

Where Love Happens

Changing Social Practices of Love in the Long Nineteenth Century

Edited by Helene Grøn,
Lene Østermark-Johansen and Viktoria de Rijke



PETER LANG

Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship between the Arts

Some decades ago, Jean-Luc Nancy asked, 'Has not everything been said on the subject of love? ... Could we perhaps be exhausted?' The question is a pertinent one; why devote yet another book to the subject? Grounding love in the realm of the concrete by querying, *where does love happen?*, the essays address hitherto under-researched aspects and aesthetics of love, like the love of the child, same-sex love, love of country, love for machines, controversial relationships, love of the dead, love of the past, and networks of relationships revolving around love and intimacy. Here, leading scholars suggest that changing social practices, developed in the course of the long nineteenth century, determined new spaces and places for love to happen, to unfold, develop – and break up. Thereby, the much-debated claim that romantic love is an invention of European Romanticism is challenged, asking if romantic love might not be less and other kinds of love far more romantic than at first imagined.

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ISBN 978-1-80374-550-3



9 781803 745503

www.peterlang.com

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CULTURAL INTERACTIONS
Studies in the Relationship between the Arts

Edited by J.B. Bullen

Volume 51



PETER LANG

Oxford • Berlin • Bruxelles • Chennai • Lausanne • New York

Helene Grøn, Lene Østermark-Johansen
and Viktoria de Rijke (eds)

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography;
detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Grøn, Helene, 1990- author | Østermark-Johansen, Lene, 1963- author

| De Rijke, Victoria author

Title: Where love happens : changing social practices of love in the long
nineteenth century / Helene Grøn, Lene Østermark-Johansen,
Victoria de Rijke.

Description: Oxford ; New York : Peter Lang, [2025] | Series: Cultural
interactions: studies in the relationship between the arts, 1662-0364 ;
volume 51 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025009810 (print) | LCCN 2025009811 (ebook) | ISBN
9781803745503 paperback | ISBN 9781803745510 ebook |
ISBN 9781803745527 epub

Subjects: LCSH: Love--History--19th century

Classification: LCC GT2630 .G76 2025 (print) | LCC GT2630 (ebook) |
DDC 152.4/109034--dc23/eng/20250805

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025009810>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025009811>

The book springs from a Danish research project generously funded by the Velux
Foundation entitled 'Where Love Happens: Topographies of Emotions in Nineteenth-
Century European Literature'.

Cover image:

Clare Atwood, The Dining Room at Smallhythe, c.1920. Oil on canvas, 550 x 495 mm.
Smallhythe Place, Kent, UK. National Trust Photographic Library/Bridgeman Images.

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Cover design by Peter Lang Group AG

ISSN 1662-0364

ISBN 978-1-80374-550-3 (print)

ISBN 978-1-80374-551-0 (E-PDF)

ISBN 978-1-80374-552-7 (E-Pub)

DOI 10.3726/b21993

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Published by Peter Lang Ltd, Oxford, United Kingdom

info@peterlang.com - www.peterlang.com

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This publication has been peer reviewed.

Dedicated to those we love.

Give me a mind in unison with my own and I'll find the way of happiness – without it, I should feel alone among multitudes; and all the world would seem to me a desert.

—Anne Lister in Muriel M. Green, ed, *Miss Lister of Shibden Hall: Selected Letters 1800–1840* (Lewes: The Book Guild Ltd., 1992), 87.

Which owes the other most? my love was long,
And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
And loved me for what might or might not be –
Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.

—Christina Rossetti, from *Monna Innominata* Sonnet 4 ,
'I loved you first but afterwards your love' (1881).

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Acknowledgements

This volume springs from a Danish research project, 'Where Love Happens: Topographies of Emotions in Nineteenth-Century European Literature', generously funded by the Velux Foundation. The papers in what follows are partly the products of a conference held in September 2023 in the University Medical Museion on 'Dissecting Love in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond'. We would like, first of all, to thank the Museion for hosting us so splendidly in this historic and suggestive building, to thank all the scholars who came along as speakers and members of the audience for their lively contributions, and their thoughts on how to develop the multiprismatic view on love presented here.

The project is housed in the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen. We thank our colleagues for all the intellectual, lively, inspiring and warm conversations, especially Alexander Knopf and Joanna Beaufoy, the two other members of our research project. It has been a pleasure to be on this many-destinationed journey of love research with you, and to have questions of love sit so neatly alongside the everyday work of love done in creating families, finding new postings, new homes, new arenas for the future. We are grateful to the departmental administration and management, who have helped us plan and execute symposiums, events, research trips and conferences, bringing our research beyond our desks. We thank the cities, parks, benches, art museums, streets and romantic corners of Paris, Frankfurt, Florence, and Copenhagen for being places where we could go and look for the European romantic visions of love, for being inspiring settings around discussions as they developed.

Aspects of our own research began with our contributions to *Rêve: Romantic Europe. The Virtual Exhibition*.¹ This extraordinarily rich, complex and ever-expanding mapping of objects associated with European Romanticism has been enormously inspiring for our work. We are extremely grateful to the two directors of the project and chief curators of the exhibition, Nicola Watson and Catriona Seth, for allowing us to curate our own mini exhibition on romantic

¹ <<http://www.euromanticism.org/virtual-exhibition/>>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

love objects which planted the seeds for some of our essays and enabled us to carry out our object-based research as a stepping-stone to longer work.² In our daily lives, we would like to thank our friends, relatives and colleagues for letting scholarly discussions on love bridge between the lived and the theoretical. At Peter Lang, we are, first of all, extremely grateful to the series editor, J. B. Bullen, for his immediate enthusiasm for this book project, and to the Senior Acquisitions Editor Laurel Plapp for her kind, efficient and helpful professionalism in all matters relating to the composition and production of this book. Thanks also to the two anonymous readers of our manuscript whose constructive criticism helped us to get this volume into publishable shape.

Finally, at a time when academic life has precious little possibility for time to think and write about what you love, thanks are due from the editors to one another, for a lively, open-intellectual and open-hearted collaboration of equal parts, bringing this fine collection together in a spirit of enthusiasm, scholarly rigour, humour, and love of shared study.

Copenhagen and London, August 2024
Helene Grøn, Lene Østermark-Johansen, Viktoria de Rijke

² <<http://www.euromanticism.org/virtual-exhibition/reve-the-collections/romanticism-and-love/>>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

Introduction

Helene Grøn, Lene Østermark-Johansen and Viktoria de Rijke

Some decades ago, Jean-Luc Nancy asked, ‘has not everything been said on the subject of love? ... Could we perhaps be exhausted?’ The question is a pertinent one; nothing may seem more clichéd or trivial than love, so why devote yet another book to the subject? In Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal work of the 1970s from which social practice theory developed,¹ he examines how rituals and rites, like matrimony, like love, are co- and recreated between explicit systems and relational (inter)actions. In 1991, Nancy argued that we still needed to address the subject of love in the specifics of ‘the life of a community, of a time and space of humanity’.² Love is what makes us human, what lies at the heart of most human relationships and what cuts to the very essence of being. Hence, it is a subject difficult to exhaust; indeed, more recently, Aukje van Rooden’s reading of Nancy concluded that ‘to speak of philosophy is to speak of its relation to love, or rather a philosophy *as* a relation of love, a love relation’.³ Thinking about human existence is to think about love and the relational. Alain Badiou’s *In Praise of Love* spells out four conditions of philosophy (the roles of the savant, the artist, the activist and the lover) where a philosopher must ‘be an accomplished scientist, an amateur poet and a political activist, but also has to accept that the realm of thought is never sealed off from the violent onslaughts of love’.⁴ These ‘violent onslaughts of love’ may indeed exhaust us, but they also testify to the overruling powers of love which cannot be controlled, not even by systematic thinking, art or activism. It is this uncontrollable force which this collection of essays acknowledges and celebrates through a series of highly interdisciplinary texts which cross literary and aesthetic, activist and affective domains.

In doing so, the collection embraces the ubiquity and the omnipresence of love by attempting the ambitious task of asking new questions – rather than offering answers – about love within the framework of Europe in the long nineteenth

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outlining of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

² Jean-Luc Nancy *Shattered Love in The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Conner, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 82–3.

³ Aukje van Rooden, ‘Jean-Luc Nancy, a Romantic Philosopher? On Romance, Love and Literature’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 26:3–4 (2021), 113–25, 114.

⁴ Alain Badiou and Nicholas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012), 1–2.

century. Love implies all cognitive domains including emotion, aesthetics, creativity and innovation, recognising the tensions across them, as well as those of time and place. A tension across the volume between love as something historically specific (taking cultural form) and the use of cultural theories that may suggest a universalism of human experience, come together to create an interesting slippage between categories – a slippage also observed in many of the contributions. A lively intellectual openness can be a methodological tool for thinking and working across disciplines, seeking chance encounters and unintended discoveries across concordant and discordant threads of research. We might look at the essays in the volume as a European exchange project, a prismatic study of the spreading of ideas, texts, images, objects, emotions, and practices as the commodification of love expanded across these relatively easy Euroborders. For readers in the digital age, it may, indeed, prove surprising how easily and effortlessly objects and ideas spread and circulated across Europe at the time. Prismatically too, Theodore Schatzki and Anders Buch remark how the field of social practices, and its related disciplines of anthropology and ethnography, are uniquely positioned to view the ‘epistemological, normative and moral relations between the practices of social science and the practices that compose the social phenomena it studies’.⁵ Schatzki and Buch highlight how the normative is at the risk of being taken as structural and political status quo, but also how a practice prism is uniquely positioned to understand the creation of such taken-for-granted doings.

Dimitri Ginev’s connection of the hermeneutical framework of social practice theory with that of literary studies supports the methodological overlap of this book’s interdisciplinary approaches.⁶ However, where social practice theory might take a bird’s eye view on love, our approach asks *where love happens*, not only as a topographical question, but as a serious, concrete premise. By making space for love’s crooked expression in both content and form, the essays view and interpret unique aspects of social and individual expressions of love, often yielding surprising conclusions, like Kirstie Blair’s insight that ‘Loving a piece of furniture is risky’ in her essay on the poetry of factory-workers to their beloved objects. The title of this book connects time and space: the interrogative pronoun ‘where’ with the elastic concept of ‘the long nineteenth century’, and, like Nancy, it suggests that there is a connection between the two. The major claim suggested

⁵ Anders Buch and Theodore R. Schatzki, ‘Introduction’, in *Questions of Practice: Related Perspectives from Pragmatism and Practice Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 1–10, 3.

⁶ Ginev makes this connection through the structuralism of Michel Foucault, as well as Giorgio Agamben’s reading of Foucault. Dimitri Ginev, *Toward a Hermeneutic Theory of Social Practices Between Existential Analytic and Social Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge 2018), 4–8.

in the title might be condensed into the argument that changing social practices, evolving in the course of the long nineteenth century, determined new spaces and places for love to happen, to unfold, develop – and break up.

The book springs from a Danish research project generously funded by the Velux Foundation, housed in the Department of English, Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of Copenhagen: ‘Where Love Happens: Topographies of Emotions in Nineteenth-Century European Literature’.⁷ The papers presented at a conference in September 2023 in the University Medical Museion on ‘Dissecting Love in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond’ form the core of the volume; some of them now appear in oral form as podcasts on the university podcast platform.⁸ Several new and commissioned essays have been added to the collection in the attempt to approach the subject from as many different angles as possible within the framework of an edited volume. Many of the essays in this volume revolve around making spaces or places for love to happen – not merely as topographical locations but also imaginatively locating a possibility for different kinds of love. Some essays will be asking where love happens in the age of conspicuous consumption, in a world of trinkets, furniture, printing, collecting, communication, new technologies and commercial developments that transfer love from the abstract to the concrete. Does love happen in a corner, in a kitchen, in an intimate letter, a mourning locket, in a poem addressed to a sewing machine or in a spiritist séance? Other essays deal with the imagining of new kinds of love, on the margins of established society, across conventional binary gender definitions, across nations and national identities, across generations, the living and the dead, in constructed spaces that make room for love to happen. Finding a space for love – emotionally, physically, topographically, materially – requires that we engage critically with the practices that condition our place in the world and the intimate relations that we form with those closest to us.

Such intimate relations may be enhanced by our physical surroundings, by the ways in which our minds and bodies perceive space as frameworks for our existence and interactions with loved ones, and in turn give shape to emotion and produce emotional spaces. The dialectics between inside and outside, of the human body itself, of the architectural structures that surround it, determine our affective behaviour. An example might be ‘love as a roundness of being’. In his chapter on ‘The Phenomenology of roundness’ Gaston Bachelard, examining shells, snails’ houses and domestic interiors, alerted our attention to the roundness of being, to

⁷ <https://engerom.ku.dk/english/research/centres_projects/where-love-happens/>, accessed on 21 August 2024.

⁸ <<https://nyheder.ku.dk/podcasts/dissecting-love/>>, accessed on 21 August 2024.

the human need for emotional and physical integrity which wraps us into a state of fulfilment: ‘Images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer on ourselves an initial constitution and to conform our being intimately, inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round’.⁹ The image chosen for the cover of this book, Clare Atwood’s *The Dining Room at Smallhythe* (ca. 1920), addresses this human desire for roundness. The spectator is drawn into the innermost depths of the interior by means of a series of round shapes: the rugs, the hat on the chair, the plates on the rack, until we reach the round copper kettle and the tin plates above the fireplace. As Michael Hatt so perceptively points out in his essay, Atwood’s depiction of the domestic interior which formed the Smallhythe framework of the ménage-à-trois between Edy Craig, ‘Christopher St John’ (Christabel Marshall) and Atwood herself may seem to be characterised by the absence of the human figure, but at a closer look the painting denotes all sorts of human activity and intimacy in a lived-in space constituting the all-embracing home – and implied love – of the three women: the flowers in the vase, the walking stick left on the chair, the polished kettle and the bench in front of the fireplace waiting for the inhabitants to come and fill it. The implied presence of love and affection in an interior glowing with warmth and traces of human activity might, Hatt argues, be seen as a rare example of the representation of love in painting, where the visual arts are far more often concerned with the representation of eroticism.

By contrast, the round shapes in Vilhelm Hammershøi’s *Interior* (1899) (see Figure 4.14), discussed as one of the final images in James Hall’s exploration of corners of love, block space and prevent the flow of circulation and movement in a claustrophobic interior where doors are closed and the female figure with her back turned towards us seems trapped in space. Together with the polished round table, with the equally polished stove in the corner, the woman herself appears enigmatic and inaccessible. Rigid as a mannikin she is yet another object in a jumble of items drawn towards the corner; the nape of her neck and the roundness of her hairbun may invite the caress of the gaze but, although physically present, the female figure appears mentally and emotionally absent, in spite of being modelled on the painter’s wife Ida to whom he was affectionately attached. As Hall argues, unlike the women depicted lovingly in Vermeer’s interiors, with which Hammershøi’s domestic scenes are so often compared, the cold and stark modernity of the Danish painter’s claustrophobic corners suggest a much more problematic emotional framework for human relationships. The love that may happen in Hammershøi’s corners is rooted in a disturbing objectification in

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 234.

which the triad of woman, table and stove are almost treated equally as surfaces providing an occasion for the painter's study of the effect of the play of light upon different textures. Put a little provocatively, one might ask if the artist's affective interests apply equally to items of furniture and wife as prop, a fossilised late-nineteenth-century angel in the house, trapped with her white apron by the white doors which seem hermetically sealed.

The twenty years which separate Hammershøi's painting from Atwood's take us into a freer world of open spaces with open doors. The contrast between Hammershøi's monochromatic urban interior and the warm embracing female space created in the countryside by women for women in Atwood's painting is striking. The first section of our book, which deals with relationships at the margins, addresses various kinds of marginal love: same-sex love or inter-racial love where the controversial relationship established in Wales in the late eighteenth century by the Ladies of Llangollen in Helene Grøn's essay may seem a precursor of the Atwood/Craig/Marshall relationship discussed in Hatt's essay some 140 years apart. Viktoria de Rijke's exploration of the forbidden aspects of fairy tale love, the (single male) adult love of the child in representations of Little Red Ridinghood in painting and photography take us into the problematic eroticisation of the nineteenth-century female child in spaces where it is often cornered by wolves or desiring painters or photographers. Happily ever after does not apply to the relationship between wolf and child or adult and child in this essay, and the romantic child, whose innocent questioning always has a deeper and less innocent meaning, is caught in a dangerous tension between the cute and the cheeky, between being the desirable morsel and the (too)-knowing child. The dangerous love that goes on in corners, from the Age of Enlightenment to Hammershøi, goes on in intersections in James Hall's essay and invites us to contemplate the hidden, the illicit, the cosy and the quaint, situated in spaces from which we cannot escape. Although at first sight alluring and attractive, the love that happens in corners may not be entirely desirable.

Many of the essays in the volume challenge the myth of 'happily ever after'. Denis de Rougemont's announcement in his classic monograph *Love in the Western World* that 'Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence when love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself',¹⁰ connects love and death as a popular trope that is examined from several different angles in this volume. In the second section of the book, 'Reconnecting Love: Thresholds of Communication', Kirstie Blair connects life with a love of dead objects as she

¹⁰ Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 15.

explores the commodification of love through the surprising relationship which working-class Victorian factory poets attributed to objects associated with life and livelihood, such as armchairs, grandfather clocks and sewing machines. The transferral of emotions onto dead objects, which sometimes even become animated in the process, makes for a new relationship between the living and the dead which challenges conventional ideas of romantic love.

Emily Vincent's essay explores the boundaries between life and death in relationships where the living are not left alone by their departed loved ones. The nineteenth-century interest in the paranormal, in communication between the living and the dead, expanded the spaces where love – between friends, relatives, lovers – could find expression after death. Helped by the fraudulent genre of spirit photography, the departed gained new material form, as the absent became disturbingly present in images and séances.¹¹ In the spiritist communications across generations, between lost sons and daughters and their still living parents, love interferes and comments across the grave in a non-romantic context which nevertheless rests on doom and fatality, as the natural order of the generations is reversed. Conventional hierarchies and power relations are upset with the spirits of the departed now setting the communicative and affective agenda. Lene Østermark-Johansen's essay on the English afterlife of Lotte, the unobtainable love object of Goethe's *Werther* (1774), transposes the relations between the dead and the living into a material cult of mourning which reaches far into the nineteenth century. The transferral of the role of the romantic lover from male protagonist to female mourner, in a cultural context which goes beyond the ending of the novel, invites us to turn our attention to women's right to love, even if their love object is confined by memory and by the past. Although hardly to be conceived as a budding feminist, eighteenth-century Lotte in love nevertheless paves the way for twentieth-century feminist thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray who have explored the possibilities for a newly liberating language for greater equality between the sexes.¹²

In later centuries, thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, Martha Nussbaum and bell hooks have reflected critically on the political life of love holding its tensions and contradictions, such as both the complications of and

¹¹ See Falcon Kyle, *Haunted Britain: Spiritualism, Physical Research and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024); Simone Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park PA: Penn State University Press, 2016).

¹² Julie Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Luce Irigaray, *I love to you: a sketch of a possible felicity in history*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996).

potential for love to produce more equal worlds.¹³ From a historical and philosophical perspective, Elizabeth Brake makes clear these social and political conditions of love by examining marriage as its regulator. How, for example, she inquires, can law even regulate relations of love, when romantic love ‘is essentially lawless, and law essentially impartial’? ‘Love and law cannot coexist’, she continues (ironically, rather than romantically), because to ‘legally codify, regulate, or obligate love is to initiate its extinction, at least in its passionate, romantic form’.¹⁴ Yet, as far back as 1791, Olympe de Gouges answered the French Assembly’s 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man* with her own declaration of women’s rights, addressing the remaining inequality for women and those enslaved, despite the *Declaration*’s universalist claims. As a playwright and social reformer, de Gouges was well aware of the stakes of love, understanding there to be little separation of the public and the private spheres when ‘the publicly protected rights of women reach into the household and the bedroom’.¹⁵ In this first ‘European women’s right manifesto’,¹⁶ she proposes that marriage would remain ‘the tomb of trust and love’ until it could be entered into by two equal parties.¹⁷ At the far end of the long nineteenth century, marriage was a concern also for Anne Lister when her diary pages from 31 March 1840 record ‘the first ever known marriage to another woman’.¹⁸ In coded writing, Lister tells of taking the sacrament with Ann Walker in Holy Trinity Church in York as a symbolic marriage ceremony between the two. Bridging stories reflecting the tension and need for diverse forms of love to find their space, the essays in this book highlight different versions of home, happiness and family, like the

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2018); Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario van der Ruhr (London: Routledge Classics, 1952). See also Shin Chiba’s discussion on Arendt in: ‘Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship’, *The Review of Politics* 57: 3 (Summer, 1995), 505–35.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Brake, ‘Love and the Law’, in Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 453–470, 453.

¹⁵ John Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouge’s Rights of Woman* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 141.

¹⁶ Lisa Gålmark, ‘Olympe de Gouges’, Arimneste Anima Museum. 2021. <<https://www.astreanimamuseum.org/2021/01/03/amnesia-and-progression-olympde-gouges/>>, accessed on 27 August 2024.

¹⁷ Olympe de Gouges, ‘Forty-Four: Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793)’, in Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, eds, *Transatlantic Feminism in the Age of Revolutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245–56.

¹⁸ Anne Choma, *Gentleman Jack: The Real Anne Lister* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

Ladies of Llangollen who set up an entire house, garden and library as material model for the ultimate love-life.

In love studies, it is often suggested that we live out our love-lives according to the narratives represented in films and romance novels. By shifting the attention solely from the plot of the text to the social activity of reading, Janice Radway's seminal study *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, Popular Literature* challenges the reductive perception that reading about love is merely a leisurely unfeminist practice. Rather, she claims, it allows readers to engage with the version of love represented imaginatively as applicable or desirable in one's own life, thereby ultimately becoming a way of rethinking the world.¹⁹ The English afterlife of Goethe's Lotte in poetry, painting, embroidery and ceramics, is exactly that: a series of individual recreations of romantic love as women were engaging imaginatively and creatively with their reading of Goethe's text, situating themselves as modern Lottes. Yet reading and writing about love could also be taken into other intimate spheres than romantic love, as we learn from Alexander Knopf's essay on the German Romantic poet Bettina Brentano von Arnim's semi-fictitious 'letter books'. In her intimate correspondence with her brother, the poet Clemens Brentano and with her friend, the poet Karoline von Günderrode, Brentano von Arnim was engaging with two other writers and their works while clothing her dialogue with them in partly invented letters, published separately. How do codes of intimacy differ between lovers, family, friends, and literary colleagues, and what does an exploration of the slippage between them reveal about our intimate relations? Love also happens between friends and relatives, and if everyone involved is of a literary inclination, the likelihood of blurred lines between the fictitious and the real increases significantly. The epistolary genre, the love letter extended into the realm of friendship, provides a fascinating space for intimacies to play themselves out, inviting us to consider the ways in which the 'I' addresses the 'you', even if part of the communicative situation is entirely fictitious.

As at once a 'relational institution'²⁰ and 'a communal institution that involves the entire society to which each pair of spouses belongs',²¹ marriage is, as Bourdieu hinted, one of the places where the prism of social practices and this book's study on love perhaps most easily converge. This 'fundamentally social character' of

¹⁹ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, Popular Literature* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

²⁰ Jan Fuhse, 'Love and Gender', *Social Networks of Meaning and Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 164–200, 168.

²¹ Irving Singer, *Meaning in Life: The Pursuit of Love* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 73.

love has been recognised by, among others, Lauren Berlant, who points out the narrative life of love which on the one hand produces coherent social stories (of marriage, reproduction, family, etc),²² but paradoxically also functions as a destabilising world-making impulse (think of Badiou's 'violent onslaughts of love').²³ Although Berlant perhaps speaks more readily to contemporary lovers, the conflict between the 'ideal of romantic choice'²⁴ and the social, familial and political factors that might limit it, was often staged in the long nineteenth century. Claudia Nelson argues that queering marriage and the family is 'a project begun by the Victorians themselves'.²⁵ On the one hand, the period invented 'romantic love' through tropes like the wife as the angel in a happy home with silent and invisible servants and subservient children 'owned' by a patriarch; while narratives of bigamy, incest, prostitution and homelessness also proliferated in the period, for very good reasons. Where marriage might then seem the keeper of a normative status quo, confirming Singer's suggestion that 'love cannot create a new society by itself',²⁶ Nelson simultaneously notes how the period 'dramatize[s] the gaps [...] between convention and possibility'.²⁷ Indeed, these more coherent social stories, some of which tie in with the myth of 'happily ever after', pave the way for some of the many clichés about romantic love which still govern our expectations and find expression in Valentine's day cards and other romanticised commodities, whose over-use rely on stock phrases such as 'love is blind', 'love at first sight', 'love conquers all', 'love unto death', etc. We have to acknowledge this tendency – in spite of modern divorce rates – to live under narrative conditions of love that at times might variously challenge or perpetuate myths of romantic love. Our collection of essays recognises the modern need to resist love as a cliché as we encourage readers to look at an old subject through new eyes. We might proudly claim our vanguard position as the first anthology to include love poems addressed to sewing machines together with an extensive discussion of the corner cult of love, while also aiming to stretch the study of the history of emotions into the realm of technological advances by looking at the fin-de-siècle electric fairy as a completely new take on conventional ideas of the connection between love and light.

²² See, for instance, Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²³ Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (Brooklyn New York: Punctum Books, 2012).

²⁴ Jan Fuhse, 'Love and Gender', 171.

²⁵ Claudia Nelson, 'Foreword' in Duc Dau and Shale Preston, eds, *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), vii–ix, viii.

²⁶ Irving Singer, *Meaning in Life: The Pursuit of Love*, 73.

²⁷ Nelson, 'Foreword', viii.

In the last section of the volume, ‘Love Illuminated: Transforming Cold Philosophy’, Joanna Beaufoy revisits the nineteenth-century love of the child already addressed in the essays by de Rijke and Vincent in her study of the ways in which children under the age of fourteen went from being objects of ‘utility’ to becoming objects of ‘sentiment’, as Simon May has pointed out.²⁸ With the invention of electricity the mythological fairy, protector of children’s sleep, was given new magical power. The parental love expressed by means of night lights – stand-ins for absent adults, not present in the nursery after dark – reflect the new sentimental value applied to children, Beaufoy argues. The figure of Tinkerbell in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* sparkles seductively and mischievously as a sign of the complexities of love and magic in the world of modern technology, proving that there is more between Heaven and Earth than is dreamed of in most people’s philosophy. James Dowthwaite’s essay on love and fate in the poetry of John Keats invites us to consider the clichéd connection between the two from the point of view of Romantic myth. The term ‘cold philosophy’ is Keats’ own and for him the representation of love in poetry functions as an alternative kind of philosophy. In ‘Lamia’ and ‘Endymion’, Keats sets up love as an earthly counter-force, often defeated by the great metaphysical caprices of fate, but frequently immortalised by poets. With his idea of love as a concrete passionate relation to another (or others), Keats has the courage to address an alternative philosophy of love, frequently with a tragic outcome, as fate is not always benevolent. Jerome Wynter turns our attention to the Victorian love of a country not one’s own in his discussion of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s passionate involvement with the Italian Risorgimento in the 1850s and 1860s. Celebrated both in her own time and by posterity for her literary love affair and marriage to Robert Browning, the expatriate poetess living in Florence was ardently engaged in the advocacy of Italian unification. This is a new kind of love conditioned by mid-nineteenth-century political and social practices, Wynter argues. The political subtext of her long poem ‘Casa Guidi Windows’ relates contemporary political affairs to Italian Renaissance art and politics and transfers affections from person to place. Employing the conventional tropes of love and the heart, Robert Browning in his poem ‘De Gustibus’ (and we know that when it comes to taste, ‘non est disputandum’) juxtaposed England and Italy with the latter as the conqueror of his heart’s affections: ‘Open my heart and you will see / Graved inside of it, “Italy”’ (‘De Gustibus’, *Men and Women* 1855). Elizabeth clearly had a rival in her husband’s affection.

²⁸ Simon May, *Love: A New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 199.

As the author of one of the most frequently anthologised love poems, Sonnet 43 from her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning has, more than anyone, contributed towards the clichéd codification of love. With its opening line ‘How do I love thee? Let me count the ways’, the poem measures love by ‘depth and breadth and height’, perhaps suggestive of a certain capitalist commodification:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday’s
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right,
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith;
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints, – I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! – and if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

A favourite poem of the Danish Queen Mary (of Tasmanian birth), exchanged, she confessed in an interview, in her private correspondence with her future husband at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Barrett Browning’s sonnet has joined the pages even of the Danish tabloid press as a love poem which reaches across the Victorian age into the modern world, from London via Tasmania to Copenhagen. The poem’s enumeration and itemisation of the elements of love culminate in the reaching into the world of the beyond, the realm of eternity which, for obvious reasons, goes beyond definition and listing (and we must not forget Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s spiritualist leanings – nor her husband’s scepticism, for that matter). Barrett Browning draws the definitive concluding word of the sonnet, ‘death’, into the inconclusivity of the future, thus stretching the ritual of the marriage service, ‘till death you doth part’, into the unknown. The cliché of love’s constancy, on which the poem rests, is the one also celebrated in the poem most frequently quoted at weddings, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds
 Or bends with the remover to remove.
 O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Though in actual fact far less unequivocal than the 'Sonnet from the Portuguese', Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 has conventionally been read as celebrating a view of love as fixed and never changing. Yet Christina Rossetti's argument that 'weights and measures do us both a wrong' from *Monna Innominata* 'I loved you first but afterwards your love' (1881) as epigraph to this volume is the nineteenth-century riposte. As with this volume's collection, Rossetti is arguing this 'ever-fixed' view of love *is* Shakespeare's error, and such metaphors run the risk of becoming similarly fixed, to die in cliché. If we share Nancy's sense that the subject of love might seem to be exhausted, it is in part because of the codification of romantic love which the circulation of poems like the two before have brought about. While we have to acknowledge that in their sonnets Barrett Browning and Shakespeare clearly hit central aspects of the complex emotion of romantic love, this volume seeks out other ways of approaching and expanding the subject at a time when the history of emotions has been enriching the complexity of the field for quite a few decades.²⁹

By looking at the changing social practices of the nineteenth century and the changing conditions for love provided by them, we will inevitably turn away from the courtship and wedding clichés as we try to embed love in technological and material advances and transformations, in new modes of reading and consuming, new social constructions and ways of cohabiting, or new ways of approaching family structures and relations between intimate friends. The much-debated claim that romantic love is an invention of European Romanticism needs questioning and contextualising by some of the many other manifestations of love in the long nineteenth century, and we may indeed end up finding romantic love less romantic and other kinds of love far more romantic than at first imagined.³⁰

²⁹ See for instance Katie Barclay and Peter Stern, eds., *The Routledge History of Emotions in the Modern World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).

³⁰ Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Dorothy L. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

It is significant that such a new and ambitious work as the six-volume *Bloomsbury Cultural History of Love* (2024), which spans the period from Antiquity to the present, deals with ‘romantic love’ in each of its six volumes from Antiquity till the twenty-first century and organises each volume under the headings ‘Romantic Love’, ‘Love in Families’, ‘Friendship’, ‘Love in Communities’, ‘Love and the Divine’, ‘Love in Politics’, ‘Physiologies of Love’ and ‘Love in Art and Material Culture’.³¹ Similarly, the new *Oxford Handbook on the Philosophy of Love* (2024) has sections on varieties of love and the intersections of love with the law, sex, infidelity, literature, knowledge, religion and freedom which resemble the prismatic methodology of our book.³² On an obviously much smaller scale, the multi-faceted approaches of our volume tie in with this perception of the manifold and diverse manifestations of love across time, intersecting and interacting with one another, adding to that *where* love happens, with a focus on topographies and relationships as situated in and out of place, with things in and out of place.

For most people, love is what gives meaning to life. Defining that meaning and its manifestation in the concrete is the work of a lifetime. The ways in which love finds expression in the world are as diverse as the human population, yet love ties the world together in meaningful ways, across genders, generations, oceans, boundaries, nations, race and class. This volume does not focus on fixed boundaries or categories of love but – in its scope, slippage and tensions – demonstrates that love is movement and love is always on the move, transforming itself, transforming us, if we allow it to. The transformative powers of love may lead us in and out of relationships and disguises, may reveal us to ourselves and to each other, may lead to break-ups and new ventures in search for new meanings. Love may indeed exhaust us but there is every good reason why love studies still make it into the catalogues of publishers and onto the shelves of bookshops: read, think, be moved and love!

³¹ Katie Barclay, ed., *Bloomsbury Cultural History of Love*, 6 vols (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

³² See Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

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Relationships at the Margins: Love as Alibi

Reading with the Heart: Tracing Love and Human Rights across Ellen and William Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860) and Mary Louisa Gordon's *Chase of the Wild Goose* (1936)

Helene Grøn

In March 1788 and December 1848, two stories begin, as many good love stories do, with an escape out of a window, a step out of a door, by women in men's disguise for safety and sanctuary. The two couples in question are not only sixty years and a continent apart; they are also situated radically differently within their legal, political and social circumstances. What brings them together on these pages is not only the daring of their escape and their stories of love, but an exploration of how their transgressive unions united them against what sought to pull them apart. A question arises: what part does love play in obtaining the human rights and dignities the couples implicitly and explicitly asserted within and beyond the bounds of their intimacy?

In March 1788, the orphaned Sarah Ponsonby leapt out of a parlour window of her relative Sir William Fownes' house in Kilkenny, Ireland. Dressed in men's clothing, Sarah was going to meet her beloved Eleanor Butler, with whom she was escaping to Llangollen in Wales. Butler, a descendant of the Duke of Ormonde, had purchased a cottage there, wherein they planned to share a life. The couple did not make it to Wales in March, as Sarah fell ill on the way. Their relatives comforted themselves that scandal might be hushed up as there had been 'no gentlemen concerned', and that their flight was nothing more 'than a scheme of Romantic Friendship'.¹ In 1936, doctor, writer and social reformer Mary Louisa Gordon imagined the circumstances before their second, successful escape, fashioning fiction from the few historical sources available: the Archbishop was fetched to talk ecumenical sense to Eleanor, they were both reminded of the several eligible suitors ready to take their hands in marriage, and of the risks their escape posed to their financial security and social standing as *noblesse oblige*.² Although to most women, 'force would have been applied [...] regardless of their

¹ S. Tighe in Eva Mary Bell, *The Hamwood Papers of The Ladies of Llangollen and Caroline Hamilton*, ed. G. H. (John Travers) Bell (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1930), 27.

² Mary Louisa Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*. (Bristol: Lurid Editions, 2023), 202.

legal and human rights',³ these two 'fiery young hearts'⁴ remain steadfast to one another, and they eventually settle in their domicile, Plas Newydd, never spending a day apart for the following fifty years.

In December 1848, William Craft took the hand of his wife Ellen Craft as they stood in front of their door, on the threshold between freedom and a continued life under the system of slavery. Having obtained a few days of holiday for Christmas from their owner, they had hatched an elaborate escape plan, which involved disguising Ellen, who was 'almost white'⁵ and could pass as such, as a 'privileged southern planter',⁶ while William, who 'possessed visibly African features',⁷ was to travel as her slave. The disguise and plan evidently had several stages that needed careful execution to bypass the intricate legal system and dehumanising restrictions placed on those who were enslaved. As a white person could not trade with enslaved people without their master's consent, William had to obtain the articles of clothing for Ellen's disguise in different parts of town; as it was illegal to teach enslaved people how to read and write, Ellen had to travel as an invalid with an arthritic condition.⁸ With her arm in a sling, they would circumvent the custom of writing their names in the visitor's books in the hotels, just like the poultice over her face would hide her beardlessness and the green spectacles covering her eyes would make meeting the gaze of fellow travellers bearable. Dressed like this, hand in hand, opening the latch of their door, William said to his wife: 'Come my dear. Let us make a desperate leap for liberty'.⁹ Thus, a journey started, which brought them from Southern Georgia to the free and Northern Boston, and eventually on to England, which became the 'safest, most logical asylum for the Crafts'.¹⁰

There are evident and necessary distinctions to make between the couples, the context of their lives and the literary works produced by and about them. Most glaringly, the Crafts risked their lives in escaping from slavery, and had

³ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 110.

⁴ Bell, *The Hamwood Papers*, 27.

⁵ William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, ed. R. J. M. Blackett (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 3.

⁶ Barbara McCaskill, 'Introduction' in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 19.

⁷ Barbara McCaskill, 'Introduction', 19.

⁸ For a discussion of Ellen's disguise in relation to disability, race and gender, see Ellen Samuels "'A Complication of Complaints': Untangling Disability, Race, and Gender in William and Ellen Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*", *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 31:3 (2006), 15–47.

⁹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 19.

¹⁰ R. J. M., Blackett, 'The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft' in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 64.

to navigate the stakes between life, death and freedom against pro-slavery policy. Compared with that alone, there was arguably less at stake for upper-class ladies, who, even so, risked social, financial and familial support, while manoeuvring the gossip and malcontent surrounding unmarried women. In making an adventurous crossing between America and England, Ireland and Wales, the couples became famous in their lifetimes, taking centre stage on some of its key political, philosophical and artistic debates. The Ladies' life of mutual devotion, seclusion and self-betterment brought an impressive roster of famous contemporaries, swept up in the spirit of Romanticism and the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to their door in awe and fascination. The Crafts' bold escape, the publishing of their memoir and their lecture tours on the moral degradation of slavery made them prime agents in the abolitionist movement across America and Britain.

