora Leigh* (1856) between them must boast half the freakish tropes for the soul in the Victorian canon. Furthermore, nearly from the beginning of her career the forms into which she twisted soul may be read as attempts to turn poetry loose from fixed constructions of gender. The *Essay on Mind* she published at twenty (1826) gives a fascinating illustration of the impediments to freedom that a young woman of spirit had to confront in her day, even under ideally privileged circumstances, and even on purely intellectual terms. This confident Popean verse essay repeatedly divides and conquers along gender lines: Book I subordinates a feminized Nature to the generalizing power of the neuter Mind; Book II, moving from physics to metaphysics, locates the highest exercise of Mind in the "Fancy" of the poet, who replaces feminine nature with "Nature's ideal form" (l. 1045), and whom Barrett Browning here as throughout her poetry types male. Yet the nascent poetic here is not so much masculine or even androgyne as it is Minervan. The chief dialectic of Barrett Browning's long first phase was negative, not synthetic: if the poetry repeatedly crosses gender lines, it does so in the sense of crossing gender out.[39] For the poet associates freedom—freedom from the female "nature" that is among her culture's regnant tropes—with the denial or incapacitation of the body. Writing as an abstracted mind let Barrett Browning trump the abjected body; but, as she realized by flashes even in the early *Essay on Mind*, this was a merely ideal victory gained on terms effectively complicit with the patriarchal ideology that sponsored sexual abjection in the first place. Trumping the pseudo-neutrality of mind would require stronger measures. Accordingly, Barrett Browning came to invoke what the *Essay on Mind* left out but the rest of her oeuvre made central: the wild card of the soul.

Writing and publishing from 1833 until nearly 1850 in the ladylike character of the disembodied soul hardly freed Barrett Browning from the constraints of gen-

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der—not for nothing was this invalid crowned the most famous *poetess* of her era. But it did give her fresh purchase on those constraints. It extended the range of her art beyond the bounds of domestic and familial propriety hitherto set to women's poetry: the angelic eroticism of the Morning Star's love-chant to Lucifer in *A Drama of Exile* (1844; ll. 810–95), for example, is work that might have taught Tighe if not Shelley a thing or two about out-of-body sex. More important, her ambition to write from and as the soul focused Barrett Browning's attention upon issues in poetic representation that were vital to the age. "The Soul's Travelling" (1838) cicerones the soul on a Victorian tour of town and country scenery that issues in a surprise confrontation with the soul's own maculate essence:

> the place is full
> Of silences, which when you cull
> By any word, it thrills you so
> That presently you let them grow
> To meditation's fullest length
> Across your soul with a soul's strength:
> And as they touch your soul, they borrow
> Both of its grandeur and its sorrow,
> That deathly odor which the clay
> Leaves on its deathlessness alway.
> (ll. 167–76)

The soul is to the body as silence is to language, and the passage sets highest worth on the mildly but firmly sexualized fullness of quiet meditation. Yet this choice interval is framed by what it blocks out: the "word" as both prompting and recording device, and especially the pervasive sense of the body, the unforgettable "clay" that tinges all. The larger subject of this interesting passage is not the abstracted soul's rapt communion, then, but the process of soul-abstraction itself, an elective spiritual exercise which the passage as a whole marks as temporary, heuristic, and—like Barrett Browning's soulful early persona within the full arc of her career—provisional.

As a Christian, Barrett Browning knew the soul for a certainty. As a poet, though, she used it as a hypothesis, and with a recklessness that probably only so certain a faith could have made good. If there seems something wanton about the following image from "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" (1844), there is supposed to be: "From my brain the soul-wings budded, waved a flame about my body, / Whence conventions coiled to ashes" (ll. 269–70). A mixed metaphor in the first line, to say the least: the soul might traditionally be winged *or* aflame; but its own bellows, growing organically for good measure out of the brain and around the body? The friction struck between such conventional images incinerates them, and the second line all but says so. Parading the conventionality of the images neutralizes their subliminal power, in a gesture that epitomizes the poem's class-defying plot. Again, "The Forced Recruit" (1860) commemorates a patriot who, impressed into the Austrian infantry, has willingly sought out friendly fire for Italia's sake:

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"His soul kissed the lips of her guns" (l. 40). This is quite as startling as the image (quoted above) of the soul's "saliva," and for quite the same reason: Barrett Browning has grasped, and pushed to a breaking point of imaginative literality, the oral implications that are contained, but ordinarily suppressed, within that conventional trope the voice of the soul.

Passages like these abound in the poetry Barrett Browning published in 1850 and after, where they are the extroverted counterparts to the introversion that governs her work through 1844. Yet what the later abandon would trumpet, the earlier reserve had also implied, albeit from the safe side of decorum where Barrett Browning's readers always preferred to gather: even then, to dramatize the soul's inexpressibility was potentially to mount a political demonstration. The 1844 *Poems* include a sequence of twenty-eight sonnets—a structural double-sonnet in itself—strategically framed by two examinations of the limits of psychic representation. "The Soul's Expression" not only explains in advance that the struggle to "deliver right / That music of my nature " (ll. 2–3) through "portals of the sense" (l. 10) is doomed by the "sensual ground" (l. 8) of nature, but warns that total self-expression even if possible would be lethal, killing the body, and presumably poetry too, "Before that dread apocalypse of soul" (l. 14). The concluding sonnet, "Insufficiency," continues the same theme, protesting against "the curse / Which breathes through Nature" (ll. 8–9). As in *An Essay on Mind* and "The Soul's Travelling," Nature here is not the physical world but "reality" in its culturally foreordained, sex-normed givenness. "Nature" thus conceived, as the crucial (and for EBB deeply gendered) word "curse" implies, owes to the cultural order of language its charter to define the real. From this worldly charter Barrett Browning's vision of the heavenly future dissents; hence the libertarian urgency of her imagined afterlife, in which the soul now "yearning to be free" (l. 3) will resume and perfect its expressive fashioning, "seek / Fit peroration without let or thrall" (ll. 13–14).

Even the staunchest opponent of the biographical fallacy must concede that the poetry Barrett Browning wrote after her marriage repossessed the bodiliness that *An Essay on Mind* had put away. The newly exaggerated physicality of her soul imagery after 1850 is one sign of this change. Another, subtler but equally pervasive, is a redoubled willingness to enact the soul through the technical and material resources of poetry. If by elopement, financial independence, and motherhood the poet had gotten her body back, by the same token she seems after 1845 readier than before to entrust soul to the embodiments of prosodic textuality—not as a trope or image but as a *psychic* energy coursing the turnings of verse. This adventure in soul-enactment, which on one level gives to *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) its plot, on another level suffuses its texture. Sonnet 7, for example, consistently proves the intimacies of poet-lovers with the in-jokes of its versification. "I heard the footsteps of thy soul / Move still, oh, still, beside me" (ll. 2–3): this must be scanned if a reader is to understand how literally the poet "Was caught up into love, and taught the whole / Of life in a new rhythm" (ll. 6–7), and what it means prosodically to say, "thy name moves right" (l. 14). Responding to the spondees

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can show us how poetic feet may be "footsteps of the soul" in a sense that is at once more and less intimately physical than the sense of concrete images.[40]

Sharp conflicts between Barrett Browning's earlier transcendental protest and her new commitment to a human and earthly lover are mediated in the performance space of the *Sonnets*, where poetic form becomes the soul's record and rehearsal at once. Moving from metrical to syntactical prosody, consider what time it is, earthly or heavenly, in the opening clauses of sonnet 22:

> When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
> Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
> Until the lengthening wings break into fire
> At either curved point—what bitter wrong
> Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
> Be here contented? Think.
>
> (ll. 1–6)

The sexual ardor of this imagery speaks for itself, but it is worth pointing out that the rapprochement Barrett Browning effects between souls and bodies is abetted by an ambiguity in her verb tenses. The suspension of the "When" and "Until" clauses between a habitual present and a proleptic future permits a bold conflation of arousal with resurrection that answers her rhetorical question in advance. Where can souls "not long"—as did the soul of an earlier sonnet, "yearning to be free"—but instead "Be here contented," as the dynamic content, the living entelechy, of a flexible protean form? Where but in the poem? And when but now?[41]

For all their manifest disparity, then, the psychopoetics of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning converge. Both writers are centrally concerned with the soul, yet respect for its resistance to direct imaginative embodiment leads them to oblique and differential means of rendering it. The grotesque proliferation of the many images they find for the soul conveys a general implication that *any* image must be a travesty—a situation only made worse by the inertia of custom. At the same time, for both Brownings a series or conjugation of soul images can reveal, through the cracks between discourses, what the single-minded discourse of the self-consistent image cannot: the distinctive soul of the imaginer. In this way the Romantic dilemma of depicting poetically the source of poetic depiction itself is finessed, if not resolved, by being expressly staged. And the stage for performance is the poetic text, which rightly apprehended becomes the unique soul image which this Nonconforming couple are prepared to swear by.

> Let who says
> "The soul's a clean white paper," rather say,
> A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
> Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's;—
> The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on
> Which obscene text, we may discern perhaps
> Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,

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Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
Expressing the old scripture.
(*Aurora Leigh* I. 824–32)

"That dread apocalypse of soul," the pure fusion of intention with articulation which Barrett Browning formerly posited as an ideal in "The Soul's Expression," is here carnivalized into monkish parody, vandalized by the contingencies of circumstance. For Aurora Leigh it is not the holograph that can copy fair the soul, but the palimpsest, in all the rich and messy process of its accretion. By this process the soul is contained within the only body that can hold it, the body of a text in history—vulnerable, mutable, but thereby legible as the "obscene" scene or record of its coming to be.

It was to this same palimpsest image that Robert Browning had his most soulful heroine turn at a climactic, profoundly metapoetic juncture from *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69). At her dying hour Pompilia ascribes to her beloved Caponsacchi

a sense
That reads, as only such can read, the mark
God sets on woman, signifying so
She should—shall peradventure—be divine;
Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
—Not this man sees,—who from his soul, re-writes
The obliterated charter,—love and strength
Mending what's marred.
(VII.1482–90)[42]

Marked, marred, or emendated, the soul for Robert as for Elizabeth is a historically produced text, which lives only as it is read in the present and in the context of human relationship. Here that context is anything but ideal, and is far from innocent of oppression: the illiterate Pompilia's assumption that reading and writing belong to men exemplifies pointedly the historical gendering of cultural power (already implicit in Aurora's figure of the "monk"). Yet Pompilia's words also counter that power, and in ways that epitomize the refractorily gendered character of the unrepresentable nineteenth-century soul. God's authorship is masculine, yet in marking woman as "divine" God signifies a female godhead that "shall" be manifest in time because it is inherently woman's already. For the time being, which is the time not of apocalypse but interpretation, it is hers in the form of the feminized human soul. This is why, when the man of letters undertakes a recension of "the obliterated charter," he finds his copy-text precisely in the soul, *his* soul, as the place where God's image takes the textual form of woman. The interpreter known as Giovanni Caponsacchi (or Robert Browning) "re-writes" the lost soul that shall be divine—overwrites it, yet also writes it over again—a double movement richly reprised in Robert's allusion to Elizabeth's original textual image. What Aurora Leigh called "the upstroke of an alpha and omega," sylleptі-

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cally conflating first with last, indicates at once the soul's latest news and the oldest scripture on its tablet.

The secular development of literary study, during the twentieth century, has imported the problematics of the soul from ecclesiastical holy ground onto the neutral premises of linguistics, anthropology, and of course psychology—the same premises which, during the nineteenth century, did so much to erode scriptural orthodoxy in the nape of scientific philology and enlightened hermeneutics. It is salutary to let the Brownings remind us that whenever we distinguish between the expression and the meaning of a text, its letter and its spirit, we are recapitulating an old psychic dilemma. The end of the hermeneutic circle is its beginning: the androgynous "love and strength" of the upstroke, the jointly read and written soul.

NOTES

For their responses to earlier drafts I thank James Eli Adams, J. Daniel Kinney, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and especially Susan J. Wolfson, whose forthcoming essay on soul gender (see n. 22 below) and mine are evidently twins separated at birth by elves of the zeitgeist.

1. Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

2. *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), p. 34 (plate 4).

3. The change from masculine to feminine norms for the soul which occurred in Blake's lifetime is narrated in Marilyn Chapin Massey's *Feminine Soul: The Fate of an Ideal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Massey draws her evidence from German examples, but her argument has broad implications for anglophone Romanticism as well.

4. I cite from *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Harriet Waters Preston (1900; rptd Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

5. "The modern 'soul,' " for Michel Foucault, is "the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. . . . On this reality-reference, various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc." (*Discipline and Punish*, tr. Alan Sheridan [New York: Pantheon, 1977], p. 29). Foucault's Wildean *mot* "The soul is the prison of the body" (p. 30) inverts Blake's view of the matter without invalidating its emancipatory hope: viz., that poets' efforts to embody the soul may punch a hole in the power loop and install a circuit breaker within the discursive system.

6. Compare the American instance of Margaret Fuller, whose 1844 poem "Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays" describes the mysterious logo she would use for her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) in terms that suggest both gender and race: "When the perfect two embrace, / Male & female, black & white, / Soul is justified in space, / Dark made fruitful by the light" (ll. 5–8, in *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, ed. Jeffrey Steele [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992], p. 233).

7. Tennyson learned early to work the seemingly redundant phrase "whole soul" as an apotropaic charm against the liability of the Victorian soul to craze and shatter. Whether in erotic ecstasy ("Fatima" [1832, ll. 20, 36]) or in the depths of melancholic grief ("A spirit haunts the year's last hours" [1830, l. 16], "Oh! that 'twere possible" [1837, l. 64]), the "whole soul" grounds its integrity in totalizing, transfixing emotion. This unifying impulse

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corresponds to an analytic tendency within Tennyson's early work that was no less marked: see "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind Not in Unity with Itself" (1830), "The Palace of Art" (1832), "The Two Voices" (1842). Before long, though, Tennyson's sure detection of cultural danger zones kept his imagery for the soul comparatively low-key: more often than not in his work of 1842 and after, "soul" remains a conceptual abstraction balancing "sense": see Lucretius' conception of the soul as "mortal" ("Lucretius" [1868], ll. 262, 273); the revulsion expressed in "Aylmer's Field" (1864) for "the foul adulteries / That saturate soul with body" (ll. 375–76); and, passim, *Idylls of the King*. I cite *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969).

8. This fission in the discourse of the modern soul is of course a blessing in disguise. It has enabled not only much nineteenth-century literature but most twentieth-century psychology, which could not have gotten started without what Freud called *Ichspaltung*. A signal case in point is provided by Freud's most fractious disciple, C. G. Jung, who in *Psyche and Symbol*, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958) introduces readers to his thought by way of a veritable garden of forking paths. Distinguishing first between the somatic and psychic bases of psychic life, Jung divides these in turn into conscious and unconscious factors; the unconscious self hereupon subdivides further into a personal and a collective psyche, the latter of which finally discloses the two-chambered heart of the matter, Jung's "contrasexual" gendered archetypes the *anima* and *animus* (p. 9). And all within ten pages.

9. See James Martineau, *A Study of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888): "Of the Soul as an object we predicate nothing beyond the bare Space definition of here and there" (1:352). Because "subjective consciousness is incommunicable," the commonest soul images—"a wind, a mist, a flitting outline"—"are selected precisely because they verge upon the very zero of objectivity, and mark the extreme but vain struggle of language to take the final step into the purely subjective" (2:353).

10. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (1855; 3rd edition New York: Appleton, 1880), 1:147, 161. For Spencer on soul see *The Principles of Sociology* (1876; 3rd edition New York: Appleton: 1888), 1:169–80.

11. A test case might be D. G. Rossetti's early prose tale "Hand and Soul" (1850), where a gifted young painter is rescued from despair by the vision of a woman who not only represents his own soul but comes right out and says so: "I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee. See me, and know me as I am" (*The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, rev. ed. William M. Rossetti [London: Ellis, 1911], p. 553).

12. Mary Tighe, *Psyche*; or, *The Legend of Love* (1805), canto VI, stanza 53; reprinted in *Keats and Mary Tighe*, ed. Earle Vonard Weller (New York: MLA, 1928), p. 205. Tighe writes quite freely when displaying Psyche's body in earlier cantos for Cupid's voyeuristic delectation: "In light transparent veil alone arrayed, / Her bosom's opening charms were half revealed, / And scarce the lucid folds her polished limbs concealed" (I.25, p. 21). Such a passage suggests that Tighe's decorum problem at the close of *Psyche* centered not on feminine desirability but on feminine desire. It was obviously crucial to her "legend of love" that Psyche figure as an actively desiring subject. This is why the heroine's last ordeal is by "Indifference" and "Disgust" (p. 178), her most interesting temptation that offered by an allegory of chastity named Castabella: "Congenial souls! they at one glance appear / Linked to each other by a mutual tie" (V.12, p. 151—an image anticipating the final "interlaced" embrace with Cupid). Tighe's myth demanded that these states of neutrality be absorbed into a conjugal norm to whose intimacies her culture offered only a heavily censored discursive access; hence, perhaps, her fondness for imagery of the "ravished soul" (I.45, p. 31; VI.1, p. 179; VI.57, p. 207): a safely worn cliché, but one that this allegory, where the soul has so invitingly beautiful a body, can thrill into strangely sudden life.