This chapter reads William Craft's memoir *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, and Mary Gordon's retelling of the Ladies in *Chase of the Wild Goose* together, by taking seriously the premise that, in both stories, and for both couples, love plays a key role in challenging the paradigms and social practices that seek to limit their human rights and joint freedom. Making a proposal for reading rights and reading love together, this chapter focuses on how both works are in conversation with their genres, as well as how they spill over their edges into wider artistic and activist networks, thereby questioning how storytelling, writing and the materiality of books can enable the transformation of human rights from abstract ideals to lived reality.

Reading love, reading rights, or, reading with the heart

It seems a tough and even unromantic argument to make that love has a role to play in political life, from the workings of the law to the abstract ideals set forth in human rights declarations. As Elizabeth Brake states in her branching philosophical and historical survey into the institutional life of love and marriage, the law is 'essentially impartial, unloving',¹¹ where love is 'unlawful, illicit, outside the law'.¹² Love and law's most direct overlap sits in the religious and statutory regulation of marriage. Yet even here, Brake traces how love has been a philosophically contested component in marriage, from Hegel who views marriage

¹¹ Elizabeth Brake, 'Love and the Law', in Christopher Grau, and Aaron Smuts, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Love* (2024; online edn, Oxford Academic, 6 Feb. 2017), 453–70, 453.

¹² Brake, 'Love and the Law', 453.

as a taming of passionate love, to Nietzsche, who conceives that love gets in the way of the legal responsibility to another undertaken in marriage.

Where Brake's study shows how legal perimeters promise something lasting in the face of the instabilities of romantic love, Simon May suggests that seeking to 'institutionalise the perilous expectation' of love via marriage might compromise the kind of freedom necessary for love to be a mutual project of self-realisation and freedom.¹³ May locates the yoking of freedom and love in the Romantic movement, and particularly the influence of Rousseau, arguing that two fundamental expressions influence instances of love to this day. Firstly, 'the quest to become yourself in dedicating yourself to a loved one and in being loved', shows how personal agency, conversely, is contingent on (loving) another. Secondly, departing from the more incredulous approach to romantic love in Brake's overview, passion cannot only be a source of 'goodness and truth', but also provide instances wherein 'we might glimpse the sacred'.¹⁴ May's argumentation extends to love gradually taking the place of religion in increasingly secular societies, not only as something to believe in, but also as a force holding people responsible and in unity with one another. Human rights historians have located the universality necessary for developing rights in a cross-religious genesis of the Golden Rule: do unto another as you would have them do unto you.¹⁵ Developed and departing from a mutual theological origin of navigating the terrain of self and other, both love and human rights are then in conversation with the meaning of relationality. Although (romantic) love seeks to unite with a specific and significant other, where human suggests rather the inalienable dignity of all beings, the universality implied in both might begin to show what viewing them together can offer.

Joseph Slaughter has suggested the proliferation of the Bildungsroman in the nineteenth century was fundamental in making clear the rights and duties of a citizen,¹⁶ just as Crystal Parikh explores literature's key role in formulating the meaning of rights from their abstract ideals in declarations, to the lives and

¹³ Simon May, *Love: A History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 157.

¹⁴ May, *Love: A History*, 153.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Thomas Crushman, *Handbook of Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2011); Alistair Davidson, *The Immutable Laws of Mankind: The Struggle for Universal Human Rights* (New York: Springer, 2012); Micheline R. Ishray, *The History of Human Rights* (London: University of California Press, 2008); Johannes Morsink, *Inherent Human Rights: Philosophical Roots of the Universal Declaration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Joseph R. Slaughter, 'Becoming Plots: Human Rights, the Bildungsroman, and the Novelization of Citizenship', *Human Rights, Inc. The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York, 2007; online edn, Fordham Scholarship Online, 1 Sept. 2011), 114.

relations of characters and, by extension, readers.¹⁷ Similar claims have been made about the difficulty of understanding, let alone theorise, love, characteristic of avoiding set definitions. In *All About Love*, bell hooks contends that in the face of lacking and sustained discussion on the meaning and mooring of love, ‘we still look to books as the primary source of guidance and direction’.¹⁸ A glance across this volume equally testifies to the role literary and artistic representations play in portraying love in its many dimensions, but also how such representations traverse from the realm of fiction into the lives of readers. For example, Lene Østermark-Johansen’s chapter on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* shows how love is rendered spatial and material in its readers visiting graves, carrying trinkets and living out their love-lives to the backdrop of this story. Identifying a kindred traversing between fiction and life, Melissa Adams-Campbell explores the marriage plot of nineteenth-century books as both a signifier of freedom, attesting to ‘Anglophone women’s new ability to contract affection-based marriages’ and as a means for ‘translating personal marital choice into nationalist claims for British superiority’.¹⁹ The ideological life of marriage as a social and literary signifier shows ‘courtship novels as a site for questioning the supposed division between private romantic relationships and public political agency’.²⁰ Even if the merging back into the social order of such plots show stasis rather than dismantling, the books read in this chapter, and in this anthology more broadly, examine how love happens across and despite the systems and social practices that seek to regulate it, suggesting how love might operate by its own logic and law.

Lynn Hunt develops her history of human rights also from the philosophical and literary legacy of Rousseau, exemplifying how his *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761) taught its readers ‘a new psychology and in the process laid the foundation for a new social and political order’.²¹ Appealing specifically to the emotions of the reader developed, Hunt argues, the ‘ability to understand the subjectivity of other people and to be able to imagine that their inner experiences are like one’s own’.²² As Philip Stewart suggests in his introduction to the book, the

¹⁷ Crystal Parikh, *The Cambridge Companion to Human Rights and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 12.

¹⁹ Melissa M. Adams-Campbell, *New World Courtships: Transatlantic Alternatives to Companionate Marriage* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 5.

²⁰ Adams-Campbell, *New World Courtships*, 9.

²¹ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights, A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company 2007), 39.

²² Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 39.

key to this was reading as the writer wrote it, namely ‘with the heart’.²³ What unites love and rights under the umbrella of literary practice are stories as ‘vital starting points for the imagination’, as what we ‘cannot imagine cannot come into being’.²⁴ However, beyond this, literature also offers a space ‘where people meet, where they must negotiate their differences, where they may contest each other’s powers, and where, while retaining their bodily borders, they may merge’.²⁵ For example, as we shall see, abolitionist literature was argued to be politically effective exactly because it was able to appeal to the hearts of readers by humanising portrayals in a dehumanising system. United, then, in the need for formulating what might otherwise elude articulation, and appealing to the hearts of readers that are part of a society, reading with the heart, or, reading love and rights together, thereby seeks to be a prism for envisioning these convergences both on and off the page.

‘Boy, do you belong to that Gentleman?’: Marriage, law and the language of love and ownership

Where strong marital bonds were unusual in abolitionist writing,²⁶ the centrality of Ellen and William Craft’s marriage and their emphasis on wider understandings of relationality and dependency on socio-political networks makes *Running* ‘a realisation of relationship’.²⁷ Yet, it was the daring of their escape, ‘the stuff of which great adventure novels are made’,²⁸ and their love with its ‘unheard-of boldness and romance’,²⁹ that captured the public’s imagination, and spread their story even to ‘newspaper opposed to the abolitionist cause’.³⁰ Blurring the lines of fact, fiction and the literary retellings of both, their escape was compared ‘to Christian and Christina’s in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and their love to Héloïse and Abélard’s’.³¹ Reflecting on this chapter’s exploration of love and storytelling as shared sites for formulating rights, the Crafts’ story was received exactly as

²³ Philip Stewart, ‘Introduction’ in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, ed. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 1997).

²⁴ hooks, *All About Love*, 14.

²⁵ Holly A Laird, *Women Coauthors* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 13.

²⁶ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 436–38.

²⁷ Laird, *Women Coauthors*, 5.

²⁸ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 74.

²⁹ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 65.

³⁰ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 57.

³¹ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 55.



Figure 1.1 *Photograph of William Craft in Locket.* From William and Ellen Craft's photograph album, ca. 1850s, jewellery. Craft and Crum families' collection.

such: a story of love and adventure to be shared widely in newspapers, on stages and beyond.³²

Contrary to the importance of love to the reception of the story, the memoir continually shows the duress placed on all bonds of affection by the system of slavery. Enslaved people had to obtain consent from their owners to marry.³³ They generally discouraged unions across lines of ownership because they could not ensure 'that they would not be sold or redistributed'. Yet, as the 'the constitutional amendments to eliminate slavery moved forward', marriage was used as an assimilative tool, seeking to merge what had been pulled asunder by an institution of enslavement? into institutional frameworks of love. Conversely, as Adams-Campbell shows, as the 'many disrupted relationships and remarriages, an inevitable result of the vagaries of slavery', white slaveholders were responsible

³² Marcus Charles Tribbett, 'Three Williams and a Subversive Text: Collaboration, Communal Agency, and Resistant Identities in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860)', *The Southern Quarterly*, 9 (2017).

³³ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 16.

for the ‘supposed nonconformity with monogamous state-sanctioned marriage’.³⁴ Ellen, William writes, ‘was torn from her mother’s embrace in childhood and taken to a different part of the country’.³⁵ Having seen this happen to many others, Ellen is as tentative of marriage and motherhood as William is of broaching the subject. Their intention to marry then includes a plan to escape, not only so they may be free, but also so they may parent free children.

The memoir consistently places linguistic, metaphorical and political ambiguity around the readability of love, race and gender, thereby exploring the humanising potential of such a double-view. Even though Ellen and William are the main agents in the memoir, William continually breaks the flow of narration, overriding his own testimony with the examples of others. The reader is drawn into ‘a world of complexly mixed relations and, we might say, mixed narrations’.³⁶ Showing how different understandings of love and marriage might then be necessary when people navigated the domains of freedom and captivity, William relays the following story: waiting for a steamer at a hotel, they meet a fugitive slave. He tells them that not long after his marriage, and while still enslaved, his wife was sold. Remaining single for many years, both before and after he becomes free, he finally remarries. Then:

[A]s he was passing down the street one day, he met a woman; at the first glance they nearly recognized each other; they both turned round and stared, and unconsciously advanced, till she screamed and flew into his arms. Her first words were ‘Dear, are you married?’ On his answering in the affirmative, she shrank from his embrace, hung her head and wept.³⁷

This story is narrated alongside Ellen and William’s difficulty in occupying a room together. Understanding Ellen as white, the butler states that there is room for her, but not for William. When she rents a room, orders dinner for two, and relays that they are married, they are asked to find other accommodation. An indirect parallel to the story of the man and his lost wife, the Crafts show the many navigations and the constant labour involved in staying together under circumstances that seek to pull them apart. Continuing the story of the man and his wife, William states how he took his old wife to see his new one, ‘who was also a fugitive slave, and as they knew the workings of the infamous system of

³⁴ All quotations in Melissa M. Adams-Campbell, *New World Courtships*, 142.

³⁵ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 15.

³⁶ John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 190.

³⁷ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 50.



Figure 1.2: J. Andrews & S. A. Schiff, *Ellen Craft, the Fugitive Slave*, 1856, illustration. New York Public Library Digital Collection.

slavery, they could (as no one else can) sympathise with each other's misfortune'.³⁸ Although the man and his former wife might be divorced in the eyes of the law, they were not divorced, as William puts it, 'morally'. As such, 'it was arranged between the three that he should live only with the lastly married wife, and allow the other one so much a week, as long as she requested his assistance'.³⁹ *Running* then shows how these mitigations of broken relationships expand an understanding of love beyond a conventional conception of marriage as a union of two, to work instead by its own moral law. Ellen and William yoke the reading of love and rights together by claiming narrative and extra-narrative relationality with unions that have been fraught, broken and challenged, but also, and

³⁸ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 51.

³⁹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 51.

importantly, by formulating their marriage within the context of resistance to and navigation of those systems.

The memoir is prefaced with the frontispiece above of Ellen dressed as a planter, thereby challenging paradigms of race and gender on a visual level before the story begins. With this picture in mind, the reader is privy to a double-view extending from her disguise to the language of love. On their journey, they meet a slave dealer who wishes to purchase William, to which Ellen replies: ‘I do not wish to sell, sir; I cannot get on well without him’. He responds that in travelling North, Ellen is risking exactly this, as William might escape. ‘My master’, William narrates, as he has stated he will call his wife-in-disguise during their journey, ‘said “I think not, sir; I have great confidence in his fidelity”’.⁴⁰ Fidelity is commonly understood a consequential promise when entering a marriage. Repurposing it within the context of escape and enslavement encourages the reader to view William simultaneously as the slave dealer and Ellen: where one sees unreliability and property, the other sees a person whose fidelity and lifelong companionship is promised. Another such instance occurs when the couple are purchasing tickets for a steamer, and William is asked by the ticket officer: ‘Boy, do you belong to that Gentleman?’. William replies in the affirmative and adds: ‘(which was correct)’.⁴¹ The bracketed addendum, once again, allows the reader to examine the radically different meanings of belonging to someone in the context of ownership and belonging to someone in a relation of love. The latter not only shows the dedication of a loving husband, but also unravels the discourses of a wife belonging to her husband. This tone of romantic defiance is employed throughout the memoir, working against the dehumanising pro-slavery rhetoric surrounding them. The rights-unfolding potential in this double-view is revealed in the reader’s task to see William and Ellen through different prisms (property, husband, master, wife), but also by inserting ambiguity into the very terms of ownership, love and fidelity.

‘Novelising the Narrative’: Genre, collaboration and co-writing for abolition

In 1850 in America, the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, which permitted the recapturing and returning of fugitive slaves to their former owners, even if they resided in free states. Paradoxically, what worked in the Crafts’ favour for spreading their abolitionist message, the adventure of their escape, the romance

⁴⁰ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 25.

⁴¹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 28.

of their union and their narrative which read ‘novelized’,⁴² made them vulnerable to recapture and re-enslavement. They continued their journey to the ‘free air of good old England’,⁴³ where both their escape from slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law had been widely reported. To make the most of their renown, first William, and later Ellen, who needed to recover from illness linked to the strain and stress of securing their freedom, joined William Wells Brown on a lecturing tour across England and Scotland.⁴⁴ The collaboration between the Crafts and Brown, who was already a celebrated writer, abolitionist and orator, became one of the most ‘influential abolitionist combinations in both America and Britain’.⁴⁵

In the memoir, William reflects how it is against the law to teach those enslaved how to read and write.⁴⁶ Writing and reading are thereby undertaken against the threat of fines and imprisonment, ‘vigorously enforced on anyone who is humane enough to violate the so-called law’.⁴⁷ And yet, it is exactly through reading and writing that the so-called law might be challenged. As the Boston *Chronotype* reflected in 1849:

[F]ugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolitionizing the free States. Argument provokes argument, reason is met by sophistry. But narratives of slaves go right to the hearts of men.⁴⁸

Reflecting on reading with one’s heart, the *Chronotype*’s remark shows how storytelling, particularly first-hand accounts, played a key part in abolitionist resistance by appealing to the solidarity of its readers. Nonetheless, as Geoffrey Sanborn is not alone to argue, abolitionist literature is ‘usually characterized, for good reason, as a means of limiting agency of ex-slave narrators’.⁴⁹ Because of the ‘low status of slave testimony in [and beyond] legal cases, where for a long time the word of a slave meant nothing when pitted against that of a white

⁴² Geoffrey Sanborn, ‘The Plagiarist’s Craft: Fugitivity and Theatricality in Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom’, *PMLA* 128:4 (2013), 917.

⁴³ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 17.

⁴⁴ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 65.

⁴⁵ Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 58.

⁴⁶ Barbara McCaskill and Steve Hahn have noted how the illiteracy of enslaved people may have been overestimated in the antebellum years, estimating that up to ten per cent had some degree of literacy. See *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 26.

⁴⁷ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 17.

⁴⁸ In Blackett, ‘The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft’, 75.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Sanborn, ‘The Plagiarist’s Craft: Fugitivity and Theatricality in Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom’, 910.

person',⁵⁰ slave narratives were typically enveloped in authenticating documents, which were 'implicitly addressed to an incredulous white readership'.⁵¹ Such testimonies offer rich space exactly for examining collaboration and co-writing, but also for questioning 'the complexity of authorship'.⁵² For example, in reading Mary Prince's 1831 memoir, 'related by herself',⁵³ Jessica Allen argues that between Susanna Strickland's transcription of Prince's testimony and Thomas Pringle's edits, Prince's story undergoes such a significant amount of 'pruning' that the very possibility of authenticity and voice are contested.⁵⁴ Indeed, in many cases, by slowing down the reader 'towards retroactively explanatory end points [slave narratives] prompt us to read for something other than truth or moral clarity'.⁵⁵

Examining the complexities of authorship and collaboration should be kept in view for *Running* also. While the memoir has 'marital cooperation' at its heart,⁵⁶ Barbara McCaskill notes several places where William silences Ellen's voice and highlights her fragility and femininity, emphasising how 'black abolitionists wrote formerly enslaved Africans into conventional gender roles'.⁵⁷ Conversely, Daneen Wardrop has suggested that Ellen is responsible for the parts of the story that deal with women's rights,⁵⁸ and Adams-Campbell explores the ways in which nineteenth-century African American women not only used the marriage plot to achieve respectability and social status within and outside stories, but equally shaped its trajectories.⁵⁹ Marcus Tribbet argues that the collaborative efforts of

⁵⁰ Sara Salih, 'Introduction', in *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (London: Penguin, 2004), xiv.

⁵¹ Sanborn, 'The Plagiarist's Craft', 910.

⁵² Jessica L. Allen, 'Pringle's Pruning of Prince: The History of Mary Prince and the Question of Repetition', *Callaloo* 35/2 (2012), 509.

⁵³ Prince, Mary, *The History of Mary Prince*, 7.

⁵⁴ Allen, 'Pringle's Pruning of Prince'

⁵⁵ Sanborn, 'The Plagiarist's Craft', 910.

⁵⁶ Daneen Wardrop, 'Collaboration in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*: William's Key and Ellen's Renaming', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 61:3 (2005), 57.

⁵⁷ Barbara McCaskill, *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory*, 25.

⁵⁸ Wardrop, 'Collaboration in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.'

⁵⁹ Adams-Campbell, *New World Courtships*, 7. See also, for example, Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole* (1984), wherein her marriage and subsequent widowhood allow her to move through the world more freely as a medical practitioner, and, as Samantha Pinto suggests, explore the possibilities of citizenship (2020). Similarly, Prince's memoir underscores the degradation of slavery when she must choose between being free in England or being with her husband in Antigua, 37.

Running become clear by reading three William-narrators into the text: William Craft, William Wells Brown, and “William Johnson”, Ellen’s adopted persona when she is dressed as a planter.⁶⁰ In *Biography of an American Bondsman* (1856), published by Josephine Brown, William Wells Brown’s daughter, Sanborn identifies a passage likely written by William Brown, wherein a married fugitive couple, Ellen and William Craft, escape by her masking as his master. In this passage, Ellen plays a much more prominent role in both conception and execution of their escape.⁶¹

These readings suggest an approach to the text where, keeping its collaborative nature in view, unearths not only instances of Ellen’s agency against the perception of a single-author male protagonist, but equally destabilises categorisations of race and gender by showing their performability. I am not the first to remark on the Shakespearean elements of Ellen’s disguise and the story of the Crafts’ escape.⁶² Indeed, Ellen may be placed within a lineage of literary heroines, kindred with Rosalind, Viola or Portia, who disguise themselves to operate safely and authoritatively in a world suited to men. Extending from a planter’s disguise into a ‘lifelong performance’,⁶³ the Crafts and Brown partake in the 1851 Great Exhibition, where Ellen is on display as ‘a specimen of Victorian femininity’⁶⁴ and an ‘authentic ‘white’ lady’.⁶⁵ This highlights the slippery textual and visual terms of Ellen’s performability within and beyond text, but also highlights the complexities of Ellen’s ‘readability’ as white in furthering abolitionist aims.

Reading love and rights brings these performative and collaborative elements into a novel view. Firstly, the memoir comes into being, as the cover states, ‘only twelve years beyond illiteracy’.⁶⁶ Secondly, writing alongside other literary and legal texts places William not only in a position of an experienced authority, this [c]itational aesthetics⁶⁷ also disrupts ‘the establishment of the narrative’s

⁶⁰ Tribbett, ‘Three Williams and a Subversive Text’ *The Southern Quarterly* 55:1, (2017).

⁶¹ Sanborn, ‘The Plagiarist’s Craft’, 907.

⁶² See Sanborn 2013 or Tribbet 2017, 25.

⁶³ Gay Gibson Cima, *From Anti-Slavery Celebrity to Cosmopolitan Self-Possession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 180

⁶⁴ Barbara McCaskill, ‘Yours Very Truly’: Ellen Craft – the Fugitive as Text and Artifact’, *African American Review* 28:4, (1994), 520.

⁶⁵ Lisa Merrill, ‘Exhibiting Race “under the World’s Huge Glass Case”: William and Ellen Craft and William Wells Brown at the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace, London, 1851’, *Slavery and Abolition* 33:2 (2012), 32.

⁶⁶ After the tour with Brown, the Crafts were sponsored by John Estlin, Lady Byron and Harriet Martineau (see Blackett 1999, 70) to spend three years at the Ockham school, where William learnt to read and write and began the work on *Running*.

⁶⁷ Sanborn, ‘The Plagiarist’s Craft’, 908.

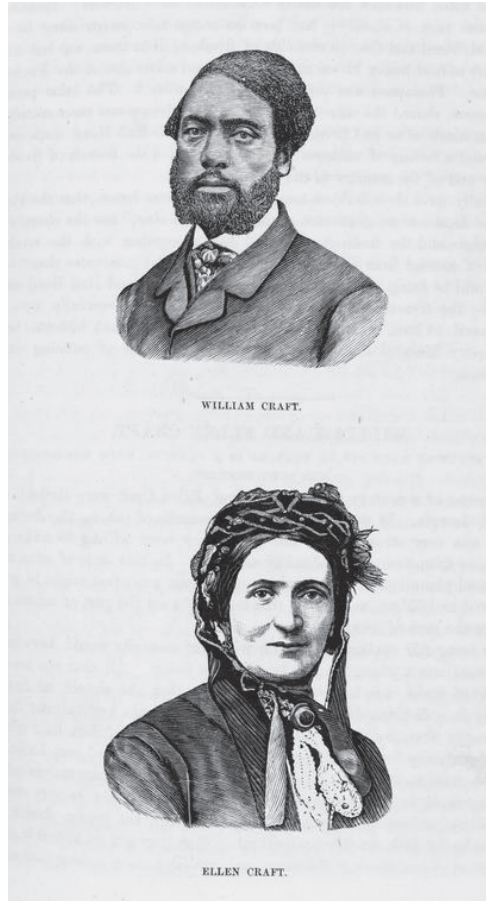


Figure 1.4: *William and Ellen Craft*, 1872, The New York Public Library Digital Collection.

relation to the genre as a whole'.⁶⁸ William begins the memoir emphasising its rights-obtaining designs against the backdrop of the American Declaration of Independence:

Having heard while in Slavery that [...] 'all men are created free and equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'; we could not understand by what right we were held as 'chattels'. Therefore, we felt perfectly justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting task of 'running a thousand miles' in order to obtain those rights which are so vividly set forth in the Declaration.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sanborn, 'The Plagiarist's Craft', 913.

⁶⁹ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 1.

As with the language of love and ownership, prefacing the story with contrasting what is legal and what is lived, the law and system of slavery is consistently scrutinised under the lens of rights and dignity.⁷⁰ Destabilising the meaning of rights, they are interrogated both as the term against which they are held as well as the reason for undertaking their flight.

Henry Louis Gates draws these connections further by titling his foreword to Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl 'In Her Own Write'*.⁷¹ Tracing the Afro-American literary canon to the 1773 poetry of Phyllis Wheatley, Gates states that in a 'strictly literary sense [...] all subsequent black writers have evolved in a matrilinear line'.⁷² Playing on the terms of rights and writing, Gates suggests a conflation of the author and the rights-bearing individual. Wheatley might then be a progenitor of a literary canon, but also of that literary canon's tensions and expressions of writing for rights. The frontispiece of Ellen in planter's disguise alongside William's preface mentioning the American Declaration of Independence might be viewed as a similar tactic. By introducing taxonomic and experiential ambiguities into how things seem to be, how they are formulated by the law to be, and how they are lived, navigated and circumvented by those caught in its system, the reader is asked to hold writing and rights in continual vision and question throughout the memoir.

'Sketched by many hands': Celebrated virgins, celibacy and a romantic friendship

In 1847, John Hickling gathers and publishes a volume of writing about the Ladies, comprising an impressive range from the practical to the poetic. It includes an auction note of their house ('Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby's little paradise at Llangollen'⁷³) by the seller, a Mr George Robins, who feels the need to apologise for the 'imperfect recital', of the 'beauties and particularities' of their 'far-famed Domicile'.⁷⁴ Robins records the rooms of the house, the surrounding

⁷⁰ Writing and acting alongside declarations of rights occurs also in other writing, for example, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* was a backdrop for Toussaint L'Ouverture's revolutionary undertakings and the 'establishment of Haiti as a Black-majority republic' (see Moore, Brooks, and Wigginton 2012, 332).

⁷¹ Henry Louis Jr Gates, 'Foreword: In Her Own Write', in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii.

⁷² Gates, 'Foreword: In Her Own Write', x.

⁷³ John Hickling, *The 'Ladies of Llangollen' as Sketched by Many Hands; with Notices of Other Objects of Interests in 'That Sweetest of Vales'* (Dublin: Thomas Catherall Edition, 1847), 8.

⁷⁴ Hickling, *The 'Ladies of Llangollen'*, 9

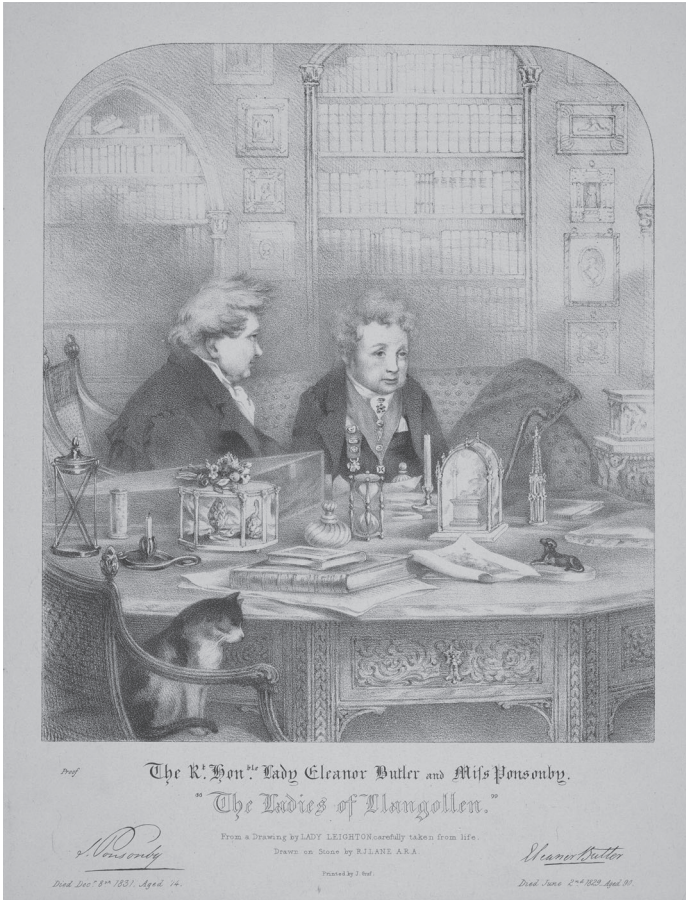


Figure 1.5. Richard James Lane, *The Rt Honble Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby 'The Ladies of Llangollen'*, 1840, illustration. The British Library.

garden and the inventory, comprising of everything from furniture to trinkets, like 'a lock of "Mary Queen of Scots" hair'.⁷⁵ The volume also includes writing about the Ladies by the many people who undertook literary pilgrimages to the secluded Pllass Newydd. Famously, Prince Hermann Pückler-Muskau of Prussia recorded his impression of the Ladies upon visiting the vale in 1832: they 'took it in their heads to hate men, to love only each other',⁷⁶ making them, as he

⁷⁵ Hickling, *The 'Ladies of Llangollen'*, 13

⁷⁶ Hickling, *The 'Ladies of Llangollen'*, 22



Figure 1.6: Cambrian Pottery and the Glamorgan Pottery, *Plate. Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby out riding*, ca. 1813–1839. Earthenware, glass, 16 cm. Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales.

continued, ‘the most celebrated virgins in Europe’.⁷⁷ Hickling further writes guidebook-like advice for the ‘adventurous tourist’ who, after climbing ‘the lofty hill’, might wish to ‘look around for a comfortable resting place and good refreshment’ like Llangollen Ale, for which a ballad is also recorded.⁷⁸ Given Eleanor’s alleged aversion to being portrayed, the first and last sketch of her and Sarah being drawn from the shadow of a curtain in their library during the year of Eleanor’s serious illness,⁷⁹ Hickling’s ‘sketching’ speaks to their inadvertent fame and the public’s desire for depiction.

In 1930, Eva Mary Bell, a distant relative of the Ladies’ only heir, Caroline Hamilton, published a volume entitled *The Hamwood Papers*, comprising the

⁷⁷ In Bell, *The Hamwood Papers*, 1.

⁷⁸ Hickling, *The ‘Ladies of Llangollen’*, 44.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (California: Moonrise Press, 2011).

diaries of Eleanor Butler alongside letters, portraits and excerpts of Hamilton's diary. A small portion of Eleanor's diary had been printed in Arthur Ponsonby's *English Diaries* in 1923. Though he finds their story so 'unique' and 'fantastical' that 'local gossip and hearsay had woven the highly-coloured strands of fiction over the bare threads of whatever there may have been of fact',⁸⁰ Bell beckons the reader to look for something beyond scandal and the 'carefully prepared disclosures of public men' in their intimate portrayal of their lives.

These volumes are but a few examples of the many sketches and a vast number of material objects making the most of the thin line between fact and fiction that sensationalised the Ladies' lives. What was the cause of their fame? Even though Bell, Arthur Ponsonby and later Mary Gordon, remark on the literary value of Eleanor's diary, they were neither writers nor artists. Mavor locates their celebrity in living out a desired Romantic ideal of Rousseau-inspired retirement, withdrawing from the vulgarity of the world to 'a life of virtue and simplicity'. To their contemporaries, the Ladies' alleged 'secluded life of celibacy', then made them not only 'exemplifiers of perfect 'retirement', but also of 'perfect friends'.⁸¹ Where Fiona Brideoake reads the Ladies' union also as a 'public evasion of erotic decipherability',⁸² the guise of celibacy and friendship providing 'epistemic protection',⁸³ Mavor instead shows how the notion of Romantic Friendship speaks between the lines of their times exactly to the nature of their attachment: 'much that we would now associate solely with a sexual attachment was contained in romantic friendship: tenderness, loyalty, sensibility, shared bed, shared tastes, coquetry, even passion'.⁸⁴

The fame and seclusion of the Ladies, curiously, brought tourists not only to Llangollen after their death, but also prominent contemporaries like Sir Walter Scott, Edmund Burke, William Wordsworth and Anna Seward, to their door and into conversation during their lives. Eleanor's diary records the movement of the skies, the birds, the weather, but it also displays a keen interest in the political affairs of their time from abolition to the French Revolution. For example, they spend a 'Lovely, lovely evening' with Edmund Burke as he had just 'returned from France. Had been in Paris in all the Riots'.⁸⁵ Eleanor also records the story of an enslaved man being freed due to finding the cure for the

⁸⁰ Arthur Ponsonby, *English Diaries: A Review of English Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London: London Methuen, 1923), 241.

⁸¹ Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, vii.

⁸² Fiona Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen : Desire, Indeterminacy, and the Legacies of Criticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), 237

⁸³ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 253

⁸⁴ Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, xvii

⁸⁵ S. Tighe in Bell, *The Hamwood Papers*, 221.

bites of rattlesnakes,⁸⁶ and writes about abolitionists dedicating themselves to ‘the relief of those unhappy beings, whose Sufferings are a disgrace to human nature’.⁸⁷

Mary Gordon’s 1936 *Chase of the Wild Goose* might be read as another imaginative sketching of the Ladies. In her foreword, Gordon states how she tries to ground her tale in reality but also how the ‘reconstruction of their very interesting story’ demands something more than reality, namely ‘various artist’s material’.⁸⁸ Akin to *Running*, Gordon writes in conversation with other texts: several chapters are prefaced with the poetry of William Shakespeare or Robert Browning, and her historical source is mainly the *Hamwood Papers*, which she deems ‘a despicable production’ full of ‘idle and unpleasant gossip’.⁸⁹ Gordon insists that there is no biography of the Ladies, ‘which is not in one particular or another based on hearsay, phantasy, or empty conjecture’,⁹⁰ and yet her own rendition might be said exactly to weave the coloured strands of fiction over fact: she fills in where historical records trail off, imagines conversations between the Ladies and their relatives that she could not have overheard, and narrates their inner musings and private thoughts. In her later sections entitled ‘I Meet the Ladies’, and ‘The Ladies Meet Me’, Gordon tells of her own literary pilgrimage to Llangollen. Asking the reader to interpret the events of these chapters ‘according to his own opinion of ghosts’,⁹¹ she meets the ghosts of the Ladies, thereby elaborating notions of collaboration and co-authorship into a spiritual and cross-temporal realm. Gordon draws them into a conversation on the advancements of women’s rights from their time to her own, thereby traversing not only death but also spatiotemporal logic and the narrative rationality of biography.

Chase then represents the dedication of her publisher, Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press, to distributing genre-bending and modern works. Virginia Woolf was familiar with the Ladies, and while she had not wished to write about them, their story was ‘part of her scaffolding for *Orlando*’,⁹² published by the Press in 1928. *Goose* and *Orlando* then both share a source of inspiration, from the nebulous white bird, repurposed from representing the ‘the elusive object of literary genius’ in the conclusion to *Orlando*,⁹³ to titling Gordon’s book in a nod

⁸⁶ S. Tighe in Bell, *The Hamwood Papers*, 92–93.

⁸⁷ S. Tighe in Bell, *The Hamwood Papers*, 167–168.

⁸⁸ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, xv.

⁸⁹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 226.

⁹⁰ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, xv.

⁹¹ Nicola Wilson, ‘Afterword’ in *Chase of the Wild Goose* (Bristol: Lurid Editions, 2003), 253.

⁹² Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 250

⁹³ Wilson, ‘Afterword’, 258.

to the Ladies' flight, togetherness and shared ideals. The two books and their writers further both depart and unite in their playful approach to the genre of biography. Woolf had variously doubted the possibility of truly recording the life of anyone and of judging works of art as separate entities,⁹⁴ making the question 'of whether a narrator will ever fully understand his subjects' 'one of the 'subtler plots' of *Orlando*.⁹⁵ Gordon, conversely, positions her biography as a work undertaken by spiritual commission from the Ladies:

How was it that I had been 'called' – as I had phrased it – to come and look for them after 150 years in which we had needed one another, had possibly been dependent upon one another – they on me, that I might give them back some lost coherence in whichever their present life amounted to, I on them for the renewal of my little remaining life, such as it was?⁹⁶

The coherence Gordon wishes to give hinges, not least, on doing justice to what she understands as the 'main feature of the Ladies' lives, their great and abiding love for one another'.⁹⁷ Together, *Orlando* and *Goose* bring same-sex desire 'into the historical and representational field of the twentieth century',⁹⁸ and show 'the possibility of a fun and hopeful lesbian history, rather than one characterised by suppression and violence'.⁹⁹ As the following section elaborates, Gordon holds them as the 'unconscious pioneers' of a 'social epoch' beyond their own,¹⁰⁰ particularly when it comes not only to imagining, but also to living out ideas beyond their age. Making union as a condition for achieving biographical coherence of their story, alongside the discourse of rights and freedom, Gordon underscores love's impact on expanding social limits.

Describing the world from the top of a staircase: The lineage of rights and love in *Chase of the Wild Goose*

Where the Crafts' memoir introduces ambiguity into the language and readability of race and gender – and, by extension expand discourses on love, rights, and ownership – Gordon achieves similar nuance by exploring a disjointed

⁹⁴ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 248.

⁹⁵ Michael Whitworth in Virginia Woolf, *Orlando, A Biography*, edited by Michael H. Whitworth. 11th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii.

⁹⁶ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 231.

⁹⁷ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, xvi.

⁹⁸ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 238.

⁹⁹ Wilson, 'Afterword', 260.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 21.

relationship with time. Waking up on a similar morning to one that Eleanor enjoyed and recorded 147 years before, Gordon ‘clears a path’ from herself to the Ladies,¹⁰¹ rendering their overlaps both temporal and narrative. On the open hillside, and later, in their house, Gordon makes the Ladies conversant with the advancements made to women’s sexual and political rights in the years spanning between their lives, of which the Ladies are held as the ‘spiritual progenitors’.¹⁰² Although the reader is left to their own faculties in judging the validity of these chapters, there might also seem a discrepancy between Gordon’s blatant spiritualism and her scientific profession as a doctor, elaborated on later. Nonetheless, meeting ghosts reflects the ‘preoccupations of the time, in which the losses of the First World War led to ‘an upsurge of interest in “talking with the dead”’;¹⁰³ in the quasi-public setting of séances, women mediums could voice ‘flagrantly transgressive outbreaks of language and sentiments’.¹⁰⁴

Within this queer and spiritual temporality, titled by the chapter ‘The Future Arrives Late’, Gordon focuses particularly on how women’s freedom has progressed due to changes made to the institutional life of love. Discussing the historical status of women who did not marry, like the Ladies, Gordon tells them:

I have never married [...] the world said a woman’s condition was an unchangeable quantity predestined for before the foundation of the world. Whereas a man’s destiny is what he chose to make of it. The Church has proclaimed a married ideal, and on that all our social laws are based.¹⁰⁵

The rights women have obtained and maintained hinges, then, on having access to the same kind of destiny which allows them governance over their own life in body (in the development of birth control and choices about pregnancy), mind (in pursuing education), and spirit (in being called to higher artistic or ethereal purposes). Yet, asking whether marriage ‘seems a reasonable and proper contract’,¹⁰⁶ Gordon also shows that freedom is obtained exactly when women have the right to terminate state-sanctioned bonds of love via access to divorce.¹⁰⁷ While these may all seem like instances of inserting her own ideals into the stories of the Ladies, Gordon also places these discussions on love earlier in the book. In

¹⁰¹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 237.

¹⁰² Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 245.

¹⁰³ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 265.

¹⁰⁴ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 220.

¹⁰⁵ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 238.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 238.

¹⁰⁷ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 239.

conversation with Mrs Goddard between their first and second flight, Sarah reflects:

We have been so much astonished that the men who proposed to us, as well as our friends who encouraged them, have never cared to tell us about themselves, and their ideas, not whether they had any principles of their own. Nor did they care what ours were. Just a few preliminaries about money or family, and that was enough.¹⁰⁸

Reflecting on May's thesis that love and personal freedom are not separated, when Mrs Goddard holds that 'Once a man makes love to you, you'll have done with ideas',¹⁰⁹ Eleanor insists that love 'cannot be assessed by any terms but its own'.¹¹⁰ Equally, when the archbishop reminds her of the Christian duty to marry, she states not only that she belongs 'first of all to myself',¹¹¹ but also that in making a financial and religious duty of love, the bishop has 'spoken of 'making love', but not of Love'.¹¹² Although both Sarah and Eleanor understand the social precarity which falling in love implies for women, they also insist on other possibilities of loving and of 'experiencing the transformative miracle which is love'.¹¹³ In a similar tactic to destabilising the meaning of love and marriage as done in *Running*, Eleanor promises her cousin to take care of Sarah using the words of the marriage vows: 'I want to assure you, for better or worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health, I'll take care of Sally'.¹¹⁴ As such, developing their own terminology of love not only underscores shared views, but also promises a way of living together against the restrictive definitions of their surroundings.

As for professional life, Gordon speaks of women uniting across classes for the parliamentary vote, and for their direct involvement in political life as Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers. In line with Eleanor's recording of political events and debates in their diaries, Sarah responds: 'Oh! Eleanor, that's where you should have been',¹¹⁵ which Gordon corrects to 'should be'.¹¹⁶ The temporal disjoining is then continued in overlapping past and present; implying that Eleanor both *should have* been and *should be* part of the political circuit; is exactly an instance of the future arriving late. This narrative 'chronological triumph'

¹⁰⁸ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 52.

¹¹¹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 28.

¹¹² Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 29.

¹¹³ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 241.

¹¹⁶ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 241.

inserts discourses of rights and possibilities of self-governance into the Ladies' lives, whereby they 'give birth to the future Gordon embodies'.¹¹⁷ Reflecting rights and reading with one's heart, Gordon places the question of language bibliographically and materially, making books a key component in the generational transmission of rights. Recounting her overview of the inventory of books in Plass Newydd, Gordon states, 'I counted a hundred and thirteen and you must have had many more – by or about women. It is plain that you cared about the subject'.¹¹⁸ For the Ladies, it is stories by and about women that can help formulate and imagine a life of 'individual freedom'.¹¹⁹ As with *Running*, books and reading are underscored as a key materiality and practice in obtaining the rights that make the love-lives of the Ladies, and subsequently Gordon, possible. When they ask Gordon what they did to bring the future – Gordon's present, the reader's past – into being, Gordon articulates her answer in the realm of books and imagination: 'You meditated among your books', Gordon replies, 'and dreamed us into existence',¹²⁰ as rights are reliant on spiritual lineage, cross-generational solidarity and historical alliances, but equally on the creative and imaginative opportunities available in books.

The retroactive placement of the Ladies as 'political visionaries' is in keeping with Gordon's bending of the biographical genre,¹²¹ but Brideoake also suggests that this disruption breaks the logic of the heterosexual life-narrative, working instead as a 'queer reproduction'.¹²² As both their biographer and a 'self-proclaimed heir',¹²³ Gordon finds a place of belonging in their lineage, and extends the disjointed prism of time to include her own biography. The kinds of emphasis she places on rights and love reflects her own preoccupations: she was a part of the first generation of doctors to be trained at the London School of Medicine for Women, after which she undertook work as a general practitioner and prison inspector. In 1907, she published *A Jury of the Virtuous* under a pseudonym, examining the ostracisation of her protagonist following incarceration, and in 1922 she published *Penal Discipline* outlining the structural inequalities she had observed in the treatment of women in prisons and the criminalisation underlying their incarceration in the first place.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 261.

¹¹⁸ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 225.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 225.

¹²⁰ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 245.

¹²¹ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 264.

¹²² Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 264.

¹²³ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 238.

¹²⁴ Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, 249; Deborah Cheney, 'Dr Mary Louisa Gordon (1861–1941): A Feminist Approach in Prison', *Feminist Legal Studies* 18:2 (2010).

Gordon's connection of the 'personal to the political' might be traced in the emphasis on specific rights that she extracts from the Ladies' story,¹²⁵ but also in being 'called' to her writerly task from a place of mutual interdependence. Gordon asks: 'where was I to place myself. I was not far from the end of a long and full life. I was the same age as Sarah Ponsonby had been when she had – gone away'.¹²⁶ Overlapping her own biography with the figure of Sarah and the quasi-fictional retelling of the story of the Ladies shows a collaborative, and perhaps even, co-writerly desire, to continue their story and reverberate in the echo of the noise they made 'in the world which has never since died out'.¹²⁷ This continues when Gordon reflects on what comes after she – goes away. 'Change', inevitably, yet would it be 'the kind of change that had come to these two, and should I acquire the impersonal view of my own past history which they had acquired towards theirs?'¹²⁸ Using similarly reflective methods for both her own life and that of the Ladies in turn strikes a kindred invitation to narrative and rights-based interdependence with the reader, reflected also in her use of 'we' throughout the book. For example, when introducing Sarah to us, she writes: 'we make the acquaintance of Sarah Ponsonby',¹²⁹ or, when reading Eleanor's journal, she proposes it is not only something she and the reader do together, but also in company with the Ladies: 'We can see the sun set in flames of crimson and gold. We can enjoy with herself and the Beloved their moonlight walks'.¹³⁰ Gordon finds grounds for this plural in Eleanor's journal, which 'is of "We"',¹³¹ even though it describes a life lived together. It is then a 'love-song, since all the pleasures and happiness it records depend upon their intimate life together',¹³² which are not only recorded, but 'recorded because they are felt and lived in'.¹³³ As such, the journal functions not only as a co-writing and co-storying materiality for biographical and rights-discursive overlap, but also as a bridge between writing and imagining, living and loving.

When she has described her present (the Ladies' future) some pages earlier, Eleanor marvels: 'It is as if you were describing the world from the top of a great staircase', to which Gordon replies 'Then climb it with us and be on a level'.¹³⁴

¹²⁵ Cheney, 'Dr Mary Louisa Gordon', 117.

¹²⁶ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 230.

¹²⁷ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 1.

¹²⁸ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 230.

¹²⁹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 9.

¹³⁰ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 147.

¹³¹ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 143.

¹³² Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 143.

¹³³ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 147.

¹³⁴ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 241.

Reflecting on a time beyond her own in an already dislodged temporal frame and with multiple possibilities for narrative kinship points the reader up the staircase too, allowing consideration as to what kind of story – of rights, of love, of individual freedom – might be told beyond the pages of the book.

Continuing to read with one's heart

In reading love and rights across these works, I have sought not to conflate contexts, issues or literary specificities that need separate attention. Nor have I sought to suggest that the liberatory possibilities of love and human rights were the practice, and not an aspiration, of the nineteenth century. Rather, I have underlined how declarations – of rights and of love – are of an aspirational nature and need both imagination and expression to become practice. Rather, I have proposed how reading with one's heart might make visible where love and rights converge as universal and agentive approaches to transforming the social limits and rightlessness around perceived transgressive unions.

The above has not directly compared the two works, but I end by drawing out a few ways in which they meet across questions of rights and love. Firstly, both works make ambiguous a core aspect of literature: the meaning of words and the sense of time. This draws the reader into worlds, where orientational points for making meaning are continually dislodged, allowing instances and ideas of love, ownership, rights, past and present to be held in question and ongoing interpretation. Secondly, the materiality of books, and the acts of collaboration and co-writing across temporal, racial and gendered lines are also present in both works, as are instances of performativity and seeming other-than through disguise and double or multiple meanings. Ellen Craft draws this vividly, in traversing gendered and racial decipherability. Yet, this was true also for the Ladies. In 1820, for example, comedian Charles Matthew wrote in a letter to his wife that on seeing the Ladies in the theatre, he found there was 'not one point to distinguish them from men', rather they 'looked like two respectable superannuated clergymen'.¹³⁵ Although there is some dispute on whether the Ladies' gentlemanly dress was simply an adopting of the Welsh costume, or whether they added flair of their own,¹³⁶ their contemporaries' commentary and prolific portrayals of the Ladies on trinkets, attests to a desire to understand their dress and gender. On such a voyeuristic or collecting note, Matthews

¹³⁵ In Hickling *The 'Ladies of Llangollen'*, 35.

¹³⁶ Michael Freeman, 'Welsh Costume / Gwisg Gymreig: Welsh Costume – Descriptions, Illustrations, Surviving Examples, 1700–1950'. n.d.

continues: 'I longed to put Lady Eleanor Butler under a bell-glass, and bring her to Highgate for you to look at'.¹³⁷ The notion of collaboration and kinship crosses divides of politics and time in both works, but also shows literature and writing extending beyond the page towards obtaining rights. Writing in continual conversation with other texts, legal, literary, anecdotal, displays this effort on a sentence-level. Yet, Gordon also shows how, from the Ladies' time to her own, women compared the state of marriage to that of being enslaved.¹³⁸ While this might seem an insensitive parallel to current readers, it also underpins exactly the notion of collaboration across textual and political spaces. For example, Cecilia Walsh-Russo shows how women took on public roles in advocating for abolition, even when they were being excluded from public debates like the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention.¹³⁹

Crossing borders and finding freedom elsewhere have run as implicit strands across both stories. Underscoring how the Crafts became central to the political debate on abolitionism, their crossing of borders renders the discourses implicit in themes of their memoir transnational, but also functioned as a way for English abolitionists to condemn slavery in America further.¹⁴⁰ Such condemnation worked also to make nationalist arguments. For example, Sara Salih wrote in the foreword to Prince's memoir about William Blackstone's 1825 *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, that it is the 'very soil', and the 'spirit of liberty', which is 'so deeply planted in our constitution', which makes English laws especially effectual in preserving the 'civil liberties even in the meanest subject'.¹⁴¹ Nationalising the discourse of freedom within the confines of narrative is apparent also in *Chase*. Gordon shows how the Ladies continually longed for the Ireland they had left behind to be together. On leaving their worldly and wordy goods to Caroline Hamilton, Eleanor reflects that their story will eventually be told, if not by her, then by some future generation. Sarah responds 'with what patience you await the fulfilment of our story! It is only comparable to your patience over Ireland'.¹⁴² Gordon thereby implies that the patience and longing of homesickness is akin to the narrative desire in awaiting one's story to be told.

So, how do love stories end? A glance across this volume suggests all possible conclusions from death to happily ever after. Disjoining the temporal frames and

¹³⁷ In Hickling, *The 'Ladies of Llangollen'*, 36.

¹³⁸ Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 237.

¹³⁹ Cecelia Walsh-Russo, 'Mutual Brokerage and Women's Participation in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Abolitionist Movements', *Social Movement Studies* 16:6 (2017), 633–46.

¹⁴⁰ Blackett, 'The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft', 64.

¹⁴¹ Sara Salih, 'Introduction', xvii–xviii.

¹⁴² Gordon, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, 208.

continuing the linguistic ambiguity explored in reading rights and love across this chapter, these stories might have a chronological ending. However, a new edition of *Chase of the Wild Goose* came out in 2023, attesting to the ongoing relevance of Gordon's work and the Ladies' lives to historical and contemporary debates on queer relationships and women's rights. Similarly, the Crafts' story remains in adaptive rotation and central to discourses on race. For example, Ilyon Woo published a 2023 biography of the Crafts entitled *Master, Slave, Husband, Wife*, and in 2017, Tanya Landman's novel, *Passing For White* came out, recasting the Crafts' story for a young adult audience. As such, Gordon's invitation to sustain a narrative relationship with a past-present of rights, and this chapter's broader prism of reading with one's heart, extends to how both stories do not end but continue climbing that staircase for the right to love and freedom.

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The Homosexual World of Love and Ritual: Love and Painting in Britain, 1860–1920

Michael Hatt

History of art – at least the history of modern art – has been much better at desire than love. The bibliography on desire and sexual relations in art is huge and distinguished, but it is much harder to think of pieces of scholarship that engage seriously with love with a similar theoretical and forensic intensity. The reasons for this are no doubt many, but some are obvious. In my own research field of homosexual and lesbian representation, and certainly in my own writing, the politics of activism and scholarship generated an emphasis on sexual arousal, sexual activity, indeed sexuality itself and the challenge to what Adrienne Rich famously called ‘compulsory heterosexuality’.¹ This has been exacerbated by the theoretical models that shaped the field: notably the first volume of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, but also Freud and psychoanalysis, as well as varieties of Marxist or materialist analysis, all of which took sexuality and the regulation of desire as the central problem; and while love is related to desire, this was always a kind of adjunct or consequence of this central concern. There was also a wish to be radical. To talk of love was soppy or bourgeois or feeble, to talk about genitals and sexual acts was cool, and while more recent identitarian perspectives have adopted a different approach, the emphasis is still on the transgressive, with love remaining in second place.

But this is not just the fault of art historians. This might also reveal something about modern art itself, and its limitations. Visual representation is also better at desire than at love. Painting is ideal for showing the object of desire, the image of the beloved, as well as such matters as prostitution or other provocations to and images of sexual arousal. But when it comes to the subjective experience of love, things are less straightforward. Kierkegaard famously remarked, ‘Everything subjective [...] eludes a direct form of expression’.² For art, this indirectness is problematic. While it can attend to the social conditions and regulation of love, art does not have access to the subjective voice or thought as in literature or theatre or, indeed, music (albeit a fictional voice). Thus, love has to be externalised in the absence of a more direct report of internal feelings.

¹ Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980)’ in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985* (London: Virago, 1987), 23–76.

² Søren Kierkegaard, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 67.

Allegory is a common means of representing love. This is less about personal emotion, and more a generalised symbol of power, as in G. F. Watts' *Love Triumphant*, finished in 1898, or pathos, as one sees in Anna Lea Merritt's *Love Locked Out* from 1890. Love is frequently represented through illustrations, as in Arthur Hughes' *St Agnes Eve* from 1856. Many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century paintings illustrate a text, classical, fictional or historical, allowing a familiar narrative to inform the viewer's reception and so incorporate a voice from elsewhere to articulate love. Moreover, a consequence of this illustrative tendency is that modern art, certainly nineteenth-century art, favoured the Romantic myth of falling in love, presenting its torments and failures, its pleasure and pain. This, after all, is more easily and more excitingly narrativised than less dramatic or tragic instances. The story of Paolo and Francesca, for example, was depicted over and over again in the nineteenth century from Ingres's version in 1819, through Pre-Raphaelite works including Alexander Munro's sculpture from 1851 and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolour triptych from 1855 to Christopher Williams' painting from 1902. This story, taken from Dante, of the tragic pair who were both married but succumbed to their love and so were murdered by Francesca's husband, became an exemplar of love and its vicissitudes.

As John Armstrong has pointed out, we are misled when we consider romantic love to be the paradigm of love. Armstrong argues that '[t]he romantic conception of love focuses our attention on the opening moments of a relationship', moments replete with 'longing, rapture, doubt and the sense that one is in touch with the source of all value'. As such, it identifies falling in love as the essence of love, ignoring the way in which love changes and develops over time as the lovers also change and develop: 'to elevate the beginning of a relationship is to do an injustice to its future'.³ To focus in this way on romantic love, therefore, gives us a very partial and lopsided view. But it is this lopsidedness, this reduction of love to one partial fiction, which allows artists to mitigate the necessary indirectness of visual representation. Those moments of falling in love, those experiences of longing and rapture, can be depicted more easily and more legibly than long-term love or the way in which a lover is loved back over time.

In this essay, I present two case studies that offer an alternative to the picturing of romantic love: a painting by Simeon Solomon from the 1860s (see Figure 2.1) and one by Clare Atwood from around 1920 (see Figure 2.2). I shall use these to speculate about ways of painting love, how these painters, in very different historical and personal circumstances, tried to mitigate or exploit the

³ John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), 3–6.



Figure 2.1. Simeon Solomon, *A Prelude by Bach*, 1868. Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 432 x 650 mm. Private collection. Photo: © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.



Figure 2.2. Clare Atwood, *The Dining Room at Smallhythe*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 550 x 495 mm. Smallhythe Place, Kent, UK. National Trust Photographic Library/Bridgeman Images. © Estate of Clare Atwood.

indirectness of love's visual expression by focusing less on narrative and more on the spaces of love. In doing this, they move us away from both a focus on desire and sexuality and the reductive model of high romance, offering instead a fuller and more nuanced notion of love as it might be lived. Implicit in my speculation will be thoughts about how art history might also mitigate the indirect expression of love, how historians might also challenge the romantic

conception of love and find alternative ways of identifying the representation of love in painting rather than seeing it only in these orthodox subjects, narratives and allegories.

Writing this has made me realise why we art historians have avoided love: it is elusive in the extreme. I should acknowledge at the outset that I have two guides in other fields who have dealt with the subject more successfully. One of these is the American feminist historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, whom I shall cite later. The other is the philosopher Simon May, whose book *Love: A History* opens up and corrects our often sloppy thinking about love with real clarity.⁴ May argues against the familiar clichés of love's being selfless, unconditional, and eternal, instead defining love as something that gives us 'ontological groundedness', a sense of security and of our being at home. He writes:

Love is the rapture we feel for people who (or things that) inspire in us the experience or hope of ontological rootedness – a rapture that triggers and sustains the long search for a vital relationship between our being and theirs. We experience their mere presence as grounding – or as a promise of grounding – because it seems to be receptive to, to recognize, to echo, to provide a powerful berth to, what we regard as most essential about us.⁵

This has a particular resonance for lesbians and homosexual men, for whom it is less obvious how to be in love and at home in the world, certainly in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Although I can hardly begin to do justice to the complexity and nuance of May's arguments, it is this fundamental conception of love that I shall use as a springboard for diving into the representation of love in art historical analysis, conceptually, historically and iconographically.

The promise and failure of love's grounding: Simeon Solomon

I begin with the Victorian artist Simeon Solomon. As a homosexual man, Solomon was acutely aware of compulsory heterosexuality and its sanction; his life and career were largely destroyed after his arrest in 1873 for attempted sodomy. Much of his work is about love, usually in the form of allegorical figures, and often as figures representing the failure, absence or wounding of love. The drawing *Bride, Bridegroom, and Sad Love* (see Figure 2.3) from 1865 speaks for itself.

This is about compulsory heterosexuality; the man forced into heterosexual marriage, an institution that denies the kind of love he feels. In *Love in Autumn*

⁴ Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵ May, *Love: A History*, 240.



Figure 2.3. Simeon Solomon, *The Bride, the Bridegroom, and Sad Love*, 1865. Pen and ink on paper, 250 x 194 mm. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

(see Figure 2.4), a painting from a year later, a standard allegorical figure of love staggers in a hostile landscape; this is homosexual love buffeted by cold winds, and sent into the wilderness, doomed to wither and die.

These works are distinctive in the way that Solomon reshapes the visual language available to him, but nonetheless present an externalised image of love in familiar fashion. He is working in a conventional mode to represent unconventional notions, replacing the ideal form of the orthodox allegory, whether child as in Anna Lea Merritt's work or adult as in Watts', with a younger, more androgynous body. This kind of body was in part a consequence of the pre-Raphaelite manner Solomon adopted and so is determined by his stylistic allegiances. However, it was also an experiment in how to represent a different kind of love. Just as homosexual love challenged the norms of compulsory heterosexuality, so this body challenged the aesthetic, morphological, and, by extension, emotional standards of love's visual representation.



Figure 2.4. Simeon Solomon, *Love in Autumn*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 840 x 660 mm. Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK. Photo © NPL-DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

A Prelude by Bach (Figure 2.1), though, is perhaps the one work by Solomon that moves beyond the limitations of allegory and considers love in a more complex manner. Viewing the painting in light of May's conception of love, it seems to address the notion of ontological groundedness, of how love can provide a safe harbour for the self, an existential and literal home. For Solomon, though, this is done negatively; he depicts the absence of this for the homosexual man, not the grounding but the elusive promise of that grounding. The painting was originally exhibited as *A Song of Spring* at the Dudley Gallery in 1869; the title by which it is now known was added later.⁶ The image represents a group of young people

⁶ *A Prelude by Bach* was the title given in the catalogue to an exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1906, and so was certainly accepted as the title by the time of Solomon's death in 1905: *Exhibition of works by the Old Masters and Deceased Masters of the British School* (London: Royal Academy, 1906), 42. Colin Cruise, who has perhaps contributed more to scholarship

arranged around one of their number playing the piano. They share stillness as they listen; the music is invoked as a non-narrative analogy for the experience of love (and love in spring rather than love in autumn). The figures are arranged in groups, mostly pairs, but also with the woman at the far right, possibly belonging in a chain of three with the man and woman in the foreground, her hand over the back of the chair, the arms forming a clear single line with the body of the man, unifying of the trio of figures. Here, then, are instances of love, whether intense friendships or erotic connections, but the nature of any specific relationships is unclear. That is the point. Sensuality is evident, the ease or comfort of other bodies enhanced by the setting decorated with tapestries and elaborate furniture, and the curiously eighteenth-century dress offering fabric as a metaphor for love's tactility.

The figure on the left is the exception; this man represents homosexual love. A male-male pairing is missing from the scene. This figure has entered from the left and is holding a branch of blossoming myrtle.⁷ His partner's absence is evident in the matching blue sash and staff on the floor, as well as the crystal globe. These objects are all part of Solomon's personal language of symbols, which is most elaborately laid out in *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, a long prose poem that Solomon privately published in 1871 in an edition of 500 copies.⁸ *A Vision of Love* recounts the journey of a figure searching for elusive love. The narrator, accompanied by his soul, moves through a symbolic world of allegorical figures including Pleasure, Death, Charity, Time and the Spirit of Dreams, among others. In what might be the two most telling incidents, the narrator first meets Love bruised and bound, tormented by Passion, and then at the end, witnesses Love unbound and free. *A Vision of Love* is episodic and repetitive, and written in a self-consciously poetic and symbolist style, alluding to mystical traditions from both Christianity and Judaism; the quotation from *The Song of Songs* on the cover of the book is an example of this. However, this somewhat arch style and weighty symbolism is a means of articulating deviant and criminal desire; following *The Song of Songs*, Solomon uses a particular kind of erotic and symbolic prose poetry in order to legitimize his dream of love.

on Solomon than anyone else, reads the painting as a pastiche of Botticelli's *Primavera*, replacing uxoriousness with diversity: Colin Cruise, 'Allegory and Aestheticism in Pater and Solomon' in Elicia Clements and Lesley J. Higgins, eds, *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions: Pater Across the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 68–82.

⁷ Cruise relates this figure to the Hermes-Mercurius in Botticelli's *Primavera*: Cruise, 'Allegory and Aestheticism', 73.

⁸ While the book was privately published, the publisher F. S. Ellis was involved in printing and distribution: Simon Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon* (Stroud, Glos: Catalpa Press Ltd., 1984), 33. Ellis also published Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti and William Morris and was a friend of Swinburne, Burne-Jones and Ruskin among others.

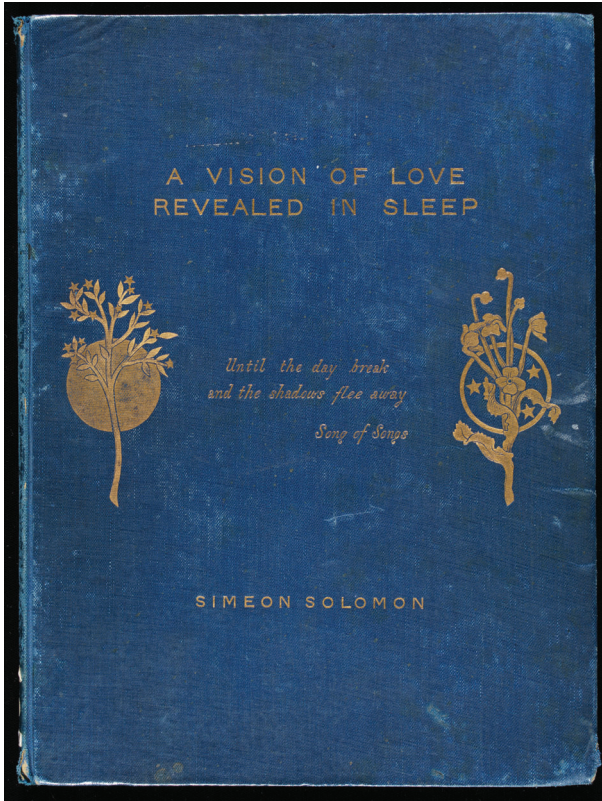


Figure 2.5. Simeon Solomon, Front cover, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, 1871. Book bound in blue cloth with gilt decoration, 260 x 200 mm. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Solomon's design for the cover of the book uses symbolism closely related to the painting (see Figure 2.5). On one side is a golden globe with a flowering myrtle branch; on the other poppies with a crystal globe. The meaning of these objects emerges in the text. Love wears myrtle in his hair; when flowering, it symbolises love's realisation, when drooping, love's anguish. Poppies, of course, are a familiar symbol, representing sleep, in which the vision is revealed, and death. The two flowers are connected in the text. When the narrator meets Love, bound and tormented by passion, he sees 'poppies mingled with myrtle', the latter stifling the former.⁹ The poppy branch wound around the myrtle is thus the suppression of love by Death or Sleep; or, as the text has it, 'Love imprisoned

⁹ Simeon Solomon, 'A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep', in Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 66.

in an alien land of oblivion'.¹⁰ At the meeting with Love at the end, however, 'the stars of the living myrtles burned fresh upon his hair'.¹¹ The task Solomon's symbolic narrative presents is how to separate the myrtle from the poppy.

The globes are rather less straightforward symbols. The golden globe is held by Love, at an intermediate point in the narrative. Having earlier seen Love bound and wounded, the narrator now comes upon Love 'seated upon a throne lowly and poor, and not worthy to bear him, – no longer, indeed, wounded and bleeding, but still bereft of his perfect glory'. Love is poised between weeping and laughter, the myrtle and poppies entwined on a branch he holds, and in his other hand 'a golden globe whose brightness was obscured and shamed by dust'.¹² The golden globe signals the potential victory of love. Although love is still mired in a world of dust and weeds and shame, the globe may be radiant and shine once love is no longer 'shamed by dust'. The crystal globe is the attribute of Eternal Silence. The narrator's Soul tells him: 'Seek not to look upon the globe, for thou assuredly knowest it is given to no man to search its depths and live'.¹³ A similar globe is held by the figure of Sleep. This figure, who 'rose impalpably from the heart of the poppies' fixes his gaze upon the globe 'wherein I knew [...] he saw pass the dreams of those who sleep beneath the stars', his face 'overshadowed by the exceeding sadness of one who knows the thoughts of men'.¹⁴ While the symbolic range is very wide in the case of both Eternal Silence and Sleep, the connection to Solomon's homosexuality is clear; the crystal globe connotes the necessity of silence and the sadness produced by the dreams of love.

The presence of the crystal globe in *A Prelude by Bach* is thus explained as a clear reference to same-sex love. Indeed, the text as a whole serves in some respects as a key to the symbols of Solomon's art. When the artist wrote to Swinburne asking him to review the poem in *The Dark Blue*, he suggested that Swinburne might use the poem as a vehicle for a discussion of his drawings and paintings.¹⁵ Similarly, John Addington Symonds, reviewing the book in *The Academy*, described the poem as 'a key to the meaning of [Solomon's] drawings'.¹⁶

¹⁰ Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 70.

¹¹ Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 70.

¹² Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 66.

¹³ Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 55.

¹⁴ Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 63.

¹⁵ A. C. Swinburne, 'Simeon Solomon: Notes on his "Vision of Love" and Other Studies', *Dark Blue* (July 1871), 568–77. For more about this see: Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 33–6.

¹⁶ John Addington Symonds, 'Solomon's "A Vision of Love"', *The Academy*, 2:21 (1871), 189. See also Sidney Colvin, 'Critical Notices', *The Fortnightly Review*, 15 (1871), 674–5.

The only illustration in the book, apart from the cover, is a photogravure/albumen print by Frederick Hollyer of one of Solomon's drawings: *Then I knew my Soul stood by me, and he and I went forth together*. This represents the narrator of the text and his Soul, shown in half-length, at the moment at which they embark on their journey. This is the body and soul of the same person, explaining the similarity in appearance, even if this is a facial type that Solomon uses again and again and can be found in *A Prelude by Bach*. The Soul points to a myrtle branch that he holds, further emphasising the plant as a symbol of love, that which they shall seek on their journey.

While *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* helps us to explain the presence of the unexpected objects in the painting, it is, in fact, a bodily absence that most forcefully marks homosexual love in the painting: the empty space where the sash and globe lie. In an oblique complement or even challenge to the reliance on conventions, whether they be age-old such as allegory or more recent such as Aestheticism, Solomon manipulates space to represent love; space itself becomes a symbol. There are three supervenient spaces in the painting. First is the space of the room, the literal setting. Second is the musical space, the conceptual space created by the song of spring, which is an analogy for the feeling of love. In his review of *A Vision of Love*, Symonds remarked that the prose poem had 'a vague yet intense yearning, a *Sehnsucht*, which belongs to music'.¹⁷ This is the familiar Aestheticist notion of art aspiring to the condition of music, but Symonds' comment points to something beyond that, which is not formal but experiential; the painting is not like music in trying to make form and content inseparable, but is representing silent music and its effects, the yearning and love-like feeling it produces in the listener. In Solomon's painting, music also serves as a ritual of collective experience. Finally, there is pictorial space, which serves to synthesise the other three. They are all linked through the composition, not just in the bodily interactions, but crucially also in the grid that the figures create. One might imagine a ground plan locating the different bodies. Such a plan will be at an angle to the ground plan of the room itself, the receding parallel lines marking the figures' locations at odds with the square frontality of the room itself.

The homosexual figure is in an uncertain relationship to those three spaces: his belonging in the room is in question; he seems not to share the musical experience, given the tension in his entrance, so unlike the relaxed manner of the others, or the more serene movement of the woman on the other side, and the fact that his love is an absence; and he disrupts the pictorial space as he teeters into the otherwise stable composition. He is not fully able to enter this world of

¹⁷ Symonds, "Solomon's "A Vision of Love"", 189.

love, and spatial dislocation is Solomon's metaphor for lack of rootedness; for not having or being denied a secure position in the world of love; for not being permitted to realise the promise of grounding that love offers.

Solomon often pits love against desire in his work, a tension that further enforces this problem. This is exemplified in *A Vision of Love* when the narrator comes across Love bound and wounded by Passion, a motif that Solomon also used in drawings, such as the watercolour *Love Bound and Wounded* (1870) and the pencil drawing *A Vision of Wounded Love* (1893). Love and Passion are at odds, and while Love is degraded by desire, so Passion also 'was grievously wounded and tormented in strange, self-devised ways'.¹⁸ This tension was symptomatic of his own life, where the space of love was quite distinct from the spaces of sex, which for Solomon were often public toilets, such as the gents in Marylebone in which he was arrested for attempted sodomy in 1873 or the pissoir close to the Bourse in Paris, where he was arrested again the following year.

Putting the Prelude and the pissoir side by side, we see the dream of rootedness and the reality of the unrooted, marked by the failure of love and the strange self-devised torment of desire. Contact in the pissoir may have been a necessity, and for some – perhaps including Solomon – a source of excitement; the sense of precariousness and danger is well known in cottaging, but this is a sexual thrill, and one that is not of necessity accompanied by love.

One of the important historical aspects of this is that Solomon unwittingly presents a challenge to the emerging world of sexology. If sexual science conceived the homosexual as a man who desires other men – 'a species' as Foucault famously termed it – Solomon wants to insist on a man *loving* other men.¹⁹ The gents' lavatory was where Solomon sought arousal and desire. As his arrests demonstrate, this was a site where the precepts of sexology appeared to be confirmed. In contrast, *A Prelude by Bach* depicts Solomon's imagined place for the possibility of love. Just as the narrator in the Vision travels from witnessing Love wounded and bloodied by Passion to the moment at the end when Love triumphs in a blaze of glory, so Solomon's painting asks how he might travel from one place to the other; from the unanchored space of cruising and sex to the glorious groundedness of love.²⁰

¹⁸ Solomon, 'A Vision of Love', 50.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 59.

²⁰ A few years later, this insistence on love rather than sex as the basis of conceiving homosexuality emerges in the work of other writers, most notably Edward Carpenter, for whom 'homogenic love' is far more important and politically far more significant and radical than homosexual activity: Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society, 1894).

The reality of love's grounding: Clare 'Tony' Atwood

This brings me to my second case study: a painting of the dining room at Smallhythe Place by Clare Atwood, made around 1920 (Figure 2.2). It is an unassuming painting, to say the least, but I shall argue – perhaps somewhat recklessly – that this develops Solomon's spatial strategy and in a more thoroughgoing manner offers us a representation of love in its ontological groundedness. Here same-sex love is less a victorious blaze of glory and more a warm glow of replete intimacy, but that, as we shall see, is the point.

Atwood is not a well-known artist, but she had a comfortable, if not stellar, career. She was well connected, being friends with such notables as Edmund Dulac and Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. After studying at the Slade School of Art, she went on to exhibit regularly in London and elsewhere. She showed work at the New English Art Club, becoming a member in 1912, and was involved with such organisations as the Women's International Art Club and the Allied Artists' Association.²¹ She exhibited works in the British exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1912, 1914 and 1928 (in the years when the Biennale had a Salon-style format rather than the single-artist or group model that emerged later).²² She also received other important commissions, not least in 1917 from the Canadian War Memorials Committee, to paint a large picture showing the Canadian Expeditionary Force in England. For this, Atwood depicted Canadian soldiers in a YMCA canteen at one of London's stations, awaiting trains to take them to their camp in Folkstone or further, to the front. The painting is now in the Senate Chamber of the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa.²³

The painting of the dining room is related closely to her life. Smallhythe is where she lived from 1916 to her death in 1962, as part of a remarkable *ménage-à-trois*. Here she cohabited with Edy Craig, the daughter of Ellen Terry, and the writer and suffragist Christabel Marshall, who went by the name of Christopher St John.²⁴ Craig and St John had been a couple since 1899. St John was a great

²¹ Mengting Yu, *London's Women Artists, 1900–1914: A Talented and Decorative Group* (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 100–111; Kenneth McConkey, *The New English: A History of the New English Art Club*, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2006).

²² Sophie Bowness and Clive Philpot, eds, *Britain at the Venice Biennale* (London: The British Council, 1995), 70, 72, 82.

²³ *The War Paintings in the Senate Chamber – Les tableaux de guerre de la chambre du Sénat* (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 2002), 13; *Art & War: Canadian War Memorial* (Published for the Canadian War Records Office by Colour Ltd, London, 1919), 38.

²⁴ Marshall changed her name to Christopher Marie St John when she converted to Catholicism. She chose St John as her surname on account of her devotion to John the Baptist; Marie clearly signals the Virgin Mary. I assume that the choice of Christopher, as with the surname, was because of St Christopher's importance. According to Michael Holroyd, she legally

devotee of Ellen Terry from an early age and met Edy when she was granted an audience with the great actress after a performance that year. By the autumn, the two of them had set up a home together. Atwood became part of the family in 1916 when she first rented two rooms in Terry's London flat and then joined the others at Smallhythe.²⁵ After Edy's death in 1947, Tony and Chris continued to live together.²⁶

Ellen Terry bought Smallhythe in 1899, and it became her home in the country. As well as the main house there were two cottages, including the Priest's House, where the three women lived, and a barn that was converted into a theatre after Terry's death in 1929. The three women were part of both a broad artistic and theatrical network. Given that Ellen Terry was the sun around which they orbited, this is hardly surprising, but theatre was also the basis of their professional lives. As a young woman, Edy had a career as an actress and costume designer, and in 1911 set up the Pioneer Players with Ellen Terry as President, Edy as director, and Chris as secretary.²⁷ Christopher St John wrote plays, most famously the suffrage drama *How the Vote Was Won*, co-written with Cicely Hamilton and first produced in 1908.²⁸ Tony also had theatrical connections. She designed sets and props for

acquired the name by deed poll in 1910: Michael Holroyd, *A Strange Eventful History: The Dramatic Lives of Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, and their Remarkable Families* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 329.