13. Keats, who learned much from Tighe, revived her coy poetics to comparable effect in *Isabella* (1820) when handling the problem of the slain Lorenzo's soul. At first an "it" (ll.

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220, 267), the shade of Isabella's lover becomes more manly the more vividly she imagines him during stanzas 35–40 (*Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982]). The "it" of line 292 becomes a "he" at line 296, at which point Keats obviates gender by giving the ghost a first-person voice. But passion will out, and what it outs is sexuality; so it is not long before the same trouble recurs: just as the vocal ghost exclaims, "Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel / A greater love through all my essence steal" (319–20), his nascent manhood falls under abrupt censorship and "dissolves" away in two lines. See also, on this same theme, Felicia Hemans' "A Spirit's Return" (1832), where a bereaved speaker tells how once her dead lover, "He, the Departed, stood" before her in the form (to judge from Hemans' discreet rendition) of a talking head. All hair, brow, eyes, and voice, this revenant nonetheless retained the spiritual capacity to move the speaker in unmistakably physical ways, which become expressible for Hemans because their currency is psychic: "the startling thrill / In that low voice, whose breezy tones could fill / My bosom's infinite"; "I sought that lighted eye,— / From its intense and searching purity / I drank in *soul*!" (*The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans* [Philadelphia: Grigg and Elliot, 1835], p. 229). This last image of fluid soul nutrience need not be discounted as a mere trope for a Romantic writer like Hemans. See Massey, *Feminine Soul*, pp. 130–31, on Novalis's belief that soul was a real substance, "a primal cosmic material source of all transforming potential."

14. This and succeeding quotations are from *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 216–19.

15. The sexual economy of Wordsworthian Romanticism is discussed by Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 18–19, 145–54. What Massey says about the domestication of feminine soul under German Romanticism (Schleiermacher) seems apt for Wordsworth as well: woman "can have the religious soul as long as she gives up the male desire to forge a second nature out of nothing" (*Feminine Soul*, p. 146).

16. I cite *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*, ed. C. W. Hatfield (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

17. A comparable poetic device, which met a comparable fate in the era of evolution, was the trope of the soul as child. Despite the advantages of gender-neutrality offered by the vocabulary of infancy and childhood, the sexual latency of this trope inevitably beckoned down a path of maturation whose default destination was female. This problematic helps explain the uncanny longing of Wordsworth's climax in the "Intimations" ode, where "Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea / . . . / And see the Children sport upon the shore" (ll. 164–67).

18. "The Blessed Damozel" (1850), in *Poems*, ed. Oswald Doughty (London: Dent, 1961), p. 3.

19. See Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 123–24; Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Bronte* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 42–45. Tayler's chapter on Emily Brontë's poems (pp. 18–71) provides a biographical and critical discussion to which my remarks here are particularly indebted.

20. Compare Shelley's rhetorical exhaustion at the finish of *Epipsychidion*: "The winged words on which my soul would pierce / Into the height of Love's rare Universe, / Are chains of lead around its flight of fire" (ll. 588–90). I cite *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977).

21. On the feminist dimension that such an askesis held for some of Brontë's contemporaries, see Janet L. Larson, "Lady-Wrestling for Victorian Soul: Discourse, Gender, and Spirituality in Women's Texts," *Religion and Literature* 23 (1991): 43–64.

22. A repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM"

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(*Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson [1906; rpt. London: Dent, 1965], p. 167). The analogy was alive and well at century's end for Coleridge's Unitarian heir James Martineau: "the Soul is the individual, God the cosmical aspect of the inward principle of existence" (*Study of Religion*, 2:352). Susan J. Wolfson correlates Coleridge's gender orthodoxy with his pivotal, and soul-normed, discussion of poetic imagination in chapter 14 of *Biographia Literaria*: see her "Gendering the Soul," in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995), pp. 33–68.

23. For testimony to the persistent vitality of this concept among philosophers see Martha C. Nussbaum and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, eds, *Essays on Aristotle's* De Anima (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992). Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), pp. 493–97, finds in Aristotle a splitting into physical and metaphysical versions of the unitary soul that had come down to him through centuries of unsystematic but consistently holistic ritual practice. This categorical division reappears in nineteenth-century terms within the *religio medici* of the Victorian physician Walter Cooper Dendy, *Psuche: A Discourse on the Birth and Pilgrimage of Thought* (London: Longman, 1853). In our time the tension between gender and sexuality is epitomized most vividly in the phenomenon of transsexual surgery.

24. For tropes of world and soul see Wordsworth, "The human soul of universal earth" ("Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, in *Poetical Works*, rev. ed. Ernest de Selincourt [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], p. 590, l. 84); Tennyson, "Thy soul is like a landskip, friend" (written 1830); D. G. Rossetti on the soul's horizon or shore in *The House of Life* (sonnets 10, 27, 40).

25. Animadversion on the psyche/butterfly topos in the nineteenth century might add the following lyrics to Coleridge's: Wordsworth's "To a Butterfly" and "To H. C. Six Years Old" (1807); Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" (1820), where mournful Psyche meets the death-moth; Robert Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (1855) and "Amphibian" (1872); Coventry Patmore's "Eros and Psyche" (1877). Stopping short of Camden Farebrother in *Middlemarch* and his lepidopterist brethren, the list should nevertheless include Emily Brontë's school theme of 1842 "Le Papillon," a highly orthodox exercise in French composition that starts with a nice arch twist: "Dans une de ces dispositions de l'âme où chacun se trouve quelquefois. . . . " Brontë's essay is printed by Winifred Gérin in *Emily Brontë: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 271–72.

26. Besides the Romantic treatments of Tighe (1805), Thomas Love Peacock (*Rhododaphne* [1818]), and Keats ("Ode to Psyche" [1820]), and the well-known retelling of Apuleius' Psyche fable in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), there are extended poetic narratives by William Morris (*The Earthly Paradise* [1868]) and Robert Bridges (*Eros and Psyche* [1898]). Both of these are stories pure and simple, though Morris does once tip the allegorical wink when an embittered Venus derides her captive Psyche as "the well-loved soul of love" (*Earthly Paradise* [1868; rev. ed. London: Longmans, 1905], 2:60). Bridges simplifies Psyche all he can: "to man's purer unsubstantial part / The brightness of her presence was addrest"; "her soul / Was soft and simple"; "Only of sweet simplicity she fell" (*Poetical Works* [London: Smith, Elder, 1898] 1:77, 125, 213). The myth becomes a backdrop for sexual and spiritual explorations, respectively, in the odes of Coventry Patmore's *The Unknown Eros* (1863–86) and the visionary monologues comprised in Lewis Morris's *The Epic of Hades* (New York and Boston: Crowell, 1897), which finally reveals Psyche as "the soul of man, the deathless soul, / Defeated, struggling, purified, and blest" (p. 173).

27. Although Shelley would not have known Coleridge's poem, it might aptly introduce a psychical reading of the "Life of Life" lyric from *Prometheus Unbound* (II.v.48–71), where Asia's "limbs are burning / Thro' the vest which seems to hide them" much as the soul of Coleridge's "She" irradiates her body. Both lyrics realize with exceptional fullness a possibility which most nineteenth-century soul poetry at least touches upon: the dream

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of pure formal expressivity. Shelley's fascination with this possibility may explain why, despite the gossamer film of his reputation, he treats the soul comparatively seldom, reserving the figure (with an atheist's scruple) for peak experiences at the thresholds of death and love. On the role played by Eros and Psyche mythology within the deep structure of Shelley's poetry see Jean H. Hagstrum, *Eros and Vision* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 85–90.

28. Letter of 5 February 1851, in Charles Kingsley, *Letters and Memories of His Life* (London: King, 1877), 1:255–56.

29. Kingsley's 1857 novel *Two Years Ago* incorporates the cautionary tale of a "selfish, vain, irritable" poet (chapter 24), who is named John Briggs but calls himself Elsley Vavasour, who proves maritally incompetent, and who, to crown the list, is the proud author of *A Soul's Agonies and Other Poems* (chapter 3).

30. See Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

31. Kingsley would not be Kingsley were his position on any gender issue quite as consistent as I may have made it look here. So it should be pointed out that in this letter the mischief of gender does obtrude after all when Kingsley denounces the Victorian dehumanization of Jesus, in successive paragraphs, for diametrically opposite reasons: first because it effeminates and enfeebles the Savior, then because it makes the Savior seem hypermasculine and thus uncongenial to sinners' supplication (2:259). Kingsley had himself been sufficiently attracted by the ideal of the feminine soul to compose in youth "a long prose fable called *Psyche*" that narrates the maiden soul's yearning for the love of God: see Susan Chitty, *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 46. On Kingsley's sexual politics see Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 55–74; John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 104–18.

32. See in this connection two sermons by Kingsley's mentor, F. D. Maurice: "On the Incarnation," in *Theological Essays* (1853; rpt. London: Clarke, 1957), pp. 82–100; "The Redemption of the Body" (1856), in *Sermons Preached in Country Churches*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1880), pp. 73–79. From the latter: "When St. Paul recollected his citizenship in Heaven, when he claimed to be a member of Christ's body, and prayed in His name to His Father and our Father, he could not but think how this body, which is so curiously and wonderfully made, has a hidden glory in it" (p. 77).

33. I cite *The Angel in the House* as initially published in two volumes, *The Betrothal* and *The Espousals* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856).

34. Compare *The Princess*, VII.281–90. Tennyson would recur years later to this dialectical troping of heterosexuality in his epigram "On One Who Affected an Effeminate Manner" (1889):

> While man and woman still are incomplete,
> I prize that soul where man and woman meet,
> Which types all Nature's male and female plan,
> But, friend, man-woman is not woman-man.

The androgynous ideal became something of a crux in late-century parapsychological discourses of spiritualism and theosophy. In her prose poem "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed," Olive Schreiner climactically envisions in heaven "the figure of a woman, but its limbs were the mighty limbs of a man," and reports God's pronouncement that "In the least Heaven sex reigns supreme; in the higher it is not noticed; but in the highest it does not exist" (*Dreams* [Boston: Roberts, 1891], p. 175). For Mary E. Coleridge, on the other

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hand, gender is essential to the soul: "I think we are separate in soul too, and that a woman's prayer is as different from a man's as a woman's thought or a woman's hand. I cannot think of souls that are not masculine or feminine. . . . it is of the very essence of our nature" (*Gathered Leaves from the Prose of Mary E. Coleridge*, ed. Edith Sichel [1910; rpt. Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971], p. 233).

35. See Maynard's fine chapter on Patmore in *Victorian Discourses*, pp. 141–270, for what is in effect the best existing monograph on this poet. Maynard treats, among many other things, Patmore's relations with Kingsley, the shortcomings of *The Angel*, and the loftier aims of the Eros and Psyche odes.

36. Carol Christ, reading the dunghill and ugly wings as images for "achievement and pride," finds them "so repulsive that they suggest a discomfort with the whole sphere of masculine action" ("Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House," in *A Widening Sphere*, ed. Martha Vicinus [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977], p. 149).

37. Letter of 21 April 1819 to George and Georgiana Keats, in *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 249–50.

38. Concordances suggest that Browning employed "soul" and its cognates twice as often as Tennyson; I suspect a versatility ratio twice that again. By the end of their careers, however, both poets had subsided into a fairly predictable sense/soul binarism. This hardening of the categories should be attributed partly to age but more to *the* age, as late-Victorian speculation about the soul became increasingly guarded.

39. The contest in early Barrett Browning between the transgression and the sublimation of gender, and the triumph of the latter, are evident from her two 1844 sonnets "To George Sand." Both address the unruly and fascinating Sand in the name of a corrective female purity. But where "A Desire" advocates repentance and return to the "stainless" sphere of "child and maiden" (ll. 13–14), "A Recognition" situates purity on the far side at once of gender and of life on earth: "Beat purer, heart, and higher, / Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore / Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!" (ll. 12–14). What Barrett Browning "recognizes" in Sand's transvestism is a protest like her own, but conducted on the unpromising ground of the female body, whose "dishevelled strength in agony" (l. 8) confines protest to the Satanic or Byronic sphere of "vain denial" (l. 5).

40. Both Brownings' efforts to infuse the soul into, or educe it from, the poetic medium itself were paralleled by the work of their Florence friend the expatriate American sculptor Hiram Powers. Powers's theoretical and practical attempts to circumvent "allegorical" by "hieroglyphic" representation of the soul are discussed by Donald M. Reynolds in "The 'Unveiled Soul': Hiram Powers's Embodiment of the Ideal," *Art Bulletin* 3 (1977): 393–414. See also Barrett Browning's 1850 sonnet "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*."

41. In this formally self-referential aspect Barrett Browning appears to have had a close disciple in Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Across the entire *House of Life* (1881), Rossetti's obsessive, eroticized interplay of soul and body images, in their permuted unions and mitoses, enacts his project of making form and content into mutually convertible artistic components. Thus the title phrase "House of Life" (alluding perhaps to Robert Browning's discussion of the poetic symbol in " 'Transcendentalism' " [1855, l. 45]) signifies at once the Body of Soul, the Meaning of Art, the Form of Content, the Monument of Moment. In sonnet 1 ("Bridal Birth") the enfleshed soul is both nurse and child of love; by the final sonnet 101 ("The One Hope") the soul has become the rarefied spirit of a decadent aesthetic, hovering like poetry itself between inscription and voice: "the wan soul in that golden air / Between the scriptured petals softly blown / Peers breathless" (ll. 9–11). Between these limits, meanwhile, the soul appears enwrought in dozens of variations on the sensuous body desired and desiring, which is also optionally the living cosmos and is always crucially the frame of the sonnet itself, giving local habitation to "the soul's sphere of infinite images" (62, l. 8).

Rossetti criticism, which from the first has conceptualized his art in terms of body

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and soul, tends to divide like Blake criticism into schools regarding that art as either mystical or visionary. Neither school, however, has paid enough heed to the Blakean reading that Rossetti's reverentially innovative stance toward Western iconographic traditions solicits. This relation stems from a radical conviction that the modern soul is *lost*: eschatologically lost, perhaps, in a sense that became the torment of Rossetti's later years; but before that aesthetically lost, as an object requiring perennial reinvention, within strict forms that the poet's conviction of lapsed modernity placed under extraordinary elegiac compression.

42. Robert Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, ed. Wylie Sypher (New York: Norton, 1961). I discuss this passage in "Representation and Repristination: Virginity in *The Ring and the Book*," in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 77–78. See "The Last Ride Together" (1855): "My soul / Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll / Freshening and fluttering in the wind" (ll. 34-36); also the similar image in "Bishop Blougram's Apology" (1855), ll. 978–79. Further investigation of the soul-as-text in Victorian poetry might include Tennyson's "still garden of the souls" where "many a figured leaf enrolls / The total world" (*In Memoriam* 43, ll. 10–12), and D. G. Rossetti's "A Last Confession": "I have seen pictures where / Souls burned with Latin shriekings in their mouths" (p. 45).

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TEN

Turn-of-the-Century Male Impersonation

Rewriting the Romance Plot

Martha Vicinus

The study of women who dressed as men has become a very fashionable topic of late, especially among Renaissance scholars and theorists of homosexual identity. Much of this work has concentrated on the theater, with special reference to Shakespeare's heroines. Few critics have considered the nineteenth century. And yet the entire century is rife with cross-dressed heroines and heroes in theater, opera, and fiction, as well as numerous historical characters. In this chapter I will look at examples of male impersonation drawn from the pivotal years 1890–1914, in which notions of sexual identity were undergoing enormous changes in definition, attitude, and self-presentation. During these years the representation of the beautiful young man by women could be read in many different ways, depending upon the subjectivity of the viewer or reader. The male impersonator could represent both an eloquent and luxurious sexual undecidability *and* a threatening homosexual potential—depending not so much on the intentions of the impersonator herself, as those of her audience. Although the fin-de-siècle male impersonator was always placed within a heterosexual context, she became a visual icon of the possibility of alternative sexual desire.

In *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber argues that critics repeatedly "look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser, to turn away from a close encounter with the transvestite, and . . . instead to subsume that figure within one of the two traditional genders."[1] For her, the cross-dresser is a "third," who must be recognized as a creature apart from either male or female—or even binary thinking, for "transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself."[2] Garber's recuperation of the transvestite as a signifier in and of itself is valuable for forcing us to look directly at what we see, rather than comfortably remaining within the pre-existing categories of male and

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female. But if we insist on the primacy of the category crisis, then we risk doing an injustice to the complex responses to the cross-dressed figure, and to the wide range of often contradictory readings he/she makes possible. While Garber privileges the cross-dresser's own interpretive strategies, I believe that we need to focus on how observers/readers choose to see and then define this figure. In effect, gender meaning is in the eye of the beholder.