²⁵ *Ellen Terry's Memoirs, with a preface, notes and additional biographical chapters by Edith Craig and Christopher St John* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 313. The women also shared the flat at 31 Bedford Street in London. This was Atwood's official address as an artist, as shown by Royal Academy exhibition catalogues. Edy Craig allowed the actress Sime Seruya to use a room in the flat for her International Suffrage Shop from 1910 to 1913.

²⁶ There is no substantial scholarly account of the ménage; the fullest is Clair Glynis Roberts, *Lesbian Identities – A Comparison of Two Sets of Female Friends in the Early Twentieth Century*, PhD thesis, (University of Hull, 2003). Julie Holledge seems to be the scholar who first recognised the women as a lesbian threesome, although she makes it clear that this is distinct from sexual activity among all three women: Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago, 1975). Since then, the group has been routinely acknowledged, not least in biographies of Edy Craig and Ellen Terry, and as such discussion of Atwood has been limited: see, for example, Joy Melville, *Ellen and Edy: a biography of Ellen Terry and her daughter, Edith Craig, 1847–1947* (London and New York: Pandora, 1987), 228–31 260–1; Holroyd, *Strange Eventful History*, 472–4, 533–35.

²⁷ See Katherine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players, 1911–1925* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Other important accounts of the Pioneer Players include: Holledge, *Innocent Flowers*, 121–52; Christine Dymkowski, 'Entertaining Ideas: Edy Craig and the Pioneer Players', in Vivien Gardner and Susan Rutherford, eds, *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and theatre, 1850–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 221–33.

²⁸ Cicely Mary Hamilton and Christopher St John, *How the Vote Was Won: Text of the Play* (London: Woman's Press. 1909).

the Pioneer Players and, later, for productions at Smallhythe; she also appeared in productions staged at Rye and elsewhere with her fellow Smallhythians and their circle.²⁹ In 1922, she was part of the selection committee for a major exhibition of international theatre design at the Victoria & Albert Museum.³⁰ Her painting, too, often dealt with theatres, rehearsals and figures from the stage, including Ellen Terry and Herbert Beerbohm Tree.³¹ Moreover, there are paintings that represent the close relations of homosexuality and theatre, such as her portrait of Vita Sackville-West dressed in the costume Ellen Terry wore to play Portia, one of her most famous roles. In this painting, the network collapses into a single figure; the worlds of same-sex bonds and theatrical endeavour to coalesce in a single body. Thus, the three women, known by some of their theatrical chums as ‘The Three Musketeers’, lived a life theatrical both in substance and in style.³²

They were also bound into the leading lesbian art circle; friends and visitors included Virginia Woolf, Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, Vita Sackville-West, composer Ethyl Smyth and others. This inevitably raises the question of whether Smallhythe was a *ménage-à-trois* in a sexual sense, in merely companionate terms, or whether there was a specific set of relationships among the women. Here I turn to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s pioneering article ‘The Female World of Love and Ritual’, from which I take my title.³³ This was published in 1975, so appeared in a very different context, historiographically, politically and socially; fifty years later much has changed but Smith-Rosenberg still has something to teach us. She was dissatisfied with what she saw as psychosexual readings of women’s history. Women’s friendships were always framed by the question of lesbianism: were they, or weren’t they? Too often the aim was to identify lesbianism as a distinct form of love or love as a diluted form of lesbianism. Smith-Rosenberg, instead, addressed

²⁹ Sabretache, ‘Pictures in the Fire’, *The Tatler*, 920 (12 February 1919), 174, reports and provides a photograph of ‘an early-English Nativity play’ produced at Rye, in which Terry played the Prologue, and Edy and Tony played monks.

³⁰ *International Theatre Exhibition: Designs and Models for the Modern Stage* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 3 June – 16 July 1922), 3.

³¹ See, for example, *Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree rehearsing ‘Henry VIII’ by William Shakespeare at His Majesty’s Theatre*, 1910 and *The Saloon Bar at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*, n.d.: Geoffrey Ashton, *Catalogue of Paintings at the Theatre Museum, London* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum in association with The Society for Theatre Research, 1992), 94–5; *Oil Paintings in National Trust Properties. V: South* (London: The Public Catalogue Foundation, 2013), 78.

³² Norman MacDermott, *Everymania: The History of the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, 1920–1926* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1975), 30.

³³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, ‘The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1:1 (1975), 1–29.



Figure 2.6. Clare Atwood, *The Terrace Outside the Priest's House*, c. 1919. Oil on canvas, 595 x 495 mm. Smallhythe Place, Kent, UK. National Trust Photographic Library/Bridgeman Images. © Estate of Clare Atwood.

the terms in which women understood themselves and their emotional and social lives, accounting for the rich range of female friendships and relationships, including lesbian ones. In essence, Smith-Rosenberg urged the historian to move her focus from desire to love; from thinking of love as a by-product of desire, or as its adjunct, and to place love – in personal and social terms – at the centre.

Smallhythe is very much a world of love and ritual and could be taken as emblematic of Smith-Rosenberg's thesis. Atwood's painting *Outside the Priest's House*, painted in 1919 represents this (see Figure 2.6). Here we see Christopher St John inside the house, and on the terrace, in the right foreground Edy Craig and, enthroned, Ellen Terry herself, along with some other family members and friends, including Ellen's niece and great-nephew, Olive Morris and Anthony Hawtrey. This is a painting of companionship, of shared enterprise more important than any specific attachment. The people are physically separated, more so

than in *A Prelude by Bach*, but unified by Atwood's placing of the figures in the space as it compressed in the perspective, heading back into the house, creating a continuity of the space. Thus, the formal arrangement is about closeness, about a world of love that can contain romantic relationships without requiring one to ask whether or not they engaged in sexual activity, rather than other physical contact or, indeed, only emotional contact.

Of course, the question of lesbian sexuality is evident in the house and its ménage, and the developing discourse about female sexual deviance in the early-twentieth century is certainly a specific context for the ladies and their lives. Indeed, this emerges explicitly, particularly in St John's writing and self-crafting. In 1915, St John published anonymously a novel titled *Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul*.³⁴ It is a roman à clef, based on St John's own life, from her childhood, through the moment of her deciding to live without men, to a life engaging with theatre and with women's suffrage, and a series of partnerships, including one that is clearly her relationship with Edy. The novel ends with John, the central character, converting to Catholicism, as St John herself did, but moving away from the autobiographical parallel, as she establishes a relationship with a nun (a very different world of love and ritual). Given St John's Catholicism, the soul in the subtitle must be taken literally.

St John conceived herself in the book in terms of the congenital lesbian as sexologists had defined that type. She was by no means the only woman to define her sexuality, and indeed her whole self, in this way. Radclyffe Hall similarly relied on Krafft-Ebbing and Havelock Ellis to understand her sexuality.³⁵ However, in the book and in her life, St John rejected the heterosexual model for lesbianism; that is, the idea of one partner as masculine and the other as feminine, thus conforming to heterosexual marriage, as Hall and Una Troubridge did, at least in private or appropriate circumstances. While there is much yearning to be 'the Only One' to 'the Only Other', this is not linked to a gendered model of desire. Indeed, when John is happily living with Sally (Edy), she writes that 'I used to wonder which was the husband and which was the wife in the ménage'.³⁶ For

³⁴ Christopher St John, *Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul* (London: Methuen & Co., 1915).

³⁵ Sally Cline, *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1997), 42–3, 227–8; Diane Souhami, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall* (New York and London: Doubleday, 1999), 167–72. See also Laura Doan's important and more critical account in: Laura Doan, 'Lesbian Writers and Sexual Science: A Passage to Modernity?' in *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 126–63.

³⁶ St John, *Hungerheart*, 219. For brief accounts of the novel, see: George Robb, 'Gutsier, and Ten-Plus Years before the Well', *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 28:6 (2021), 46; David Trotter, 'Lesbians Before Lesbianism: Sexual Identity and Early-Twentieth-Century British

all its agonising and melodrama, *Hungerheart* points towards the more mature world of Smallhythe, where same-sex love, a mutual affirmation that ideally has equal weight on both or all sides, is the emotional bedrock. Moreover, this was a network. Love exceeds not only a pair of bodies, those of Edy and Chris, but also a trio, after Tony moved in. It extended further to Ellen Terry, whose gravitational pull had brought the women together and whose celebrity status helped to make this life possible.

Thus, the ménage at Smallhythe, both the three women and the broader female world they crafted, are exemplary of Smith-Rosenberg's thesis. What matters here is not what is homosexual and what heterosexual, what norm and what deviance, what genital and what platonic; instead, what matters is the fact that they built a home together, and a home based in loving same-sex bonds.

And so, to Atwood's painting of the dining room, which I want to discuss as an image of this complex love; not in terms of lesbian sexuality, but in terms of same-sex love; not as sexological type, but as experiential ground. This unassuming painting will be made to bear huge weight interpretatively and conceptually. This is in part because this essay is an experiment in looking for love, but more importantly because the apparent mismatch between the quiet, small and unexceptional painting and the weight of love is the point here; that only in moving away from the transcendental, the myth of the romantic, the epiphanic and the allegorical can love be painted as ontological groundedness.

What Atwood presents here is the world they share; indeed, the ground of that world. Every part of the image signals this. First, the very mise-en-scène: it is, of course, domestic and personal, waiting to be populated and used, with the settle by the fire, the table at the far left ready for a meal, and the door open at the far right, giving on to the stairs, suggesting movement through the house. While this is a far from unusual image of a domestic interior, it is one that asserts the sense of a life lived here, the life shared by the women.

Second, the objects and, most telling, the familiarity of objects: the flowers on the sideboard, the ceramics on the dresser, the plates lined up above the fire-place, and the hat, cape and walking stick on the stool. These last items are very different from the discarded symbolic objects in the Solomon painting. Rather than representing absence, these things connote someone's presence in the house; here is what has been taken off upon entering and occupying the space. (The hat, cape, and walking stick might belong to Ellen Terry, mother, matriarch, and centre of the Smallhythe community.)

Fiction', in Billie Melman, ed., *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace 1870–1930* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 206–8; Joy Melville, *Ellen and Edy*, 176–91.

Third, and perhaps most striking of all, is the use of viewpoint and perspective. Visually, we are invited to enter the space, an invitation enhanced by the discarded cape and by the open door giving onto the stairs, effectively allowing us access through the house. Atwood's paintings often deal with the geometry of architectural spaces, from theatres and stations to Billingsgate and Olympia, and in all cases the architectural structure not only gives form to the painting's composition, but also plays a role in dramatising the *mise-en-scène*. The same is true of the Smallhythe dining room. Here, Atwood identifies a pseudo-Cartesian grid in the pillars, the shadow of the pillars, the beams in the roof, and the pattern of the floor tiles. I say pseudo-Cartesian, since this is not about the objective measuring of space, but rather the subjective inhabitation; it does not provide a neat mapping of the space, but draws our attention to the materials, the wood and clay, the historical and material fabric of the house, and this contributes to the sense of our being at home here. Of course, I am not suggesting that Atwood sat down with her brushes and planned to do this; but the transfiguration of the literal home into a conceptual home is implicit in or a consequence of how she looks and how she represents the space. The texture of the space stands for the texture of their life.

This is not just a setting for a narrative of love, a space waiting to be filled with the experience of love; it signals love itself. Here, the commonplace and the extraordinary, the real and the imagined cohere. Unlike the distinct if supervenient spaces of Solomon's world, the tension between the space of absent love and the space of dangerous desire, here the spatial becomes a visual correlative for rootedness, physically and by extension emotionally. Same-sex love is at home.

As an aside, we should note that the painting also encompasses the absent servants. The highly polished surfaces, the swept floor and the laid table all indicate that invisible domestic labour is supporting this world of love and ritual. In later years, Mrs Seal, known as Bruce, lived rent-free in the Toll Cottage in exchange for household duties.³⁷ Bruce had not only been given a male monicker, but she also wore men's clothes. As such, she appears to conform to the Smallhythe ethos, but we must be wary of including her in this history in an uncritical manner. Her presence and the evident domestic labour in the painting are reminders that the

³⁷ Holroyd, *Strange Eventful History*, 535. James Lee-Milne also mentioned Bruce in his brief account of visits to Smallhythe in the 1940s. His account is rather unkind, and he concentrates on the appearance of the two old ladies, Chris and Tony, noting their corduroy trousers and men's jackets, rather overstating the masculinity of their dress; most photographs of the women show them in smocks rather than trousers. Lee-Milne describes Mrs Seal as a 'terrifying woman in the ferry cottage who helps with housework': James Lee-Milne, *Some Country Houses and their Owner* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 61.

women's world of love and ritual was not only enabled by their theatrical and Bohemian milieu, but also by their social class and status. Just as George Roberts, the man with whom Solomon was arrested in the gents' lavatory at Marylebone, received a much harsher penalty than the painter when sentenced, and just as, say, the experiments in living amongst the Bloomsbury Group relied on servants, so Smallhythe was both pioneeringly radical and, from the perspective of class, wearily orthodox.³⁸

Home is a familiar, even clichéd metaphor for love, but historians of the domestic interior have tended to focus more on décor, home life, family, and so on, rather than to insist on the word love as a defining characteristic. One might ask, though, what evidence there might be to support the claim that this is an image of love, a representation not simply of the particular home described but of the ontological groundedness it afforded its inhabitants? Is this taking May's notion of 'at-homeness' too literally? In a sense, the move from home to love is the result of a particular hermeneutic, but there are visual, painterly strategies underpinned by Atwood's understanding of domestic space that might support such an interpretative move.

First, Atwood's paintings of interiors, whether they are concerned with love or not, illustrate how emotional lives, our subjective and bodily experience, work in tandem with the world we inhabit; this is, perhaps, a symptom of our feeling love as a kind of 'at-homeness'. Unlike the model of romantic love as something that transcends the world, apparently removing us from our physical and social surroundings, Atwood depicts spaces as agents in human interactions. This is evident in a range of spaces, from the YCMA Canteen at a London railway station (probably Victoria), where Canadian soldiers wait to leave for their camp in Folkstone or the front in *On Leave*, the painting she made for the Canadian War Memorial Fund in 1917, to the unidentified Catholic charitable institution in *Finis* (1928) or the interior of the Barn Theatre in Smallhythe in 1939. Each work pays acute attention to architecture, but also to the architecture of human relationships as played out by the figures within those spaces.

Second, and more striking, is Atwood's representation of uninhabited spaces. As with the painting of the dining room at Smallhythe, she presents spaces as bearing the marks of lives and loves and personalities. Take her picture of John Gielgud's dining room from 1933 (see Figure 2.7).³⁹ The possessions, the distinctive

³⁸ On the Bloomsbury Group and domestic staff, see: Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008). The women at Smallhythe similarly relied on their chauffeur and gardener: Melville, *Ellen and Edy*, 230.

³⁹ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts MCMXXXIII* (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1933), 13. Clare Barlow included this in her pioneering exhibition *Queer British Art*



Figure 2.7. Clare Atwood, *John Gielgud's Room*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 635 x 764 mm. Tate Britain. © Estate of Clare Atwood.

taste of furniture with the green marble-topped table and Louis XIV chairs, and nineteenth-century boudoir screen, the drinks tray and cat curled up on a chair: all these remind us that a portrait of a room is the portrait of its inhabitant, and represents daily life, the use and care of possessions, the possibilities of social and emotional encounters, and so on. The painting also hints at the nexus of homosexuality, theatre and the decorative, a stereotypical set of connections, but connections that have been used positively and fruitfully by homosexual men to craft personal and professional lives, as was the case for Gielgud. In this painting, Atwood captures the porousness of home and inhabitant, of home and at-homeness. This is not a fantasy space promising an elsewhere, as in Solomon's vision and Aestheticist music room, but this is a space in which selfhood is firmly embedded.

1867–1967 (London: Tate Publishing, 2017). Gielgud was Ellen Terry's great-nephew and so part of the broader network in theatrical, sexual and familial terms.

There is another difference that makes love present in Atwood's domestic world rather than absent as in Solomon's and synthesises the metaphorical at-homeness of love with the literal home: age. The Smallhythe women could certainly exhibit behaviours associated with self-dramatising romantic love. This was particularly true of St John, whose narcissism was pointed out in a review of *Hungerheart* in *The Spectator*; the critic remarked that 'she is only able to consider the world in its relation to her own personality'.⁴⁰ However, when Tony joined the household at Smallhythe at the age of fifty, love had come to mean something different; it was, as her painting suggests, about stability rather than unpredictability, about the groundedness of a shared life rather than the flightiness of romance.

The task of the least: Love and the history of art

Thus, for Atwood, home is a means of representing love indirectly but fully. For Solomon, it is more a case of nostalgia, in its etymological sense, the pain of not being at or not having a home. This difference is a consequence of the individual circumstances of the two artists; a homosexual man in the 1860s to whom love was denied and whose life was ruined by this and a lesbian woman in the 1910s and after, for whom the female world of love and ritual accommodated desire and, as I have argued, made it less important than love. As such, the comparison is asymmetrical, although one must acknowledge that men could create loving homes, such as Ricketts and Shannon or Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, and women were also persecuted and denied love by the structures of compulsory heterosexuality. Nevertheless, what the comparison does reveal is the ways in which home can be deployed to literalise the conceptual space of groundedness, whether finding or not finding a place in the world anchored by a person or persons who might affirm one's being. Making space a symbol in this way bypasses the need for illustration or allegory, avoids the problem of desire or sex, and attends to the feeling of love rather than its behaviour. It finds a solution to the indirectness of visual representation. But while Solomon's symbolism is designed to represent a love that cannot speak its name or paint its image, Atwood requires no such strategy, for she has found a way of painting love. Hers is no vision of love revealed in sleep, in a fictional space, but a vision of love revealed in the real world, a real space transfigured by love and ritual. The dining room

⁴⁰ *The Spectator* (17 April 1915), 549. A very sympathetic review in *The Asiatic Review* also comments in passing that 'The writer [...] attributes too much singularity to herself' in respect to her desire to be loved: L. C. W. 'Reviews and Notices', *The Asiatic Review*, 6 (April 1915), 342.

at Smallhythe is not where falling in love happens, but it is where love persists. While both paintings show domestic spaces, there is a marked difference between the Aestheticist fantasy of Solomon's space and the quotidian nature of Atwood's, where instead of the discarded sash and crystal globe are the cape and walking stick laid down, instead of the mystical myrtle are flowers arranged on a side table, instead of absence and silence, love is present.

In essence, this is about what John Armstrong calls 'the task of the least'. This he defines as seeing 'the significance of a detail which a hasty eye would easily pass over', understanding how that detail is part of another person's world and life; apprehending not the cataclysm of falling in love but the small intimacies of a love that persists.⁴¹ For Armstrong this 'task of the least' is an act of the imagination, but it is an imaginative act that does not change or distort the world. Rather, it imagines the world more acutely as it is: 'imagination can be allied to acuteness of perception, rather than distortion. And this function of the imagination has its natural application with respect to the quieter, less obvious features of a person or a work of art'.⁴²

This is Atwood's world. She sees the quieter, the unobtrusive, the less obvious, representing this world in a way that both minimises its drama and yet magnifies its emotional and amatory force. The actors are, in her theatrical mode, waiting in the wings, but not to enter and perform high-flown, high-strung drama; rather, to sit, to eat, to share a life. The dining room does not bear the spiritual and personal struggles of *Hungerheart*, but it is here that the heart is fed. And this is where we witness the ontological groundedness that love ideally provides. The task of the least serves as the corrective May demands; he points out that in conceptions of love as unconditional, eternal and selfless, 'love is being overloaded'.⁴³

Perhaps this imaginative task of the least is how art can best represent love. Perhaps it is in this 'task of the least' that the world of love and ritual is most visible, that the hysterical desire of falling in love and its vicissitudes is displaced by a better understanding of love. And I wonder if the history of art is particularly well suited to attend to this task of the least. After all, the seeking of details and relating them to broader contexts of life, discourse, or society is what many art historians do; they find the visual symptom that reveals the structure or fundamental concern. The art historian is well positioned to see the texture of love, its quiet traces in the image. This is a fundamentally tendentious process, but as

⁴¹ Armstrong, *Conditions of Love*, 95.

⁴² Armstrong, *Conditions of Love*, 96.

⁴³ May, *Love: A History*, 239.

no less a figure than Heinrich Wölfflin pointed out, 'It is true, we only see what we look for, but we only look for what we can see'.⁴⁴

There are, inevitably, objections to be raised to all of this. Not least of these, it may be that my reading of these paintings is too much for them to bear; that the paintings are being overloaded and this is more about my intention to find love in these works, than about history. But even if that is the case, I hope that this essay has opened up questions about how we might think of love and intimacy rather than sexual desire and identity as a framework for art historical investigation; not, I hasten to add, to displace desire, but rather to broaden our endeavours, and to make the task of the least for the painter the task of the least for the art historian.

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⁴⁴ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger, sixth edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 247.

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Fairy Tale Love: Little Red Riding Hood and Photography, 1820–1920

Viktorija de Rijke

Prologue

Love is such a classic narrative of the fairy tale genre that the term (or cliché) ‘fairy tale romance’ is ubiquitously used either to applaud or decry unrealistic expectations of beauty, sacrificial femininity, male chivalry, love at first sight, romantic marriage or happily ever after. Fairy tale historian Jack Zipes argues that mass-mediatised versions, like some of the fairy tale images in this chapter,¹ have produced a universal voice and image which stultifies the public with escapist fantasy. But for critic Marina Warner and many others, fairy tale is a feminist genre, optative rather than prescriptive (suggestive of ‘if only’, rather than ‘you must’), which offers women a voice with which to critique love, from the literary tales of the seventeenth century to the disjunctive retellings of contemporary feminism.² As a highly metamorphic genre that has flourished in diverse media including oral tradition, literature, film and the visual arts, fairy tale has a great deal to say about love in all its forms, understood as an emotion with social, political and gendered affects and effects. Thus, in a sense, fairy tale love is at once both romantic cliché and its savage critique.

The child is of course another complex (adult) construction into which Rousseau and the Romantics invested ideals of inherent innocent love from a ‘natural’ pure point of origin that society corrupts. Given the flagrantly unequal power relations of child to adult, Jacqueline Rose’s study of Peter Pan phenomena declared children’s literature to be an ‘impossibility’ that serves adult needs to secure an imagined childhood innocence.³ In figures such as Peter Pan who famously refused to grow up, the ‘Golden Age’ of the nineteenth century saw what Ernest Dowson (1889) celebrated as the ‘Cult of Childhood’,⁴ with adults

¹ Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (London: Routledge, 1983).

² Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Virago, 1995).

³ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴ ‘Dowson and other members of the “cult” insisted that contemplating the innocent simplicity of children served as a healthy corrective to the tawdriness and scepticism of modern life’, according to Marah Gubar, in *Representing Childhood: The Victorian Child 1837–1901* (2024).

arguing that the love of children somehow cured society of evil. Manufactured as a figure both incorrupt and corruptible, the female child was particularly susceptible to this simultaneous idealisation and eroticisation.

It could be also said that the Victorians began a love affair with fairy tale and photography. Exploring fairy tale love as depicted via English photographs of children over the long Victorian period necessitates both a selective perspective and selection of images, but in so doing, I am aware that the study also necessarily omits images of working-class and minoritised children in England, who, rather than posing for fairy tale pictures over this period, were working the streets, factories and chimneys for the privileged and powerful. The Victorian period is often accused of being a particularly hypocritical one, in which the majority of actual childhoods, entirely unlike many idealistic depictions, were hard times. Perhaps, rather than a hypocritical age, it was one of extreme tensions: the threat to religion with the advent of science and technology, prosperity gained at the expense of poverty and enslavement, and child idealisation amidst high rates of child labour and child mortality.

Eager to understand its own complexity, the era is marked by technical innovation – such as photography’s invention – joined with physiognomy and other pseudo-sciences using the new medium to support spurious and prejudicial claims for reading, classifying and categorising the body. Yet many Victorians also believed in fairies, and that external signs – visible in photographs – could reflect the workings of the soul. In her study of the assimilation of the photographic image into literary rhetoric, Helen Groth claims that ‘the invention of photography complicated the always troubled distinction between illusion and truth, realism and romance in the Victorian period’.⁵ Within this troubled arena, this chapter addresses illusory, faked, fairy tale forms of love in photography of the child. Thus, love of/for the child carried the period’s uncertain slippage between representations – or performances of – platonic, romantic, spiritualised, naturalised and sexualised objects of commodification and consumption. Within this troubled arena, this chapter addresses illusory, fairy tale forms of love in photography of the child.

Once upon a time, fairy tale

Anthropological research finds the origins of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in an oral tale passed around in tenth-century France to Italy, where variants such as ‘La Finta Nona’ [The False Grandmother] were created. In the oldest variants,

⁵ Helen Groth, *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

the child is deceived by the disguised wolf into eating her grandmother's flesh and drinking her blood, getting into bed with the wolf, but saving herself from being eaten by deceiving the wolf in turn. Migrating easily to different versions and media, the tale has what adaptation theorists Gaudreault and Marion call the 'adaptogénie' of a text,⁶ or what Emer O'Sullivan describes as a 'quarry' for adaptors 'from which pieces can be taken and put together' in folkloric mode.⁷

Histoires, or Tales of Past Times (1697) (published in English by 1729) by Charles Perrault,⁸ who is credited with laying the foundations of the new bourgeois genre of fairy tale, removed all gory cannibalistic reference and sexual or female initiative. His 'Le Petite Chaperon Rouge', ending with the child eaten by the wolf, is a warning to readers of the dangers of strangers preying on young girls. The Brothers Grimm used the French version in turn, told to them by Marie Hassenflug of Huguenot background, for their 'Rotkäppchen' ['Little Red Cap'] (1812), though they defined the tale as uniquely German, because they believed, as did Hitler, such stories were reflective of German culture.⁹ As editors, the Grimms further censored and sanitised the tale's origins by removing sexual or violent elements, securing the child's rescue from a male patriarch and adding a didactic warning, thus altering the tale very fundamentally and ideologically.

According to Hans-Wolf Jäger, 'Rotkäppchen' was also a commentary on the French invasion of the Rhineland during the Napoleonic wars. The French were associated with wolves at the time, hence the child in a red cap could be read as the innocent German youth first drawn to the revolution, then repulsed by its cruelty and barbarism. The Grimms reworked the tale into an explicit narrative of law and order, reversing the child/girl's initiative for conformity. For Zipes, 'it is impossible to exaggerate the impact and importance of the Little Red Riding Hood syndrome as a dominant cultural pattern in western societies'.¹⁰ While pointing out the era also included some parodies, presumably

⁶ A. Gaudreault and P. Marion, 'An art of borrowing: the intermedial sources of adaptation', in D. Cutchins, K. Brebbs and E. Voigts, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2018), 31.

⁷ Emer O'Sullivan, 'Does Pinocchio have an Italian Passport?' in G. Lathey, ed., *The Translation of Children's Literature: A Reader* (Cleveland: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 160.

⁸ Charles Perrault, *Histoires, or Tales of Past Times* (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 2020)

⁹ This was later to resurface in Nazi Germany, where nationalist propaganda 'sought to ground all the Grimms' tales in German blood and soil, though many originated in France and elsewhere in Europe' (Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 35).

¹⁰ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 56.

intended for adult audiences, such as F. W. N. Bayley's 'Comic Nursery Rhymes' (1846), his research reveals that for the Victorians, 'Little Red Riding Hood' largely swung between the Perrault and the Grimm 'regulatory' versions, of 'male creation and projections', 'tame and prudent' warning to control children and women's 'carnality', that 'reflects men's fear of women's sexuality – and their own as well ... in other words, that Little Red Riding Hood is to blame for her own rape'.¹¹ In Germanic thinking, fairy tales were an integral part of German Romanticism with its qualities of wonder and enchantment, spiritual and psychological insights, picked up as a vehicle for the rational mind of the German Enlightenment and to transmit didactic, moralistic messages. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Brothers Grimm were not writers but librarians and editors, collecting their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*, 1812) predominantly from women, then adjusting the stories to fit a patriarchal paradigm. They gave us evil stepmothers, children-eating witches, and so on, though scholars have since exposed the fact that for example, the region where the tale Hansel and Gretel originates has graveyards full of mothers who starved to death in a famine rather than let their husbands or children go without food. That, too, is a form of love, but apparently not one that men could stomach.

Notwithstanding its censorship, the genre was clearly loved by the Victorians. Fairy tale, fantasy and nonsense were popular forms for page and stage, from chapbooks and weeklies sold in the street to leather-bound literary collections, and in theatre, music hall and ballet. Well-known writers such as Dickens and Thackeray produced works with fantastic elements, and many writers followed suit with fairy tales in periodicals for adults and children. Traces of 'Little Red Riding Hood' can be found in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1862), and other sensation novels of the Victorian period with their plot devices of uncertainty and melodrama, such as Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White* (1860) or Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), following fairy story structures involving rags-to-riches, murder, bigamy and adultery. Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf featured in scrapbooks, on story cards, postcards, in paintings and popular prints, figurines, vases, cups and bowls for children, as dolls, and fancy-dress costumes. Thus, the tale (along with photographs of the characters) went through its own nineteenth-century process of beloved cultural 'artefactualisation'.¹²

¹¹ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 57.

¹² Susan Stewart, 'Notes on Distressed Genres', *The Journal of American Folklore* 104 (1991), 5–31.



Figure 3.1. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *le Gras*, France, 1827, the earliest saved photographic image, heliograph on pewter plate, open domain.

‘Photogenic drawing’ or ‘fixing a shadow’ is what Nicéphore Niépce called the first stages of photography’s invention.¹³ John Herschel coined the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ to describe what Geoffrey Batchen calls ‘the processes’ magnet-like bipolar character.¹⁴ Calling it ‘the miracle of analogy’, Kaja Silverman outlines how cameras themselves rapidly improved in design from the huge unwieldy boxes of the 1830s mounted on tripods to Lewis Carroll’s Otterwill folding camera of 1856 and Thomas Skiafe’s fast-lens version of 1858 modelled on a gun which he called the ‘Pistol-graph’ (perhaps foolishly, as pointing it at Queen

¹³ Nicéphore Niépce quoted in Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ John Herschel quoted in Wells’ *Photography*. Batchen also sees the term as indicative of photography’s central paradoxes: ‘photo’ meaning ‘light’, inferring ‘(sun, God, nature)’ and ‘graph’ that of ‘writing (history, humankind, culture); an impossible binary opposition fixed in uneasy conjunction only by the artifice of language’, in ‘The Naming of Photography’ *History of Photography*, 17:1 (1993), 28–29.

Victoria almost resulted in Skiafe's arrest).¹⁵ Photography, as a technological process, also represented a challenge to Victorian mores about what constituted art. 'Frequently imaged in contemporary writing as the "new child" abroad in the world; to Wiertz in 1855, the daguerreotype was an "infant prodigy"'.¹⁶ A reviewer of the 1856 Photographic Exhibition in London presented photography as 'Art's youngest and fairest child'.¹⁷ Writing 15 years after its invention, Lady Eastlake, a photographer in her own right, announced that:

Photography has become a household word and a household want; it is used alike by art and science, by love, business and justice; is found in the most sumptuous saloon and the dingiest attic – in the solitude of the Highland cottage and the glare of the London gin palace – in the pocket of the detective, in the cell of the convict, in the folio of the painter and the architect, among the papers and patterns of the mill owner and manufacturer and on the cold breast of the battlefield.¹⁸

What she omitted from her list was the fact that this metaphoric 'infant' apparatus was also very frequently turned on the infant; pointed at real children. Eastlake was also anticipating how ubiquitous and classless the medium would become by several decades. In 1859, Charles Baudelaire advised only using photography as 'secretary and record-keeper', linking its invasion to the 'great industrial madness of today' and warning that it threatened to 'supplant or corrupt art altogether'.¹⁹ In fact, 'pictorial' photography, from the 1850s onwards, sought to overcome the problem Baudelaire had warned of by taking meticulously arranged compositions and reducing the signifiers of technological production, such as making the image deliberately out of focus and scratching or marking the print to evoke a canvas. Such efforts to appear painterly can also account for the trend for religious scenes, allegorical and fairy tale subjects (thereby placing the connotations of the industrial age far ahead). So, in reflecting on photographs of Little Red Riding Hood, we start with the kind of painting they may emulate.

This *Little Red Riding Hood* was painted in 1851 as John Thomas Peele returned to London from having some success with idealised genre subjects featuring children (invariably in bare feet, with pets, butterflies, doves, and so on) in New York. Little Red Riding Hood is standing poised outside her grandmother's house with her

¹⁵ Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, or the History of Photography, Part 1* (California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Wiertz quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 15.

¹⁷ C. Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 132.

¹⁸ Eastlake quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 16.

¹⁹ Baudelaire quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 13.



Figure 3.2. John Thomas Peele, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 1851, oil on canvas, 49 x 38 in, Private Collection.

basket, about to go in and face the wolf (Figure 3.2). The Victorian viewer would know that the wolf is in bed disguised as grandmother, and the next scene will involve the ‘what big eyes/teeth you have’ refrain, followed by her being eaten.

Then he put the poor lady’s night cap on his head
 And cunningly slipped himself into the bed;
 And when Riding Hood knocked as she’d oft done before,
 Says the wolf ‘Pull the bobbin, it will open the door ...’
 (from *The History of Little Red Riding Hood*, Juvenile Books, J. L. Marks,
 Smithfield, 1840)

As Zipes’ research and Peele’s painting demonstrate, Victorian English versions of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ censored out the tale’s former frankness about sexuality and dangers in the woods into a ‘coded message about rationalising bodies and sex... altering the tale ideologically to satisfy the morals and ethics

of the emerging bourgeoisie in the nineteenth-century'.²⁰ Peele focuses careful attention on the materiality of the scene: the drapery of the child's fancy-dress costume as she turns to face the viewer while pulling the bobbin, the white linen spilling over the basket, the cracked stone doorway out of which the hollyhocks are growing, tall as the child. The painterly metaphors are those of threatened innocence, growth and fecundity: in the rosy child, the flowering abundance of the mallow and the grape vine, contradicted by the dark shadow of the door (evoking the wolf on the other side of it). Looking up from under her red hood, the child's expression seems both knowing and inviting.

This particular moment in the fairy tale is revisited again and again in photographs, perhaps because it does not involve (how to depict) the wolf, yet of course the wolf is inferred. Typically, though the child's shining curled ringlets and white skin suggest she is not of the rural classes, she is posed in a white apron, red cloak and hood with a linen-covered basket, knocking at a wooden door framed with ivy, plus a few other rustic props, such as milk jug.



Figure 3.3. Anon., *Roodkapje klopt op grootmoeders deur* [Little Red Riding Hood knocks on grandmother's door] 1853–1863, hand-coloured stereograph, 85 mm x 173 mm, open domain.

'Cartes de visite' or visiting cards (Figure 3.4) were small-format photographs patented in Paris by the photographer André Disdéri in 1854, with his multi-lens camera. As an early form of social media, photographic cards were commonly traded among friends and visitors in the Victorian period. Albums for the collection and display of cards became a common fixture in

²⁰ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 40.



Figure 3.4. Anon., *When the little girl knocks, he says, 'open the latch and come in'*, 1898–1903, hand-coloured photograph, L'éditeur Künzli Frères (Paris), 141 x 93 mm, open domain.

Victorian parlours. Queen Victoria collected visiting cards and photographs that she placed in over 100 albums, launching a new scrapbooking craze of 'cartomania'. The practice became a status symbol among the privileged class. As it gained momentum, it also gave weight to an emerging photography culture and commodification.²¹

Hand-coloured after printing, (often done by young women on male photographer's instructions) these visiting cards are unusual for being taken out of doors rather than posed on front of artist-produced country scenes (which studio photographers could commission, then use again and again). Small cultural differences, such as the French version (Figure 3.4) with the lace door curtains, the broderie apron and wicker tray, would have charmed international buyers,

²¹ This commodification mirrors historians describing nineteenth century science as a collecting practice.

and Batchen & Gitelman believe that it was the success of the *carte de visite* that led to photography's institutionalisation across Europe. The sudden proliferation of reproducible images that were both 'magical and empirical modes of storytelling',²² classifying things and people, meant new kinds of observers emerged – with new commercial interests. In this way, fairy tale also became co-opted into commercialised use, with certain fixed tropes and meanings, such as the trope of Little Red Riding Hood at the door.

Taking on Enlightenment ideals of the child as born good but in need of formation, and in the arts as representative of perfect, angelic morality (as found in Sir 'Sloshua'²³ Reynolds' child paintings) youth and innocence continued to be conflated and admired in the Victorian era. Incapable of consummating his marriage to Effie Gray (whom he met when she was twelve and he twenty-one) John Ruskin fell disastrously in love with Rose la Touche when she was ten and he forty. The tension in many fairy tales, and perhaps especially 'Little Red Riding Hood', speaks of love's continuum from innocence to experience, of normative to pathological or bestial love and love on the edge of acceptability, like Lewis Carroll's photograph of Alfred Lord Tennyson's niece Agnes Grace Weld as *The Little Red Riding Hood* (Figure 3.5). Carroll asked Agnes to act out the lines from a poem that he inscribed in his album next to the photograph: 'And now at last she threads the maze, / And now she need not fear / Nor trembles she, nor turns nor stays, / Although the wolf be near'.

Friend to many more children than adults, and less conscious of his lifelong stutter with the young, Carroll famously told stories to the girls as he posed them, and one sitter recalled fifty years later his skills in playfulness 'that still live in the memory after all these years', and how the children enjoyed the magical sessions, given 'his traffic with the fairies seemed a very definite thing to us, then. He was, so to speak, the link between them and us, the "middleman" in fact, and the Interpreter'.²⁴ Carroll sent the children signed copies of their photos and wrote them miniature notes in 'fairy writing' using a fine nib on 'Lilliputian Stationary'. The playfulness of Carroll's books, letters, games and stories thus became part of the photographic process, and this, Diane Waggoner believes, means his images are 'one of the first attempts to visualise difference between

²² Geoffrey Batchen and Lisa Gitelman, 'Afterword: Media History and History of Photography in Parallel Lines' in Nicoletta Leonardi and Simone Natale, eds, *Photography and Other Media in the Nineteenth Century* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2019), 15.

²³ Around 1848 the Pre-Raphaelite painters called Joshua Reynolds 'Sir Sloshua' as they objected to his influence for lax painting technique or commonplace genre scenes and portraits.

²⁴ Dymphna Ellis quoted in Diane Waggoner, *Lewis Carroll's Photography and Modern Childhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 109.



Figure 3.5. Lewis Carroll, *The Little Red Riding Hood*, 1857, one of only three images Carroll allowed the public to see in his lifetime (at the 5th Annual Exhibition of the Photographic Society, South Kensington Museum, 1858), 650 x 963 mm, open domain.

children and adults in the new medium of photography...[assuming] the role of the interpreter between the world of the child and the world of the adult',²⁵ signifying a significant shift away from untroubled romanticised love of the child and its world to something more conspiratorial.

Given the deliberate staging of the shot, it is possible that Carroll was also playing interpreter or 'middleman' between photographer and sitter, real and fairy world by suggesting the child herself as wolf. Agnes is anything but meek and is scowling, looking up threateningly from under her eyebrows, leading to Carol Mavor's response: 'Here are the eyes of the wolf that has presumably just eaten her grandmother; we wonder whether she has eaten the wolf, and whether

²⁵ In Marilyn Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: constructions of the child between Rousseau and Freud* (London: Ashgate, 2002), 159.

she is about ready to eat us up'.²⁶ Is there perhaps an element of this tale that speaks of the paedophile fantasies of adults imagining themselves innocent while imitating an aesthetics of eroticism? Displacing the taboo by representing the child as knowing? For Wakely-Mulroney, 'evidence of this not only in the author's correspondence, where he worked to persuade parents that his interest in naked girls was wholly artistic, but also in the diaries, where he worked to persuade himself'. She believes that Carroll, particularly though his later work exploring 'romantic but chaste' thus 'permissible forms of child-loving' in *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), was attempting to reconcile the creator of Alice with that of 'the clergyman concerned for the child's soul',²⁷ and that of his own ambiguous sexuality.

Apparently, negative Oxford gossip about Carroll's interest in photographing young girls, including in the nude, may have contributed to his destroying negatives and giving photography up by 1880. Given Seth Koven's research in the social and sexual politics of 'slumming' London suggests the Victorian 'public were well aware of the existence of a large underground market in pornographic photos of women and children',²⁸ it is perhaps no surprise that on his instructions after his death, Carroll's executors destroyed a collection of nude photographs of children gathered in an envelope marked 'honi soit' – an act which has only succeeded in further incriminating the photographer. As Wakely-Mulroney puts it, the abbreviated chivalric maxim 'honi soit qui mal y pense' ('shame be to him who thinks evil of it') 'underscores Carroll's awareness of the images' potential eroticism' while in his (conscious) mind, perhaps, exonerating himself in posterum.²⁹

Laurence Talaraich-Veilmas argues that several examples of Carroll's photography reveal how, rather than the stereotyped motif of 'the angel in the house', the 'Victorian feminine ideal was poised over contradictory discourses which the rise of capitalism brought to climactic excess'.³⁰ He cites Harriet Louisa Child-Pemberton's late Victorian *All My Doing or Red Riding Hood Over Again* (1882) which opens in a nursery discussion where the narrator agrees with her niece that 'we don't meet with wolves now, and if we did, we couldn't talk to them'.³¹

²⁶ Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London: J.B. Tauris, 1994), 29.

²⁷ Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'The Man Who Loved Children: Lewis Carroll Studies' Evidence Problem' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 30:3 (2021), 349.

²⁸ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 118.

²⁹ Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'The Man Who Loved Children', 361.

³⁰ Laurence Talaraich-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 5.

³¹ Talaraich-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, 211.

The narrator then, however, recounts a true-life story about taking a train to her grandmother as a heedless young woman, wearing ‘red stockings and a crimson cloak’, meeting a dapper little man whose looks are somehow ‘unreadable’ but whose manners are so good he cannot be an ‘ow ruffian’, despite the fact that an austere woman in the same carriage ‘casts severe and suspicious glances at him’. The wolf-man discovers her direction, robs her of her purse, and later inveigles himself into her grandmother’s house, ostensibly to see and sketch the carvings and mouldings. Here, his big eyes are wide open, taking in the costly commodities of pictures, mirrors, china. One night the place is robbed of jewellery and other valuables, the thief disguised in her own scarlet cloak. The young woman’s suitor is shot in the leg while chasing the villains. Eventually caught, the case comes to trial and the narrator testifies. Her wolfish gentleman is exposed as the ‘well-known leader of a housebreaking gang’. Her grandmother never recovers her health from the shock, her suitor has to have his leg amputated, and she is left a ‘lonely old maid’.

Written for the Christian Knowledge Society, this variant of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ remains a ‘scare and warning tale’ of feminine foolishness and its consequences, while working in both Victorian and quite modern motifs. Independent travel on the railway associated with life ‘off the rails’, the dangers of fashion and commodity linked to the spoils of vanity and theft, and the ‘unreadable’ physiognomy of the stranger associated with Victorian society’s sexual socialisation in its effacement of the natural body, its wildness concealed. In consumer culture, anyone can pass as anything. The fact that the villain presents himself as an attractive gentleman and later wears her red cloak as disguise suggests he is merely a reflection of the young woman, who artificially constructs her image through fashion accessories. ‘Both are artefacts – products of mass reproduction’. For Talaraich-Veilmas, the tale reveals ‘the transformation of individuals into sets of visual codes – in other words, images’,³² which he links directly to photography.

Confusing sight with insight, photography as ‘evidence’ of the metaphysics of presence amplified the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy (face reading) and later phrenology (skull measurements) as a reliable means of judging personality and mental traits. European Victorian fervour for classification into ‘types’ used photography as a means to observe ‘objective’ differences between peoples, races, castes and social categories, in support of the genocides and enslavements of empire and colonial oppression, where photography was ‘no mere handmaid of empire, but a shaping dimension of it’.³³ Thus, photography, as a social tool,

³² Talaraich-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, 12

³³ Quoted in Wells’ *Photography*, 6.

contributed to shaping social categories, like those of fairy tale notions of love, and the love of children. Typological classification was considered to be reassuring to the rising numbers of urban middle classes and because visual appearances became important in an age of mass public transport, where physiognomy and phenology provided ‘a method of quickly assessing the characters of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth century’.³⁴ Hence the risks posed in Child-Pemberton’s *Red Riding Hood Over Again* (1882), where the young woman fails to read the stranger-danger on a train. Such dependency on a method of social observance quickly shifted to that of social control, with an increasingly professionalised use of photographic ‘evidence’ stored in police and medical archives, to its later sinister and political use in eugenics.

The child was not exempt from the pernicious effects of physiognomy, and the use of multiple photographic images was central to many publications depicting criminal, disabled or mentally ill children. Such usage illustrates the tension between exclusive romantic and realist versions of photography; that same paradox which Roland Barthes was later to pronounce the multivalence of the medium as able to picture both realist and rhetorical relations. This reading is far from the precise ‘language of nature’ as the Victorians had pictured it but sees it as language and nonlanguage, or a ‘message without a code’.³⁵ In terms of ‘framing the Victorians’, then, ‘from the 1850s, and with increasing authority, photography as a practice embodied, documented and justified the “flow”, or rather imbalance of power between the standard (subject) and its aberrations (objects) in popular physiognomy as much as in medical textbooks’.³⁶

Among Carroll’s contemporaries was the leading British figure of mental science Henry Maudsley, who made observations on ‘the insanity of early life’, with the ‘perverted action’ and ‘neuropathic temperament’ of children described as brutes and animals; like Havelock Ellis’ picture of children growing ‘out of initially savage animal and criminal organisation’.³⁷ Charles West, whose *Lectures on the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* went through six editions between 1848 and 1874, stressed that one could not diagnose children without feeling real love for

³⁴ Alan Sekula, ‘The Body and the Archive’, in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (New York: MIT Press, 1989), 348.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 17.

³⁶ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (New York: Cornell University Press 1996), 166.

³⁷ Henry Maudsley’s ‘The Insanity of Early Life’ (1867), quoted in Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science and Medicine 1840–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182.

them and learning to speak their language (something relatives recalled of Carroll, as one of his abilities when speaking and playing with children). According to Anna Neill, ‘the assumption that [Carroll’s] photographs are evidence of sexual predation also, interestingly, situates the observation of an unfolding young life within the frame of mental illness’. She argues that, ‘with what seems almost like calculated punning, Dodgson’s photographs of children also play with the theme of development’, given his images capture children in surprisingly natural poses; ‘no small feat given the extraordinary challenges of the wet-plate process, which required a portable darkroom kit and chemicals for on-the-spot processing’, plus of course the fact that the child would have to keep still for at least sixty seconds in Summer, when the light was best.³⁸ Describing that ‘peculiar web of space and time’ he called ‘aura’, Walter Benjamin argued that photographs of the past hold something that ‘cannot be silenced, that impudently demands the name of the person who lived at the time, and who, remaining real even now, will never yield herself up entirely into art’.³⁹ Carroll’s photographs feature the expressions of sullen, bored, belligerent, hostile, tired or suspicious children, and in that sense, seem more real to life than many other Victorian portraits of children.

I would like to argue that Carroll’s visual code might be metaphoric. From his early years at school, Carroll demonstrated what his schoolmasters recognised as ‘a genius for analogy’ (whereas the boy himself reflected that at school none of the learning ‘was done *con amore*’). That love was to come, in his mathematics achievements, nonsense writing and photography. Given his interest was parallelism in *relations* rather than appearance, Carroll’s *Little Red Riding Hood* – surrounded by tangled ivy with her hair loose and her ferocious expression – is analogous to the idea of the feral, or wild child, an image of fascination for the Victorians, not least because of the tensions between the need to ‘civilise’ a sexually uninhibited body tempered with the need to retain childlike ‘innocence’.⁴⁰ Given parody was Carroll’s means of questioning the tangle of Victorian evolutionary and educational discourse, the fact that Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) ‘subjects its heroine to morphological metamorphoses and species confusion’

³⁸ Anna Neill, *Human Evolution and Fantastic Victorian Fiction* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2021).

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, *Screen*, 13:1, (1972), 20.

⁴⁰ According to Joanne McPherson’s ‘From Victor to Mowgli: the Transformation of the Wild Child in Victorian Literature and Culture’, *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal* 5:1 (1999), 124, Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron captured in the Caune woods of France in 1799 was the object of intensive study, caught the European Victorian imagination, and ‘became part of a medical, sexual and psychological discourse on the phenomenon of wild children’ that required ‘civilising’ while retaining their ‘natural’ innocence.

should come as no surprise.⁴¹ He had already experimented with the Little Red Riding Hood photograph.

Henry Peach Robinson's image (Figure 3.6), like Carroll's, is careful to include – if not stage – the tangled ivy, rural jug, basket and recognisable costume, but this Little Red Riding Hood is no wild child. Yet, just as the camera is 'loaded', 'aimed' at what will be 'taken', 'captured' or 'shot', photography was for some Victorians described as a collector sport, as if on a colonial hunt to bag trophies; its subjects as wild animals to be pursued. In his journal, Robinson described 'a picturesque model caught wild, but too stupid to be of any use. Naturally, she had a delightful smile, and though I tried all I knew for a fortnight to overcome her timidity – mixed her with tame models, as they train wild elephants – she remained camera-shy, and I could do nothing with her'.⁴² Unlike Carroll, whose repeated criticisms of the practice of hunting in *Sylvie and Bruno* has been attributed as 'evidence of the author's awareness of the problems that attend relationships between predatory men and girls',⁴³ Robinson positions himself proudly as a colonial aggressor in the 'taming' of the sitter 'caught wild but too stupid to be of any use'. But, like Carroll and many photographers of the time, Robinson wanted his images to be regarded as an art form. Several of his images could be seen as effectively substituting for the representational task previously attributed to painting.

By focusing on the fabric of the girl's costume, his image strongly evokes Peele's painting of 1851, with its painterly attention to the innocent child turned to face the viewer while knocking, and the hollyhocks planted beside the door. In reality, this is clearly a dressed-up farm or work building with carefully placed stage props such as climbing ivy, the rustic pot, the background blurred out of focus, perhaps to hide unsightly or modern working equipment. The wolf, as always in Victorian photography of the tale, is implied, never depicted.

Carroll rented a studio in Badcock's Yard from 1863, in the same street as his Oxford College. Part of an upholstery shop, the studio presumably offered fabrics, as can be seen in the Persian carpet and heavy drapes on the right. No longer knocking on the door, this is a Little Red Riding Hood who has come inside, taken off her shoes and is perhaps looking directly at the wolf in her grandmother's bed, pointing her cane at the camera (and the photographer) like a magic wand, as if to ward off evil. Tellingly, Carroll has printed the emulsion peeling back from

⁴¹ Anna Neill, *Human Evolution and Fantastic Victorian Fiction*, 8.

⁴² Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, 147.

⁴³ Henry Peach Robinson, *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph* (London 1896; reprint New York: Arno, 1973), 104.



Figure 3.6. Henry Peach Robinson, *Little Red Riding Hood Arrives at the Door of Her Grandmother's House*, 1858/9, Albumen print, 23.3 x 18.7 cm, open domain.

the left-hand side of the glass negative, which acts like a second curtain revealing the chemical process, like breaking the third wall in the theatre.

From painting to poetry, bare feet have variously been read as symbolic of saintly submission or, as substitutes for genitalia, expressive of (female) penance. We might read this Little Red Riding Hood's bare feet as a pure index of the innocent childish state for the Victorians, but Carroll's images of Beatrice Hatch as *The Little Acrobat* (1879) or with her sister as *Beggar Children* (1872) follows a plethora of bare-footed photographs of the workhouse or street poor in 'beggar rags'.⁴⁴ Waggoner has documented the considerable lengths that Carroll underwent to ensure his images were of 'nonsexual bodies that could only be

⁴⁴ Beggars in rags, street children and child performers were subjects of cultural fascination to the Victorians, considered both 'picturesque' and as symbols of urban degeneration. Allegorical and evangelical photographs took artistic and charitable form, such as advertising for Barnardo's Ragged Schools and orphanages.



Figure 3.7. Lewis Carroll, unknown child as *Little Red Riding Hood*, Badcock's Yard, Oxford, 1868.

looked at innocently', believing these 'tactics were determined by a necessity to secure a visual practice that had become deeply uncertain by the Victorian era because of the Romantic legacy of dividing purity and sexuality by childhood and adulthood', but her claim that revealing the girls' feet brought her 'outside the bounds of civilisation and therefore a realm where the threat of sexuality in the civilised world did not exist',⁴⁵ faced with the fact that Victorian working women often went barefoot (shoes or clogs being prone to slip on oil-saturated wooden factory floors) suggests a very entangled politics of reference; both alluding to and denying the facts of everyday impoverished and working Victorian real life with those of fairy tale fantasy.

As John Berger reflected, a photograph provides more than a picture, it taps into the ambiguity of vision as an experiential opening to something. In *Another Way*

⁴⁵ Waggoner, *Lewis Carroll's Photography*, 201.

of *Telling*, he argued that ‘photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them’,⁴⁶ inviting the viewer to break the links between positivism, the camera and sociology. As a good amateur conjuror, Carroll thus misquotes the fairy tale, exploring its magic and that of childhood with his notorious ambiguity and sleight of hand. Lindsay Smith has argued that Carroll’s set-up for studio photographs such as the unknown child posing as Little Red Riding Hood (Figure 3.7), is characteristic of the ‘uncanny’ effect of his work: a ‘politics of focus’ requiring a certain depth of field, typically plenty of foreground space with a ‘captive, literally up against a wall’, suggestive of the distance to the photographer himself and the child ‘set up to view’.⁴⁷ Did Carroll, as Anne Higonnet argues, stage ‘the “natural” image of the “natural” child ... convinced that the innocence of the child was a natural quality, just as he was convinced that the truth of the photographic image was an automatic quality’?⁴⁸ Did these Little Red Riding Hoods ‘ensure a negation of a real sexual union, while at the same time staging its possibility’?⁴⁹ Mavor reminds us that for Roland Barthes, photography was ‘born not of painting, but of the theatre’ and,⁵⁰ as a man who loved all things theatrical, who worked so expertly in knowing parody and pastiche, I would argue that Carroll’s set up of the Little Red Riding Hood costume with magician’s cane, bare feet, rug and both chemical and fabric act curtains are so deliberately suggestive of a stage or theatre as to remind the viewer that *photographer, photographed, fairy tale, childhood and innocence are all staged*.

Given ‘Carroll’s photographs tapped into Victorian conventions ranging all the way from paedophilia to innocence, and back again’,⁵¹ photographers’ manipulations of the photographic field threatened to upset conventional acceptance of the medium as a neutral mode of visual representation. Techniques such as composite and combination photography produced photographs that were compositions built by the photographer in the darkroom rather than exact representations of a single scene placed before the camera, like the double-take of two children’s photographs. A famous example *The Cottingley Fairies* appeared in a series of five photographs taken in 1917 by cousins Elsie Wright (age 16) and Frances Griffiths (age 9). Writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle used the pictures to illustrate an article

⁴⁶ John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (London: Granta, 1982), 95.

⁴⁷ Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: women, children and nineteenth century photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998), 30.

⁴⁸ Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 110.

⁴⁹ Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, 105.

⁵⁰ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 28.

⁵¹ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 123.

on fairies he had been commissioned to write for the Christmas 1920 edition of *The Strand Magazine* (which sold out within days). The fact that Elsie worked in a photographic studio correcting plates should, of course, have alerted the men (such as Doyle, Edward Gardner of the Theosophical Society, occultist Geoffrey Hodson and Harold Snelling, a photography expert) who all pronounced the images to be untouched and showing no signs of being faked, but it is thought the terrible losses from the First World War and the 1918 flu pandemic encouraged their zeal for ideas of spiritualism and the afterlife. On a return visit to Cottingley in 1921, the girls no longer saw fairies, but apparently Hodson saw them everywhere. Both Elsie and Frances admitted (by the 1980s) that they ‘played along’ with Hodson ‘out of mischief’ and that they considered him ‘a fake’, but what also transpired later was that Gardner had asked the expert Snelling to ‘improve’ the negatives he claimed were authentic. A double-negative fraud had occurred. Despite confessing to the hoax, both women maintained all their lives that they had seen fairies as children, and that the men ‘wanted to be taken in’.⁵²

It is evident from this examination and many others that Victorian fairies and fairy tales were not just for children but perhaps predominantly for adult men. Nicola Brown argues that they represented a rejection of the values of the enlightenment which found its expression in Romanticism, were shaped by nationalism and the industrial revolution, and in many ways were metaphoric of (mostly men’s) optimism and anxiety about the technological and scientific developments of the age. Susan Casteras similarly attributes the Victorian fascination with fairy paintings as a ‘safety-valve’, permitting unrepressed images of nude female figures but of diminutive size associated with Victorian constructions of childhood innocence. Thus, the ‘counter-Enlightenment’s rediscovery of the irrational’ was appealing to men but – with its association with childlike nostalgia or fairy tale love – as not appealing to women at that time ‘for all that feminism was struggling to rescue women from’.⁵³

The psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel later suggested that fantasy revealed in analysis associated with recurrent themes of legend and fairy tale featuring little girls could be interpreted as phallic ‘half-girl’ figures, or ‘little doubles’. He concluded that ‘men who fall in love with little girls in whom they see themselves embodied ... was very probably the decisive mechanism of paedophilia’.⁵⁴ By

⁵² ITV programme, ‘Fairies, Phantoms and Fantastic Photographs’, *Arthur C. Clark’s World of Strange Powers*, 22 May 1985, Season 1, no.6.

⁵³ Nicola Brown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18.

⁵⁴ Otto Fenichel, 1949, ‘The Symbolic Equation: Girl=Phallus’, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 18:3 (1949), 311.

bringing paedophilia in from the margins, James Kincaid's study (1992) makes 'child-loving' central to the cultural history of the west that has systematically reified and sexualised children, while Steedman sees Little Red Riding Hood as assuming the shape of a child, but, operating as a form of historicised interiority, actually representing a Victorian masculinist 'cry for the self, the long lost and gone: possibly a bid for recurrence, eternity, sameness'.⁵⁵

As Susan Sontag has observed,⁵⁶ photography reifies the tension between the past and present. As it entered the twentieth century, childhood would be changing again. Emergent psychoanalysis meant Freud and others would explore pathological defences and repressions in adult memory related to the bodily trauma of childhood or in 'fantasized seduction' (outlined by Freud in *Family Romances*, 1908 and the *Sexual Theories of Children*, 1909) towards a growing understanding of the split subject of the adult, 'torn between consciousness and unconsciousness. Childhood, as a cluster of desires, happenings, experiences, assaults and traumas' would be relocated – as a metaphor for the unconscious itself – into another place and time.⁵⁷

Though not dressed as Little Red Riding Hood (Figure 3.8), placing a toddler in white lace on a wolfskin rug in such a theatrical setting recalls the tale, the child unconscious of any risk, or, like Angela Carter's 1989 reworking of the tale, knowingly 'sleeping sweetly, between the paws of the big bad wolf'. Later to be labelled a 'turbid Victorian hack' of 'midwestern fantasia',⁵⁸ Fitz Guerin was a highly successful society photographer in Missouri between 1876 and 1903. In this image, the curtain opens on staged opulence and vulnerability: the open mouth of the fireplace, the tiny child in white frills in a huge, empty room, sleeping on the open-jawed wolfskin rug; the dark shadow behind another curtain stage left. It is an image that, in looking back to the Grimm engravings and forward to the magical and highly theatrical visual metaphors of Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête* (1946), also anticipates the grip that America was to have on the fairy tale from the first Disney animation, which was the 'Laugh-O-Gram' *Little Red Riding Hood* in 1922.

The Disney conglomerate have never been bold enough to tackle the tale in film, especially not as Angela Carter and Neil Jordan did in the surreal

⁵⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1930* (London: Virago, 1995), 171.

⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1977).

⁵⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1930*, 87–8.

⁵⁸ Stephane Russell, 'Midwestern Fantasia: the uncanny photographs of Fitz W. Guerin', *St Louis Magazine* (2009).



Figure 3.8. Fitz W. Guerin, *Child sleeping on wolfskin rug*, ca. 1900, photographic print, open domain.

Company of Wolves (1984). Like Carter and many feminist writers, Hélène Cixous reframed the way we might think about the notions of love and innocence, particularly as they bear on the issue of the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge. In her uncompromising essay *Castration or Decapitation* (1981), she reads fairy tale as the feminine entering into unknown spaces. Just as Little Red Riding Hood allows herself the forbidden and ‘makes her little detour, does what women should never do, travels through her own forest... caught in her chain of metaphors, metaphors that organise culture’, Cixous’ theories of the sexualisation of writing, or ‘writing the body’, links the language of the feminine to that of the child in play, and helps explain her suggestion that Little Red Riding Hood is a metonymy for the clitoris, or: ‘the female sex with her little jar of honey caught in a forest of male metaphors’,⁵⁹ though how much of this is noticed by the child or adult reader must of course be left to each unconscious.

⁵⁹ Hélène Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs*, 7:1 (1981), 44.



Figure 3.9. Still from the American film *Little Red Riding Hood*, 1922 featuring Baby Peggy, aka Diana Serra Cary, from *Universal Weekly*, 7 October 1922, open domain.

Little Red Riding Hood's forest of male metaphors was not to become radically feminised until the later twentieth century. Like the visiting or postcards of the mid-Victorian period, film posters and stills were to become a means to commercialise and popularise images of child actors, for the early twentieth century. Though the drawn versions of wolf and child are as unthreatening as Kate Greenaway idylls,⁶⁰ in the film still (Figure 3.9) 'Baby Peggy', described in the poster as "The Kutest little Kiddie on the screen" (Figure 3.10) has her hand actually in the wolf's mouth as he lies in bed. Whether a well-trained or taxidermised dog, the wolf is finally visible, as it would continue to be in the coming centuries. As with the earlier images, the child is turned to face the photographer, but now her anxious expression is highly suggestive of needing rescue. Thus, the nineteenth century began what Simon May has described as 'the rise of cute' as 'a weapon of mass seduction' or cultural uncertainty principle involving knowing, mocking versions of innocence and experience that were

⁶⁰ English Victorian illustrator Kate Greenaway (1846–1901) specialised in children's books. Her depictions of children in then 'retro' eighteenth-century costumes and dainty colours were/are very popular and influential.



Figure 3.10. Advert for the film with Baby Peggy, *Universal Weekly*, 11 November 1922, open domain.

to further pervert the shape and cultural commodification of childhood over the next two centuries.⁶¹

Unfixed conclusions

‘It is in the nineteenth-century that a modern western concept of childhood acquires, through photographic representation, a particular form of visual ubiquity’.⁶² Linked to the fact that as childhood mortality rates were still very high, a photograph could keep a child alive in memory who was lost to the living, like Benjamin’s subsistence of the future in the past (the present in a photographed moment) as a characteristic of photography manifest in early processes, or what

⁶¹ Simon May, *The Power of Cute* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁶² George Rousseau, ed., *Children and Sexuality: From the Greeks to the Great War* (London: Palgrave, 2007) 250.

Lindsay Smith calls the ‘chemical, physical trace of time passed, yet to pass and passing in the image’.⁶³ Smith reminds us that, as both Benjamin and Barthes have demonstrated, an adult subject’s identification of himself with a child involves a kind of infantilisation. A sociology of the ‘undeveloped’, negative imaging of an era and a nation emerges, the black and white of an inverse photography of the self, a darkroom with the need for intermittent light in order to capture, frame, develop and imprint on culture the conflict of the child and fairy tale notions of love.

Fairy tale love as depicted in photographs of children can only speak in metaphors and analogies, given the photograph’s limits as visual abstractions in space and time. Metaphor places photography as a connective process of memory, history and analogy. Though Alan Sekula considers the ‘two chattering ghosts’ of ‘bourgeois science and... bourgeois art’ to have defined photography for the Victorians,⁶⁴ throughout the long Victorian period, the medium both enacted and illuminated the proliferation and standardisation of visual and literary experience in a rapidly expanding cultural field. While its use as standard illustration found its place only by the final decades of that century, the efforts to reproduce photographs in affordable forms from the 1860s onwards pointed the way towards the mass reproduction of images that was to characterise the next century, and in digital form, epitomise the twenty-first.⁶⁵ As Mavor puts it, ‘the child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other; they were laminated and framed as one’.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding the fact that the childhoods depicted in the photography of the period may have shocked, surprised or displeased the very society they reflected, it has been noted that, from the long Victorian period onward, a shift took place from that of the woman to the object of the child as that which ‘carries the burden of expressing ideas’. Marina Warner speculates on how images of children somehow operate as ‘some ghastly masquerade of the way so much of the rest of society also “loves children”, by stimulating their desires, by exploiting their vulnerability and suggestibility, by finding them irresistibly cute, by staging, in any number of [images], the performance of their seduction’. She sees fairy tale’s

⁶³ Lindsay Smith, *Lewis Carroll: Photography on the Move* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 10.

⁶⁴ Alan Sekula, ‘The Traffic in Photographs’ in Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin, eds, *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1983), 122.

⁶⁵ Benjamin’s hope for photography offering a new materialist aesthetic (releasing it from former traditions of magic and notions of originality) is ever as troubled and unlikely with AI’s grip on massive data.

⁶⁶ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 3.

central narrative as a fear contest, and, when they feature little girls or women, as a ‘journey from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance’.⁶⁷

Yet, there exists a profound desire to complicate this trope in Carroll’s photography and writing. As an effeminate unmarried clergyman who preferred spending time with nonsense, children and algebra, Carroll epitomises the entangled tensions of the Victorian period that were to preoccupy the next century: repressed childhood experience, child and adult sexuality and perversity, masculine and feminine norms, the role of mathematics, science and technology in the face of religion and the supernatural. Just as his books and poems are full of uncomfortable doubts and self-conscious mediations (playful, resistant asides, the disputative authorial voice, failed communications, etc.), his photographic images play with the technology of mediation, giving the reader/viewer opportunities to doubt, test and question. Where is the wolf, after all? Where does love happen?

Storytelling thus becomes an act of hopeful love because it engages the reader/viewer in a bond of identification with the risk-taking author/photographer, in a quest for alternatives that could exist in a culture of such seemingly fixed values. Communicating *through* Alice, *through* Little Red Riding Hood’s wolfish innocence, it seems to me that Carroll actively resists the notion of the ‘type’ that photography was also serving through physiognomy, by claiming back or rescuing a personal, interiorised, improvised sense of self, as a form of transference love. The tension in his photographs evokes that of Rose’s critique of children’s literature, as ‘a soliciting, a chase, a form of seduction’,⁶⁸ yet is ‘not that of an adult man wanting sexual reciprocity with a child’, but perhaps one wanting to resist (bed)time, ageing and developing, desiring ‘the freedom to perform his visual compulsion, through a repeated photographic fixing of the minor’ that is expressive of his own Victorian fairy tale of childhood, capturing his own culture’s resistance to and reconsideration of what the child is or what love is.⁶⁹ Carroll’s girls photographed as Little Red Riding Hood thus enact a kind of ‘bodily theatre’ of these aspects of love in social practice.⁷⁰

Just as middle-class Victorians must have felt the idea of childhood innocence slipping away in a society whose comfort for some depended on its exploitation, they clung to staged versions of it all the tighter. Fairy tale, with its ambiguous

⁶⁷ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 276.

⁶⁸ Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 60.

⁶⁹ Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, 109.

⁷⁰ Claudia Castañeda, *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (New York: Duke University Press, 2002), 13.

double-take on purity and sexuality, could be eroticised, fetishised and naturalised through the shadowy, bipolar medium of photography. As Green-Lewis observes, photographs of stories from the distant past, such as allegory and fairy tale, can also provide ‘reverse transportation’.⁷¹ Did the Victorians place emphasis on the double-edged aspect of fairy tale love as depicted by Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf as a mirror of the cultural disquiet of their own age, and as travelling back in time away from it? Perhaps love for Little Red Riding Hood came to stand for the growing tensions between individual and mass reproduction, childhood as a personification of resisting vast tracts of evolutionary and cultural complexity; a strategy for acknowledging an unresolved tension between seeming innocence, simplicity and continuance. Steedman has argued that the long Victorian period

strenuously attempted to delimit and resist the implications of growth... pushing these thoughts into the interior. The vast, historicised world was turned inside, so that history itself might be dehistoricised, removed from the time that allowed growth and decay, so that they might be overcome, in the lost- and crucially- timeless place within.⁷²

Perhaps fairy tale in the long nineteenth-century entrenched certain western myths of childhood and love as it deliberately heightened the importance of repetitive forms of imagination and symbol (myth) to these states of being. The versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* explored here dropped all the tale’s connections with the French Revolution and even turned a blind eye to the Industrial Revolution, in favour of presenting the child and the fairy tale ‘as if’ timelessly and innocently about to face the wolf, yet also performing intimate familiarity with that wolf in staged knowingness. Standing at the door as if ready to knock on the next century, love, growth, risk and sexuality happen on a threshold of change and continuance for the child, photograph and fairy tale, pointing forward and back, at once progressive and retrogressive.

Interiorised hypocrisies of love for the child and its need for protection from that love, fairy tale love and the love of Little Red Riding Hoods took many overdetermined forms over the long Victorian era that continued throughout the twentieth and will doubtless do so over the twenty-first and beyond. The staged sources of such love’s ‘obvious sexuality’ continue to be ‘more complex than modern viewers may feel comfortable admitting’,⁷³ but, in our bid for

⁷¹ Jennifer Green-Lewis. *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 147.

⁷² Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 95.

⁷³ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 8.

recurrence, eternity and sameness, as Steedman points out, ‘we cannot, it seems, stop wanting this child, nor performing all our acts of rescue’.⁷⁴

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⁷⁴ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 160.

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Corners of Love and Death: Probing into a Modern Obsession

James Hall

J'ai vingt-deux ans; je ne suis pas vierge. – Hélas! on ne l'est plus à cet âge-là, maintenant, ni de corps, – ni de cœur, – ce qui est bien pis. Ouire celles qui font plaisir aux gens pour la somme et qui ne doivent pas plus compter qu'un rêve lascif, j'ai bien eu par-ci par-là, dans quelque coin obscur, quelques femmes honnêtes ou à peu près ...

—Théophile Gautier, *Madame de Maupin*, Paris 1835, bk. 1, ch. 1, 93.¹

[I am twenty-two; I am not a virgin. Alas! Nowadays, one no longer is a virgin at this age, neither in body nor in heart, which is far worse. Apart from those women who give pleasure to young men for money and who should count no more than a lascivious dream, I have certainly had here and there, in some dark corner, a few honest or almost honest women.]

Preamble

The street corner has always been a key geographical marker, a public stage for social, political and commercial interaction. During the long nineteenth century, however, the enclosed corners of rooms, gardens and squares, as well as remote geographical 'corners', became important sites of revelation and intimacy, often transgressive and amorous. In what can only be called a corner cult, the corner became a zone where authenticity, identity, difference and desire could be asserted. By the same token, the corner could be a marker of marginalisation and punishment, especially of women, children, the poor, foreigners, colonised peoples and Jews. In Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), an English yeoman compares Isaac of York to a spider, 'which might be overlooked while he kept in a corner, but would be crushed if it ventured into the light'.² As punishment for claiming to have seen a ghost in the graveyard, a schoolboy in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman*

¹ Théophile Gautier, *Romans, contes et nouvelles*, ed. Pierre Laubriet (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 1:251. My translation. Translations are my own if there is no citation of a published translation.

² Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe; a Romance*, vol. 8 in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels*, ed. Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 70, 180–1.

in White (1859–60) has to stand apart ‘from all the rest on a stool in a corner – a forlorn little Crusoe, isolated in his own desert island of solitary penal disgrace’.³

Some of these issues are manifest in a sombre realist poem written by the painter Émile Bernard while living in the remote Breton port village of Saint-Briac. Bernard sent it to Vincent van Gogh in faraway Arles, accompanied by a coloured drawing showing a crowded corner in a tavern-cum-brothel.

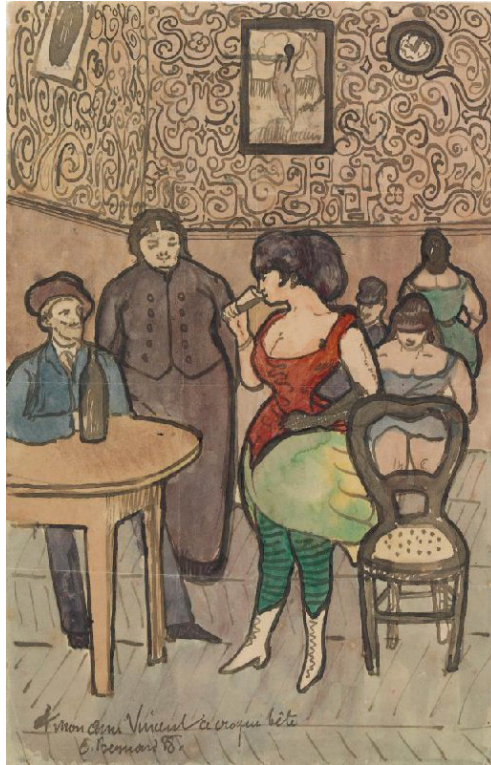


Figure 4.1. Émile Bernard, *Brothel Scene*, 1888, reed pen and brush and ink and watercolour on paper, 31 x 20 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).

It opens:

C'est dans un coin très retiré
Un cabaret sombre qu'attriste
Le jour bas d'un volet tiré.

³ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 84 (ch. xii).

La marchande est spécialiste
 Et vend comme en un débit clair
 De la boisson et de la chair ...

[It's in a faraway corner,
 A dark tavern saddened
 By the feeble light of a closed shutter.