Queer theorists Sue-Ellen Case and Judith Butler have argued for a kind of theatrical display that calls into question any specific gender identity.[3] While I am attracted to such arguments about gender fluidity and indeterminancy, we must beware of exaggerating the range of roles available to the stage male or female impersonator. In theory she or he could be anything, but in practice theatrical conventions dictate a narrow range of stereotypes. The actor in drag is virtually always either a salacious old hag or a libidinous beauty of doubtful character. Thinly veiled misogyny deflects, even destroys, sexual desire. Although the male impersonator will occasionally cross-dress as an older man, she is almost always dressed as a dandy—a young, beautiful man-about-town. Most often, echoing Shakespeare's Viola and Rosalind, she feigns more sexual experience than she has, providing the audience with a frisson of pleasure as it watches a boy-like woman pretend to male experience that will confirm a sophistication she/he does not possess. Touches of femininity highlight her sexual charm for both men and women. The male impersonator attracts by means of her understated eroticism; the female impersonator repels by means of his overstated libidinal extravagance.

I will examine three examples drawn from the fin-de-siècle in order to show how male impersonation allowed multiple readings by both heterosexual and homosexual women and men. I will look first at two examples drawn from the stage, Vesta Tilley (1864–1952), the most popular male impersonator of the music hall, and Sarah Bernhardt (1845–1923), the most famous *travesti* actress of her day. One specialized in comic songs and the other in tragic heroes, but neither broke out of character on stage. The audience watched a woman play a male role, and judged her success accordingly. In contrast, I will then examine the feminist best-seller, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), in which one of the heroines cross-dressed temporarily. The liberating effect of her utterly fantastic behavior opened a range of erotic possibilities for readers. Finally I will look briefly at the backlash against male impersonation in the attacks on the suffrage movement of the pre-World War I years. Throughout, I am especially interested in the ways in which an early generation of "out" lesbians selected images from the music halls, theater and fiction to compose their own public personae.

The late Victorian male impersonator could be found in the most apolitical of venues—the comic stage. The long tradition of theatrical transvestism in England normalized cross-dressing in such non-realistic genres as the pantomime and burlesque. Every winter the Christmas pantomime saw a beautiful actress play the principal boy in revealing tights and a well-known comedian cast as the homely dame; it continues to this day to be the most popular form of drama in Britain.

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Pantomime functions as the comic equivalent to domestic melodrama; in both, heterosexual romance is the emotional core. The plot of pantomime is loosely based on a traditional folk tale, such as *Puss in Boots, Jack and the Beanstalk, Aladdin* or *Dick Whittington*. A selfish father plans to marry his daughter to a rich, ugly, or foolish man, whereas she wishes to marry the poor but honest hero. The hero and heroine escape the clutches of the father or the villain by using a bat, sword, or lamp—all obvious phallic symbols—given to the hero by a good fairy. Through carelessness, the hero loses the bat and then regains it. Roustabout adventures in which the principal boy is helped by the fairy godmother to defeat the heroine's father are combined with topical songs. A grand finale celebrates the victorious, happy couple, now reunited with both the chastened father and the boy's mother, often played by the dame. The curtain falls on the engagement or marriage of the principal boy and his beloved, thereby marking the entry of the liminal boy into adult maturity and active sexuality. Cross-dressing in this fantasy world provided an opportunity to express the feminine aspects of the boy-hero and the aggressive masculinity of the comic older woman. Audiences could have their cake and eat it too—they could laugh at the ugly dame, thrill at seeing the legs of the beautiful principal boy, and enjoy the restoration of order in the concluding marriage scene.[4]

The principal boy was and remains the single best-known male impersonator on the British stage. She did not seem to embody sexual ambiguity so much as sexual candor. At a time when both women and men wore layers upon layers of clothing, her relative undress was extraordinarily alluring. She began in the 1830s as a slim, almost prepubescent hero, but soon the Victorian preference for embonpoint brought to the stage full-bodied women displaying leg and buttocks in tights and glitter:

> Ample-bosomed, small-waisted and with thighs—oh such thighs!—thighs that shone and glittered in the different coloured silk tights in which she continually appeared. How she stood about the stage, proud and dominant, smacking those rounded limbs with a riding crop![5]

E. H. Shepard, later to be A. A. Milne's illustrator for *Winnie the Pooh*, remembered how "At every smack, a fresh dart was shot" into his young heart. As figure 1 shows, by the 1890s the principal boy could radiate rakish insouciance, with a cigarette, tipped hat, and full fleshlings.[6] Tradition called for a kind of dashing femininity; the costume, like Ethel Earl's trimming, often drew attention to the breasts and penis-free genitals. Nevertheless, "she" always won the heroine.

Absolute realism was by no means the norm in theatrical cross-dressing. Many music-hall male impersonators wore a variety of costumes that could range from impeccable male dress to a tie combined with a short skirt to a woman's dress with a top hat and cane. Even Vesta Tilley, who prided herself on her accurate reproduction of male fashions, insisted, "I leave just enough of the woman in my impersonations to keep my work clean and make it remembered."[7] The rather stout

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1. Miss Ethel Earl, Principal Boy at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Birmingham, *The Sketch* (8 January 1896), p. 561. Author's collection.

Sarah Bernhardt wore no wig and a costume reminiscent of the principal boy's when she played Hamlet (see fig. 4). Gender confusion that played on the attractive figure of the (often corsetted) actress was most common, as if to accentuate a range of sexual possibilities without losing sight of an essential womanliness. This femininity went hand in hand with a plot which focused on showing the various ways in which a young man could or could not find sexual success.

Gender indeterminancy is possible only in the realm of fantasy—when recreated off the stage and on the streets it becomes sexual deviance. Fin-de-siècle admirers of the male impersonator could use her gender ambiguity to imagine a different structure of sexual relations between women and men or to identify with her masculine freedoms. But when individual women began to make elements of this theatrical convention part of their own lives, male impersonation changed. It became expressive not of gender ambiguity, but of an increasingly well-defined sexual preference, namely homosexuality. The modern lesbian identity was formed from a bricolage of cultural sources, including theatrical images, utopian fiction, Greek and Roman literature, medical texts, male pornographic and semi-pornographic literature, the flourishing male homosexual culture of the times, and the inventiveness of confident women claiming a new public sexual identity. This

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chapter examines in detail only one thread of this rich heritage, the important borrowings from the theatrical male impersonator.

I. VESTA TILLEY'S STYLISH PRETENDERS

The reign of the male impersonator in the music halls of Great Britain was shorter than the principal boy. Her heyday coincided with the most important years of the women's movement, 1870 to the mid-1920s, as if to provide a slightly disreputable commentary on the legal and political demands of middle-class feminists. The music hall was rooted in men's supper clubs, where drink and sexual jollity ruled. Even though the halls gradually became respectable, winning the praise of such literary snobs as T. S. Eliot, they never quite lost all traces of their raffish origins. Women performers in the 1860s and 1870s were noted for their ability to parry jibes with a drunken audience, and their power in belting out a song. All music hall artistes had to grab the attention of an audience quickly, for each turn was only fifteen to twenty minutes; three or four songs, with quick costume changes, a strong chorus and a catchy tune provided the formula for success for the adroit and attractive. Women worked in an aggressively heterosexual milieu, and yet they did not perform solely for men. As representatives of sexual freedom, they appealed to women as much as to men; indeed, women performers, whether cross-dressed or not, seldom lost an opportunity to joke at male sexual pretensions.

Unmarried clerks, skilled laborers, and salesmen attended night after night, so it is not surprising that one of the most popular male singers was the swell, or man about town, dedicated to fashion, drink, and nights with the boys. Class envy, pride, and satire jostled with sexual hints and broad asides. From the moment the *lion comique* George Leyburne sang the hit "Champagne Charlie" in 1868, male impersonators were parodying the upper-class swell.[8] He remained their single most popular character (see fig. 2). The costume of this stylish representative of conspicuous consumption echoed the lavish fripperies of the principal boy in its extravagance, but the goal was to avoid marriage, and to enjoy the pleasures of city life. All of the successful male impersonators regularly played principal boys in Christmas pantomimes, welcoming the opportunity to show off their acting skills in a more romantic scenario.[9]

As if to provide some relief from their portraits of rich sophisticates, male impersonators also created mini-dramas about innocent young clerks on holiday or poor waifs starving in the streets.[10] Vesta Tilley, Ella Shields, and Hetty King, whose careers peaked at the turn of the century, were highly successful in their portrayal of impudent boys and aspiring swells. Tilley, the epitome of turn-of-the-century respectability, brought young women and families into the halls.[11] As she proudly claimed in her autobiography, "I made a point of cutting out the questionable lines, and I think this had a great deal to do with my success."[12] She became the most famous male impersonator on the English stage, and, as figure 2

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2. Vesta Tilley, "By the Sad Sea Waves." Author's collection.

shows, she prided herself on her perfect costuming and accurate imitation of a man's stride. Her soprano voice then underscored the disjunction between appearance and gender.

The wealthy, retired Tilley, however, may have exaggerated her respectability. Thirty years earlier in an interview she sardonically commented on her imitators, "The good ones will survive and the poor ones—well, the Lord only knows what becomes of them."[13] The tacit assumption that theatrical failure meant prostitution simply underscores the ways in which male impersonation was designed to pique heterosexual desire. Certainly Tilly focused all of her sympathy on young men who flirt and spoon, but rarely get their girl. Many of her best-known songs were about the social difficulties of a young unmarried man who wished to attract a girl. A perennial favorite was Sidney, whose holidays were in September, and "He's been saving up since November"; he had four different seaside outfits in which to dazzle the girls in the audience (see fig. 2). Women, and especially working women, were always hard to get, too independent, and likely to con a man.[14]

> Oh the girls are the ruin of man,
> Since the days of Eve and Adam,
> Nice little things, want little rings,
> Want little diamonds and pearls.

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> Oh the girls are the ruin of man,
> To change a Miss into a Madam,
> Isn't it funny, we spend all our money,
> Just for the sake of the girls.[15]

Another of her songs ended with a chorus reminding the girls in the audience, "Don't flirt with so many swells / Stick to one as you should, you should."[16]

Beneath Tilley's relentlessly cheerful songs was a deep sense of male vulnerability. While the pantomime ended in sexual union and reconciliation, the male impersonator's song ended in frustration; money spent on stylish clothes and girls did not bring happiness. Marriage proved an impossibility, and male camaraderie became the only reliable bond. Her young men lack the principal boy's helpful fairy godmother. The underlying poignancy of Tilley's vignettes is provided by the absent mother, which made her seem so boy-like to the men and so attractive to both women and men in the audience.

By the 1890s the beautiful youth was a complex image. An active male homosexual subculture gave a rather different look to sexual desire; while probably unacknowledged in the highly respectable circles in which Tilley traveled, some men in the audience would have recognized her creations as attractive boys. Her repertoire included not only the fashionable swell, but also messenger boys, midshipmen, and enlisted soldiers—all well-known "trade" for Oscar Wilde and other homosexuals.[17] Moreover, the effeminate swell with his excessive interest in fashion had always been sexually suspect. Tilley's ribald predecessors had poked fun at "midnight sons" and "Piccadilly Algies," noting both their "lah-di-dah manners" and their preference for drinking with the boys to courting the girls.[18] The fascination of the American press with Tilley's costumes can also be interpreted as a fascination with male display, associated then as now with homosexual sophistication. Headlines such as "Vesta Tilley Kindly Shows Mere Men What to Wear and How to Wear It" and "How Men Ought to Dress" combined with photos of her and illustrations of well-dressed men gave staid Americans permission to examine male fashion—and an attractive, slight figure—closely.[19]

Contemporaries could not, of course, openly express the homosexual attraction of Tilley's creations. J. S. Bratton has pointed out how rarely a male impersonator's actual act is described; she speculates that this deliberate silence may come from male journalists' unwillingness to confront the anarchic gender bending of so many women performers.[20] Instead, we have bland appreciations of specific routines or disquisitions on the accuracy of the clothes worn. A slightly later generation wrote of Tilley's uncanny ability to capture their remembered feelings of adolescent insecurity. M. Willson Disher reminisced about how her portraits steadily improved over her long career. He carefully avoids too close an identification with Tilley's characters, ignoring the erotic in favor of the emotional:

> By pretending to be young men for so long, she had come to understand them as well as they did themselves. Now she went further, and understood them better than they

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> did themselves. That is why we saw them, not as we could see them in real life but as they were viewed through a clever woman's eyes.[21]

Memoirs such as Disher's express a kind of double nostalgia—for a lost innocence and for a lost cultural experience. An evening at the halls, laughing at a performer who gently imitated male foibles, recalled not the painful awkwardnesses of adolescence, but softened memories.

Men who had seen Tilley perform concentrated on her outward appearance, but Colin MacInnes, a modern historian of the music halls, can only look through her clothes to her body. For him, female admiration of a male impersonator can only be suppressed lesbian desire. He uneasily comments that when Tilley appealed to the girls in the audience with the chorus line, "If you'd like to love a soldier, you can all love me!" there must be "something slightly equivocal about this number."[22] MacInnes cannot see youthful beauty and vulnerability as an attractive ideal of heterosexual maleness for women because he never forgets the body beneath the clothes. It is precisely this kind of literalization that Garber argues against in her privileging of the "third" element, which frees both cross-dresser and audience to dwell temporarily in fantasy, apart from sexual binaries. Yet repeatedly male historians and memoirists have seen gender commentary rather than gender instability in the male impersonator; for them the actress calls attention to the limitations of the masculine without undermining its authority.

Vesta Tilley's keenest admirers were women, perhaps because they seem to have avoided construing her as a heterosexual woman. She described their adulation in her autobiography:

> Girls of all ages would wait in crowds to see me enter or leave the theatre, and each post brought piles of letters, varying from an impassioned declaration of undying love to a request for an autograph, or a photograph, or a simple flower, or a piece of ribbon I had worn. . . . I still have a letter from a middle-aged woman who was a cook, in which she told me how very much she admired me, and what a dear little boy I made, and proceeded to assure me that it would give her the very greatest happiness to serve me. If I ever were ill and wanted special nursing, or wanted someone to look after me, I had only to let her know.[23]

We have yet to acknowledge the allure of the beautiful boy for both homosexual and heterosexual women.[24] While some women, like the cook, may have wanted to mother Vesta Tilley, many idolized her because she represented that fleeting youth so celebrated in Greek love. As the feminist critic Elaine Aston has argued, for female spectators Tilley could represent "a collectively recognized, mythical ideal of male beauty" in which "the threat of physical, sexual contact is absent."[25] While women have generally been seen as seeking permanent love, perhaps Tilley enabled them to imagine a transitory moment that did not involve experience or consequences, but rather remained a fantasy of evanescent beauty. The women who sought an autograph, a flower or some other token from their favorite performer were privileging a phallus-free masculinity. The Freudian critic Sarah Kofman has argued that "what is pertinent to women in fetishism is the paradigm of undecidability that it offers."[26] Women fans, unlike male theater critics, ignored

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the body beneath the clothes, and celebrated the male impersonator's appearance. Tilley's sexual undecidability was the main source of her attractiveness for women.

Unfortunately we have no surviving comments by women about Tilley. But her immaculately attired dandies influenced the styles of both young men and women. She herself tells the story of having misplaced a cufflink one night; after she substituted a black ribbon, swells everywhere began to use ribbons instead of cuff links.[27] The connection between her and the nascent lesbian movement cannot be documented, but individual lesbians were fascinated with the stage. The large number of postcards, carte d'visite, and other memorabilia of Tilley and her many rivals testify to the widespread circulation of images of mannish women. Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943), the author of the infamous lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), from a very early age began to wear men's jackets and ties and in 1920 she cut her hair short (fig. 3 dates from before 1910). Since Hall strongly disapproved of women passing as men, theatrical transvestism provided her with a model for the mannish lesbian. She obviously felt that the impeccable tailoring of Vesta Tilley's gentlemen best represented her own sense of belonging to the "third sex." Both women, for example, loved flowered silks as part of their male costume. By purchasing her clothes at a theatrical costumier's she even managed to capture some of Tilley's exaggerated stylishness.[28] To many of her lovers, Hall seemed to embody the captivating aloofness and vulnerability of the male impersonator.

Radclyffe Hall's borrowings from the stage did not affect the impersonator herself, nor most of those who admired her. She remains an extreme example, but a dangerous sexual independence was implicit in the theater's transvestites. Principal boys, empowered by fairy godmothers, foiled predatory father-figures. Courting youths retaliated against paternal authority with sarcasm and parody. As Elaine Aston has pointed out, when Tilley sang, "How many 'lemonades' we had—my word!? I really couldn't tell / At two a.m. pa started off for home, like *this*, / And so did I!" she used her androgynous appearance as a satirical weapon. The audience heard the mischievous tune and saw a pubescent boy walking off stage exaggerating the absent father's angry gestures.[29] Neither the male impersonator nor the principal boy inverted the male order; rather, each disrupted it, calling attention to all that remains unsatisfied, repressed, or disturbing. As Julia Kristeva has said, when women attempt male power, they do not overturn the male hierarchy, but bring it into question.[30] The male impersonator can never be a boy, however skilled she might be in representing one, but she can draw attention to the follies of the male order—and provide an opening for fantasies of empowerment, sexual and otherwise.

II. SARAH BERNHARDT'S EFFEMINATE HEROES

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At the turn of the century, Sarah Bernhardt was one of the best-known actresses in Europe and America; her *travesti* roles were widely admired and imitated

3. Radclyffe Hall, ca. 1910. Courtesy of the Henry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

by lesbians. This French-Jewish actress had revolutionized the French theater with her unconventional interpretations of the female leads in such famous French plays as *Phèdre*, *Hernani*, *La Dame aux camélias*, and *Théodora*. In the 1870s and 1880s she had taken Paris, London, and New York by storm; she never retired, bringing her lavish productions year after year to English-speaking audiences; the spectacle of this famous woman was sufficient to overcome any language barrier. Her well-publicized slim beauty, personal extravagance and sexual liaisons thrilled admirers everywhere; photos, postcards (including pornographic versions of her most famous roles), card games, commemorative plates, and other mementoes of the most famous actress of her time can still be found in antique markets. Bernhardt never feared controversy, publicly fighting with the Comédie Française, actively supporting Dreyfus, and openly praising the suffrage movement. She also included in her intimate circle the mannish artist, Louise Abbéma.[31]

At a time when most actresses retired or took supporting roles, Bernhardt shifted from her famous *femme fatales to* portray a series of tragic heroes. She chose her roles carefully, specializing in men who had "a strong mind in a weak body," claiming that only an older woman (she was in her fifties) was mature enough to interpret thought-wracked young men.[32] Her best-known roles were "the Floren-

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4. Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet. Author's collection.

tine Hamlet," the melodramatic, demented Lorenzo d'Medici in Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio* (1897), her self-consciously light-hearted "black Hamlet" (fig. 4) in Shakespeare's play (1899) and her popular antihero, the Duke of Reichstadt, son of Napoleon, or her "white Hamlet," after the color of his uniform (fig. 5), in Edmond Rostand's *L'Aiglon* (1900).

Bernhardt's three tragedies included a crucial twist in the pantomime plot. Her "Hamlets" were betrayed by their mothers and dominated by their fathers. The combination leaves them weak and cowardly. Gertrude marries the murderer of her husband; Reichstadt's Austrian mother is disloyal to France; Lorenzo's mother wishes to avoid her son at all costs, and admits that "like a noxious vapor, the defilement of his heart has mounted to his face."[33] Hamlet vacillates, the Duke of Reichstadt plays with toy soldiers, and Lorenzo faints at the sight of a sword, the very instrument that gave the principal boy masculine power. Not surprisingly, all three men are hopeless lovers on stage, where they either talk of off-stage debauchery, or fail to meet promised assignations. Obviously this meant that Bernhardt could largely avoid the awkwardness of love-making on stage, while underscoring their emotional immaturity.[34]

Bernhardt's "principal boys" are even more isolated than Vesta Tilley's, for they can turn to neither mother nor father nor heroine for support. While obsessed

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5. Sarah Bernhardt as the Duke of Reichstadt. Author's collection.

with their lost fathers, her heroes are forced to contend with powerful villains—Claudius, the Duke of Florence, and Metternich dominate the plots. In order to defeat these men, her young men must resort to feminine wiles, deception, and play-acting. Bernhardt's mannered acting style and appearance accentuated their effeminacy. For many seeing her act, these heroes must have raised awkward questions about not only the impotence and folly of masculine heroics, but also about feminine guile. The defensive laughter of some male reviewers may have been their discomfort at seeing the deception and artifice practiced by a feminized hero.[35]

A single incident from Rostand's *L'Aiglon* points to why lessons accepted under the guise of fantasy could become uncomfortably disturbing in tragedy. In pantomime the audience might admit the necessity of a female helper, such as the good fairy, but in tragedy such a figure underscored the cowardice of the hero. During a masquerade ball loyal French patriots, led by the Contessa Camerata, effect the Duke of Reichstadt's escape from Austria; he is to lead Bonapartist forces against the repressive French monarchy and its Austrian allies. The forceful Contessa dresses as the Duke so that he (played by Bernhardt) may flee to the border. She then goes to an assignation the Duke has made with a female admirer. When the Duke learns that the disguised Contessa is in danger of being murdered by a jeal-

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ous brother, he refuses to escape, and thereby betrays the troops waiting for him, and all possibility of a return to Bonapartist democracy. The Duke's chivalry is undermined by the appearance of the Contessa, still dressed as him; she furiously declares, "After all I've done, I hoped / At least to find that you had gone!"[36] But the Duke is not meant for leadership—he lacks his father's ruthlessness, and his patriotism (which appealed mightily to the French audience, still smarting under the defeats of the Franco-Prussian War) is only rhetoric. As if to confirm feminine power, the would-be assassin swears, " 'I didn't know / The Corsican's brat was such a fighter!' " And when he learns the identity of his adversary, he exclaims, " 'This woman's a Napoleon!' " (Rostand, 285–86). An actress in the role of a woman who dresses as a man has the courage of a Napoleon, while an actress in the role of a man personifies effeminate inaction. Only an actress as skilled as Bernhardt could keep an audience's sympathy for the Duke, although a long death scene, as well as the expensive sets, and a large, well-trained cast helped.

All of the rewritings of pantomime's romance plot insist upon the sexual attractiveness of the unsuccessful, isolated man who cannot fulfill the conventional masculine role. Like Vesta Tilley, Bernhardt's fans idolized her. On one occasion she agreed to meet with a French girl who had refused to consider any of the presentable young men her parents introduced her to because none looked like the Duke of Reichstadt. Bernhardt persuaded the girl to forget her stage-hero by receiving her "in her oldest dressing-gown, no make-up, wrinkles and hollows showing up horribly."[37] Vesta Tilley reports a similar incident. But when she showed herself in post-performance disarray, the woman insisted that "the real you" was her stage persona, not the tired, thin-lipped woman before her.[38]

The fans who cannot distinguish between a stage persona and the actress are comic. But Bernhardt's influence was more far-reaching; for many young women her impassioned acting expressed their inchoate yearnings for a dramatic passion or cause. The young Una Troubridge, Radclyffe Hall's partner, had adored Bernhardt as the Duke of Reichstadt, and tried to imitate her; she longed "how utterly in vain, for dark, mysterious narrow eyes, a high-bridged nose, a questing, haunted expression and an interesting past."[39] Lady Emilia Dilke, a well-known art historian and feminist, found herself so disturbed by "Sarah Bernhardt in a male part" that she "could not sleep until she had disposed of her impression and dispelled nightmare by a sketch."[40] Her loving husband does not describe the nature of her nightmare, but we must ask why a happily married woman—whose first marriage had been a disaster—would find Bernhardt's impersonation so troubling. Did she momentarily sense an erotic attraction to one of her many feminist friends? Or did she identify with the sexual possibilities implicit in Bernhardt's characterizations? The frequency with which allusions to Bernhardt appear in memoirs of the time speaks to her enduring hold on the imagination of theatergoers.

Bernhardt was a favorite among the growing coterie of fin-de-siècle Paris lesbians. The American heiress, Natalie Barney (1876–1972), addressed a poem to Bernhardt after seeing her in *L'Aiglon*. The poem was published in 1900 as part of

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a collection of lesbian verse; as if to highlight her close identification with the Duke, Barney included a portrait of herself as a page. Her outraged father had the plates and all copies destroyed, though Barney managed to save a few.[41] But Albert Barney could not stop his daughter, who became one of the best-known lesbian hostesses and patrons of her day and was also notorious for her numerous affairs. The courtesan, Liane de Pougy published a roman à clef, *L'Idylle saphique* in 1901, describing her tumultuous affair with the young Barney. In one scene, clearly drawn directly from their relationship, the two lovers watch Bernhardt play Hamlet. Rather than falling in love with her Hamlet, as so many heterosexual women did, they identified with him. The Natalie-figure compares the frustations of women with Hamlet's impotent rage against tyranny, "For what is there for women who feel the passion for action when pitiless Destiny holds them in chains? Destiny made us women at a time when the law of men is the only law that is recognized."[42] The staginess of this speech echoes Bernhardt's own grandiose style of expression.

But, like Radclyffe Hall, Natalie Barney and her friends took their identification with the male impersonator beyond literature and into the public domain. For Barney, however, cross-dressing was an erotic embellishment of lesbian play, and not the embodiment of her special nature; passing as male was bad form. Indeed, Liane de Pougy roundly declared in her memoir, "I shall never understand that kind of deviation: wanting to look like a man, sacrificing feminine grace, charm and sweetness. . . . And cutting off one's hair when it can be a woman's most beautiful adornment! It's a ridiculous aberration, quite apart from the fact that it invites insult and scandal."[43] The attractiveness of Bernhardt was as much for her highly theatrical style as her portrayal of anguished young men. Barney and her coterie took Bernhardt's tragic heroes and turned them into romantic exponents of lesbian love. Barney dressed as Bernhardt's Hamlet, but added a provocative garter, as if to draw attention to the erotic nature of her costume (fig. 6). She and her various lovers celebrated lesbian passion by photographing themselves in costumes that ranged from nudity in the woods of Maine to the britches and ruffles of eighteenth-century pages and the flowing gowns of Sappho's Greece.

Bernhardt was also a cult figure among male homosexuals. The amateur actor, the Marquis of Angelsey, was photographed as the Duke of Reichstadt (fig. 7) in "a romantic pose and appropriate costume" in the gossip column of *The Sketch* in January 1902.[44] H. Montgomery Hyde describes the Marquis as "the most notorious aristocratic homosexual" immediately following the Wilde trial; he was "an extreme example of the effeminate transvestite type, and was a gifted female impersonator."[45] He was well known for staging private pantomimes at Christmas; whatever role he played, the slight, girlish Marquis must often have looked like a principal boy. Within six years of coming into his inheritance the Marquis had to declare bankruptcy and flee to Monte Carlo. Vesta Tilley added to her male wardrobe by buying "dozens" of vests of "delicately flowered silk" at the sale of his personal effects.[46] In the 1930s the lead role in *L'Aiglon* was taken over by a well-

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6. Natalie Barney as Hamlet. Courtesy of George Wickes.

known homosexual, Jean Weber.[47] Weber was proud of his ability to play roles that had previously been exclusively *travesti* parts. He continued the tradition of exaggerated emotionalism and gender ambiguity in his portrayal of the Duke of Reichstadt, if a surviving publicity still is any guide.

It is not surprising to find a dense web of cross-references between the theater and lesbians and male homosexuals. The public expression of homosexuality among a small group of courageous (and wealthy) pioneers drew repeatedly from theatrical prototypes. Vesta Tilley's almost fanatical realism attracted heterosexual men and appears to have been a model for women who thought of themselves as naturally male. For Radclyffe Hall, who thought she had a man's soul trapped in a woman's body, the closer she could come to masculinity the better; Vesta Tilley's successful impersonation may well have been a model and a goad for her. Bernhardt's effete characters, like the principal boy, were less essentialized and more open to varying constructions. She personified both the effeminate male and the sexual allure of a cross-dressed woman. Her affected acting style, so unlike the deft wit of Tilley, lent itself to camp imitations. Cabaret parodies of her most famous roles were legion—and so too were her homosexual admirers.[48] As figures 3 and 6 show, no one would mistake Radclyffe Hall or Natalie Barney for men;

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7. The Marquis of Angelsey as the Duke of Reichstadt, *The Sketch* (1 January 1902), p. 403. Courtesy of the British Library.

both are obviously in costumes in the sense of wearing nontraditional clothes that draw attention to themselves. But each portrays a different version of the third sex—one earnest and erotic, the other playful and sexy.

III. GRAND'S FEMINIST FANTASY

On stage the male impersonator was a long-accepted convention. But what happened when she walked off stage into realistic fiction? Or, more seriously, appeared on the streets, rivaling men? Nineteenth-century fiction abounds with scenes of cross-dressed women passionately declaring their love for a man; amateur theatricals invariably provided an occasion of truth-telling or heightened romance. But the implications of cross-dressing in fin-de-siècle fiction are less easy to unravel. Although few critics have seen any relationship between the sexually aware world of the theater and the rational New Woman novels of the 1890s, the connections cannot be avoided in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), with its explicit use of male impersonation and theatrical plotting.

The Heavenly Twins was a scandalous best-seller that catapulted its unknown author into fame and fortune. The reading public read with fascination Sarah

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Grand's candid account of the horrors of male vice. The main plot focused on the educated Evadne, who refuses to consummate her marriage with a dissolute military officer, and barely survives to marry a good doctor. Her friend Edith foolishly believes she can save a fallen man, and herself falls into syphilitic dementia with astonishing speed after giving birth to a diseased son. The third plot, which gave the novel its title, recorded the pranks of Angelica and her twin brother, Diavolo. Although much admired at the time for their impish tricks and moral probity, critics of our day have largely ignored these tedious pranksters, preferring to concentrate on the author's diatribes against women's sexual ignorance or the plight of Evadne, whose life lacks purpose.

Contemporaries were especially taken with a portion of the novel labeled "An Interlude," in which a mysterious, handsome man arrives in town to become the cathedral's tenor[49] He falls in love with Angelica, who sits in the front row, admiring him at every service; the class difference is too great to bridge, but the Tenor is solaced nights by the visits of Angelica's brother, who teases him relentlessly about his idealistic love. The Boy, as he is dubbed, accompanies the Tenor brilliantly on the violin and consumes expensive food and fine wine. One evening while rowing on the river, their boat capsizes; the Tenor saves the drowning Boy, whose wig falls off, revealing Angelica in disguise. Both are humiliated and part in sorrow. The Tenor catches pneumonia and dies; Angelica returns to her elderly, kind husband. She is last seen writing his parliamentary speeches. Father-figures turn out to be necessary for women until the feminist revolution.

Like Sarah Bernhardt, the Boy and his ambiguous night-time relationship with the Tenor provided readers with a dizzying array of contradictory options. Was Angelica only acting out an adolescent desire for action? Brighter and stronger than her brother, was she drawing attention to the social constraints imposed upon a woman? Did the freedom her husband gave her remind readers of the dangers of undisciplined feminism? Could man-boy love find a literary expression through the simple use of cross-dressing? Or can we see this situation as prefiguring lesbian love? Contemporaries may have wanted all of these possibilities, and found it easy to keep all options open.

We first meet the Boy after midnight, watching a "lady of mercy" save a prostitute on the market square. As a man, Angelica can safely see what is concealed from young respectable women. The female transvestite becomes a flâneuse—the observer rather than the observed—who sees all, records all, and yet remains detached from the passing scene. But the transvestite's power to look contains a paradox: like the flâneur, women look in order to be seen. We first encounter the Boy in the market square through the eyes of the Tenor; thereafter the point of view shifts to him whenever something important happens to the Boy. Male clothing liberates not only a woman's body, but also her other senses, all of which Angelica uses to draw attention to herself, just as if she were on stage. The Boy demands to be seen, "Like my new suit, Israfil?" He laughs heartily when told, "It looks as if you'd got it for private theatricals, and taken great care of it" (Grand, p. 418). He is so full of "superfluous life and energy" that he "jumped over the chairs instead

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of walking around them, and performed an occasional *pas seul*, or pirouette, in various parts of the room," unconventional behavior which the Tenor "humours" "good-naturedly" (Grand, p. 389).

Grand, however much she thought she was recording the lives of the ruling class, could not avoid images drawn from the theater when she created the Boy. One evening the Boy appears in a "spotless flannel boating suit, with a silk handkerchief of many colours, knotted picturesquely round his neck" (Grand, p. 378). The seaside dandy was one of Vesta Tilley's most popular figures, for he was the archetypal flâneur in his determined promenade along the beach, ogling the girls and waiting to be noticed (fig. 2). The Tenor correctly labels his appearance as more suitable for the stage—there is something artificial in the Boy's stylishness; only someone in love would remain unsuspicious. The cover of a paperback edition beckons to potential readers with Angelica dressed as the Boy in "his" favorite boating suit, but to avoid the very confusion Grand so carefully built into her narrative, she is shown without her wig (fig. 8). Angelica's successful transvestism is undermined, as if it were too daring to illustrate a cheap reprint.[50]

Nevertheless, within the narrative Angelica assumes that her suit and wig give her protection, that they are an assertion of autonomy, of bodily self-containment in the face of threats of invasion, either visual or physical. Disguise enables her to deny the patriarchal insistence that a woman is always already her body. Yet Angelica's expectation of asexual neutrality proves false from the very beginning of her disguised life, for the Boy is accosted by a prostitute on his first night out. "He" steps back "with an unmistakeable gesture of disgust," and stumbles into the Tenor. Even as a young man, Angelica is a sexual object—his choice is the delicate homoerotic admiration of the Tenor or the flagrant solicitation of the prostitute.