The tradeswoman's a specialist
 And sells, as in an open open trade,
 Both drink and flesh ...]⁴

Both painters were regular brothel users and had been discussing how much sex a male artist could safely have without impairing their genius, so the sentimental tone is somewhat hypocritical. In the illustration, the brothel owner stands proudly in the corner, the dado rail exploding powerfully from her head like devil's horns or spider's web. Bernard calls her a specialist because she has, as it were, cornered the sex market in Saint-Briac. Bernard inscribed the drawing ambiguously: 'À mon ami Vincent ce croqui bête' [To my friend Vincent this bestial/brutal sketch]. The dandyish seated client is probably Bernard himself.⁵ Van Gogh was an ideal recipient as he fully appreciated the romantic allure of the corner. It is a realm for love and intimacy more than for disgust or lust, just as Gautier's 'coin obscur' in the epigraph is used for assignations with honest women. In the summer of 1882, Vincent had written to his brother Theo, insisting he could find beauty in the filthiest corner, just as he could find tranquillity in his own troubled life:

Al is het dat ik dikwijls in de beroerdigheid zit toch is er binnen in mij een kalme, reine harmonie en muziek. In het armste huisje, in het smerigste hoekje zie ik schilderijen of teekeningen. En als met onweerstaanbaren aandrang gaat mijn geest die rigting uit.

[Even though I'm often in a mess, inside me there's still a calm, pure harmony and music. In the poorest little house, in the filthiest corner, I see paintings or drawings. And as if with an irresistible urge, my spirit runs in that direction.]⁶

Especially before the arrival of electric light, corners were often dark and dirty. Zones of mystery, fantasy, fear, disease and dirt, the supernatural and unconscious,

⁴ Vincent Van Gogh, *The Letters. The complete, illustrated and annotated edition*, ed. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker, 6 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum / Huygens ING, 2009). Online edition: <<https://vangoghletters.org/vg/>>. No. 630, 23 June 1888.

⁵ Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, Émile Bernard (1868–1941): The theme of bordellos and prostitutes in turn-of-the-century French art (Rutgers: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1988), 3, 13–15; Richard Thomson et al., *Easy virtue: prostitution in French art 1850–1910* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2016), 106, 109, 176.

⁶ Van Gogh, *The Letters*, no. 249, 21 July 1882.

they were repositories for discarded fragments of natural and human history, havens and cemeteries for pests and insects. In 1882, the ‘filthiest corner’ had a major love component because it encompassed van Gogh’s mistress Sien, a destitute sex worker he hoped to ‘rescue’ by marriage. She (or another sex worker) had given him the gonorrhoea for which he had just been treated in hospital. In the same letter, he says he has made a drawing of the child’s cradle. Sien was about to give birth to the child of a previous client.

The corner cult of the long nineteenth century has been largely overlooked, and never examined systematically or historically. Gaston Bachelard’s brief chapter on corners in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) is suggestive – ‘le plus sordide des refuges’ – but perfunctory and largely confined to passages from twentieth-century poets.⁷ Martin Warnke highlighted the ‘Sofaecke’ [sofa corner] as a twentieth-century German bourgeois ideal, but overlooked its long European history.⁸ Daniel Jutte’s ‘Towards a History of the Corner’ is far more wide-ranging historically and thematically, but largely concerned with street corners and external corners of buildings.⁹ None of these writers showed full awareness of the depth, breadth and history of the corner cult, or mentioned its key literary champion, Émile Zola.

The corner cult had concrete manifestations. Architects and interior designers created cosy, lazy, poetic, Indian and Turkish corners, bay windows, corner towers and turrets, nests, dens, caves, alcoves, recesses, nooks, inglenooks and chimney corners. These spaces often had bespoke seating, and plump cushions in a purported oriental style to encourage romantic languor and reverie.¹⁰ Japanese and decoupage folding screens created moveable corners. Towards the end of the century some makers of ‘artistic’ furniture specialised in cosy corners, providing bespoke sofas and display cabinets.¹¹ Mrs J. E. Pantton’s *Nooks and Corners* (1889) was a guide to household management and interior decoration for professional married couples.¹² Pantton’s ‘Winter Corner’, an oriental enclave next to the

⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l’espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012), 131. *The Poetics of Space*. trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 136–47.

⁸ Martin Warnke, ‘Zur Situation der Couchecke’, in *Stichworte zur ‘Geistigen Situation der Zeit’*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 675–76.

⁹ Daniel Jutte, ‘Toward a History of the Corner’, *Res*, 73/74 (2020), 340–56

¹⁰ Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the 19th-century Domestic Interior* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 257–64; Charlotte Gere and Lesley Hoskins, *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2000), *passim* and figs. 64, 75, 90, 117, 118.

¹¹ J. S. Henry, <<https://bifmo.furniturehistorysociety.org/entry/henry-j-s-1878-1911>>.

¹² Gere and Hoskins, *The House Beautiful*, 80–1, 114–5.



Figure 4.2. *A Summer Corner*, from J. E. Panton, *Nooks and Corners*, London 1889. Figure 5, 53.

fireplace, featured a cabinet for porcelain, made by Mr Smee; an adapted second-hand sofa was a 'special favourite of Max, the tabby cat, who much resents being moved therefrom'.¹³ Here, the cosy corner was also a cat lover's corner.

New picture types appeared entitled 'Corner of the Room/Studio/Village/Field/Farm', and countless corner-centred pictures with more general titles. Frank Millet's *A Cosy Corner* (1884), painted while the American was living in the Cotswolds, England, is a carefully contrived erotic fantasy loosely based on the kitchen in his New England studio. (Figure 4.4) A pretty young woman dressed in a flowery Indian chintz dress in eighteenth-century style, is warmed by fire and caressed by sun. She loses herself in a book we presume to be romantic rather than religious. Her languid feline stretch recalls the more strenuous

¹³ J. E. Panton, *Nooks and Corners* (London, Ward & Downey, 1889), 59, and figs. 4.2, 4.3.



Figure 4.3. *A Winter Corner*, from J. E. Panton, *Nooks and Corners*, London 1889. Figure 8, 60.

arched body of John Everett Millais's *Mariana* (Tate, 1851), pining alone in her bay window for the fiancé who has rejected her.¹⁴ In Tennyson's eponymous poem, inspired by *Measure for Measure*, *Mariana* says: 'My life is dreary, / He cometh not' (l.9–10). The apples on Frank Millet's grate suggest multiple temptations; the rifle suspended on the beam, alongside the 'male' corkscrew and pipe, implies patriarchal control and retribution.

Disorientating 'close-up' fragments of an invisible whole, corner pictures could overturn the post-Renaissance convention whereby the back wall of a room was parallel to the picture plane, with figures and objects spread out rationally as in a frieze or tableau. These enclaves satisfied what the essayist Leigh Hunt called the

¹⁴ Elisabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), 10–13.



Figure 4.4. Frank Millet, *A Cozy Corner*. 1884. Oil on canvas. 92.1 x 61.6 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of George I. Seney, 1887, public domain.

‘corner-loving mood of the mind’.¹⁵ To this end, new buildings multiplied and maximised corners – cosy on a sunny day, scary on a dark stormy night, unless accompanied by a lover (Figure 4.5).

In what follows, I propose to sketch out briefly some of the key aspects of the erotic corner cult as manifested in literature and the visual arts, mainly focusing on north European examples. I will begin with Denis Diderot’s celebration of corners in his writings on art from 1765/7, and end with Danish symbolist painter Wilhelm Hammershøi’s moody ‘woman/stove in the corner’ pictures of circa 1900. I will broadly chart a shift from a euphoric libertine attitude to the corner, manifest in Rococo art, design and architecture, to

¹⁵ Leigh Hunt, *A Book for a Corner; Or, Selections in Prose and Verse from Authors the Best Suited to that Mode* (New York: Puttenham, 1852), 176.



Figure 4.5. James Wyatt and James Thornton, Belvoir Castle, 1799–1832. David P. Howard.

the more troubled nineteenth-century approach where the corner is a zone of love and death, simultaneously utopian and dystopian. As such, the corner became the perfect hunting ground for haunted Gothic, realist and puritanical imaginations.

Rococo corners

During his essay review of the Paris Salon of 1767, Diderot offered a deliberately provocative definition of artistic inspiration while describing a romantic pastoral scene, now lost, by Jean-Baptiste Le Prince.¹⁶ A young man and woman were listening to music in the countryside. Diderot can only praise the head of the musician, but he observes how often a single beautiful passage, idea or event in music, literature and history, can make him forget the mediocrity of the rest. This echoes his first discussion of Le Prince in the Salon of 1765, where he laments uninspired art lacking a single striking idea or vital line. To this end, he can

¹⁶ Diderot, *Salons*. III, *Ruines et paysages: Salons de 1767*, ed. Else Marie Bukdahl, Michel Delon, Annette Lorenceau (Paris: Hermann, 1995), 309–12; Diderot on Art, 2 vols, trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2:180–1.

praise artists who are distinguished by particular qualities: ‘Le Sueur a son coin, Rubens le sien’ [Le Sueur has a corner to himself, as does Rubens].¹⁷

Diderot defines inspiration in a similarly specialised way, as the revelation/recognition of a single corner, detail or fragment located at the frontier of self, world and art:

Qu’est-ce-donc que l’inspiration? L’art de lever un pan du voile et de montrer aux hommes in coin ignoré ou plutôt oublié du monde qu’ils habitent. L’inspiré est lui-même incertain, quelquefois, si la chose qu’il annonce est une réalité ou une chimère; si elle existe jamais hors de lui; il est alors sur la dernière limite de l’énergie de la nature de l’homme et à l’extrémité des ressources de l’art.

[What then is inspiration? The art of lifting a flap of the veil and revealing to men ignored or rather a forgotten corner of the world they inhabit. The inspired person is sometimes himself uncertain whether the thing he makes manifest is a reality or a chimera, whether it ever existed outside of himself; he is then at the final boundary of the energy of human nature and at the extremity of the resources of art].¹⁸

Diderot admits his definition will strike his readers as an alibi for the most extreme poetic madness. Today, we might call it object fetishism or a precursor to Roland Barthes’s photographic punctum, a specific detail that hits us emotionally.

Diderot’s metaphor of the veil that needs to be lifted was commonplace in discussions of allegory and religion. Nicolas Antoine Boulanger’s *L’antiquité dévoilée par ses usages...* [Antiquity unveiled through its customs] (1766) treated pagan religious stories as consolatory fables that veiled painful truths, often from the masses who were easily duped ((II: 38–9; III: 318, 417; I: 314; II: 90; III: 180). For Diderot, however, the exposure of ‘veiled corners’ has a powerful erotic component that can be sublimely overwhelming. Veils are usually associated with beautiful women who are at once real, ideal, fantastical and allegorical, preferably placed in a confined space enabling intimate one-on-one encounters. In the Salon of 1765, he describes depictions of two such women, their nudity barely concealed by transparent veils. Charles-Nicolas Cochin’s drawing for an allegorical frontispiece for the first volume of Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (Paris 1765) comprises a heaving crowd of scantily clad female allegories. Truth stands coyly in the clouds hemmed in by Reason and Imagination. Reason, from behind, is trying to tear off [arracher] Truth’s whole-body veil, while from the side

¹⁷ Diderot, *Salon de 1765*, ed. Else Marie Bukdahl and Annette Lorenceau (Paris: Hermann, 1984), 224–5; Diderot on Art, 1:123–4.

¹⁸ Diderot, *Salons*, III, 311; Diderot on Art, 2:181.

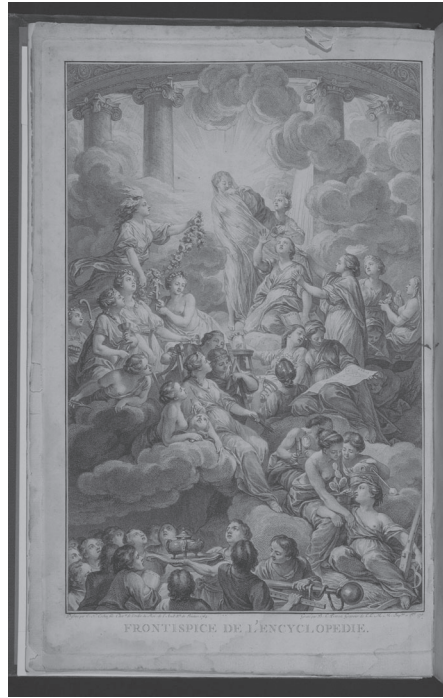


Figure 4.6. Bonaventure-Louis Prévost after Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Frontispiece to Diderot and d’Alambert’s Encyclopédie*, 1772, etching and engraving. 37 x 24 cm. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, public domain.

Imagination prepares to adorn Truth’s naked body with a garland of flowers¹⁹ (Figure 4.6).

Diderot had previously hyperventilated over Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s painting of a young woman en *négligé* at a window opening mysteriously lacking shutters and glazing (Figure 4.7). She has pushed aside curtains which envelop her, overflowing the sill. The picture was commissioned by Madame de Grammont as a new-year’s gift to her lover the Duc de Choiseul. The girl has just received a note from her lover and is blowing him a kiss. Diderot goes into raptures:

Il est impossible de vous peindre toute la volupté de cette figure . . . quelle bouche! quelles lèvres! quelles dents! Quelle gorge! On la voit cette gorge et on la voit tout entière, quoi- qu’elle soit couverte d’un voile léger. Le bras gauche . . . Elle est ivre, elle n’y est plus, elle ne sait plus ce qu’elle fait, ni moi presque ce que j’écris.

¹⁹ Diderot, *Salon de 1765*, 224–5; Diderot on Art, 1:182; *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert: Collaborative Translation Project*, 2002–. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library). ‘frontispiece’: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/frontispiece.html>>.



Figure 4.7. Augustin de Saint-Aubin after Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Le Baiser Envoyé*, 1807. (*Reverse*) Mezzotint. 57 x 40.4 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1960, public domain.

[It is impossible to describe the full voluptuousness of this figure ... Such a face! Such a mouth! Such lips! Such teeth! Such a bosom! We see this bosom, all of it, despite its being covered by a thin veil. The left arm... She's intoxicated, she's beside herself, she doesn't know what she's doing, nor I, almost, what I'm writing].²⁰

The left arm has fallen onto a pot of flowers whose stems and leaves snake along her arm, enveloping her like the curtain opposite. She is a cornered Lady Laocöon, in ecstasy rather than agony. Her squid-like fingers are suggestively inserted between the rippled pages of the letter, caressing and splaying them, making them look labial. Here, blatantly, the most intoxicating veiled coin is *le con*. Diderot's rapturous account had been in keeping with the conclusion of the entry for 'VOILER' in the *Encyclopédie*, which he edited and partially wrote with d'Alembert: 'Le voile qui nous dérobe les objets par intervalle, sert à nos plaisirs qu'il rend plus durables & plus piquans. Le désir est caché sous le voile; levez le voile, le désir s'accroît, & le plaisir naît'. [The veil which undresses objects

²⁰ Diderot, *Salon de 1765*, 275–6; Diderot on Art, 1:155–6.



Figure 4.8. Pierre Chenu after Juste Aurèle Meissonnier, *Projet de l'angle d'un Salon portatif pour le Roy en 1730*. [Design for a corner of a room for the King in 1730], 1748, etching and engraving, 45.7 x 33.7 cm. New York, Cooper Hewitt Museum, public domain.

gradually, serves our pleasures which it makes more durable and piquant. Desire is hidden under the veil; lift the veil, desire grows and pleasure is born.]²¹ Diderot's *voiler* is evidently joined at the hip with *violier*, to violate and rape.

The eroticised corner was a key component of Rococo art and architecture, a zone of supreme libertine fantasy for female as well as male patrons and viewers. The corner had become increasingly 'active' and central with the publication of a treatise on architectural perspective by the Bolognese illusionist scene painter Ferdinando Galli da Bibiena, *Architettura civile ...* (1711).²² Bibiena described and

²¹ *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers* / par une Société de gens de lettres; mis en ordre et publié par M. Diderot et, quant à la partie mathématique par M. d'Alembert, 35 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1751–1780), vol. 17 (1765), 426.

²² Ferdinando Galli da Bibiena, *L'architettura civile: preparata sú la geometria, e ridotta alle prospettive: considerazioni pratiche* (Parma: Paolo Monti, 1711).

illustrated a scenographic method which he called *scena per angolo* [view from an angle/corner]. Rather than showing a centralised symmetrical vista down a main street, or through an interior, in the scenographic style popularised by Sebastiano Serlio, he showed buildings and streets at a raking angle with diagonal vistas. The audience stared onto and into the corners of buildings, which blockaded the space like beached architectural fragments.²³ Piranesi was one of the many artists to be inspired by Bibiena, in views of Rome and imaginary prisons. Buildings viewed from a corner, rather than front on, would be central to the ideals of Picturesque landscape.²⁴ Recesses, bays and corner features like turrets would take starring roles in Gothic revival architecture and Gothic novels.²⁵

Juste Aurèle Meissonier eroticised the *scena per angolo* in his influential *Livre d'Ornemens* (1734), a new type of ornamental print, the *morceau de fantaisie*, with no clear practical purpose (Figure 4.8). Abbé Jean-Bernard Le Blanc was thinking of Meissonier when he complained about designers who 'no longer observe any order, any probability, in their productions. They heap cornices, bases, columns, cascades, rushes and rocks, in a confused manner, one upon another; and in some corner of this chaos, they will place a cupid in a great fright, and have a festoon of flowers above the whole'.²⁶ The signal advantage of corners, especially concave ones, as opposed to flat open-ended walls, was that they could more easily evoke erotic compression, contraction and embrace. Shakespeare already implied this in *The Merchant of Venice* when Lorenzo warns: 'I shall grow jealous of you shortly, Launcelot, if you thus get my wife into corners' [III: 5:31–2]. Similarly, the twentieth-century term 'nooky', meaning sex, probably derives from nook. (OED) Meissonier's shell-like architecture is convulsively muscular, even orgiastic, while the flora, fauna, young women and cupids suggest hyper-fertility. Contemporaneously in England, informal gardens like Stowe had what Gilbert

²³ *Idem.*, 108–10, Fig. 14.

²⁴ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty...* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), 84; Humphrey Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: T. Bensley and Son, 1816), 4–5.

²⁵ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69–70, 84; Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3, 6, 12, 22, 245, 253, 448; Humphrey Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: T. Bensley and Son, 1816), 101–2; Edgar Allan Poe, *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe I: Tales and Sketches 1831–1842*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 662–6; Chris Brooks, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon, 1999) 155–87; Dale Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity: History, Romance, and the Architectural Imagination, 1760–1840*. (Oxford, 2019; online edn, Oxford Academic, 21 Nov. 2019), ch. 3. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198845669.001.0001>>, accessed 21 Jan. 2024.

²⁶ Abbé le Blanc, *Letters on the English and French nations...*, 2 vols. (London: J. Brindley, 1747), 1:284 [translated from *Lettres d'un François*, 3 vols. (La Haye: Jean Naulme, 1745)]



Figure 4.9. Bernard II van Risenburgh, *Corner Cabinet (encoignure)*, one of a pair, ca. 1745–49, oak veneered with ebony and Coromandel lacquer, cherry wood, and purplewood; gilt-bronze mounts; brocatelle marble top, 91.1 x 86.0 x 66.4 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1983, public domain.

West called ‘A cool Recess ... / Sacred to Love, to Mirth, and rural Play’, where libertine pleasures could be privately enjoyed.²⁷ Peering into corners, nooks and recesses was becoming central to the genre of architectural capricci [caprices], with their evocative heaped ruins, wild vegetation, peasants and tourists.²⁸ The emphasis on corners and recesses chimed with the improvised perspectives in imported Far Eastern art (Figure 4.9).

²⁷ Gilbert West, *Stowe, The Gardens of the Right Honourable Richard Lord Viscount Cobham: Address'd to Mr Pope; To which is added, Taste: A Poem, by Mr Pope* (London and Dublin: George Faulkner, 1732), 12. Reprinted 1753 and 1756.

²⁸ Lucien Steil ed., *The Architectural Capriccio: Memory, Fantasy and Invention* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

No one has become more identified with Rococo art and style than Louis XV's mistress and confidante, Madame de Pompadour (1721–64) (Figure 4.10). The term was coined retrospectively in around 1800 by Maurice Quai, a pupil of Jacques-Louis David, who criticised effete, un-classical art as 'Van Loo, Pompadour, rococo', entering French dictionaries as a stylistic term in 1842.²⁹ The cognate term used in the early eighteenth century was 'rocaille', derived from the concave shells used to decorate garden grottoes. From 1736 it was used to describe the latest type of modern decoration.³⁰ It was thus associated with nature and with the smaller, cosier specialised spaces that were a new feature of elite dwellings and gardens.³¹ Pompadour's later reputation as a frivolous stylistic arbiter was partly due to her patronage of the First Painter of the King, François Boucher, purveyor of amorous pastoral scenes and mythologies. He painted several full-length statement portraits of Pompadour in the 1750s, when her relationship with King Louis XV was becoming platonic for various reasons, including ill-health. In all but one (and in a large posthumous portrait by François-Hubert Drouais), she reclines in the corner of a room in her apartments in Versailles. In the other, she sits in the same reclining pose in a 'cosy corner' of wild woodland.³²

The largest and most elaborate was painted when Pompadour had just been appointed lady-in-waiting to the queen. A collaborative venture, Boucher let her see the unfinished portrait. She is splendidly multi-purpose – reclining object of desire; pertly pensive femme savante; lady-in-waiting who passive-aggressively remains in the margins (the dark reflection in the mirror of the shadowed back of her head suggests this too). The oddly triangular shape formed by her silk dress and upper body implies she is a natural corner dweller, a human encoignure. Previously an architectural term for the place where two walls met, encoignure was beginning to be used for new furniture types designed to fit into corners, especially display cabinets.³³ The corner cabinet with lacquer decoration illus-

²⁹ E. J. Delécluze, *Louis David: son école et son temps: souvenirs* (Paris: Didier, 1855), 421, 426.

³⁰ Colin B. Bailey, 'Was There Such a Thing as Rococo Painting in Eighteenth-Century France?', in Melissa Lee Hyde and Katie Scott, eds, *Rococo Echo: Art, History and Historiography from Cochin to Coppola* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 169–90.

³¹ Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); John Whitehead, *French Interiors of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Laurence King, 2009).

³² E. Goodman, *The Portraits of Madame de Pompadour: Celebrating the Femme Savante* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000); Colin Jones, *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* (London: National Gallery, 2002); Humphrey Wine, *The eighteenth-century French paintings* (London: National Gallery, 2018), 187–99.

³³ *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed. (Paris: la Veuve de Bernard Brunet, 1762), 1:619; Jean-François Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (Marseille: Jean Mossy, 1787), 2:79.



Figure 4.10. François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1756, oil on canvas. 205 x 161 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen – Alte Pinakothek München, public domain.

trated here is of a type ordered by Pompadour herself in around 1750. She half leans back on the plump cushions of a daybed, becoming a flowerbed for the pink embroidered roses adorning her blue-green silk dress and the real roses spilling onto the floor. Roses signify love; the dog, loving fidelity. She is further enclosed by a gold curtain and writing table. Her pose is nudely echoed by that of a reclining gilt bronze Cupid flanking a clock on an ornate bookcase which is darkly reflected in the large mirror behind her. It is a shadowy remembrance of her royal erotic past. The bookcase, heaped books, prints, drawings, sheet music, letters, writing and drawing implements signify her love of learning and the arts. The book resting on her lap, the pages held open by her thumb, suggests that study is the new sex; so too the open drawer of the writing table, its white feathered quill rising priapically from the ink pot, waiting to be guided firmly by her accomplished hand.

A female foot, and a girl, in the corner

Honoré de Balzac would both exploit and ridicule the erotic corner cult in his novella, *Un Chef-d'Oeuvre Inconnu* (1831/37; *The Unknown Masterpiece*).³⁴ Corners are central to this tragi-comic melodrama set in seventeenth-century Paris. The opening scene has young aspiring painter Nicholas Poussin gate-crashing the studio of Porbus, who has painted royal portraits. Poussin enters at the same time as the living legend Frenhofer, who reminds him of a painting by Rembrandt without its frame because he walks silently, enveloped in his own dark atmosphere. Frenhofer goes on to advocate an art that is atmospheric and expressive rather than merely descriptive, redolent of Venetian art and Rembrandt. Porbus's studio has a central skylight, illuminating the easel below, but 'le jour n'atteignait pas jusqu'aux noires profondeurs des angles de cette vaste pièce' [daylight did not penetrate the black depths in the corners of this vast room].³⁵ It is soon apparent that corners harbour dark human truths and depths that await unveiling.

Frenhofer's own studio is dust-filled and disordered. He has been working for ten years in secret on his great masterpiece, a reclining female nude, initially painted from life from the beautiful courtesan Catherine Lescaut. Veiled by a velvet curtain, Frenhofer refuses to show his masterpiece to anyone. When Porbus and Poussin ask to view it, they are rebuffed:

Comment ! s'écria-t-il enfin douloureusement, montrer ma créature, mon épouse ? déchirer le voile sous lequel j'ai chastement couvert mon bonheur ? Mais ce serait une horrible prostitution !...Née dans mon atelier, elle doit y rester vierge, et n'en peut sortir que vêtue.³⁶

[What! he cried sadly at last, exhibit my creature, my wife? tear the veil under which I have chastely covered my well being? But that would be horrible prostitution! ... Born in my studio, she must remain a virgin, and only leave if clothed.]

They are only permitted to see the picture after Poussin offers up his young mistress Gillette to pose nude beside it so Frenhofer can compare a real beauty with the painted image. Gillette is disillusioned because Poussin has betrayed their love by asking her to strip for another man. Frenhofer barely gives her a glance before returning to his own painted idol. He believes he has painted a woman lying on a velvet bed hung with curtains, a tripod incense burner beside her exhaling

³⁴ Pierre Laubriet, *Un catéchisme esthétique: Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu de Balzac* (Paris: Didier, 1961), 85–99.

³⁵ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, ed. René Guise, in *La Comédie Humaine*, vol. x: *Études Philosophiques*, ed. Pierre-Georges Castex (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 415.

³⁶ Balzac, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, 431.

perfumes (this recalls Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*, shown at the Salon of 1819 and published as a lithograph in 1826). He goes into raptures, drunk with love like a young ingenue. His effusions resemble Diderot's over the girl at the window.

Initially, Porbus and Poussin fail to see anything except 'couleurs confusément amassées et contenues par une multitude de lignes bizarres qui forment une muraille de peinture' [colours confusingly amassed and bounded by a multitude of bizarre lines which form a wall of paint]. However, more careful inspection reveals something small but very beautiful in the bottom corner:

ils aperçurent dans un coin de la toile le bout d'un pied nu qui sortait de ce chaos de couleurs, de tons, de nuances indéceses, espèce de brouillard sans forme; mais un pied délicieux, un pied vivant! Ils restèrent pétrifiés d'admiration devant ce fragment échappé à une incroyable, à une lente et progressive destruction. Ce pied apparaissait là comme le torse de quelque Vénus en marbre de Paros qui surgirait parmi les décombres d'une ville incendiée.³⁷

[They recognised in a corner of the canvas the end of a bare foot which emerged from this chaos of colours, tones, uncertain nuances, a kind of formless fog; but a delicious foot, a living foot! They remained petrified with admiration before this fragment that had escaped from an incredible, slow and progressive destruction. This foot appeared there like the torso of some Venus in Parian marble which emerged from the rubble of a burnt-down town.]

Frenhofer's picture has become an apocalyptic landscape with ruins. The only recognisable component is an extremity – a far corner of the body, as it were – located in a far corner of the canvas. It is unclear whether Frenhofer/Balzac think Lescaut's loveable foot fragment is a self-sufficient entity, the *ne plus ultra* of Picturesque taste. The vogue for Picturesque landscape had got people used to searching for things in the corners of pictures. In Leigh Hunt's contemporaneous essay 'Put up a Picture in your Room' (1834), he observes: 'By living with pictures we learn to "read" them, – to see into every nook and corner of a landscape, and every feature of the mind'.³⁸ Frenhofer is the most radical corner artist of all.

The rest of Catherine Lescaut's painted body is veiled by Frenhofer's fog of form. This is social realism insofar as a glimpse of female foot might well be as good as it got, thereby encouraging foot fetishism (Victorians, understanding the allure of feet, covered the feet of furniture). We see Madame de Pompadour's shod feet-lets poking out cutely from under her dress in Boucher's portrait, and there are plenty of naked feet in Cochin's allegorical *Frontispiece*. In cult

³⁷ Balzac, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, 436.

³⁸ Leigh Hunt, *Essays by Leigh Hunt. The Indicator. The Seer* (London: E. Moxon, 1842), pt. 2: 4.

statues, an exposed foot might be worn down by caresses and kisses. But Balzac also alludes to the subjection of real women: covered up in clothes and mostly confined to quarters. While Porbus and Poussin marvel at the foot, Poussin hears Gillette weeping, ‘oubliée dans un coin’ [forgotten in a corner].³⁹ Poussin has doubly betrayed her – by asking her to model for Frenhofer, and by being more mesmerised by art. He has never looked at her with the same devotion. Gillette is the emotionally broken counterpart to the broken foot in the picture, with both pathetically and tragically confined to a corner due to the perversity of male artists. Poussin and Frenhofer have opted for chastity and/or impotence, sublimating sexual energy into art. Balzac reputedly believed he lost a novel every time he reached orgasm.⁴⁰

When Balzac compares the beautiful foot to a torso of Venus emerging from the rubble of a burnt-down town, he reminds his readers that artists often studied the human body piecemeal, using casts taken from life and antique sculpture, and from prints and drawings. The torso of Venus in the burnt town equally evokes Pompeii. Frenhofer is a volcanic artist, who has covered his own picture in lava, burying it to conceal it, except for one tantalising corner. The preserved fragment recalls one of the most famous discoveries at Pompeii and demands equal veneration. Visitors were enthralled by a lump of earth found beneath the House of Diomedes and displayed in the museum at Portici. The travel writer François-René de Chateaubriand had grown rhapsodic about it in his memoir *Voyage en Italie*: ‘c’est là que fut étouffée la jeune femme dont le sein s’est imprimé dans le morceau de terre que j’ai vu à Portici: la mort, comme un statuaire, a moulé sa victime’.⁴¹ [It is there that the young woman was smothered whose breast is imprinted in the piece of earth that I saw at Portici: death, like a sculptor, has moulded his victim.]

Frenhofer is a painter equivalent to Chateaubriand’s death-dealing sculptor. Whereas the ‘sculptor’ sculpts the torso, embodying the heart of the human body, Frenhofer paints the foot, a marginal corner. For Gillette, the dark and dusty studio corner is a tomb where an abandoned woman goes to die: ‘kill me’, she says to Poussin when he finally notices her, her death fitting punishment for having loved someone she now despises. That same night Frenhofer, realising there is nothing on his canvas except for that one small corner, kills himself

³⁹ Balzac, *Le Chef-d’oeuvre inconnu*, 438.

⁴⁰ James Hall, *The Self-Portrait: a Cultural History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), 216–29.

⁴¹ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Italie* (Grenoble: J. Rey, 1921), 118: 11 January 1804.

after burning all his pictures. The world's first corner artist, along with his life's work, becomes dust and ashes like Pompeii, the memory of it preserved only in Balzac's novella.

Corners of creation

In the 1860s, Émile Zola defined the work of art as 'un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament' [a corner of creation seen through a temperament].⁴² He was partly thinking of Manet, whose *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, with its scandalous secluded picnic party was 'ce coin de la nature rendu avec un simplicité si juste' [this corner of nature rendered with perfect simplicity]. In contrast to academic history painters, composing vast staged tableaux with classical themes, Manet 'place tranquillement dans un coin de son atelier quelques objets et quelques personnes, et se met à peindre, en analysant le tout avec soin'. [is happy to place a few objects and people in a corner of his studio and paint them with care]. With Olympia, Manet's supercilious reclining sex worker, he placed 'dans un coin une négresse et un chat' [in a corner a negress and a cat].⁴³ In Manet's *Portrait of Zola* (1868), the author was duly 'cornered' by his chair back and a Japanese screen. The corner cult had helped facilitate appreciation of Japanese prints, with their improvised perspectives.

Van Gogh was one of many artists fascinated by Zola's apotheosis of the 'coin de creation', as we saw in the examples discussed earlier.⁴⁴ Edgar Degas's dancer pictures are some his many works to activate the corner/edge. His most sado-erotic use of corners is *Portrait of Henri Michel-Lévy* (c.1878), where a 'cornered' artist is flanked by an abject clothed female mannequin, suggestive of a troubled relationship with women. The latter is the model for the supine 'loose' woman in the painted 'corner of nature' to his right (Figure 4.11). Works entitled 'coin de ...' had come into vogue around this time, implying bohemian alienation, geographical exoticism, or bourgeois solitude and intimacy. When Degas exhibited this claustrophobic studio corner at the 1879 Impressionist exhibition, there were three pictures entitled 'coin de', including Louis Forain's study in romantic flirtation *Coin de Salon*.⁴⁵

⁴² Émile Zola, *Mes haines; causeries littéraires et artistiques* (Paris: A. Faure, 1866), 25; idem., *Le Roman Experimentale* (1880) (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1902), 237.

⁴³ Zola, *Mes haines*, 356, 347, 359.

⁴⁴ Van Gogh, *The Letters*, nos. 361, 492, 643.

⁴⁵ *Catalogue de la 4e Exposition de peinture, par M. Bracquemond...* (Paris: Morris Père, 1789), nos. 44, 98 (Forain), 207.



Figure 4.11. Edgar Degas, *Portrait of an Artist in his Studio*, ca. 1878, oil on canvas, 41.5 x 27.3 cm. Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.

Zola was inspired by the positivism of historian and philosopher Hippolyte Taine (1828–93), a close friend.⁴⁶ Taine criticised German idealist philosophers for having ‘torturé leurs formules universelles pour en tirer des cas tout particuliers’ [tortured their universal formulae to make special cases conform to them].⁴⁷ Idealists ignored the element of chance, because to admit it would bring their grand philosophical edifices down in ruins. Taine did not mean that everything in our own little ‘canton’ was merely of local significance. Rather, it was a microcosm: ‘Ce coin où nous sommes relégués nous en fournit la matière, et la chute d’une pomme suffit à Newton pour deviner cette loi de la pesanteur qui fait rouler les astres au delà de la portée de nos instruments et de nos conjectures ...’. [This corner where we are relegated furnishes us with matter, and the fall of

⁴⁶ Thomas H. Goetz, *Taine and the Fine Arts*. (Madrid: Playor 1973).

⁴⁷ Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, *Le positivisme anglais: Étude sur Stuart Mill* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1864; reprint Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 143.

an apple sufficed to Newton to divine this law of gravity which makes the stars revolve, beyond the scope of our instruments and conjectures ...’].⁴⁸As part of his mission to define specific ‘corners’, Taine stressed the importance of race, milieu and history in the development of the arts and sciences.

In order to give a role to imagination in literature and the arts, Zola would add a ‘coin plein de fantaisie et de caprice’ [corner full of fantasy and caprice].⁴⁹ This corner was often erotic, but too brutally and socially transgressive to be considered a rococo revival. In *Nana* (1880), a vast aristocratic town house, now melancholy and austere as a convent, contains only a single piece of modern furniture in which the rebellious young hostess sits waiting for her evening salon to start.

La comtesse Sabine se tenait sur une chaise profonde, dont la soie rouge capitonnée avait une mollesse d’édredon. C’était le seul meuble moderne, un coin de fantaisie introduit dans cette sévérité, et qui jurait. – Alors, disait la jeune femme, nous aurons le shah de Perse ...⁵⁰

[The countess Sabine sat on a deep chair, whose padded red silk had the softness of eiderdown. It was the only modern furniture, a corner of fantasy introduced into this severity, and which it blasphemed. ‘Well then’, said the young woman, ‘this evening we will have the Shah of Persia ...’].

Figure 4.12 is a comparable chair, the padded upholstery as good as new because it is part of a set of miniature pieces made to demonstrate British furniture maker Albert Bentley’s skill. Sabine’s chair underpins her desire for a sensuous, passionate life. It transports her, like a magic carpet, into an erotic fantasy where she entertains the Shah of Persia in her Parisian harem. The French word *coin* means wedge as well as corner. The countess’s armchair-cum-bed is a red wedge that breaks asunder her own family’s social norms, while embracing and cornering her from behind like a lover. For Zola, the *coin* sends tremors through respectable bourgeois society. It is the place where animal passions are born – and die.

This is nowhere more apparent than in *Thérèse Raquin* (1868), a grim petit bourgeois Macbeth that scandalised Zola’s contemporaries, who nonetheless read the novel compulsively. Corners are central to the nightmarish wedding night of the orphan Thérèse, whose mother was Algerian, and Laurent, of peasant stock. The word *coin* is repeated during the wedding night chapter like the tolling of a bell. Thérèse had been married by her guardian aunt to her sickly son Camille. She has never loved him and is bored to death. When Camille’s strapping childhood

⁴⁸ Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, *Essai sur Tite Live* (Paris, L. Hachette, 2nd. ed, 1860), 119.

⁴⁹ Zola, *Mes haines*, 158.

⁵⁰ Zola, *Nana* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1880), 68.