Yet in the feminist fantasy of *The Heavenly Twins*, Angelica is able to use her position to become a sexual subject without losing her purity or her self-respect. She is the silent observer of the male performer in the cathedral, and when she dresses as the Boy, she draws attention to herself and mocks the Tenor's passivity. The aristocratic female gaze can inhabit but not disrupt the conservative male space of the church, but when gendered male, it rules the homoerotic space of the Tenor's lodgings.[51] In both situations Angelica actively courts the Tenor's gaze; indeed, when their eyes meet for the first time, he falters and commits a musical error. The Boy's unannounced visits and erratic hours keep the captivated Tenor constantly on the lookout. His life turns on seeing either Angelica or the Boy, while she writes the script of their drama, whatever she wears. Like Rosalind's teasing of Orlando, the Boy's chafing of the Tenor for his silent love is not to test that love, which is never in question, but rather is a form of erotic foreplay, or as Stephen Greenblatt has said about Shakespeare's comedy, it is a symbolic enactment of their mutual desire.[52]

This desire, so graphically expressed in metaphors of music and food, is overtly homoerotic. Heterosexuality is reduced to descriptive gestures; the Boy is afraid of mice, cannot swim, loves flowers, all characteristics that remind the reader that

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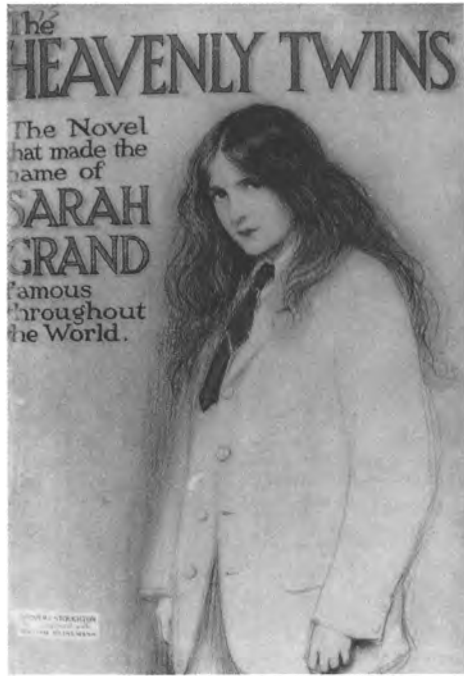

8. Cover of *The Heavenly Twins*. Courtesy of the British Library.

he is she, but also reinforce the erotic vulnerability of the liminal male adolescent. We have a militantly pro-marriage feminist who can only imagine a utopian world of male-female relations in terms of the burgeoning homosexual world around her. Had Sarah Grand known any homosexuals? She may have heard rumors of despised men in the barracks when she lived with her husband, an army doctor. How much did he teach her, besides the etiology of venereal disease? In 1890, when Grand left her husband and took her pseudonym, she covered her declassé origins, and constructed a public persona of serene feminine rectitude. Whatever personal knowledge she may have had in regard to male homosexuality was scarcely likely to be made public in the years surrounding the Wilde trial.

And yet the beautiful choir boy was a cliché among homosexuals by the 1890s, and the Boy's "pleasure in the Tenor's beauty never tired" (Grand, p. 424). The mothering Tenor treats the Boy in a fashion recognized by every pedophile. He permits him to define the parameters of their relation, indulges him in everything he demands, and yet hopes to teach him a higher and more moral life.[53] He constantly wants to touch the Boy, commenting at one juncture, "You put that remarkable head of yours under my hand, and then growl at me for touching it. And really it is a temptation" (Grand, p. 405). Until at least the eighteenth, and some would argue, into the nineteenth century, boys had been permitted, even encour-

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aged, in a period of sexual passivity. Sexually experienced women, or older boys and men, initiated the adolescent male into sexual experience. The tradition of taking a young son to a brothel to be taught by an older woman has a long and hoary tradition; Greek love, of course, was based upon a pedagogic ideal.[54]

In this woman-authored work, however, the Boy insists "irritably" to the Tenor one moonlit night on the river:

> I take my pleasures daintily, and this scene satisfies me heart and soul . . . the calm fellowship, the brotherly love undisturbed by a single violent emotion, which is the perfection of social intercourse to me. I say the scene is hallowed, and I'll have no sex in my paradise. (Grand, p. 423)

Contemporary male critics considered Angelica's sexual purity in the face of the Tenor's love a silly fantasy. As F. W. Barry commented, "This unimpeachable Mignon, who breaks bounds at night and dares the police and the perils of a Cathedral close, bears no small resemblance to Dodo, with virtue added. Would not so flighty a temper, trained by itself to Epicurean notions of the Highest Good, often leave out the virtue, which spoils the cup of pleasantness?"[55] But Grand, like Vesta Tilley's many admirers, found the beautiful young man—the pious, self-controlled Tenor—more attractive than any available model of masculinity. She dared to imagine female erotic pleasure in terms of two beautiful, androgynous youths coming together for music and intellectual talk. Moreover, Angelica was not as sexless as obtuse critics assumed; a few nights after her declaration in favor of dainty pleasures, emotions erupt metaphorically with the capsizing of their boat.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has suggested that Sarah Grand is wooing the Boy-Angelica through the Tenor as a means of speaking her own homosexual desire.[56] Grand thereby displaces the phallus, and the requirement of fixed gender identity for sexual pleasure. Since Grand had already destabilized gender in her passive Tenor and active heroine, further gender switching obviously becomes possible. The delights of food, warmth, conversation, and the Tenor's moral pedagogy repeat and subtly enlarge upon a Sapphic romance. Both the Tenor and the Boy are mysterious creatures of the night, without a past or a future; their love flourishes apart from the eyes of society, a thing unto itself. The Tenor's almost suicidal death prefigures countless lesbian novels which end tragically. The entire Interlude is suffused with an unfocused eroticism that finally gathers to a climactic moment on, and in, moonlit water—images that confirm a purely feminine desire writ upon Nature. The Tenor saves the Boy from drowning, reviving him through the heat of his own body, in a scene strongly reminiscent of a sexual climax:

> . . . he clasped the lad in his arms and pressed his cheek to his in a burst of grief and tenderness not to be controlled. He held him so for a few seconds, and it seemed as if in that close embrace, his whole being had expressed itself in love and prayer, for all at once he felt the Boy's limbs quiver through their clumsy wrappings, and then he

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> heard him sigh. Oh, the relief of it! The sudden reaction made him feel sick and faint. (Grand, p. 445)

What looks like a form of man-boy love can be read as a groping toward an expression of lesbian love. The Tenor and the Boy have a stereotypical male homosexual relationship which serves to cover the pervasive lesbian eroticism of the situation. At a time when a modern lesbian culture was just beginning to define itself publicly, the well-established contemporary male culture could have been a source of inspiration, however indirectly.

Notoriety had sold her books, but Sarah Grand craved respectability and social acceptance. Around 1900, accompanied by a Miss Harling, she moved into her stepson's home in the elegant spa of Tunbridge Wells. During her years there she headed a moderate suffrage society and lectured widely. She became well known for her ultra-feminine hats and stylish clothing.[57] Although several women were devoted to "Madame Grand," she left no evidence of reciprocating their passion; her public cause was sexually pure marriages. She insisted that her notorious novel was only intended to draw the public's attention to venereal disease; she did not comment on the Tenor and the Boy. She also claimed to have coined the phrase "New Woman," in an article written for the *North American Review*, "All I meant by the term 'new woman' was one who, while retaining all the grace of manner and feminine charm, had thrown off all the silliness and hysterical feebleness of her sex . . . I never could have meant the vulgar creature who now passes for the approved type of new woman. Woman was never meant to be developed man."[58] But what of the "silliness" of Angelica's cross-dressing? In the heady days of press attention, had she forgotten the death of her immaculate hero, the Tenor? Did a woman's unappeased desire for love and freedom bring only death?

Sarah Grand's charming women and refined marriages had little appeal to young suffragists determined to gain women's political rights during the years 1903–1913. These women, however, acted upon Angelica's dreams, both in their politics and their attire. Although the dominant image projected by such leaders as Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughter, Christabel, and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, was of unimpeachable high style, many of their followers adopted a more practical—more masculine—dress. Photographs of women who sold suffrage newspapers on the street show them dressed in tweed suits, sturdy boots and neat bow ties. Male impersonators had appropriated specific male symbols as short-hand for masculinity; they invariably sported such obvious phallic accoutrements as a cigarette or cigar, sword or walking stick, or, at the very least, a tie. Now suffragists all seemed to be wearing a version of a man's tie. Photos and illustrations of suffragists invariably include a woman with a tie. It spoke of political and sexual independence—and made a woman fair game for lewd jostling and obscenities.[59]

In the eyes of male journalists, medical men and most politicians, suffragists were assumed to be usurping male power, both in the bedroom and Parliament.

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Lesbian innuendo was pervasive. Rumors abounded about Emmeline Pankhurst's close relationship with the mannish composer, Ethel Smyth. Commentators spoke darkly of the undue influence of the "female celibate pedagogue" and medical men warned against the contagion of inversion.[60] To outsiders, some women flaunted their sexual preference. Ethel Smyth was the most egregious example, but Cecily Hamilton and Edy Craig, known for their lesbian proclivities, also wore tweed skirts, shirts, jackets, and flowing bow ties.[61] Theirs was a softer version of Radclyffe Hall's more elaborate masculinity (fig. 3), but just as obviously drew attention to their sexual independence. Both women contributed their theater expertise to the Cause, writing and producing suffrage plays, training volunteers for numerous events, and master-minding vast, colorful pageants and marches. These women and others provided confirmation of pre-existing assumptions about politically active women. The popular novelist, Marie Corelli, dismissed the suffragists with the comment "No man likes to be libellously caricatured and a masculine woman is nothing more than a libellous caricature of an effeminate man."[62] What an earlier generation had left implicit was now explicit: the effeminate male homosexual (fig. 7) and the ravening lesbian harridan (fig. 9) endangered society.

Lisa Ticknor has described how long-standing iconographic shorthand, familiar from *Punch*, the music halls, and comics, was used to portray the suffragist as an older, unattractive spinster with either a vindictive or excitable nature.[63] Anti-suffragists rewrote theatrical male impersonation, turning fantasy into a savage burlesque. Young women in particular needed male protection, lest they fall victim to a coarse, man-hating virago. The womanly woman could be saved only by the intervention of paternal authority. As figure 9 shows, this could be an open attack on the suffragist, portraying her as a hefty, ugly "dame," in danger of leading astray the vulnerable "principal boy" girl in the background. The alluring principal girl with her whip in hand, so attractive to the young, heterosexual E. H. Shepard, became a domineering deviant or an endangered girl in need of male guidance.

The viciousness of this attack on suffrage women in Parliament, the press, and cartoons is a reminder that the positive expression of women's sexual desire, and specifically lesbian desire, was a dangerous imaginative act with potentially explosive political and personal consequences. Although early twentieth-century lesbians and suffragists successfully recuperated the theatrical transvestite as an expression of sexual independence, they did so at a price. Women who made political demands were identified as lesbians; the expression of lesbian desire evoked calls for political repression.[64] On stage and in fiction tastes changed as mannish women became associated with homosexuality. By 1920, when Vesta Tilley retired, the music hall was losing ground to cinema; she blamed the reluctance of young performers to train as hard as she had, but audiences preferred the realism of film to the natty exaggerations of the male impersonator. Sarah Bernhardt's style of acting had given way to Naturalism, which emphasized unaffected gestures and a subdued voice. Special effects, grandiose sets, and spectacle were out of place; theater-goers still went to see Bernhardt perform, but more as an icon of French

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9. "The Suffragette. Number 1 in a series of Present Day Types," *Bystander* (31 December 1913). Courtesy the Mansell Collection.

culture than for the content of the play. Sarah Grand's books drifted out of print. Modernism brought a new set of images—and new definitions of deviance.[65]

NOTES

1. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 9.
2. Garber, p. 17.
3. See their key essays, Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," and Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," both in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 294–306 and 307–20, respectively.
4. See David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) for a discussion of the heyday of traditional pantomime, featuring the brilliant clown, Grimaldi. Mayer argues that Grimaidi's extraordinary abilities froze pantomime for many years as a vehicle for ingenious staging and acrobatic display. For a psychoanalytic treatment of the principal boy, see Mayer's "The Sexuality of Pantomime," *Theatre Quarterly*, 4 (1974), 55–65.
5. E. H. Shepard, *Drawn from Memory* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 186.

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6. Tracy Davis discusses the male heterosexual fascination with legs and buttocks in "The Actress in Victorian Pornography," *Theatre Journal*, 41/3 (October 1989), 294–315.

7. Quoted in Charles N. Young, "Vesta Tilley Wears Masculine Attire Like a Seasoned Veteran," the *Boston Traveler* (Saturday, June 12, 1900), n.p. Vesta Tilley Clipping Files, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center. I am indebted to Geri Maschio for this reference.

8. See Peter Bailey, "Champagne Charlie: Performance and Ideology in the Music-Hall Swell Song," in *Music Hall: Performance and Style*, ed. J. S. Bratton (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1986), pp, 63–69. Bailey points out that Leybourne brandished "a bottle fitted with a device that exploded the cork to order, a final ejaculatory flourish whose *significance* I leave to the critical imagination of the reader," p. 63.

9. George Bernard Shaw felt that the principal boy retained too much of the male impersonator in her, complaining that he could not understand why she was "expected to be more vulgar than the principal girl, when she does not want to, and where there is not the slightest reason to suppose that anyone else wants her to." See his review of the 1897 Drury Lane production of *Aladdin*, reprinted in *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1932), III, 24.

10. J. S. Bratton traces Jenny Hill's shift from raucous defense of the working-class version of the swell, " 'Arry," to her more pathetic, but still subtly subversive newsboys. See her "Jenny Hill: Sex and Sexism in Victorian Music Hall," in Bratton, pp. 92–110.

11. Bratton has argued that Vesta Tilley is an unrepresentative example of the male impersonator in "Irrational Dress," *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850–1914*, ed. Vivien Gardner and Susan Rutherford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 82. She also cautions against interpreting male impersonators as either lesbians or as a source for lesbian self-presentation.

12. Lady de Frece [Vesta Tilley], *Recollections of Vesta Tilley* (London: Hutchinson, 1934), p. 124.

13. "American Tailors Would Never Satisfy This Little English Girl," the *Boston Traveler* (Saturday, June 12, 1900), n.p. Vesta Tilley Clipping Files, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

14. Jane Trales outlines these characteristics in "Jones and the Working Girl: Class Marginality in Music-Hall Song, 1850–1900," in Bratton, pp. 23–48.

15. Chorus to "For the Sake of the Dear Little Girls," De Frece, p. 132.

16. Chorus to "Oh! You Girls!" De Frece, p. 133.

17. See Richard Ellmann's section, "Disgrace," in *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage, 1988), pp. 435–524. See also Jeffrey Weeks, "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulations of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), pp. 195–211.

18. See Bailey, pp. 64–65 for a discussion of Nelly Power's career parodying George Leybourne.

19. See the Vesta Tilley Clipping Files, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center. The illustrations of fashionable men are in the style of Charles Dana Gibson's "Gibson Girls."

20. Bratton, "Irrational Dress," p. 87.

21. M. Willson Disher, *Winkles and Champagne: Comedies and Tragedies of the Music Hall* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1938), p. 78.

22. Quoted by Elaine Aston, "Male Impersonation in the Music Hall: The Case of Vesta Tilley," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 4 (August 1988), p. 255.

23. De Frece, pp. 233, 235.

24. But see Suzanne Moore's discussion of male models in contemporary advertisements in "Here's Looking at You, Kid!" in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshmont (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1989), p. 17.

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25. Aston, "Male Impersonation," p. 255.

26. I quote Naomi Schor's paraphrase in "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand," *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 306.

27. De Frece, p. 126.

28. See Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), pp. 21, 131–32. See also Katrina Rolley, "Cutting a Dash: The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge," *Feminist Review*, 35 (Summer 1990), pp. 54–66.

29. Aston, "Male Impersonation," p. 252.

30. See Lorraine Gamman, "Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze," in Gamman and Marshmont, p. 17.

31. Biographies of Bernhardt are legion. See Gerda Tarnow, *Sarah Bernhardt: The Art within the Legend* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) and Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *The Divine Sarah: The Life of Sarah Bernhardt* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991). For an analysis of her theatrical innovations and influence, see John Stokes, "Sarah Bernhardt," *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in Her Time*, John Stokes, Michael R. Booth, and Susan Basnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and see Tarnow, p. 211.

32. The critical response to Bernhardt's numerous *travesti* roles—nine in the first thirty-two years of her career and eighteen in the last twenty-seven—are recounted in many biographies. The best summary is Tarnow, pp. 210–27. Bernhardt's description of her three Hamlets as strong minds in weak bodies comes from her *The Art of the Theatre*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Geoffrey Bles, n.d. [1929]), p. 141.

33. Alfred de Musset, *Lorenzaccio*, in *The Complete Writings of Alfred de Musset*, trans. Edmund Burke Thompson (New York: privately printed, 1905), IV, 37. The play was considered closet drama until Bernhardt shortened it and altered the ending, so that it concludes by turning the immoral anti-hero Lorenzo's assassination of the Duke of Florence into a heroic call for republican liberty. De Musset's pessimistic ending concludes with the death of Lorenzo and the re-establishment of tyranny. It is unclear whether Bernhardt's acting version survives.

34. In *Pelleas and Melisande* (1904) she played opposite the leading English star of the time, Mrs. Patrick Campbell; this performance was more acceptable because the dream-like quality of the play made courtship both more romantic and less offensive to the prudish. See Elaine Aston, *Sarah Bernhardt: A French Actress on the English Stage* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 124–26.

35. Max Beerbohm and George Bernard Shaw, both passive young men anxious to make their own names, poked fun at Bernhardt's *travesti* heroes. See the former's *Around Theatres* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1924), pp. 34–37, 151–54, 331–33. For the latter, see *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, I, 147–54, III, 170–77.

36. Edmond Rostand, *L'Aiglon*, trans. Basil Davenport (New York: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 287.

37. May Agate, *Madame Sarah* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1945), p. 124.

38. De Frece, pp. 234–35.

39. Una Troubridge's unpublished essay, "Hero-Worship," quoted in Baker, p. 63.

40. Lady [Emilia Francis] Dilke, *The Book of the Spiritual Life, Including a Memoir of the Author* by the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Dilke, Bt. M. P. (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 31. I am indebted to Kali Israel for this reference.

41. George Wickes describes the contents of *Quelques Portraits—Sonnets de femmes* in *The Amazon of Letters: The Life and Loves of Natalie Barney* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1976). pp. 45–46. The volume has never been reprinted.

42. Quoted and translated in Wickes, p. 40.

43. Liane de Pougy, *My Blue Notebooks*, trans. Diana Athill (London: André Deutsch, 1979), p. 111. She also mentions another connection between Bernhardt and lesbians: "Sarah Bernhardt tried again and again to tear a beloved niece away from those circles and those

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habits, she reasoned with her, she gave her an allowance, she took her to America, she put her into plays. Nothing worked. Dinner jackets and love nests, short hair and the style of an invert" (pp. 110–11).

44. See page 403. *The Sketch* does not identify whom the Marquis is imitating, but theater-goers of the day would never have missed the visual reference.

45. H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), pp. 153–54. He had married his cousin, Lilian Chetwynd, who left him on their honeymoon and received a decree of nullity.

46. De Frece, p. 125. According to Hyde, p. 154, the sale of his jewelry and clothes (mostly women's or, like his vests, effeminate) raised £88,000 for his creditors, but he had debts of over £500,000.

47. Gilles Barbedette and Michel Carassou, *Paris Gay 1925* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1981), p. 66. See also the illustration of Weber in costume, opposite page 255.

48. Tarnow, p. 221, cites nine parodies of *L'Aiglon* alone, with at least a dozen more based on her other successes.

49. The reviewer in the *Quarterly Review* tempered his diatribe against the novel long enough to praise "its single artistic episode, the friendship between the Tenor and the supposed Boy." As offended as he was by Grand's frank discussion of venereal disease, her strong-minded women and tirades against the male order, he praised this section as the only one containing true sentiment. Of course, a middle-class theater audience preferred sentimental love over sexual conquest, so his praise is not surprising after a century of pantomimes. See "The Strike of Sex," *Quarterly Review*, 179 (1894), 295.

50. Anne Freadman in her essay, "Of Cats, and Companions, and the Name of George Sand," in *Grafts*, ed. Susan Sheridan (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 125–26, discusses this same disjunction between Sand's successful passing as a male student and the numerous illustrations of her in trousers, all of which accentuate her femininity.

51. See Lorraine Gamman's reading of *Cagney and Lacey* in "Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze," in Gamman and Marshmont, pp. 15–17.

52. "Fiction and Friction," *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 90.

53. These characteristics are described by Edward Brongerma, "Boy-Lovers and Their Influence on Boys: Distorted Research and Anecdotal Observations," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 20 (1990), 145–71. This is a special double issue on male intergenerational intimacy.

54. Randolph Trumbach discusses the gradual rejection of this initiation period in England, and attributes it to the rise of the affective, egalitarian family. See his essay, "Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries Compared," in Dennis Altman, et al., *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1989), pp. 150–55.

55. F. W. Barry, "The Strike of Sex," *Quarterly Review*, 179 (1894), 300.

56. In conversation with me, March 1991.

57. Gillian Kersley, *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend* (London: Virago, 1983), pp. 99–100, 111. Her "devoted friend" is Gladys Singers-Bigger, whom she met in 1925, after she had moved to Bath. It is a classic example of an unrequited romantic friendship.

58. Quoted in Athol Forbes, "My Impressions of Sarah Grand," *The Lady's World*, II, 21 (June 1900), 883.

59. Policemen often stuck their nightsticks up women's skirts, both to expose them and to hurt them. These and similar incidents are described in Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 262–68.

60. Ethel Colquhuon, "Modern Feminism and Sex-Antagonism," *Quarterly Review*, 219 (1913), 155, and Walter Heape, *Sex Antagonism* (London: Constable, 1913), pp. 206–14. See

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also Sir Almroth E. Wright, *The Unexpurgated Case against Woman Suffrage* (London: Constable, 1913), which argues that women could not lead the country because they suffered temporary monthly insanity.

61. See Cicely Hamilton's unrevealing autobiography, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent, 1935) and *Edy: Recollections of Edith Craig*, ed. E. Adlard (London: Frederick Muller, 1949) and J. Melville, *Ellen and Edy: A Biography of Ellen Terry and Her Daughter, Edith Craig, 1847–1947* (London: Pandora, 1987). Edy and her partner were friends with Radclyffe Hall and her partner.

62. Quoted from Marie Corelli's *Woman,—or Suffragette?* in Lisa Ticknor, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 198.

63. Ticknor, pp. 162–74. See especially her astute discussion of the hysteric.

64. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet, 1977), pp. 106–107 for a discussion of efforts to criminalize lesbian sexual acts in 1920–21.

65. Special thanks to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who critiqued an early version of this essay in detail, and who has contributed so much to my thinking about the construction of the modern lesbian, and to Claire G. Moses who read a later version and suggested ways to recast it. I am also indebted to Nina Auerbach, Robyn Cooper, Anne Herrmann, Phyllis Rackin, Marlon Ross, and Laurence Senelick, and my NEH Summer Seminar (1992). I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a fellowship that gave me time to write the final draft.

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ELEVEN

"I Am the Woman for Spirit"

A Working Woman's Gender Transgression in Victorian London

Camilla Townsend

One June day in 1865, a woman from the mile end section of London wrote a letter to a shoemaker in Shoreditch. "I know Caroline would come and see me often, but you keep her away, as she is very submissive, and you do not care how hard she slaves, like some poor drudge of a servant. If you loved her you would not allow it. . . . Since you have had her you have broke her spirit. If the dinner is not ready to a minute, look at the agitated state she is in, frightened almost to death. As I told you last Sunday, I am the woman for spirit." We have Sarah Geals's letter today only because it was preserved in the transcription of her trial at the Old Bailey: not long after writing the note, she attempted to shoot James Giles, a shoemaker, and was apprehended. In the course of the proceedings it came out that she had lived in the guise of a man for over twelve years and had been ostensibly married to Caroline. After they were discovered by James, who was Sarah's employer, Caroline married him, and Sarah resumed the dress of a woman. Relations between all three deteriorated drastically over the next two years until they finally found themselves in court (*Proceedings of the Central Criminal Court* 421–25).

Sarah's story deserves to be told, not only because it involves acts of daring and determination for which we often commemorate more famous people, but also because it was part of important mid-Victorian cultural changes. Each of these two motives for writing requires a narration at variance with that demanded by the other: Sarah's life, and the issues it raises, must be presented in at least two different ways if they are to be understood at all. Her life was a story in which she was the main character, her hopes and her anger speaking eloquently to anyone who has ever wanted to be different, to be courageous. But her life was also part of a larger cultural system in which she herself was not the beginning or the end, in which her intentions were almost irrelevant, and her acts significant in myriad ways beyond her control.

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On the one hand, a few flattened pages found in the Sessions papers of London's Central Criminal Court have preserved some of the utterances and recorded some of the experiences of a brave and frightened working woman. The shreds of evidence found in the court papers can be held up to the light offered by newspapers, city directories, prison records, and studies of artisans in order to try to piece together the life and thoughts of this remarkable human being. On the other hand, the same trial transcription has recorded a cultural performance which was sparked by the public discovery of Sarah, but in which she herself had almost no role. The transcript can be placed next to the texts of journalists and broadsides in order to study the shifting attitudes toward gender transgression and class in the mid-Victorian period. Sarah's trial provides an opportunity to study representations of cross-dressing and gender identity in her society, while she herself recedes as subject.

In an effort to underscore the tensions between two styles in which we write history, I will write about Sarah twice. The differences between our predominant methodologies are profound, even disturbing if left unspoken. We can write about agency, about an individual's choices and decisions—and yet render them insignificant if they are divorced from an understanding of cultural production. Or we can present complex cultural analyses and not evince the least interest in people themselves—without which interest there is no need for us to study history. Only in my conclusions do I attempt to reconcile the two approaches, not by fusing them—for that, I suspect, cannot be done—but by demonstrating their importance to each other. Nothing about Sarah's life or the cultural issues it raises provides a sense of closure.

I. SARAH

The story of Sarah's life opens in 1824, in some section of England remote from London. All that we know of her in the years before the shooting comes from the trial transcription—certainly a problematic source, filtered as it is through the legal apparatus. Held up against other types of historical evidence, however, and viewed from a variety of angles, the transcription allows us to piece together many parts of a puzzle. We must be patient with the evidence, drawing out as much as possible without declaring sure knowledge where we have no right.

It was during Sarah's early years that someone taught her to use a gun. She also learned to read. She was close to her brother and remained in touch with her mother even as an adult. We don't know if she knew her father but she may have learned her trade as a shoemaker in a family workshop at home, as this was still a common practice at the time. During the 1830s, as Sarah grew up, the average manufacturing worker was not yet in a mill or factory, but in a small workshop or at home. The largest group of these workers did textile outwork; the second largest, the shoemakers, still considered themselves artisans (Thompson 234 and Snell). Such categories and concepts were rapidly changing, however, as industrial

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mass production came to rely more and more on unskilled, replaceable labor. The hemmed-in artisans hotly contested such changes through radical movements where they articulated their anger at having their trade given over to such groups as low-paid women. Shoemakers were particularly radical in their discussions and protests (Hobsbawm and Scott 86–114):

> Specific problems varied from place to place . . . but it is undeniable that the trade as a whole was politicized. Thus a young journeyman experienced strikes and participated in discussions of alternate political and economic systems as he acquired his skills. [Even] those who ended up in small village shops knew about Jacobinism and carried radical ideas from cities to small towns. (Hobsbawm and Scott 105)

Among their political causes was the need for men to receive a family wage. James Giles would later say about Sarah: "I paid her regular wages, the same as the men working the same capacity. I had no idea she was not a man." He implied what was almost certainly the case: that had he known, he would have ranked her labor as unskilled and paid her less.

In the same years as Sarah might have begun to wish that *she* could get a family wage, she almost certainly heard a number of popular stories about famous and infamous women who had transformed themselves into men and thereby earned handsomely. One historian's reading of *The Times* and *The Weekly Dispatch* in the 1830s and '40s has revealed stories of women who dressed as men so they could work in the positions of bricklayer, sawyer, buttonmaker, groom, ballad seller, and horse thief (Clark). Several were sailors and criminals, and some had popular broadsides written about them. ("She done her duty like a man, did reef and steer we are told" ["Gallant"]). Many songs about such heroines also survived from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when cross-dressing women had been even more numerous.[1]

Sometime in the late 1840s, when Sarah was in her mid-twenties, she began to call herself William Smith and to dress as a man. At that time, she must have moved to London, and may have apprenticed herself to a shoemaker if she had not already learned the trade from her family. We do not know if she arrived with Caroline or not. One reporter would later claim that she had been married to a man, but if she ever was, the marriage must have been brief; it was never mentioned again. Her transformation was similar to that of most cross-dressers in its timing: when such events were more common, the women had almost always changed their identities between their late teens and mid-twenties, which were the years when they were expected to look out for themselves economically (Van de Pol and Dekker 13).

We do not know how much of a strain the impersonation was for Sarah. It would have been especially difficult to play "William" with serenity at first, before she had years of people's assumptions on her side: she was less likely to fear discovery by a person who had known her as a man for years and who knew other people who knew her as a man. We do not know if she believed that disclosure

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would bring down violent retribution from her neighbors, or cause the loss of her income and status and social niche. Fear of discovery certainly did not apply to everybody: her past was not a secret from everyone. Her brother knew about her choice and supported her; possibly her mother did as well, if a reporter who mentioned this spoke the truth. And before long, she was definitely living with Caroline, who posed as her wife and clearly knew she was a woman.

The two left no written record of their feelings for each other, but in the letter Sarah later wrote to James, she implied that although he apparently didn't really love Caroline, she, Sarah, certainly did. They never claimed that they were brother and sister, which would have left Caroline free to marry, but rather husband and wife. Although we do not know if they had a sexual relationship, they lived intimately for over twelve years, and together worked out what that intimacy meant, stretching it to include personal and social bonds beyond those which they had been taught women ought to share. They lived together in a small house in Shoreditch, an old industrial area, known at that time for furniture-making and silk-weaving. In the 1850s it became massively overcrowded, due to displacement caused by railway extensions and street widenings. Caroline had to be a resourceful housekeeper; Sarah managed to continue to pay the rent so that they could go on living in a place of their own, rather than moving into lodgings where they would have shared rooms with others. She found work as a "clicker," cutting out boots and shoes, which carried high status in the shoe industry. Most of her business for over ten years consisted of outwork and some shopwork for James Giles, who was a master shoemaker on Hackney Road, listed as a "wholesale shoe manufacturer" in the Post Office Directory. He employed several men onsite and more offsite, still a common arrangement. Apparently, Sarah and Caroline were relatively content. While most working-class husbands and wives did not generally socialize in public together, they went out walking. James himself said, "I knew nothing of their private affairs, or whether they lived comfortably together. I never heard anything to the contrary."

Then in January of 1863, Mrs. Giles took to her bed with a severe illness. As many other men of his time had done, James decided to "borrow" a much needed nurse and housekeeper. He asked William Smith if his wife could come and tend to things. ("I very seldom saw Caroline before that, but I proposed for her to wait on my wife, because it was handy and she could come at once.") Caroline came. Three days later, Mrs. Giles died. Caroline returned home, but continued to go during the day to organize the household of the bereft James. At some point during the next several months, James discovered that William was a woman, in a way that he apparently wished to forget: "It was three months after my wife's death that Caroline communicated to me the prisoner's sex. . . . I do not know how." We do not know if Caroline let the secret out accidentally, or came to trust James, or told him on purpose so that she could leave Sarah. Once he found out, however, he discharged Sarah, ordered that she dress as a woman, and insisted that Caroline marry him. Caroline did so, but they struck a bargain first: if Sarah dressed as a

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woman, James was to set her up in a retail shop, and the two women were to be allowed to spend Sundays together, their traditional day of leisure. James agreed to this, and began by keeping his part.

There are several possible reasons for Caroline's actions. She may have thought the new situation would be economically advantageous for both Sarah and herself. She may have feared exposure, or have been threatened by James, who could apparently be violent. (She was "frightened almost to death" of him, according to Sarah, which was not unreasonable, as he once held Sarah herself until her arms were "black and blue.") Or she may have been tired of feeling different, wishful of being a real "wife."

The next chapter in the adventures of the trio is quite complicated, and the evidence not exactly clear. Caroline and James were married, with only Sarah and Sarah's brother in attendance at the wedding. Sarah was set up in a shop on Bow Street. After two years of Sunday dinners at the Giles's—which sometimes went well and sometimes were quarrelsome, according to all parties—James said he decided that Sarah's retail shop was not profitable enough and should be closed. He felt that he dealt with her kindly: "I saw that she was placed in respectable apartments, and acted to her like a brother." According to the Post Office Directory of 1863, these "respectable apartments" were apparently a row of tenements owned by a single landlord. Rooms such as these were often inhabited by prostitutes, who had few economic alternatives. It seems Sarah ended up in the setting she most wished to avoid, boarding in a room crowded with destitute single women. The postscript at the end of her dramatic letter suggests that she was experiencing severe need now that she could no longer earn a man's salary: "Tell Caroline to bring or send me a few shillings. I will pay her again."

Sarah claimed that Giles came to her shop one Sunday morning—as he often did to check her books—and threatened her; she implied that he tried to or did rape her. "You know what I mean," she wrote. "The affair that has taken place between us at Bow." James insisted that the only disturbance that day occurred between Sarah and Caroline. "There was a little disturbance between her and my wife that morning, but I was out. . . . There has never been any improper intimacy between us." In either event, two days later he received an unsigned letter which was clearly from Sarah, a "woman for spirit." In it she said that their present troubles were all his fault, and suggested that he give her money (an attempt at blackmail, according to James) so that she could emigrate to the colonies, leaving it open to doubt whether she planned to depart with or without Caroline. "I have been thinking of our quarrel, but you were the cause, and not Caroline. . . . The best thing you can do is supply me with a few pounds, and I will go to New Zealand,[2] and then you will be rid of those you have acted so wrong to. I must have an answer to this."