Figure 4.12. Albert Bentley, *Miniature Armchair*, 1860–80. 32.5 x 20 cm. Frames: softwood and mahogany. Feet: brass. Upholstery: glazed linen and wadding under upholstery, with silk damask and trimmings. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Miss F. Bentley

friend and novice artist Laurent turns up to paint Camille's portrait, they start a torrid affair fired by savage animal passion – and by Thérèse's African blood. They brutally murder Camille on a boating expedition, Laurent assaulting then drowning him. No one suspects a thing, despite Camille having bitten Laurent on the neck, making a wound that never fully heals. The death is recorded as accidental, but the killers are haunted by their crime, and by the dead man, whose ghost is ever-present, even in bed; the neck-bite remains, the pain intensifying at salient moments. The lovers can no longer abide each other. A year after Camille's murder, however, they marry, and return to the Raquin family home for their wedding night, hoping for a new start, free from guilt, fear and loathing. The master bedroom has been beautifully prepared: 'On eût dit un désert heureux, un coin ignoré, chaud et sentant bon, fermé à tous les cris du dehors, un de ces coins faits et apprêtés pour les sensualités et les besoins de mystère de la passion'. [It was like a happy oasis, a forgotten corner, warm and sweet-smelling, shut off from all extraneous noise, one of those corners designed for sensuality and to satisfy the needs of the mystery of passionate love].⁵¹

⁵¹ Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1868), 254; English translation by Robin Buss (London: Penguin, 2004), 112.

It should be an earthly paradise, a *hortus conclusus*, one that ultimately recalls both Eden and Horace's country villa near Tarentum in Puglia:

Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnis
 angulus ridet, ubi non Hymetto
 mella decedunt viridique certat
 baca Venafro, ... [Odes, 2.6. 13–16]⁵²

[This corner of the world smiles at me more than any other, where the honey is superior to that from Mount Hymettus, and its green olives vie with those from Venafrum ...]

Yet they can feel nothing but disgust and horror at each other, realising that their passion died the moment they killed Camille. Camille is far more alive dead, than he ever was alive:

Tout à coup Laurent crut avoir une hallucination. Comme il se tournait, re-venant de la fenêtre au lit, il vit Camille dans un coin plein d'ombre, entre la cheminée et l'armoire à glace. La face de sa victime était verdâtre et convulsionnée, telle qu'il l'avait aperçue sur une dalle de la Morgue. Il demeura cloué sur le tapis, défaillant, s'appuyant contre un meuble.

[Suddenly, Laurent thought he experienced a hallucination. As he was turning to go from the window back to the bed, he saw Camille in a corner plunged in shadow between the fireplace and the wardrobe. His victim's face was greenish in colour and convulsed, as it had been on the slab in the Morgue. He stayed, rooted to the spot, faint and supporting himself on a piece of furniture.]⁵³

Terrified, he points to the 'coin plein d'ombre' [shadow-filled corner] where he can still see Camille's face. Thérèse realises it is the portrait of Camille that Laurent had painted, which should have been removed (Figure 4.13). Laurent now realises what a dreadful but prophetic daub it is, showing the grimacing face of a corpse with 'two white eyes swimming in their soft, yellowish sockets' against a dark background. He is too afraid to take it down, but feels Camille is watching him and becomes terrified of any dark corner. 'C'est ainsi que Laurent s'était mis à trembler devant un coin d'ombre, comme un enfant poltron. L'être frissonnant et hagard, le nouvel individu qui venait de se dégager en lui du paysan épais et abruti, éprouvait les peurs, lès anxiétés des tempéraments nerveux'. [That is why Laurent came to shudder at the sight of a dark corner, like a timorous child. This new person, the shivering, haggard being that had just emerged in him

⁵² Victoria Rimell, *The Closure of Space in Roman Poetics: Empire's Inward Turn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 87–8; Jutte, 'Toward a History of the Corner', 345–6.

⁵³ Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, 181; trans. Robin Buss, 119.



Là, là, disait Laurent d'une voix terrifiée.
E. ZOLA. — THÉRÈSE RAQUIN. LIV. 30

Figure 4.13. Horace Castelli, *Là, là, disait Laurent d'une voix terrifiée*, illustration to Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin; suivi du Capitaine Burle* (Paris: Marpon and Flammarion, 1883), 233. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF Non-Commercial

out of the thick, brutish peasant, experienced the fears and anxieties of those of nervous temperament.]⁵⁴

Laurent's fear of dark corners resembles affective monomania, a psychological disorder defined earlier in the century by medical reformer Étienne-Jean Georget (1772–1840). It was an abrupt 'lesion of the will' resulting in partial insanity, which could lead to murder and other crimes, such as kleptomania.⁵⁵ Here Laurent's scar, hurting more than usual because the collar on his wedding shirt digs into it, is a permanent 'lesion of the will'. The dark corner is an architectural lesion, a festering, malignant growth on the body of the room. It is also, of course, the mouth of hell, the lurid portrait a devil staring at new arrivals. In this bedroom, Paradise and Hell are conjoined, the two sides – light and dark – of their marital

⁵⁴ Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, 189; trans. Robin Buss, 124.

⁵⁵ Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

coin (coin also means money in French). The newlyweds cannot now enjoy the sensual pleasures of love and will never have children. But there has been a new birth. Laurent is instantly reborn as a scared child, a ‘shivering, haggard being’, an orphan who will never find a cosy corner of his own.

Hot and cold corners

Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916) is one of the major turn-of-the-century exponents of the corner cult. Corners are key protagonists in many of his sparsely furnished, hazily depicted, greyly monochrome interiors (Figure 4.14). They are sites of solitude and disconnection, where love and emotion appear to have gone cold, or been bottled up. The rooms are mostly based on the apartments he and his wife Ida Ilsted occupied in Copenhagen from their marriage in 1891 until Vilhelm’s death. His home was his studio, a stage set with moveable props. Women, shown singly, usually from the back dressed in black, are the only human models, with Ida by far the most frequent. The back of the neck, ivoried by light, is the only beacon.⁵⁶

Around sixty of these interiors were painted in the first-floor apartment at Standgade 30, a seventeenth-century merchant house where they lived from 1898 to 1909. In an interview of 1909 for the interiors magazine *Hjemmet* [Home], Hammershøi said: ‘Rent personlig holder jeg af det Gamle, af gamle Boliger, gamle Møbler, af den ganske saeregne Stemning, som hviler over alt’. [From a personal point of view, I am fond of the old, of old homes, old furniture, of the quite distinctive atmosphere which reposes in all of this].⁵⁷ The old furniture he admired was eighteenth and early nineteenth-century – the plain ‘Georgian’ furniture that the English Arts and Crafts movement so revered, and that was copied and emulated by modern manufacturers. In the *Hjemmet* interview, he praised the craftsmen of a century ago for working with far more artistic understanding and love than now, when factory work dominates. The Hammershøis’ apartment, with its simple geometric mouldings and panelling from the eighteenth century, is nonetheless reimagined. Endowed with a chaste, quasi-monastic austerity and simplicity, it is even more radically pared down than the *biedermeier* interiors of the earlier nineteenth century. There is no trace of what Edmond de Goncourt in the preface to *La Maison d’un Artiste* (Paris 1880) praised as *bricabracomania*,

⁵⁶ Poul Vad, *Hammershøi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1988), 178ff.; English translation with same pagination: *Vilhelm Hammershøi and Danish Art at the Turn of the Century*, trans. Kenneth Tindall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵⁷ Vad, *Hammershøi*, 402.



Figure 4.14. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior*, 1899, oil on canvas, 64.5 × 58.1 cm. Tate Gallery, Presented in memory of Leonard Borwick by his friends through the Art Fund 1926.

or of the textile saturated interiors of the French intimiste painters Vuillard and Bonnard, and of Orientalist interior design.⁵⁸

Hammershøi eschewed and purged home comforts like patterned and coloured wallpaper and textiles, books, newspapers, drapes, carpets, rugs and coal buckets and (we see some of these in photographs of Vilhelm and Ida in situ). Virtually the only decoration appears on single ceramics, as isolated as the human props and more sparingly used than in Whistler's japonisme. Even door handles may be eradicated or dissolved down to tiny functionless knobs. Doors, located in the corners of rooms, are leading protagonists, doubling up as moveable folding screens.

There is never enough furniture or furnishing to make the house a conventional home. It is the closing stages of a chess match, with few pieces on the board. The absurd end game is often enacted in a corner, with Ida as Queen, the stove as King. The corner is a magnet for furniture, stoves, stove screens, gazes,

⁵⁸ James Hall, *The Artist's Studio: A Cultural History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022), 199–225.

bodies and shadows. Corners can be concealed, compressed and created by an open door, the shadowy space behind intensified and rendered mysterious. Our hyper-consciousness of the corner/edge of picture and room creates a lopsided asymmetry. In the corner, objects, feelings, thoughts, printed and written words are stockpiled and safeguarded, creating a desert island refuge or prison, with *Ida* as solitary female *Crusoe*. There may have been a political dimension to this carving up and emptying of space, and human occupation of a small segment. During the nineteenth century, Denmark had radically shrunk in size, losing Norway in 1814 during the Napoleonic Wars, and losing Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg in 1864 to Prussia.⁵⁹ At any rate, ‘*Ida*’ is at once stranded and self-sufficient.

Hammershøi’s creation, activation, and mystification of corners, together with the pervasive austerity, is one of key things that separates his work from Dutch Golden Age artists like Vermeer, with whom his work has always been compared.⁶⁰ The Dutch square-on box interior is uniformly hospitable, habitable and comfortable; in Hammershøi, the semantic excess of the corner severs and alienates it from the rest of the room, hinting at rupture and trauma.

Ida is usually seen from behind in virtual silhouette wearing black, but so abstracted as to be objectified and ghostly. She is often placed in a corner or gazing into one, immovable with a mannikin’s stiffness and impersonality, or with a punished child’s petrified numbness.⁶¹ She is no more animated or important (just another heat source?) than the black cast-iron stoves that dominate several corners like rusty suits of armour in a Gothic revival interior, as in his first picture of an empty room, *The White Door (Interior with Old Stove)* (1888).⁶² In *Interior* (1899), a matt black woman stares enigmatically into a corner at a matt black stove and projecting pipe. The stove is barricaded or besieged by a chair and a circular mahogany table, which would seem to block the doors. Here the man-sized stove is both ominous memento mori and phallic fetish. Depictions of stoves in artists’ studios became common in the second half of the nineteenth century, dark symbols of the impoverished bohemian’s constant battle against cold in the face of an indifferent public.⁶³ The stove here shows no sign of burning, and the woman is wearing summer clothes, rendering the scene still more mysterious.

⁵⁹ Jean-Loup Champion et al., *Hammershøi: Painter of Northern Light* (New York: Rizzoli-Electa, 2023), 21.

⁶⁰ Vad, *Hammershøi*, 407–8; Naoki Sato, ‘The Quotidian View Without Narrative’, in Felix Krämer et al., *Hammershøi* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), 38–45.

⁶¹ Champion, *Hammershøi: Painter of Northern Light*, 129.

⁶² Vad, *Hammershøi*, 73.

⁶³ Hall, *Artist’s Studio*, 8–9.

Even if pensively self-contained ('Ida' sometimes reads or writes or sews) it is hard not to see the 'woman-in-the-corner' as symbolic of the confinement and Gillette-style marginalisation of women by men in general and by artists in particular. In *Sunshine in the Drawing Room* (1910; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), a woman reads in the far corner of a cavernous room dominated by a male portrait that hangs above a monumental Empire-style sofa. It feels as though the man in the portrait is a dead and/or absent patriarch, and that the empty sofa will never be a 'coin de fantaisie'. Hammershøi cultivates enigma rather than clear messages, and without taking sides, deftly dramatises the cultural gulf that existed between modern man and woman. This gulf was critiqued by Henrik Ibsen with a view to female emancipation and equality, and by the Goncourt brothers in despair that modern hommesses were nothing like the Madame de Pompadours of the Ancien Régime – the brothers' own 'lust' for collecting rococo art was only the index of how modern woman had failed to possess the male imagination.⁶⁴

One thinks especially of Charlotte Brontë's doomed young teenage bride in *Shirley* (1849). Mary Cave has rejected many ardent suitors in favour of a tepid vicar who didn't like women. She was 'stillness personified', and dies after two years of marriage, seemingly of neglect. Her Cave surname seems to have doomed her to hermit-like isolation. Her indifferent husband believed that

so long as a woman was silent, nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing. If she did not complain of solitude, solitude, however continued, could not be irksome to her. If she did not talk and put herself forward, express a partiality for this, an aversion to that, she had no partialities nor aversions, and it was useless to consult her tastes.⁶⁵

Purging the (female) corner

The modernist architect Le Corbusier provides a suitable coda to a story that continues vigorously into the present day, with works such as Anish Kapoor's much vandalised erotic sculpture *Dirty Corner* (2011–15), installed in the formal gardens of Versailles. The centrality of the corner to the nineteenth-century imagination was made clear by Le Corbusier's puritanical 'Law of Ripolin' (1925), which is in large part a patriarchal crusade against corners. Addressed to male property owners, it remains in force today with the fashion for open-plan minimalist

⁶⁴ Debra Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin de Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 36.

⁶⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. Jessica Cox (London: Penguin, 2006), 50–51, ch. 4.

interiors. Having called on the police to enforce a decree for ‘all rooms in Paris to be given a coat of whitewash’, Le Corbusier elaborates:

His home is made clean. There are no more dirty, dark corners. Everything is shown as it is. Then comes inner cleanness, for the course adopted leads to refusal to allow anything at all which is not correct, authorised, intended, desired, thought-out ... When you are surrounded with shadows and dark corners you are at home only as far as the hazy edges of the darkness your eyes cannot penetrate. You are not master in your own house. Once you have put ripolin on your walls you will be master of yourself.⁶⁶

Le Corbusier’s fanatical suppression of the corner acknowledges that it had indeed become a special place – an unruly realm of love, fantasy, desire, dirt and death.⁶⁷

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⁶⁶ Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: G. Crès, 1925), 188; Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. J. Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1987), 192.

⁶⁷ Japanese novelist Junichirō Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* (1933–4) rowed against the tide of Western Modernism, celebrating the beauty of shadowy alcoves, nooks and corners in Japanese homes before the arrival of electric light and pale wall and ceiling colours: ‘we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquillity holds sway. The “mysterious Orient” of which Westerners speak probably refers to the uncanny silence of these dark places. ... A phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow and colour in the dark and loses its beauty in the light of day. Were it not for shadows there would be no beauty. Our ancestors made of woman an object inseparable from darkness, like lacquerware decorated in gold or mother-of-pearl ...’. *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 32–3, 46.

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Reconnecting Love: Thresholds of Communication

Owd Friends: Victorian Working-Class Poetry and the Love of Things

Kirstie Blair

Love, as this collection demonstrates, is an emotion and a concept that can be read across a very wide range of literary texts and genres, and in relation to different forms of relationship. This chapter focuses on the social practices of love in working-class writing, drawing from an archive of published and unpublished texts, largely poetry, and often poems first published in the local newspaper press. Elsewhere, I have used this archive to assess how the literature of heterosexual love, courtship and marriage changed in a newly industrialised world, in which women and men worked side by side on the factory floor.¹ I have additionally discussed an important subset of working-class poetry which focuses on the relationship between worker and machine, and often expresses affection for those machines.² Here, I turn to a different and equally important subgenre of working-class poetry, and one which has similarly received little critical attention: the social practice of love in relation to domestic objects. How is love for things expressed, and what things are loved in working-class poetry? How and why do poets choose to represent certain beloved objects in poetry, and which contexts inform these poems? How do the tropes and forms of language familiar from poems about romantic love cross over to this genre? In this chapter, I argue that working-class love poetry encompasses a love for domestic possessions, and that the emotional investment these poems are at pains to highlight is a means both to comment on the precarity endemic to working-class domesticity, always ‘unstable and hard-wrought’, and to signal respectability, through emphasising a desire for stable family relations in a domestic space.³ As such, love poems to objects are not apolitical, but join in a wider project of working-class poetics, the effort towards reform, and to frame working-class subjects as worthy of social and political inclusion.

Though poems in praise of objects and possessions exist throughout the English literary canon, a foundational work in the Victorian and early twentieth-century flourishing of this genre was Eliza Cook’s ‘The Old Arm Chair’, published in her

¹ Kirstie Blair, ‘Love on the Factory Floor: Working-Class Poets and Factory Courtship Verse’, in Erik Gray and Pearl Chaozon Bauer, eds., *Love Among the Poets: The Victorian Poetics of Intimacy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2024), 103–23.

² Blair, ‘Addressing the Machine: Victorian Working-Class Poetry and Industrial Machinery’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 28:3 (2023), 395–409.

³ Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 3.

1840 collection. Cook was a self-educated writer, who was extremely successful as a popular poet, journalist and journal editor.⁴ Arguably one of the best-known poems of the period, ‘The Old Arm Chair’ also circulated as a popular parlour song, with music by Henry Russell. Is it possible to love a piece of furniture? Cook’s opening is unequivocal:

I love it, I love it; and who shall dare
 To chide me for loving that old arm-chair?
 I’ve treasured it long as a sainted prize,
 I’ve bedew’d it with tears, and embalmed it with sighs;
 ’Tis bound by a thousand bands to my heart,
 Not a tie will break, not a link will start.⁵

Cook’s poem uses a homely and worn object – title and word choice repeatedly emphasise that the chair is ‘old’ – as a sentimental touchstone for filial affection and piety. ‘The Old Arm Chair’ sets the Victorian narrative standard for love poems addressed to a domestic object. Firstly, the opening will describe the object, usually from the position of the speaker, inside the domestic space, gazing at or using it. The poem will then turn towards an explanation of how attachment to this object grew, moving into the past and recalling, in effect, a developing relationship. Often this relationship with a thing has developed because it is so imbued with familial relationships and life moments. Here, the armchair is beloved because it is so strongly associated with the speaker’s mother: ‘Twas there she nursed me, ‘twas there she died’. As ‘embalmed’ suggests, the chair is a relic. Deborah Lutz argues of Victorian relics that they are linked to the ‘thingness’ of the missing body, and demonstrate a ‘desire to find in and through these keepsakes an active, revived love for the individual now dead’.⁶ Cook’s poem, in line with Lutz’s reading of Victorian literature, both shows us how to read a relic, the empty chair, and is itself a form of relic, a thing that preserves memory. Armchairs, moreover, in this historical period, were specifically charged with meaning within the domestic space. Megan Doolittle, examining the importance of the father or husband’s armchair in working-class autobiography, notes that it was not uncommon for Victorian funeral flower arrangements to have an ‘empty chair’ theme.⁷

⁴ For an account of Cook’s contribution to working-class literature, see Shu-Chuan Yan, ‘“When Common Voices Speak”: Labour, Poetry and Eliza Cook’, *Women’s Writing* 22:4 (2015), 428–54.

⁵ Eliza Cook, *Melaia and Other Poems* (London: Charles Tilt, 1840), 55–6.

⁶ Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

⁷ Megan Doolittle, ‘Time, Space, and Memories: The Father’s Chair and Grandfather Clocks in Victorian Working-Class Domestic Lives’, *Home Cultures*, 8:3 (2015), 245–64, 256. Doolittle

Cook's armchair is a good example of what Remo Bodei identifies as an 'orphaned object', something with special significance because it survives beyond death.⁸ Bodei's contribution to the body of 'thing theory' or 'thing culture' – an examination of the complexities of our relationship with objects which has produced significant critical and theoretical work in the past two to three decades – is important for this chapter because it focuses on the 'love of things'.⁹ He views the human tendency to 'invest objects intellectually and emotionally' as expansive:

The decision to know and to care for some things, without precluding the understanding of other things, implies not only an attitude of constant attention to the world and to people, a willingness to learn, and a desire to love; it also implies an ethos and even a political stance: that of contributing to making a *respublica* out of the society that fate has thrust upon us.¹⁰

This argument about the value of caring for things is, in many ways, very Victorian, in the sense that this period is often discussed in relation to the rise of 'commodity culture' and as a time in which 'possessions became a way of defining oneself in a society where it was increasingly difficult to tell people apart'.¹¹ Viewed in reverse, Bodei's language suggests that the ability to love things indicates a good moral character, and indeed, willingness to be a good citizen. This is exactly what Elaine Freedgood, in her seminal study of things in the Victorian novel, noted of the representation of working-class domestic items:

To represent a laboring-class family as in possession of domestic necessities like furniture, and of domestic embellishments like curtains, was tantamount, in the early Victorian period, to declaring their moral worth. It also promises the possibility of political stability.¹²

is citing Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 78–80.

⁸ Remo Bodei, trans. Murtha Baca, *The Life of Things, the Love of Things* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 24. Bodei and others note the complication of the words 'thing' and 'object' (10). Here, I use 'object' and 'thing' indistinguishably, as both indicating 'a cluster of relationships' (18).

⁹ For a foundational introduction to 'thing theory', see Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), 1–22.

¹⁰ Bodei, 21, 115.

¹¹ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xi. See also Thomas Richards's influential *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹² Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 61.

'Domestic order', Freedgood continues, is perceived as the opposite to the political recklessness shown in radical working-class movements. Her chapter is concerned with domestic possessions in Elizabeth Gaskell's important industrial novel, *Mary Barton* (1848); also the focus of another highly influential study of Victorian things, Carolyn Steedman's examination of the rag rug.¹³ Both critics emphasise what is at stake, for the middle classes, in Gaskell's representation of working-class domestic interiors, and both, as well as many other critics who have studied commodities, possessions, and objects in Victorian literature, focus on fiction. There has been less attention to the poetry of domestic life, and little attention as to how and why working-class authors, inserting themselves into the literary representation of things, display their own love of things. Gaskell, Henry Mayhew, and other observers of working-class possessions in domestic spaces trade on the perceived authenticity and realism of their representations. Yet the poems discussed here, in which, due to the conventions of reading lyric verse, we tend to assume that the speaker is the poet and the thing they love is a real, tangible object, possessed by them, highlight that authenticity in a different way. They do not tell us about the working-class speaker's love for a particular thing, they show us, using the affective resources of poetry to make us feel sympathy for the love of an armchair, a clock, or a sewing machine.

One of the political effects of such sympathy is to make the reader feel the *precarity* of the loved object, and hence of 'domestic order'. Things in working-class poetry have been removed from the 'phase in the life of some things' which is the 'commodity state', in Arjun Appadurai's phrasing: they are no longer transferable and exchangeable in terms of pure economic value because of the additional value they have gained from sentimental attachment.¹⁴ But in these poems, the threat is that these things can be returned to the status of commodities. Over sixty years after Cook's poem first appeared, Lancashire poet Sam Fitton's 'My Owd Case Clock' presents a beloved clock as a constant companion to the 'household crew', overseeing the deaths of siblings and a parent, the courtship and marriage of the speaker, and the birth of his own family. The clock is not a passive witness, but an active and sympathetic participant: 'It's like a sentinel i' th' nook;/Th' owd lad con read me like a book'.¹⁵

¹³ See Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), Chapter 6, 'What a Rag Rug Means'.

¹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3–63, 17, 13.

¹⁵ Sam Fitton, 'My Owd Case Clock', printed by Sam Fitton, with illustration. Held at Oldham Local Studies and Archives, D-FIT6/2. Full text and illustration digitised at 'Minor Victorian

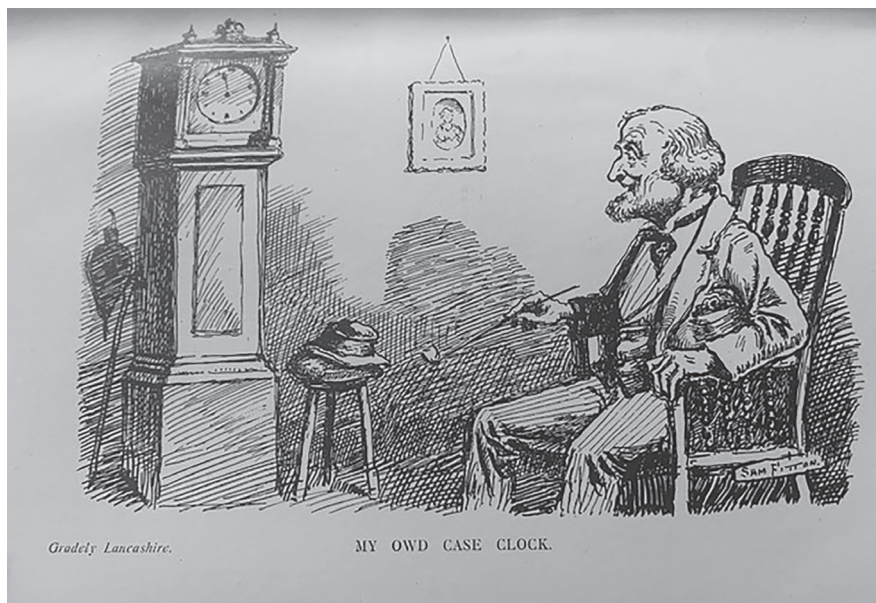


Figure 5.1. Sam Fitton, 'My Owd Case Clock', *Gradely Lancashire* (Stalybridge: George Whittaker & Sons, 1930), 64.

Fitton's accompanying illustration (Figure 5.1) shows an elderly man in a domestic setting, labelled as 'Sam Fitton', with his chair turned towards the clock and smiling at it, as though in conversation. Fitton was a child factory worker, and remained in a cotton factory while he developed a side career as writer, performer and cartoonist. His poem is representative because it emphasises this threat of losing the loved object in times of economic hardship:

I axed th' owd clock: 'What mun I do?'
 I welly think tha'll ha' to goo;
 I'm loth to part wi' thee, owd lad,
 But th' childer starve, an times are bad.
 Say shall I sell thee, too, owd friend,
 Or does ta think 'at times ull mend?

Fitton's conversational style indicates that this was also an oral piece, meant for recitation. In a happy ending, the decision is made to keep the clock and the hard

Writers': <https://minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/Lancashire%20Miscellany/c_Fitton_1.htm> (consulted 17 May 2024). Poems also republished in Sam Fitton, *Gradely Lancashire* (Stalybridge: George Whittaker, 1929).

times pass. Yet this sense that every domestic object can and might be pawned, sold, and lost, as working-class families move between rented properties and workplaces, and in and out of steady employment, is the essential underpinning of the affection portrayed in these poems. Doolittle notes that clocks

underpinned the rhythms of family life by marking cyclical patterns of hours and weeks through their sounds and the rituals of winding and cleaning. They also acted as constant reminders of longer periods of time, of generations and generations to come in the future. But clocks could stop, just as family continuity could not be taken for granted in the insecurities of everyday life and death.¹⁶

As she observes, the link between the elderly male householder and a clock was solidified by the huge popularity of American songwriter Henry Clay Work's 'My Grandfather's Clock', from 1870, which helped to popularise the term 'grandfather clock'. Poems like Fitton's take their cue from the song, yet revise it by writing from the perspective of the grandfather, not the grandson, and by expressing more affection for the clock itself.

Loving a piece of furniture is risky. These material objects will wear out, grow obsolete, and eventually become junk; they are also always unstable possessions, which can pass at any time to a new owner. While Cook's poem does not make this explicit, it is implicit in her defiant determination not to part with the armchair. Fitton does make it explicit – the clock partakes in the risks of domestic life in a worker's household, including the constant risk of loss. And its risk of breaking down, of becoming worthless, is echoed in the worker's status, as he ages alongside it. While this argument could potentially be made about objects owned by people living in poverty in any historical period or location, there is a particular valence to these poems in Victorian Britain, because of their relationship to the rise of a new commodity culture and mass market in this period, drawing on new technologies for rapid international and imperial trade, and for the mass production of goods.¹⁷ As Peter Gurney has argued, consumption was seen as part of social advancement: he traces the rise of a 'liberal consumerism' in which 'rising demand for goods across all classes was regarded as the bedrock of moral as well as material progress'.¹⁸ Fitton's family losing their clock, in this light, would be less of a personal failure than a political one, since the acquisition and retention of consumer goods was an index to the health of wider society.

¹⁶ Doolittle, 260.

¹⁷ On this, see Richards, *passim*.

¹⁸ Peter Gurney, *Wanting and Having: Popular Politics and Liberal Consumerism in England, 1830–1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 17 and *passim*.

Ownership of domestic objects that were not essentials but luxuries – both an armchair and a clock fall into this category – certainly did become much more possible for working people as goods became cheaper and easier to purchase. At the same time, however, the working population, especially in urban centres, became more mobile, and hence more likely to live in temporary accommodation: home ownership was out of reach for most people. As Karl Marx observed in 1844, the poor man ‘finds himself in *someone else’s* house, in the house of a *stranger* who always watches him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent’.¹⁹

Larger items of furniture might just fall into the category of ‘portable property’, as recommended by Dickens’s Wemmick in *Great Expectations*, but were not necessarily easy to move. They are markers, in Cook and Fitton, of a hoped-for and hard-won solidity and permanence in domestic space, that reflect on the desire for children to thrive despite very high death-rates, for women to survive childbirth, parents to live comfortably into old age, and for the speaker to be able to look back on a past which involves continuity amid change. To write a love poem to these objects is a means to reflect on the dark realities of life for working people, in a format that was inoffensive and thus readily publishable in spaces mediated by editors and read by employers, particularly the periodical and newspaper press. Such poems may also, as shown in my examples later, be a way of *advertising* these objects, as goods that others might wish to possess. But this does not detract from the fact that these poems express love: love in a lesser sense than love for other living things, perhaps, but love nonetheless. To notice them as love poems, rather than simply poems that express mild affection, helps to reframe the literary relationship between people and things as intense, meaningful, and both emotionally and intellectually important: as Sherry Turkle puts it, in a collection of essays on ‘evocative objects’, ‘we think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with’.²⁰

This essay focuses on two particular objects, out of the many that are celebrated in this genre: clocks, especially the ‘wag at the wa’ pendulum clock, which predates the ‘grandfather’ clock (the case clock is a later development – early-mid Victorian clocks had this name because the weights and pendulum hung free

¹⁹ Karl Marx, ‘Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property, in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, consulted at <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>> (accessed 31 May 2024). There is a useful reflection on this passage in Emily Cuming, “‘Home is home be it never so homely’: Reading Mid-Victorian Slum Interiors’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18:3 (2013), 368–86, 371.

²⁰ Sherry Turkle, ‘Introduction: The Things That Matter’, in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, ed. Sherry Turkle (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007), 3–10, 5.

below the clock face, ‘wagging’), and the sewing machine. Both objects are useful yet not vital possessions. Timekeeping could be done by means of the growing visibility of public clocks, as well as the increasingly old-fashioned norm of being woken up by a ‘caller’ to get to work on time in the morning, usual in industrial towns and districts. Sewing could be done by hand. Owning these items indicated a small measure of prosperity, though they both became increasingly widespread in domestic homes as the century progressed. And they are both artefacts that represent new mechanised ways of performing an old task – keeping time, mending or making garments – and that were produced, increasingly, in larger workshops or factories, shipped and sold at scale, rather than being hand-made and locally produced. Moreover, there is a particular rationale in choosing two pieces of machinery like this as subjects of poems, because rhythmic motion and regular mechanical sounds are essential to their operation. While it is unusual for popular verse *not* to be metrically regular and follow a set rhythm, this does enable poets to connect the soothing rhythms of the poem with the soothing rhythmic presence of the object described.

‘Wag at the wa’ clocks are especially fascinating because there is quite a substantive subgenre of poems featuring poets discussing their affection for this particular style of clock, preceding Work’s song as well as succeeding it. Unsurprisingly, since this nickname for a pendulum clock is most used in Scotland, the majority are from the Scottish newspaper press. I have located five ‘wag at the wa’ poems first published or reprinted in newspaper poetry columns between the 1860s and the 1890s, which generally indicates, given what is missing from newspaper archives or difficult to locate by key-word searches, that many more poems remain to be found. Several of these poems were additionally reprinted across multiple newspapers, as was common practice with newspaper poems thought to have wide appeal, so they would have reached a very large audience. Pendulum clocks may have been so common in poems about beloved objects because they were widely perceived as a standard item in the mid-Victorian workers’ home, one likely to be familiar to (and owned by) readers of the popular press. Several newspaper accounts mention this. In the *Forfar Herald* of 1888, a piece in which the author revisits the small Scottish weaving town he left twenty years ago describes how the wives of handloom weavers ‘did their very best’ to keep a one-room dwelling, which also housed the loom and spinning wheel, neat and pleasant:

The plate rack on the wall, being high, had the best chance of preserving a tidy appearance. Over the chimney piece, or at the side of it, hung the clock, known as the ‘wag-at-the-wa’ because its pendulum was not concealed in a case.

The other furniture consisted of built-in beds, ‘a dresser, two tables ... and some chairs and stools’.²¹ The clock, then, is the only item that is mentioned in the description which is as much decorative as functional. Although this article represents it as an item commonly found two decades previously, in the 1860s, an 1887 *People’s Journal* piece on ‘How the Poor Live’ includes one of these clocks in a description of a ‘but and ben’ day labourer’s house (one room, partitioned roughly into two), where a family of seven lived:

A little decoration has been attempted for the purpose of brightening up the dismal shanty. The rough deals of the partition have been covered with pieces of wall paper, ‘presentation’ portraits are suspended with pins on the opposite wall, and a few maimed crockery ornaments adorn the mantelpiece, which has been placed almost close to the roof. An old ‘wag at the wa’’, hung beside the fireplace, grinds out the time, but, judging from where the ‘hands’ were pointing while I was in the house, the inmates would have been better without the clock if they had appointments to keep.²²

As the clock does not work correctly, it is there not to be useful but, as with the ornaments, to indicate an aspiration towards a better way of life. The ‘grinding’ of the clock echoes the daily grind of living in this level of poverty. Wag at the wa’ clocks were, by the 1880s, perceived as slightly old-fashioned. The unsigned 1873 newspaper poem ‘Auld Granny’s Wag at the Wa’ emphasizes that this is an ‘auld fashioned’ possession in its title and opening lines, which stress that the actual value of the clock is small, but that the author values it because out of her few possessions, his grandmother left him this clock, and an admonition to use his time wisely.²³ Despite it being a slightly out of place possession in a modern 1870s household, the poem concludes, his family will never be ‘ashamed’ of displaying it.

Every ‘wag at the wa’ poem is written from the perspective either of a working man or woman who inherited the clock from an older relative, or an older man or woman who bought it in their youth. This enables each poem to enact the same narrative as Cook’s ‘The Old Arm Chair’, or Work’s ‘My Grandfather’s Clock’, in which the speaker recalls how the clock accompanied them or a family member through key life moments. Yet these poems have a much stronger focus on survival, as in Fitton’s poem, where the survival and continued functioning of this possession indicates that the family inhabiting the same domestic space as the clock has made it through hard times. In Jessie Morton’s ‘My Wag at the

²¹ ‘A Weaving Town Revisited’, *Forfar Herald* (20 January 1888), 6.

²² A Special Inquirer, ‘How the Poor Live: II. The Day Labourer’, *People’s Journal* (10 December 1887), 4.

²³ ‘Auld Granny’s Wag-at-the-Wa’’, *Southern Reporter* (27 February 1873).

Wa’’, published in her collection in 1866, she stresses that the speaker’s continued possession of a clock bought in her youth was hard won, when widowhood left her without resources:

Then dark grew the warl’ that ance was sae fair,
 My pouch sune grew licht an’ my hoosie grew bare;
 I grat owre my bairnies sae helpless an’ sma’
 An’ thocht I wad pairt wi’ my Wag-at-the-wa’.

In old age, her children grown up, the ‘cantie wee’ clock keeps her company, and they ‘crack’ (chat) together about the old days.²⁴ As in all these poems, the clock has developed a personality, and a mutual relationship with its owner. Agnes Marchbank’s ‘Oor Wag-at-the-wa’ similarly represents the clock as the only remaining friend of an elderly speaker. The poem is written from the perspective of a working man. The clock was his mother’s, and moved with him into the ‘butt an’ a ben’ that he shared with his new wife and family. It watches over years of loss:

Then cam’ darker days fu’ o’ trouble and pain,
 And it ticked softer music like some sad refrain,
 An’ the hoose was as quiet as quiet could be –
 For the bairns were a’ laid ‘neath the ‘aul elm tree:
 An’ Jen she gaed neist, the last o’ them a’,
 And left me nae freen but my wag-at-the-wa.’²⁵

In reminding the speaker of those he loved, even if they are now lost, the clock brings religious consolation and companionship; it is affectionately addressed as ‘my aul’ wag-at-the-wa’’. As in a number of such poems, the constant ticking of the clock is like the ticking of a heartbeat, the underlying beat of a human life. The anapaestic rhythm of two unstressed beats followed by a stressed beat, in both poems, mimics the tick of the clock. Marchbank was a regular contributor to Scotland’s most popular magazine, the *People’s Friend*, and wrote a number of now forgotten novels; while Morton was the widow of an ironmonger who later worked as a stationer and bookseller.²⁶ The poems demonstrate their mastery of an already established sentimental subgenre.

²⁴ Mrs James [Jessie] Morton, from *Clarkson Gray and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1867), 51.

²⁵ Agnes Marchbank, ‘Oor Wag-at-the-Wa’’, *Wishaw Press and Advertiser* (18 February 1893).

²⁶ For more on Marchbank’s career, see Charlotte Lauder, *The People’s Friend? Recovering Scottish Popular Magazine Culture*. PhD thesis, University of Strathclyde, 2023.