Over a month went by and Sarah received no reply. One Monday evening she went to look for James in his shop. He was distributing outwork to his employees but Caroline, who lived in apartments attached to the worksite, came out. Sarah

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asked the foreman if Giles was in. He heard her voice, emerged, and asked, "Well Sarah, what is your pleasure with me?" She aimed a pistol at his face. "That," she answered, and pulled the trigger.

The gun was loaded incorrectly, and did not even hurt him. She tossed it down and walked away. She headed for the "respectable apartments" off Mile End Road, a 20 minute walk for someone who knew the byways of the East End. James had been thoroughly traumatized, and it was some time before he pulled himself together to summon a policeman. He gave the officer Sarah's address, where she was apprehended without difficulty. The policeman said, "I asked her if she knew the charge against her—she said yes, and was quite satisfied to come any place with me." She was brought to the Worship Street police station, where she was searched, and a note was made that she was sober. She was arraigned the following day with James and Caroline present. After James spoke, the justice asked Sarah if she wished to say anything. "No, nothing just at present," she replied. Later she did try to make a statement, but then she was silenced. Though the judge might have decided to try her at the local level, he decided that the case was important enough to be sent on to the Central Criminal Court. She was brought to Newgate to await trial at the Old Bailey.[3] The infamous Newgate had been renovated at the end of the eighteenth century, and was considered slightly less "sinister" than it had been, but the cleaner, more isolated cells could not have calmed Sarah's feelings. Records indicate that she had never been tried before for any crime; she could not have known what to expect, although she did know that outside the prison wall, executions still took place.[4]

Sarah may have received written communications from Caroline, as the court authorities suspected that she had. (We do not know if Caroline could write, but she could certainly have dictated a note.) Outside, there was a flurry of talk about Sarah in the East End and elsewhere, as all the major newspapers briefly covered her case. It took two months for her case to come up, although legally it should have been called after one. On Wednesday morning, September 20, Sarah was escorted to a cell in the neighboring Sessions house which would open into the court when the officials were ready. She did not have long to wait, as she was called first that morning. Emerging into the Second Court, she saw the presiding justice, the Recorder of London, and the box filled with jury members and the balcony for the audience. (It was only five years since the court had stopped charging an admittance fee to the public, as if each Session were a show, and the Old Bailey still had a reputation for providing excellent entertainment [O'Donnell 16].) The charge against her was read. The defense had had it divided into two separable offenses: "Feloniously attempting to discharge a loaded pistol at James Giles, with intent to murder him. Second count: with intent to do him some grievous bodily harm."

James was the first witness. He recounted his story, emphasizing how hard he had tried to help the prisoner regain her rightful identity until she committed the supreme act of ingratitude. He acknowledged the evidence of her letter, which he

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considered to be in his favor. During the cross-examination, he admitted that as far as he knew the prisoner had never mistreated Caroline. He could not explain why Sarah had pretended to be Caroline's husband.

The defense then called two employees of the shop and the police officer who had been summoned. All corroborated that the pistol had been loaded incorrectly. This was strange, as James himself had admitted that Sarah definitely knew how to use firearms. Then the defense called other acquaintances who had known the prisoner while she was still William, and they warmly insisted that she had always had an excellent character. Apparently the efforts of the defense did not make much impression on the judge: he instructed the jury as to the gravity of the prisoner's crime, but added that if they believed she had merely intended to frighten or threaten the complainant, they might find her guilty of the second count only.

Sarah and Caroline did not participate in the trial, and Sarah herself never spoke. It would have been unusual to have deprived her of the opportunity to make a statement, and so it is possible that she chose not to, as she had before. Her presence, however, was clearly felt. Her letter to James and another note were read, and the reporters were fascinated by her. Caroline probably did not attend, but she must have appeared a vital figure to everyone: she had been active in both unions, and even now James did not have absolute control over her. When asked if she had written to Sarah during her imprisonment of the last two months, he admitted that she might have.

The jury returned, and pronounced the prisoner guilty on the second count only. The judge then sentenced her to five years penal servitude. That this was harsh is clear only in context. Later that morning, after Sarah had returned to her cell, the same judge issued three more sentences: a man who had run over a child and killed her received nine months; a man who had killed another man in a fight received twelve; a man accused of rape was released. Sarah was removed to Millbank prison. When the door closed behind her she walked down a corridor of stone, steel, and iron. Her hair was cut as short as it had been when the world believed she was a man. She was weighed, measured, bathed, uniformed, and entered in the great ledger: "Sarah Geals—41—single—reads: imperfectly—trade: clicker—convicted: 18 September 1865—Central Criminal Court—crime: 'Attempting to shoot a person'—sentence: Five PS" (*Millbank Register*).[5] She was brought to her cell, and perhaps presented with her first labor assignment right away. She was going to have to accustom herself to sewing or picking threads from ropes for ten hours every day, separated from the other inmates for the first several months.

The new penal servitude system required an intensely close supervision of time and space, designed to monitor the prisoners' every move so as to encourage their reform, rather than allowing them to continue any of their old habits, however small. Labor, meals, and prayer were organized to fill every moment of the day, with an hour for walking in circles in a small courtyard. Talking was generally forbidden, but the women found ways to communicate by writing notes on paper meant to light their lamps and by tapping messages on the corrugated iron roofs

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of their cells.[6] According to prison records, most of Sarah's fellow inmates were in for larceny; no one else was listed with a masculine trade. On February 9 of the next year she was taken to Brixton, where prisoners were allowed to associate more, the next step for females in the system of graduated privileges based on good behavior. Every three months, the matrons entered a progress report on the prisoners in their ledger. Sarah's always said exactly the same thing: "Surgeon's report: good. Behavior: good" (*Brixton Register*).

She stayed at Brixton longer than most. As the months slipped away, those who had arrived earlier completed their terms, or were sent on to Fulham Refuge for good behavior or even received "tickets of leave" allowing for early release. A few sickened and died and more and more went "mad" (there was cholera in the city in the late 1860s, and Brixton and other female prisons were known in these years for the spreading of "insanity" among the inmates). On February 5, 1869, after serving three-and-one-half years of her term, Sarah received her own ticket of leave. It was the maximum ticket she could have received, issued only to those whose behavior matched the wardens' vision of an ideal prisoner. Apparently she had had no quarrel with those women.

We cannot know where Sarah went on the day she was let out, or what she was thinking: she receded into unrecorded history, from which she had only briefly emerged for having broken a law. We do, however, have some clues about her personality. We know from the style of her letters that her manner was brusque and forceful. Although the court clerk who did the transcription probably corrected spelling and grammar, the content and tone must have been her own, for her letters read very differently from the rest of the trial transcription. Consider her closing lines, which demonstrate a measure of internalized respect for James's power, but even more notably, deep anger and assertiveness: "This is not Caroline's fault but yours, sir. Remember. P. S. Sir: I want the answer." Her letters also indicate that she did not want a wifely role for herself or for the one she loved, as she viewed it as slavery and drudgery. She wanted to do different kinds of work from that generally assigned to women. Later she saw herself as being adventurous enough to sail away—perhaps harkening back emotionally to the songs about women who for generations had gone to sea as men. And later still, she chose to use a gun, conventionally a man's weapon. She herself believed that she was distinctive when she wrote, "I am the woman for spirit."

II. THE PERFORMANCES

Once Sarah had been caught and imprisoned, nobody seemed to be able to agree on what was to be done with her. "Had she been a man," inferred *The Times*, "doubtless the verdict would have been that her intention was to kill, but, as it was, they appeared to have thought that she was not aware of the effect she was likely to produce." *The Daily Telegraph* disagreed. "It was evident that she was a very violent and determined woman"; and it was "in the interest of society" that the

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judge "felt bound to sentence her to five years' penal servitude." *The Morning Herald* took an entirely different view and refused to say that Sarah should be blamed at all: "There could be no doubt that she felt disappointment in the loss of the society of her associate and companion, Caroline, toward whom a feeling of affection had been generated" (all comments from the papers of 21 September 1865).

Whatever Sarah was thinking or feeling, whatever she had intended to do when she shot at James, appeared quite irrelevant as the drama unfolded in the courtroom and the papers. Each observer commented from his own perspective, drawing on his own associations and assumptions within a cultural matrix in which Sarah herself was only an infinitesimally small point. The woman had committed two transgressions against authority—one in dressing and passing as a man in marriage though she had been born female, another in making a violent attack on a man in a higher station. No one, other than the judge, seemed much interested in the latter. Her contemporaries appear to have been interested almost exclusively in her cross-dressing, although she was on trial only for her attempted crime of violence. Even when forced to deal directly with the indictment and verdict, they never let drop the theme that "Sarah" had been "William" for so many years. Indeed, it is true that until the episode with the gun, gender was the single transgressive variable in her case. She did not reject the working-class lifestyle of her neighbors, or Christianity, or the concept of respectability. Reactions to the unusual life she had chosen were reactions to the transgression of gender expectations.

Given that all the commentators shared an interest in this topic, it is all the more noteworthy that their reactions arose in discordant cacophony. The papers first covered the case on July 19, a day after Sarah's appearance in police court, and then again in September, after her trial. The papers with the most affluent readership were generally the most condescending, those with readers from the aspiring lower middle class the most harshly critical, and those of radical working-class organizations or working-class neighborhoods almost sympathetic.

In July, the elite *Pall Mall Gazette* placed a short paragraph about the case after an item on a donkey show, stating only that the prisoner had worked in the "disguise" of a man until she was discovered and discharged. "Since then, Geals seems to have considered herself aggrieved and went the other day to her late employer's shop and presented a pistol at him. Fortunately it missed its aim." *The Times* was slightly less distanced, allowing the case a long column and including the details of the story. The paper changed James's words a little, adding some moralizing statements which he never made in court: "I allowed her to come and live at my place. I both felt and acted toward her a great deal more like a brother than her own brother has done." After the actual trial in September, *The Pall Mall Gazette* summarized the case in a paragraph as short as their first one, this time including the fact that Sarah had been the "pretended husband" of Caroline, and adding that when James later married Caroline, "it appeared this annoyed the woman." *The Times* was if anything more condescending, describing Sarah as a "spinster" guilty of "fraud":

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His Lordship, in sentencing the prisoner, told her that the jury had taken a very lenient view of her case. Had she been a man, accustomed to firearms, doubtless their verdict would have been that her intention was to kill, but, as it was, they appeared to have thought that she was not aware of the effect she was likely to produce with such a weapon and such a charge.

Two papers with a less elite but still lower-middle-class readership of upwardly mobile workers reprinted or expanded on the first article from *The Times*, but they treated it as a more important news item; in September, after the details of the trial were available, hostility began to outweigh condescension in their reports. *The Illustrated Times*, a weekly which sold for 5d, featured large graphics and direct language, and which might have been read by less serious clerks as well as by the wives and children of readers of *The Times*, gave the story its first catchy headline, "Another Female Husband" (thereby also indicating that the case was not unique). In September, the same paper said that the case was "worthy of permanent record among the curiosities of crime" and that a "morbid jealousy" had induced Sarah to "attempt murder."

The Daily Telegraph, which also appealed to employees on the lower rungs of the middle class (clerks, engineers, fine needleworkers, and the "small capitalists" addressed in the ads) added an element of slapstick humor to the complainant's statement, reminiscent of the gender confusion in broadsides or plays from an earlier period:

"My wife being ill, I asked her (the prisoner) to let her wife—no, his wife—come and nurse her. She did come, and stated that she was this woman's (the prisoner's) wife. Shortly afterwards my wife died, and then it came to my knowledge that William Smith was not a man, but a woman."

By September all derision in such papers had given way to hostility. The journalist seemed to feel that there was more to fear from Sarah and her potential cohorts. Almost all reporters, having seen Sarah at the Old Bailey, commented on her "masculine" physical appearance, but the writer for *The Daily Telegraph* went further: "Owing to the singular nature of the case, it must be stated that the prisoner had the appearance of a mulatto, was short and stout, and evidently in possession of a 'very strong mind.' " This reporter later concluded: "Although she had received a very excellent character, yet it was evident that she was a very violent and determined woman, and, in the interest of society, [the judge] felt bound to sentence her to five years' penal servitude." That the writer (or writers) selected the adjectives "mulatto" and "strong-minded" made it almost unnecessary to say that Sarah was dangerous to society. If any readers were unmoved by the reference to the class of blacks known to be in the forefront of revolutions and rebellions in the Caribbean, such people would then have been made nervous by the allusion to the current term for the strident middle-class women, whose unnatural intellectual pride cut off feminine sensibilities and caused them to demand rights never meant to be theirs. (If images of hot and lusty people seemed diamet-

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rically opposed to those of cold and stiff women, they were at least similar in conveying a sense of danger.)

A very different reception awaited Sarah elsewhere. The radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* and *Lloyd's Weekly* both appeared on Sundays. Although in July they reprinted the same article as that found in *The Times*, they rendered it more important. In *Reynolds's*, the story appeared in the first edition at the top of the crime page, with the headline, "Singular Case of a Female Assuming Masculine Attire," and in *Lloyd's*, it was separated out of the other newspieces from the police courts and made into a full-length article: "Attempted Murder by Shooting: A Woman Working as a Man." In September, as the editors found out more, rather than becoming more hostile, they became more sympathetic. Taking an unusual step, they left the final quarrel and Sarah's supposed attempt at blackmail out of the story, depicting the shooting incident as the direct result of Sarah's need for revenge after James's marriage to Caroline. They thus allowed her to be a wounded lover rather than a lowly criminal.

It was, however, the local papers appearing in Sarah's old neighborhood, not the self-consciously radical papers, which went so far as to explicitly sanction Sarah's decisions. These newspapers sold for a penny or halfpenny in working-class areas, and some of their readers would have known Sarah, or "William Smith." Some gave short summaries of the city's news; others were only of local interest. They would have been published by aspiring tradesmen in the neighborhoods, who themselves might have read *The Daily Telegraph*, but their content was geared to the majority of Sarah's neighbors. *The Morning Herald* and *The Bethnal Green Times* added details which other papers had ignored, such as, "Prisoner was undefended." The closest attention was accorded in the Shoreditch weeklies. Although the issue died immediately in every other paper and received no reader response, in Shoreditch it was still being analyzed on July 29, over a week later. In *The Shoreditch Advertizer*, it was stated that Sarah had been driven to crime after being "deprived of the woman with whom she passed a lengthened companionship."[7] *The Shoreditch Observer* reported that her friends asserted in the police court that Giles no longer wanted to "press the charge harshly against her," that the shooting was not the "result of premeditation," and that her "friends would see that she was taken care of." The reporter then threw in a bit of hearsay that may be a sample of what people in the streets said in order to explain to themselves how people they liked so much could have done something so unusual. "If report be correct, Caroline, who passed first for the prisoner's wife and is said to be a person of excellent character, and is now the prosecutor's wife, is the prisoner's mother. We do not vouch for the truth of this statement." Clearly people liked Sarah and wanted to find an acceptable "good" reason for her behavior: daughterly piety (dressing as a man in order to support her mother) served well. There was no basis in fact for this theory, as Caroline would then have had to be at least sixty when James, much younger, asked her to marry him.

In September those papers with local working-class readership evinced even stronger support for Sarah. Even papers which had largely reprinted the articles

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appearing in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* in July now chose not to. The editors of *The Morning Star* and *The Morning Advertizer*, among others, based their pieces this time on one which appeared in *The Morning Herald*. It was a long article, "The Pretended Man Case," introducing "Sarah Geals, of masculine proportions." It recounted all the details of the story and included in its conclusion the defense's proposition that, "There could be no doubt that Sarah felt disappointment in the loss of the society of her associate and companion, Caroline, toward whom a feeling of affection had been generated," and also that "all the prisoner had done was to frighten the prosecutor in order to obtain from him that assistance which the letter which had been read indicated."

These findings do not indicate that working-class readers had a uniformly supportive attitude. The excerpts indicate that some of the language used by such reporters was the same as that appearing in *The Times*. *The Bethnal Green Times* printed a long article on Saturday much like the one which had appeared in *The Morning Herald*, except that either for brevity's sake or because of an editorial preference, much of the positive commentary at the end was left out. The response was not monolithic, but it is important that even *The Bethnal Green Times* was like the other local papers in that it accorded the case serious consideration. Whether threatened, or respectful, or both—and most were both—not one working-class paper of any type was dismissive. Nor did they consider the case ghastly or titillating. Notably, the papers which were passed from hand to hand in the poorest areas were the least critical or condescending. The people who lived on Mile End Road were eager to buy *The Penny Illustrated Weekly News* or *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, replete with bloody crime stories and scandalizing facts. When almost every other city paper covered her case, neither mentioned her at all. Apparently the editors did not consider that the details would appear horrific to people on Mile End.

The sharp differences in the interpretation of Sarah's case stem from the nature of cross-dressing. In her recent work, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Marjorie Garber argues that cross-dressing is not an attempt to adopt a new identity. Instead, she says, it is in itself a desired and a necessary effect, a liminal state without which culture could not exist:

> Cross dressing is about gender confusion . . . about the phallus as constitutively veiled . . . about the power of women . . . about the emergence of gay identity. . . . All true, all partial truths, all powerful metaphors. But the compelling force of transvestism in literature and culture comes not, or not only, from these effects, but also from its instatement of metaphor itself, not as that for which a literal meaning must be found, but precisely as that without which there would be no such thing as meaning in the first place. (390)

Crossing borders makes them visible, borders between symbols make the symbols visible, and a shared culture, after all, is only a shared symbolic imagination.

This Lacanian analysis, while useful in explaining why Sarah's cross-dressing was fascinating to all reporters while her deliberate attempt to shoot a man was almost universally ignored, still does not help explain the dramatically different

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forms of fascination exhibited. While we might put together a common discourse from all the newspaper reports on Sarah's trial, demonstrating the centripetal force of the act of an otherwise obscure woman, we would still need to explain the reasons that these reports flatly contradict each other, and why they do so in clusters. These clusters, I believe, mark certain historically specific group tendencies; social and economic power was not evenly distributed, and the responses to Sarah's case marked that uneven distribution. This unevenness was given cultural shape in the emerging self-consciousness of the middle class. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have suggested, those farmers and townsmen who were more successful than others as the Industrial Revolution progressed gradually developed awareness of themselves as "middle class." They wanted a prominent, respected role in society to match their economic importance, and they claimed moral power for themselves by insisting upon the domestic ideal of active, independent men and protected, dependent women.

By the 1860s the "respectable" working classes, too, had supposedly seized upon ideas of "manliness" and "femininity," in imitation of their betters in the middle classes. To the extent that they did so, however, it was not so as to be obedient or because they shared a self-understanding with the middle classes, but because they perceived it to be expedient to their own goals. It is true that marriage and domesticity came to be required elements of life more than they had been previously. One historian has documented the transformation of an extensive common-law practice into a custom of teaching young girls, "Better a bad husband than no husband at all" (Gillis). These people were living under conditions of increasingly limited resources, in the midst of middle-class rhetoric about manly men supporting women. Small wonder that the demand for a "family wage" and the exclusion of women from trades, which we saw in shoemaking in the '30s, became general among working-class men. It is not surprising that many women unable to make ends meet came to espouse marriage and domesticity.

Yet they did not do so monolithically. They also protested against their husbands—early on in trade union halls, and continuously at home (Tomes).[8] Their lives continued to exemplify more tension within their roles than did the lives of middle-class women, who had more investment in domesticity, both economically and psychologically. If, as some have claimed, it was critical for middle-class women at this juncture to join with their husbands in formulating a culture of firmly distinct manliness and femininity in order to ensure their identity, it was equally important for working women to maintain the ability to alienate themselves from such a dependent identity if necessary in order to survive economically. They fought with men, dressed as men to perform some jobs, and even passed as men in their daily lives. Furthermore, although such women must certainly have faced potential and real hostility from their neighbors and co-workers, they also met with remarkable acceptance. Women became their companions. Brothers knew about their actions and approved. Male friends thought they were great companions even after they found out.[9]

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Far from ruthlessly suppressing gender transgression among themselves, many

members of the working classes may have preserved a flexible sense of gender roles in a way that middle-class women never could. A middle-class woman needed to reinforce her husband's prestige and therefore his success by underscoring her own feminine dependency. If a woman tried to take over a man's role, then she must be mad, or a drunkard, or a poor creature taken in by unorthodox feminist ideas. (Thus Sarah's middle-class defense attorney pursued an unproductive line of questioning. "Was it stated to you by others that the cause of this extraordinary conduct was a disappointment in marriage early in life?" It had not been. Was Sarah's mind affected? No, it was not. Was she prone to drinking? No, she was not. The barrister was mystified.) A working-class woman, on the other hand, more often than a middle-class woman, knew that she needed to defend her ability to survive economically. Many working-class women had to discard the idea of feminine dependency on men when it wasn't economically viable (some may never have embraced it in the first place) and so did not completely accept the idea that one's gender identity was inherently tied to one's body. One social role could be exchanged for another. To such women the idea was at least still worth arguing about and was not automatically laughable or disgusting. It was expedient to keep their options open.

To the more economically vulnerable working people, financial independence from charity was key to their own definition of "respectability." Thus Sarah's friends from her masculine days willingly testified on her behalf and insisted on her respectable character, and reporters from radical working-class papers eloquently defended her. The headline chosen by the radical *Lloyd's Weekly* is indicative of the emphasis placed on the labor she had done for years. Rather than referring to a "Female Husband" the article was called "Attempted Murder by Shooting: A Woman Working as a Man." On the other hand, while the genteel middle classes also praised hard work and the desire for economic independence, the latter was not considered nearly so important in a woman as the preservation of her femininity. They did not consider that cross-dressing should occur anywhere other than in romances. Thus the judge was unmoved by arguments that Sarah was respectable: he instructed the jury as to the gravity of the prisoner's crime, and after the verdict sentenced her to five years. His sentence was the minimum necessary for her to be removed from local prisons and sent to an institution for "penal servitude," where the judge thought, as did his contemporaries, that moral regeneration could occur.

Those in the courtroom who were caught in between the laboring and the genteel classes seemed to be harshest of all in their condemnation: the clerks, for example, and some journalists, who were struggling on the lower rungs of the middle classes and aspiring to rise, felt most keenly the shame of a working-class woman failing to live up to feminine dependency. They themselves were in the position of trying to emulate as closely as possible the lifestyle of the genteel, and by association, Sarah, grown from the unregenerate masses, might set them back. Such men on the jury found Sarah guilty; such reporters wrote that Sarah must be either mulatto or strong-minded, for she was certainly dangerous.

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Sarah's observers, however, were not only gazing at her from their various socio-economic positions and views of respectability. They were also gazing with avid interest from out the windows of their respective erotic imaginations and sexual associations. These sexual undercurrents were plural, not singular, and themselves contributed to the cacophony of interpretation. Sarah, too, must have experienced her actions as more than a method of supporting Caroline and herself. Garber suggests that Sarah's sympathetic contemporaries and modern day biographers do women like her a disservice in ascribing their cross-dressing solely to socio-economic or socio-political motives rather than to a basic erotic wish to cross-dress. "This conflation of economic, professional, and political desires with sartorial and sexual ones, a conflation that marked the early years of Victorian feminism and continues in some quarters today, was a way of stigmatizing lesbians, female cross-dressers, the poor, and the unconventional" (Garber 135; 45–46). While men who enjoy being men are understood to experience sexual arousal in wearing, for example, women's undergarments, women who wear men's undergarments are not envisioned as doing so for erotic reasons, but out of a sad and unfortunate (albeit understandable) desire to *be* men. It is almost impossible to find authentic expressions of a working woman's erotic experiences in Sarah's time and place, but it is possible that she thrilled to being a woman-seen-as-a-man-who-was-still-a-woman, rather than almost pathetically being a would-be man trapped in a female body. It does seem dangerous, however, to ignore the fact that the women were living in a context of superior male power and that thus their "economic and political desires" may well have been mixed with "sartorial and sexual ones" after all. Leonore Davidoff's analysis of the 1860s and '70s London diaries of Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick, for instance, show a master who delighted in his power over the servant who later became his wife, and a servant who delighted in begriming herself for the pleasure—and apparently increased love—of her "Massa." She dressed as a man when he wanted her to, and she worked on developing her biceps so he could measure them. She was so strong that she could lift him easily and carry him, and yet she gloried in being in his power. Despite all of this, however, the language of erotic humiliation never became Hannah's only language, though Arthur wanted it to. Although she shared some of the pleasure, Hannah understood their sexual games differently than her "master." Dirt was more than a symbol for her: removing it absorbed nearly all of her time.

Similarly, Sarah understood her actions and her sources of pleasure far differently than did James, the first male voyeur in her story. After discovering that she was a woman, he insisted on taking Caroline as his own, and on transforming Sarah by forcing her to adopt women's clothing. He was almost certainly titillated, for he continued to visit Sarah when she was alone in her shop on his day of leisure, until they had some sort of violent confrontation. Despite James's view that Sarah had done something deeply wrong, and that he was rehabilitating her with clothing and possibly with sexual attention—a view which many others in their society shared—Sarah continued to see herself as innocent and not in need of help.

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If men and women did not experience erotic liminal "games" in the same way, or even as equally pleasurable, given the differences in their experiences and relative power, it is important to add that all men did not approach these things in the same way, either. Outside their shared maleness, they, too, came from different positions. Here, again, class plays a critical role. The sexual imaginations and associations which elite men brought to Sarah's story seem to have been generally far different from those brought by working men and they thus shaped different reactions.

That the working-class papers did not condemn Sarah does not mean that working-class reporters or readers were simply more relaxed about gender bending. When Mary Newall, a contemporary of Sarah's, attempted in 1861 not only to pass as a man, but also robbed her male employer, the working-class public deemed that she had gone too far. She had not worked to support herself "respectably" *and* she had violated a man by putting on his boots and breeches and turning his house "near inside out." While Sarah's case was passed by, Mary was pilloried far and wide in broadsheets: "The Magistrate said, take her away / And pull off this lady's breeches."[10] Perhaps it was the violence in Mary's story which struck working men (and perhaps working women). Unlike Munby and other upper-middle-class elite men, writers in the working-class papers did not present pictures of dirty, sweating, working women as being especially arousing. After all, dirt in their readers' world was not taboo. Violence, on the other hand, did often appear in association with exciting scenes. Perhaps Mary Newall's real claim to notoriety lay in the fact that she brutally murdered her female self before becoming a man. So that people would believe her dead and not look for her, she covered a poker in bullock's blood and stuck onto it some of her own hair. It is possible that if Sarah had loaded her gun correctly, and aimed it directly at James's heart or brain or groin, she, too, might have been attacked mercilessly in popular song.

Perhaps because they had so much actual socio-economic power, middle-class men found it enjoyable—both arousing and humorous—to transform girls into boys and back again: thus Munby loved to photograph Hannah and others in men's clothing. They took this "game" beyond their encounters with working-class domestic servants or prostitutes. As Davidoff points out, "The power to create or transform another human being and in so doing reaffirm upper-middle-class masculine identity provided . . . the compelling attraction of rescue work as well as the rationale for the phenomenon of the child bride" (116). But these men also very much wanted to remain in control of the charade; they wanted it to be a lark. Munby expressed outrage in his journal that Mary Newall had laid her plans in all seriousness. *The Times* portrayed Sarah as having been amused, as if it were all a joke, at her first appearance in court in July, but after the trial, when it was clear that it had been no lark, the editors, as we have seen, became more hostile.

For many middle-class men, unlike for most working-class men, the fascination lay both in their ability to transform a girl's gender and back again, and in their ability to play at switching who should perform the dirtiest, hardest work. In the 1850s, for example, years before Sarah was discovered, *Punch* published a large

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two-page set of cartoon pictures in mockery of the idea of the bloomer, in which women who wear the new costume take on men's social roles, and men, also in pants, take on women's roles. Significantly, the two sexes do not simply take on the customary task of the opposite sex within their own station. Rather, most of the women are given the position of upper-and middle-class men: they drive sporty carriages and walk confidently down the street in snappy clothes and boots. Most of the men, on the other hand, have the jobs of working-class women. They scrub on all fours, carry and sell fruits and vegetables; one is even speaking to a woman in a street scene reminiscent of a prostitute soliciting a customer. Sarah's prosaic and long undiscovered and uncorrected daily life as a man made a mockery of the assumption that this idea was necessarily a joke: thus she made some of her viewers more than a little uncomfortable.

III. CONCLUSION

A variety of other working women from the decade of the 1860s planned to pass as men for the rest of their lives. Sometime in the 1850s, a girl younger than 15 arrived in London dressed as a boy and found work as a cab driver; she went on to pass for years as a male (*Times* 15 February 1875).[11] In 1861, Mary Newall decided to leave her master. She stole some clothes, and travelled to Yarmouth as a man, where she took lodgings. She was seen smoking cigars and courting her landlady before she was apprehended for theft. In 1865, Sarah was tried. Several weeks after her first appearance in court, a servant girl who may have been inspired by her case decided to run away in boys' clothes and go to sea (*Morning Herald* 19 July 1865). In 1867, Annie Hindle, a male-impersonating stage figure emigrated to the United States to continue her profession on- and off-stage; years later she actually married a woman (Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen, eds.). Mary Walker, a former sailor, railway porter, and barman, was arrested for begging in 1868 after her disguise was discovered and she was unable to find employment (*Morning Star* 31 March 1868).

It is highly unlikely that these women were unique. Two of them were only discovered because their economic circumstances reduced them to dependency on institutions, where there could be no secrets: it seems probable that they represented the tip of an iceberg largely unknown to the middle classes. That most of them were able to find companions who were willing to accept them as mates despite their rejection of femininity tells us that their culture did not produce women who uniformly accepted the idea that they must marry men.

Many people by the 1860s insisted that there were no longer any such women as Sarah, no passing cross-dressers; yet somewhere in the back of their minds they knew there were, for Sarah and others like her had appeared before them without waiting for permission. Sarah and other cross-dressing women affected genteel fears, impinged on what was said and left unsaid. Sarah and the other cross-dressers of the 1850s and 60s, as silenced as they were, still provided part of the

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context for later conflicts that became more vocal. It was shortly after this period that the widespread debates emerged over "inverts" and the corrupting influences of the "New Woman."

But to make Sarah's tale matter, it is not imperative to state that there were apparently many Sarahs; rather, it is imperative to describe the cultural systems in which she was enmeshed. Certainly without the latter, neither her decisions, nor her punishment, nor the types of attention she received make any sense. Less common is the idea that the cultural analyses themselves lose much of their power if we do not pay any attention to what Sarah experienced, or to what she might have said she was trying to do. Much of the most cogent recent work on gender transgression has deliberately omitted such a perspective.[12] It is true that Sarah's acts have no meaning without their surrounding cultural system. But it is also true that the cultural system has no importance and would never change were it not for Sarah—Sarah striding rapidly through the East End, strenuously pushing the limits of someone else's definition of the possible.

NOTES

1. Of the three hundred plays performed in London between 1660 and 1700, at least 89 contained roles for women wearing men's clothes. Many of these were about real women. In the 1750s, Hannah Snell even staged a sucessful review about her own life as a male sailor prior to her discovery by the crew. See Van de Pol and Dekker 94.
2. The papers of the period were filled with advertisements for cheap passage on vessels sailing to all destinations. It would be interesting to know why Sarah selected New Zealand.
3. These are the facts that all newspaper accounts of the police court session agree on, which are the only records of it available.
4. Although Sarah would not have known this, the first person to be hanged at that site, rather than at Tyburn, had been another woman cross-dresser, Nan Hereford, who had been arrested for thieving and executed in 1698 for setting fire to the prison (recorded in O'Donnell 107). The different treatment accorded a woman who could have been perceived as similar to Sarah indicates how significantly both reactions to female cross-dressers and concepts of punishment had changed in a century and a half.
5. "Reads imperfectly" was the most the keepers would allow any inmate, most entries stating that they read poorly or not at all.
6. There is extensive contemporary literature on the penal servitude system. For a sample in Sarah's period see *Parliamentary* 2: 171. The best theoretical discussion is still to be found in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. An excellent new work on the women's prisons is Zedner.
7. A week earlier, on July 23, the same paper had printed a positive and unusual piece about a woman farmer who wore bloomers. "People might call her coarse, rude, rough, but she was satisfied that she was right. She knew she was free."
8. For a later period and a different perspective, see Ross. For a starting point on studies of women's union activities, even when in conflict with men, see Taylor.
9. In addition to Sarah's character references, see *The Times* 6 January 1830, and 29 December 1839. Both Van de Pol and Dekker, and Wheelwright mention this phenomenon, and both discussed it further in their panel presentation "The Battle for the Breeches: Fe-

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male Cross-Dressing in Modern Europe," at the Eighth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Douglass College, 9 June, 1990.

10. The broadsheet, "Mary Newall, the Artful Girl of Pimlico" appears in Hindley's collection. Arthur Munby heard about her and went to view her at a court appearance. See his journal for 19 November 1861, in Hudson 110.

11. Arthur Munby's file on women cross-dressers in the Christopher Wren Library refers to this girl. Munby also records the uncovering of an Irish contemporary of this girl in Dublin. It is important that his file of clippings is filled mostly with the kind of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century examples mentioned earlier, and with foreign disclosures and articles on exotic girl gymnasts. These two contemporary bread-and-butter cases, similar to Sarah's, were apparently not the stuff of typical articles. Munby does have a handwritten note giving the names and discovery dates of at least eight women sailors in the 1860s, but does not give his source or tell anything more about them. Journal entries in 1866 indicate that he may have heard of them in conversations with former women sailors themselves. See Wheelwright 7.

12. See, for example, Poovey. For a study of high discourse around cross-dressing specifically, see Friedli. Several relevant articles also appear in the recent collection edited by Epstein and Straub.

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