There is another historical context to this collection of poems, however. As readers would have known, this kind of clock – often made in Germany, and also sometimes known as a Black Forest clock – was ‘industriously hawked from door to door’ from around mid-century onwards by sometimes aggressive salesmen, deliberately targeting the working-class domestic market.²⁷ Henry Mayhew briefly discusses the ‘tallymen’ who sell clocks, ‘principally Germans who can speak English’ in *London Labour and the London Poor*.²⁸ In 1862, an editorial in the *North Briton* discusses a common scam, in which door to door clock sellers deliberately target poor households who are likely to refuse to buy the ‘wag-at-the-wa’, as the 26 shilling cost of a clock was high on a standard weekly wage. On receiving a refusal, however, the clock seller ‘seeks permission simply to hang up the clock beside you for a few days, as he has no convenient place where it can be accommodated’. But the seller then never returns, and the householder is instead issued with a summons for an unpaid debt to the value of the clock, risking losing both it and all his goods to pay for it. The salesman then buys the clock back at cost price, to repeat the scam.²⁹ In 1863, the same newspaper again used its editorial to rail against German clock hawkers, arguing that they were operating illegally, that their means of selling was suspect, especially in targeting women, and that they were selling clocks at hire purchase for thirty shillings which were promptly ending up in the pawnshop, where they were worth only three:

The entire clock is imported at a tenth of the price for which it is sold, a little trouble sticks it together and then it is stuck on the wall of some home, which in a few weeks is desolated and sold at the Cross, clock and all, to pay these illegal traffickers their gross imposition.³⁰

Pawnshops were ‘overstocked’ with brand new clocks, the editorial asserts, some of which might have been pawned by the woman of the house without the male breadwinner even realising that she had committed to the purchase.

Wag at the wa’ clocks, then, were likely widely associated in mid-century with predatory practices of sale and loan. These editorials do not suggest that they are exposing this trade, but that everyone knows about it and yet it remains scandalously unregulated. This recasts the sentimental poems about such clocks in a new light, not because it undermines the strength of affection and family ties felt for

²⁷ A Native, ‘Reminiscences of Kilrenny’, *East of Fife Record* (26 August 1898), 6.

²⁸ Henry Mayhew, ‘Of the Tally Packman’, *London Labour and the London Poor* (Charles Griffin: London, 1865), 1:382.

²⁹ ‘Poor Men’s Debts’, *The North Briton* (21 June 1862).

³⁰ ‘The German Clock Hawkers’, *The North Briton* (25 April 1863).

these objects, but because it emphasises that commodities that were linked to fraud and the darker practices of the marketplace, and that were perceived by at least some contemporary sources as cheap, over-valued, mass-produced artefacts, nonetheless were loved. The fact that these clocks were commonplace and unexceptional, and yet are highly valued through the perception of a working-class speaker, reinforces the connection between the common object and the common people. Love for an object is not reliant on rarity or commercial value; it inheres in the presence the object has accrued by virtue of enduring throughout time and space.

This is true for many poems celebrating possessions, including workplace objects (tools, machines) such as the wheelbarrow that Northumberland miner-poet Matthew Tate celebrates in ‘Ti me awd barrow’ (more beloved because Tate himself constructed it), or even miner James Brown’s worn-out pit coat in ‘My Auld Wark-Coat’.³¹ In both cases, as in some of the clock poems, ‘auld’ is used in an affectionate Northern/Scots sense, as part of an informal address, while also signifying the fear that something is becoming worn out and can no longer be used. The second subgenre of poems I will discuss, sewing machine poetry, is interesting because it falls mid-way between such poems about working or workplace objects, poems about domestic objects, and advertising poetry. Sewing machines started to become available for the domestic market in the 1860s, with large-scale factories open in Manchester and Glasgow by the 1870s. The first poems celebrating them appear from around this period. Several are paeans to industrial progress and technology and serve to advertise the new machines to a wide audience through publication in the newspaper press. Reverend Fergus Ferguson’s ‘The Sewing Machine’, for instance, composed for recitation at an event hosted by the Howe Machine Company, of Glasgow, was reprinted in the ‘Poets’ Corner’ of the *Hawick Express* in 1873. He suggested that sewing machines were so popular with young women that courtship was now accompanying the sewing:

Young bachelors now do not care for pianos,
Nor whether fair voices be deep or sopranos;
There is hardly a week, through the day or at e’en,
But the question is popped at a sewing machine.³²

This is partly because ownership of a sewing machine and dexterity in using it, Ferguson suggests, are the hallmarks of a good investment in a wife, who will

³¹ Matthew Tate, ‘Ti me awd barrow’, *Songs, Poems, and Ballads* (Blyth: Alder and Co., 1898), 58–9. James Brown, ‘My Auld Wark-Coat’, *Songs and Poems* (Glasgow: John McCallum, 1932), 33–4.

³² ‘The Sewing Machine’, *Hawick Express* (20 April 1872).

run the domestic space efficiently. But the machine also saves on domestic labour, causing ‘many a house, where the tear’s in the een’ to ‘give eloquent thanks, to the sewing machine’.

In similar mode, Glasgow engineer poet and journalist, Alexander Murdoch, who worked for Singer’s factory during his career, wrote two poems praising sewing machines, likely for recitation at company events. One, ‘The Shoooin’ Machine, A Rale Fack’. is a Scots poem purportedly written by a working-class man who has been persuaded to buy his wife not just one of these amazing new machines, but specifically a Singer model. Murdoch added, in a note to the second poem, ‘The “Singer” Sewing Machine’:

The Sewing Machine, in its invention and extraordinary development, has proved as important a discovery to the domestic world, as the Engine and the Steamship have become on the highways of commerce.³³

His collection also contains a positive quote from a review of his poems in the *Sewing Machine Journal*. As I have noted elsewhere, such poems operate in an ambiguous space, as ‘puff’ advertising poetry, or product placement, and as genuine celebrations of a transformative new technology that would make the lives of working people – women, in particular – much easier.³⁴ In this case, while Murdoch’s admiration of sewing machines may be entirely genuine, the ability to write convincing poetry about the commodities manufactured by his company would undoubtedly have furthered his career, by pleasing his employers. Indeed, such poems are an important part of Singer’s global marketing strategy, which, as Paula De La Cruz-Fernández has argued, involved ‘catering the sewing machine to a gendered middle-class perception of female labor in the home’ and ‘portraying this labor as art’, thus becoming a ‘protector of domesticity’.³⁵

The marketing strategies that visibly underly such poems would lead Victorian readers, accustomed to advertising verse, to suspect how ‘authentic’ the emotional relationship between working-class woman and sewing machine might be. Local firms like John Hargraves and Son of Carlisle commissioned sewing machine poems, again written in a working-class woman’s voice and emphasising the

³³ Alexander G. Murdoch, ‘The Shoooin’ Machine’ and ‘The “Singer” Sewing Machine’ (with footnote), *Rhymes and Lyrics* (Kilmarnock: James McKie, 1879), 71, 92. *Sewing Machine Journal* quotation, 104.

³⁴ Blair, ‘Advertising Poetry, the Working-Class Poet and the Victorian Newspaper Press’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 23:1 (2018), 103–18.

³⁵ Paula A. De La Cruz-Fernández, ‘Marketing the Hearth: Ornamental Embroidery and the Building of the Multinational Singer Sewing Machine Company’, *Enterprise and Society*, 15:3 (2014), 442–71, 444.

leisure time she gained from this purchase ('Now I have time to breathe / The breath of the flowers sweet'), as part of their campaign: 'I've a sewing machine of my own / At HARGRAVE'S depot bought'.³⁶ Yet other sewing machine poems do appear to represent the machine as a beloved object. Elizabeth Dickenson, an unknown poet whose collection, published in Leeds in 1871, states she is an invalid in 'humble life', wrote a poem 'On Parting With My Sewing Machine', which uses the language associated with romantic loss or mourning ('My bosom now with pain is swelling, / The cup of grief is flowing o'er') because she has had to sell, or perhaps pawn, a much-loved household 'treasure':

Thou art gone my household treasure,
 I shall miss thy cheering sound
 I have listen'd to – with pleasure –
 As thy wheel went swiftly round.

How I labour'd to obtain thee!
 Yes! I worked both night and day,
 For I knew, when once I'd gain'd thee,
 Thou my labour wouldst repay.

Now, by sickness overtaken,
 I am forced with thee to part;
 As if, by a friend – forsaken –
 I regret thee from my heart.³⁷

Dickenson's regret is not simply framed as loss of past and future earnings, but as an emotional loss, of an object that brought her pleasure and company. 'I now can write no more', she closes, a standard ending that signifies that the writer is too overcome with grief to continue.

Similarly, 'Mrs Binnie's Sewing Machine', by Mary Bowskill Hair, wife of a schoolmaster in Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, and partner in a local printing firm before her marriage, seems like a genuine celebration of the sewing machine. The headnote to this poem, by editor James Knox, says that the poem 'recalls the time when the sewing machine was first introduced into Airdrie' and that Mrs Binnie was a dressmaker in the High Street. It is of course not impossible that Mrs Binnie commissioned this poem from Hair, since it related to improvements to a local business. Equally, it is possible that Hair and Binnie were friends or acquaintances. The poem, again addressed to the machine, states:

³⁶ 'A Song Over a Shirt', *Carlisle Patriot* (17 November 1860), 7.

³⁷ Elizabeth Dickenson, *Poems* (Leeds: Fred. R. Spark, 1871), 85. I have been unable to locate this poet in census records.

Whirr awa', my wee machine,
 There's music in thy foot and tension;
 A boon thou'lt prove to sewing folk,
 My wee machine, the newest invention!

[...]

Thou art a perfect wee conceit,
 I'm never weary working wi' thee;
 When winter nights are long and dull,
 Thou'lt keep me aye baith blithe and cheery.³⁸

'I like thee weel, my wee machine', Mrs Binnie, as speaker of the poem, observes, and 'With thee I'll work it fine and easy'. 'Wee machine' emphasises the contrast between the domestic scale of the sewing machine and the more suspect, less respectable large-scale sewing and weaving that happened in the Lanarkshire factories. But it also signifies affection: like 'auld', 'wee' in Scots is more than a straightforward reference to something as old or small, it is often used for children, or animals, with implications of fondness.

Once a sewing machine or a clock has been purchased, it either rapidly or slowly accrues the status of a treasured possession. Like all mechanical objects, obsolescence is built into these particular artefacts. John Plotz has argued that repeated Victorian assertions of attachment to objects may conceal an anxiety about the status of objects in this modernising age:

In Victorian sentimental object narratives, we often find the passionate insistence that in such objects must lie depth of personality, coupled with the worry (or perhaps even the latent conviction) that just the opposite is the case: that such objects are no better than cold material, and that the human energies wasted upon them signify the real coldness that lies beneath the seeming warmth of affective relations.³⁹

Poetry, however, is perhaps less inclined to represent the 'coldness' in these relationships, and more inclined to suggest their fragility, and the intrusive presence of future loss. Although objects were mass produced, heavily marketed using the latest techniques, and far from rare as household possessions, such poems do attempt to give each clock and machine an individual value and stress the emotional impact that ownership has on the owner. By framing the relationship

³⁸ Mary Bowskill Hair, 'Mrs Binnie's Sewing Machine', reprinted in *Airdrie Bards, Past and Present*, ed. James Knox (Airdrie: Baird & Hamilton, 1930), 288.

³⁹ John Plotz, 'Discreet Jewels: Victorian Diamond Narratives and the Problem of Sentimental Value' in *Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects and It-Narratives in 18thc England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 329–54, 336.

as one of love (not simply the more qualified ‘sentiment’), the affective power of household goods, and the pain felt at their loss or destruction, is brought into play. These poems use forms of language and framing to discuss things, which are exactly the same as those used in the love poetry and elegiac poetry published in the same columns and collections. The language and tropes, and the emphasis on writing ‘from the heart’, frame these poems as love poems for an audience very familiar with the popular love poem. Moreover, poetry itself, as a highly respected genre, helps to endue these common items with powerful resonance, suggesting they are worthy of being enshrined in literature. To love an object is indeed a risky investment, these poems argue, yet it is not ridiculous, because the pleasure and satisfaction gained from a relationship with a beloved item – satisfaction that may be linked to both usefulness and aesthetic value – is rewarding, particularly when the object in question successfully lasts for a long time. Since these poems value women’s domestic labour and men’s involvement in the domestic space, they are certainly part of the ongoing effort to render the working classes respectable and politically safe. Produced by working-class writers themselves, however, they represent respectability and a secure domestic space, containing attractive and useful household goods, as a desirable and attainable goal that is nonetheless constantly under threat by external forces. Economic downturns, precarious employment, sickness and an old age without state support, all haunt these poems, and the poems are designed as an indirect means to create readerly sympathy for helplessness in the face of the loss of beloved things. In a small way, then, practicing love for ‘perfect’ objects, and enshrining it in poetry, helps to advocate for an amelioration of social conditions.

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‘There Is No Death’: Familial Love, Loss and (Re)connection in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualist Literature

Emily Vincent

In her aptly named Spiritualist manifesto, *There Is No Death* (1891), prolific author of Victorian sensation and Gothic fiction Florence Marryat (1833–99) relays a peculiar encounter with the apparent ghost of her lost child, her infant daughter also named ‘Florence’ who had died at just ten days old. Looking down from the spirit world, the spectral ‘Florence’ is arrestingly precocious in her matured and emphatic speech as she seeks to comfort and console her mother:

Don’t fret, dear mother. Remember *I* am always near you. No one can take *me* away. Your earthly children may grow up and go out into the world and leave you, but you will always have your spirit child close to you.¹

By discouraging her mother’s tendency to ‘fret’, the spirit of ‘Florence’ appears highly intuitive in her attempts to assuage her mother’s anxieties about their physical and emotional distance. However, the young ‘Florence’ also asserts a kind of familial dominance when suggesting that her unwavering love and loyalty to her mother supplants that of her siblings: Marryat’s still living ‘earthly children’. The ghostly ‘Florence’, through her unexpectedly maternal demeanour, enacts a striking mother-daughter role reversal in which a revenant ‘spirit child’ is depicted as communing from beyond the grave to provide a fiercely loyal display of love and comfort to her own parent. The spirit’s assurance that (despite her own corporeal demise) she, in fact, would not ‘grow up and go out into the world and leave’, is especially curious given that, for most materialist observers, the death of an infant would sadly mean just that. Yet, fervent Spiritualists like Marryat believed that the life of a loved one not only continued after death, but that human existence blossomed, heralding a new spiritual pathway which could be both beautiful and transformative. Alongside tens of thousands of ardent believers in Spiritualism, Marryat emphasized that, after her daughter’s death, she maintained direct communication with the young ‘Florence’, one who had ‘developed into the merriest little spirit’ whose ‘childhood has now passed away’, ultimately rendering her departed daughter ‘more dignified and thoughtful and

¹ Emphasis in original. Florence Marryat, *There is No Death* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891), 115.

womanly [...] joyous and happy'.² For readers, it is these empowering, yet often deeply perplexing, accounts of unforeseen hope and enduring contact in times of mourning which raise important epistemological questions concerning familial love and loss. How, for instance, did the Spiritualist denial of the concept of 'loss', affect how a child could be memorialised? In what way, as the reappearance of 'Florence' does, could a dismissal of death, yet a continuation of contact, upturn traditional familial hierarchies and thereby challenge established social practices relating to love, motherhood and marriage? And how did literature produced from within the Spiritualism movement seek to reinforce and persuade others of a worldview in which the death of a loved one could be seen as sanguine?

As this chapter demonstrates, it is in the striking paranormal accounts of parent-child reconnection that Spiritualism's ability to invert expected cultural and emotional norms of mourning becomes most apparent. I therefore consider family-centric Spiritualist memoir, supernatural fiction and anti-Spiritualist poetics written by a select group of British authors, through which Spiritualism was both defended and mocked, to demonstrate how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spiritualist literature addressed the complexities of love, loss and reconnection following the death of a child. Given that even the mainstream literary climate at this time teemed with what Timothy L. Carens deems 'idolatrous' models for love, Spiritualist literature brazenly threatened to imbalance socially acceptable and theologically conventional representations of love.³ Spiritualism (with its attendant array of fiction, manifesto and life-writing invested in the psychical) was unapologetic in its disruption of conventional dynamics between parent and child, the mourner and the mourned and, at its core, between life and death. For the bereaved, Spiritualist heterodoxy consequently destabilised the perceived interrelatedness of love and longing, while its accessibility proposed to break down barriers of economic privilege so that, at least ideologically, everyone could access the immortal.⁴ Given the Spiritualist promise that powerful expressions of love for (and from) the dead intensified when conversing with familial spirits during a séance, extended periods of melancholy and yearning appeared to be unproductive, even unnecessary. Following the infamous 'table-rappings'

² Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 109.

³ Timothy L. Carens, *Strange Gods: Love and Idolatry in the Victorian Novel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 1–33.

⁴ By the 1870s, as Alex Owen reinforces, Spiritualism was 'most securely established amongst the ranks of respectable working- and middle-class people' as séance practices also took place outside of the parlours of the elite. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8.



Figure 6.1. Portrait of Florence Marryat from *The 'Two Worlds': Portrait Album of Spiritual Mediums, Workers, and Celebrities* (Manchester: Labour Press Society Ltd., 1897), 18. IAPSOP.

of the Fox sisters in mid-nineteenth century New York, these disruptive beliefs spread quickly to Britain as it became a more established religious movement and set of socio-cultural practices (see Figure 6.1). The breadth of Spiritualism's appeal was extended by the fact that it 'humanized the afterlife, peopling it with identifiable personalities' and assured direct verbal contact which, as Pat Jalland stresses, 'transformed' the movement for 'many thousands of bereaved relatives', thus rendering it a deeply affective movement.⁵ Spiritualist practice shifted as it moved away from the popular physical manifestations of the late 1860s and early 1870s – including 'direct voice phenomena (writing and speaking through a

⁵ Simon During, 'From Magic to Film', in *Modern Enchantments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 135–77, 151; Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 371.

medium)' and full-body materialisations, in which mediums went into a cabinet, fell into a trance and the form of a materialised spirit emerged – to 'more mental, psychological aspects of communication taking precedence in the 1880s'.⁶ This led to the formation in 1882 of the still-existent Society for Psychical Research and a predominating culture of psychical scrutiny in which, as Efram Sera-Shriar notes, 'investigations of spirits and psychic forces were beginning to find a significant place in Victorian intellectual life' amidst an emergent 'crisis of evidence'.⁷ As part of the *fin-de-siècle* Spiritualist response to mounting societal pressure to catalogue and defend meaningful and empirically verifiable encounters with the spirit world, Spiritualist authors such as Marryat made it their mission to use both memoir and fiction to promote their highly devout 'investigation[s] of the science of Spiritualism' and to assert continued contact with their deceased loved ones.⁸

Marryat serves as an exemplary case study for the multi-modal potency of Spiritualist literature in engaging bereaved readers through provocative non-fictional and fictional forms which centralised revenant children. Marryat's memoir *There Is No Death* and novel *The Dead Man's Message* (1894) are persuasive Spiritualist narratives which capitalised on the unceasing nature of family ties post-mortem. The maternal and proof-centric impetus of Marryat's work explores how, by disclosing her own lived experiences of child loss and séance reconnection with her readers, she promotes the eternal bond of earthbound mothers and spectral children. I then review the best-selling narrative of scientist-turned-Spiritualist, Oliver Lodge, whose medium-derived contact with his son killed during World War One, *Raymond or, Life and Death* (1916), is a pertinent paternal counterpoint to Marryat's tales. Examining Lodge's memoir enables an extended look at the turbulent afterlife of Victorian Spiritualism, stressing how the image of the continuing spirit in the context of wartime bereavement 'provides an antidote to grief', also complicated by the pain of war.⁹ I argue that narratives such as these presented the bibliotherapeutic potential of the Spiritualist cause as they challenged

⁶ Tatiana Kontou, 'Sensation Fiction, Spiritualism and the Supernatural', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, Andrew Scott Mangham ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141–53, 143.

⁷ Sera-Shriar's study considers the concurrent emergence of British anthropology as a case study for interrogating issues of human belief while reinforcing recent Spiritualist criticism which asserts that the movement emerged as a response to a Victorian 'crisis of evidence', rather than to a crisis of faith. Efram Sera-Shriar, *Psychic Investigators: Anthropology, Modern Spiritualism, and Credible Witnessing in the Late Victorian Age* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022), 5, 4.

⁸ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.

⁹ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914–1934: The Ghosts of World War One* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 110.

cultures of mourning by turning death into an opportunity for continued communion, and of construction rather than destruction. When considering social relationships in this way, scholars of Spiritualism typically highlight feminist debates concerning female mediums appearing in novel and vocal public positions of power, while at the same time experiencing a relinquishment of bodily control, as well as the sexually transgressive potential of the movement, enabled through 'the intimate spaces underneath the tipping tables' which threatened 'all rules of decency and decorum'.¹⁰ However, few assess the pivotal affective role that love and specific familial dynamics, including parent-child relations, play in Spiritualism's literary history. Emma Griffin emphasises that '[e]motions history invites us to step outside the norms of our own culture and offers a genuinely different way of understanding historical societies in all their specificity'; in this way, viewing such 'genuinely different' Spiritualist history and culture through an affective lens is both nuanced and rewarding.¹¹

In conducting a balanced review of the movement's standout literary representations of love and its post-life consequences, I close with an examination of the poetics of popular Spiritualist sceptic Robert Browning and his dramatic monologue: 'Mr Sludge: "The Medium"' (1864). Browning's highly theatrical monologue critiques early Spiritualist charlatanry by depicting sham medium 'Mr Sludge' leveraging familial bonds and vulnerable paying clients to portray a fine line between the provision of emotional solace and financially manipulating mourners. As a repeatedly polarising movement, Spiritualism not only caused large-scale shifts in thought concerning conceptions of the mortal and the immortal, but it also disrupted the microcosmic, unsettling the domestic sphere. I thus consider speculation surrounding the contentious nature of Spiritualism for Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the differing imprints that the movement left on poetry attending to the psychical. I highlight Browning's *dramatis personae* in the context of child loss in the séance room, reflecting on it as one which stresses the haptic desires of ghost-seekers, while presenting Spiritualism's limitations for truly consoling the bereaved. Assessing literature produced by believers and their sceptical counterparts initiates a wide-ranging look at the literature of the beyond to consider its changing pre- and post-war aesthetic and social character, while crucially emphasising Spiritualism's unyielding focus: the continuation of an unending love not quelled, but strengthened, by death.

¹⁰ Marlene Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality: Sex, Marriage, and Victorian Spiritualism', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (2003), 67–81, 67.

¹¹ Emma Griffin, 'The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture, and Poverty in Victorian Britain', *The American Historical Review*, 123: 1 (2018), 60–85, 62.

‘[A]ctual, irrefragable proof’: Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* and *The Dead Man’s Message*

Marryat’s *fin-de-siècle* Spiritualist texts are quintessential reflections of late Victorian supernatural discourse, which sought to proselytise and persuade readers of the veracity of their cause by relaying audacious details from the séance room. Central to the rhetorical power of Marryat’s popular memoirs of the psychical, *There Is No Death* and *The Spirit World* (1894), is her open and profoundly personal style, through which she confidently shares her experiences of being visited by the materialised spirits of her lost infants and children. Marryat goes further than professing only of the enduring nature of love, instead insisting that spirit-world love was a developed one, a connection which was far more potent, mature and meaningful than the love felt between a parent and child when on earth. In both, her séance retellings and supernatural fiction, Marryat evocatively depicts the spiritual development of her lost children as a process which inevitably advanced their capacity to give and receive love. Unlike other sentimentalised textual renderings of the departed, in which, as Mary Gryctko points out in the case of many mid-century authors from Dickens onwards, ‘the dead child in frozen permanently in its ideal form, unable to grow up or change’, Spiritualist offspring typically aged and developed in order to thrive.¹² The spiritual growth of the once ten-day-old ghost of ‘Florence’, for instance, is demonstrated through her newfound abilities to converse, write letters and even enact a parental role to her own mother. As a consequence of the superior learning process that juvenile spirits were said to be subject to, parents could look forward to ‘constant and increasing intimacy’ from their offspring, who, most desirably, could ‘express superhuman love and provide superhuman comfort’ to their bereaved parent.¹³ Bridget Bennett concurs that Spiritualism ‘removed fear from encounters with the dead and replaced it with tenderness, benevolence, and love’ and this focus on emotional growth was just one of the many ways that Spiritualists sought to destigmatise death.¹⁴ Marryat’s retellings of séances placed concerted energies on the tender moments of actively communicating with the dead, rather than on solely memorialising them. This in turn reflected an unconventional mourning process which, rather than centralising absence, focused on presence. As one minister-turned-Spiritualist affirmed, the movement’s ‘real spirit’ lay in ‘construction

¹² Mary Gryctko, “‘The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:’ Nineteenth-Century Comfort Books and the Creation of the Immortal Child”, *Victorian Review*, 48:2 (2022), 293–308, 292.

¹³ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989), 40–41.

¹⁴ Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36.

rather than destruction', further attesting to the Spiritualist intention to celebrate and depict displays of developing, and not dwindling, love.¹⁵

At the heart of Marryat's dedication to her cause was a desire to convince others of the 'indisputable fact, that the dead are *not* gone beyond the reach of those who love them' by appealing to the *fin-de-siècle* demand for psychical research. Psychical research involved seeking and promoting empirical evidence which supported the claims that Spiritualist mediums could make contact with a world beyond the veil.¹⁶ Writing in *The Spirit World*, Marryat invokes readers with deeply sentimental language which underscores her compulsion to prove the existence of the ghostly:

The torn and bereaved heart wants proof – actual, irrefragable proof, that those who have gone before us, live and breathe somewhere; that they are not entirely beyond the limits of our sight and love and remembrance; that the deepest feelings of our hearts have not been wasted, but are bearing fruit still, and even our sorrow for their loss affords a tender pleasure to the spirits who sympathize with us.¹⁷

The repeated use of first-person plural pronouns invites an empathetic community of bereaved readers to choose Spiritualism as a demonstrable, optimistic answer to 'torn and bereaved' heartache. Marryat's eschatological commitment to a bettered life after death even led her to trivialise earthly loss. In her later Spiritualist defence, *The Spirit World*, she asks why we 'grieve so terribly "as those without hope", when we lose our friends by death', but do not feel the same when they travel abroad, at risk of 'all sorts of dangers from sickness and traveling', 'lost to our sight and hearing'.¹⁸ Skilled at anticipating recurrent scepticism, Marryat acknowledges that the main difficulty of proving Spiritualist hypotheses was that so many of the facts revealed via mediumistic communications were personal and 'so strictly private a nature that it would be impossible to put them into print', resolving that '[t]he best tests we receive are when the very secrets of our hearts, which we have not confided to our nearest friends, are revealed to us'.¹⁹ Thus, Marryat knew that her most convincing case studies would be those which exposed these 'secrets of our hearts' by revealing detailed encounters with her lost children which could be regarded as genuine exemplars of spirit-world contact.

¹⁵ J. M. Peebles, *Christianity, Churchianity, or Spiritualism - Which?* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1913), 3.

¹⁶ Emphasis in original. Florence Marryat, *The Spirit World* (New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894), 33.

¹⁷ Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 8.

¹⁸ Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 22.

¹⁹ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 39.

There Is No Death epitomises Spiritualist literature which aimed to persuade others of a life after death by presenting a vibrant catalogue of séance phenomena and Spiritualist mediums, while also promoting compelling interactions with the apparent spirits of Marryat's own departed children. Marryat is characteristically bold in shunning patriarchal expectations of Victorian propriety when discussing the reproductive female body and repeatedly discloses her experiences with stillbirths and premature child loss. Confident that they 'lived again', she is direct and matter of fact when revealing that, during her second marriage, she had 'lost several infants from premature birth'.²⁰ She admits being 'very curious to speak with these unknown babies of mine' and reveals that she used to task her favoured spirit of 'Florence' to 'bring them to me'.²¹ Marryat's tone is often frank and less sentimental when relaying these highly personal lived experiences and this is especially surprising when considered against the deeply sentimental tone and style of popular Victorian consolation literature and child-centred comfort books. The apparent ageing and growth of Marryat's 'unknown babies' into spirits capable of communication with mortals conflicts with popular comfort manuals which, as Gryctko highlights, denied the agency and development of the apotheosised child, rendering them as 'objects, angels, and text – never as characters or people'.²² In comfort manuals, '[t]he dead child becomes a real-world version of Peter Pan, the boy (or girl) who never grows up' as a means of representing 'perfect childhood'.²³ By contrast, in depicting the continuing development of child spirits like 'Florence' and her other lost infants, Marryat promotes a resistance to mid-late nineteenth-century literary mourning culture. She reinforces the bold Spiritualist mission which claimed that deceased loved ones continued growing, and, by doing so, they thrived.

Though discussing many of Marryat's encounters with young spirits which took place within the séance room, *There Is No Death* also reveals instances of her materialised relatives appearing in domestic settings as a means of demonstrating the pervasiveness of Spiritualist phenomena in her day-to-day life. In one engaging vignette, Marryat recounts seeing two apparitions of 'a wild young fellow', her step-son Francis Lean, in Brighton in 1880 when, much to her surprise, he was believed to be aboard a ship sailing to South America.²⁴ With a nod to the popular nautical accounts of her famous father, naval officer and author Captain Frederick

²⁰ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 215.

²¹ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 216.

²² Gryctko, "'The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:'", 305.

²³ Gryctko, "'The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:'", 305.

²⁴ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 62.

Marryat, Marryat initially presumes Lean to be a renegade, but an unnerving ‘second vision’ of her step-son appearing to her in his naval uniform while she was in bed confirms her suspicion that ‘something must have happened to the boy’.²⁵ Sure enough, Marryat asserts her clairvoyance and dramatically reveals that Lean’s ship had capsized and he had drowned two months before she had seen what she claimed to be his ghost. Anticipating the investigative challenges of the era, and the accompanying discourse which typified the climate of psychical research, Marryat seeks to pre-empt critics who would dismiss her visions as a ‘very remarkable case of “optical illusion”’.²⁶ *There Is No Death* was a ‘best-selling account [...] praised and castigated in equal measure’ and, while Marryat ‘received hundreds of letters of gratitude from bereaved parents around the world, [...] the press ridiculed her’.²⁷ By describing Lean as appearing to her in his naval uniform ‘with the peaked cap on his head’ and ‘smiling’, Marryat asserts that the spectral Lean has developed into a deferent and peaceful iteration of his former ‘wild’ self so that she could further leverage her familial encounters to underline the transformative and consolatory potential of the spirit world.

The mischievous spirit of ‘Florence’ pervades *There Is No Death* to provide readers with both entertainment and solace. The accounts of ‘Florence’ provided audiences with ‘great comfort’, especially as they bolstered one of the ultimate Spiritualist endeavours, providing support for those ‘consoled by the idea of a son or daughter enjoying a second, and healthier, life’.²⁸ Chapter Eight is dedicated to the spirit of ‘Florence’, and Marryat begins by deploying evocative medical terminology to describe her infant’s ‘most peculiar blemish’, which appeared ‘as though a semi-circular piece of flesh had been cut out by a bullet-mould, exposing part of the gum’.²⁹ She reveals intimate details relating to her daughter’s congenital disorder, describing baby Florence’s cleft palate. Marryat claimed that doctors had observed this as being so rare that it was reported in the *Lancet* ‘as something quite out of the common way’.³⁰ The multi-layered mediatisation of her daughter’s condition is compounded as she goes on to depict the condition as relayed by the spirit-world version of ‘Florence’. Attending a séance hosted by the famed medium Florence Cook at the British National Association of Spiritualists, Cook is described as summoning the spirit of young ‘Florence’, who, by this point, has aged to seventeen years old, and after requesting proof that this

²⁵ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 62.

²⁶ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 61.

²⁷ Catherine Pope, *Florence Marryat* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2020), 31.

²⁸ Pope, *Florence Marryat*, 153.

²⁹ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 97.

³⁰ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 98.

spirit was really her departed daughter, the spectral ‘Florence’ commands her mother to ‘look at my mouth’ and see the ‘*peculiar defect on the lip*’ with which she was born. Marryat applauds this visual evidence as ‘incontrovertible proof of identity’ and stresses her book’s opening mission to ‘leave the deduction to be drawn from [...] my readers’.³¹ Despite outlining the persistence of her daughter’s physical affliction, there is no suggestion of a prolonged pain or suffering and she concludes the chapter with a note of overriding optimism. She observes that, in 1873, when first encountering the spirit-child version of ‘Florence’, her daughter was ‘a simple child who did not know how to express itself’, yet, by 1890 she had become ‘a woman full of counsel and tender warning’.³² It is this soothing notion of spirit-world independence and spiritual growth that Marryat later embeds into her subsequent Spiritualist fiction to suggest the true power of a belief system which, if committed to while on earth, could be utterly transformative in the next life.

The Dead Man’s Message (1894) demonstrates how Marryat’s alleged experiences of her children’s spirit-world transformations are creatively reimagined in her Spiritualist fiction, while it also outlines her multi-modal approach to depicting parental love as a means of persuading readers to join her cause.³³ Marryat’s supernatural stories are highly preoccupied with figures of mothers – figures both beleaguered and revered, as well as biological and surrogate – and of children, most often depicting those threatened during their existence on earth and saved through their spirit-world redemption. Exemplifying many of these archetypal Spiritualist characterisations, *The Dead Man’s Message* is a convoluted and melodramatic reenvisioning of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in which Dickens’ denouncement of Ebenezer Scrooge’s avarice is replaced by a, rather unsubtle, advertisement for pursuing an unquestioning Spiritualist life. It follows the sudden death of dismissive and dogmatic scientist Professor Aldwyn on his Odyssean spiritual quest for redemption after he becomes trapped in a purgatory of his own making when transported into the spirit world. Led by his mysterious spirit guide, Aldwyn is forced to confront his immoral ways, observing in frustration as he is shown how domestic life (both on earth and in the spirit world) progresses without him until ‘his spiritual eyes seemed to open’ and he is

³¹ Emphasis in original. Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 113.

³² Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 116.

³³ Likely due to her transatlantic popularity in the 1890s, *The Dead Man’s Message*, subtitled ‘An Occult Romance’, was first published in New York before it was later renamed to reflect a far more retributive tone as *A Soul on Fire* (1898) when published in Britain four years later.

left as a 'repentant child' watched over by the spirit of his first wife, Susan.³⁴ These striking kinds of esoteric reincarnation novels first emerged in the late nineteenth century, and Christine Ferguson identifies how they enabled those experiencing 'the loss of traditional faith' to gain a 'source of renewed spiritual optimism'.³⁵ In *The Dead Man's Message*, Marryat presents 'first and foremost, a warning to those who neglect their spiritual needs', but also challenges scientific cynicism in responding to a 'dismissive attitude to spiritualism by having a dedicated man of science undergo a spiritual awakening'; Marryat then ultimately posits a 'co-existence and mutual understanding' between scientific and Spiritualist ideologies.³⁶ Exemplifying what Ferguson affirms as one of 'the least-discussed genre of modern Spiritualist writing: the afterlife novel', *The Dead Man's Message* uses its cautionary moralising to underscore the importance of cultivating positive familial relationships on earth, and, most crucially, of nurturing exemplary ones in the hereafter.³⁷

The novel centres around the inversion of domestic hierarchies and consequently serves to reinforce Spiritualism as an evocative movement which challenged and reimagined established social practices relating to love, motherhood and marriage. Marryat foregrounds prematurely deceased children and their apotheosised mother, Susan, to depict a strengthened spirit-world bond of love and highlight how, as Bennett affirms, Spiritualist ideals were 'domesticating [...] the spirits of the dead'.³⁸ These depictions recall Marryat's séance experiences with her own precocious daughter who in the spirit world adopts the role of maternal caretaker to Marryat. In *The Dead Man's Message*, Susan usurps her first husband's place as the head of the household by becoming the spectral caregiver for hers and Aldwyn's 'still-born babies [...] the loss of which she so much grieved'.³⁹ Susan, in the novel's closing pages, is ultimately 'commissioned' as Aldwyn's new spiritual guide, imbued with supernatural knowledge which, Aldwyn is told, is an 'influence [which] will lead you aright'.⁴⁰ Though Ferguson is right to acknowledge that Susan's passivity in this closing

³⁴ Florence Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message* (New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894), 174, 178.

³⁵ Christine Ferguson, 'New Religions and Esotericism', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer eds. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 413–424, 421.

³⁶ Depledge, 'Introduction', xxiii, xiv.

³⁷ Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848–1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 87.

³⁸ Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 36.

³⁹ Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 71.

⁴⁰ Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 178.

appointment could be considered as a form of ‘silenced enslavement’ in closing with a ‘patriarchal model of perpetual marriage’, it is Susan’s maternal abilities (which Marryat presents as being evidently superior to Aldwyn’s parental skills) that further conceptualise the spirit world as a place of redemption and growth for once-threatened children.⁴¹ Marryat thus ultimately privileges Susan with a crucial maternal role of a spirit-world caregiver.

Underscoring the veneration of maternity so central to Marryat’s fiction, Pope stresses that, by establishing Susan as ‘a divine mother who is strong and passionate’, Marryat ‘marginalises the father figure, instead making a bold statement of the supremacy and divinity of both motherhood and femininity’.⁴² This is most apparent in an intimate depiction of infant loss in which Aldwyn is brought to a spiritual plane on which their still-born children exist, grow and yet again thrive. While Aldwyn is barred from communicating with his lost children, he is forced to watch as Susan reclaims their offspring, redirecting them to a fertile Elysian realm as she ‘disappeared beneath the grove of the trees, holding her infants by the hand’.⁴³ The mobility of the infants – now ‘little children’ – suggests their matured age and the authoritative use of ‘her’ and not ‘their’ infants reinforces how Susan’s psychological maturity imbues her with privileged ways of knowing and raising the children. Underscoring Aldwyn’s relinquished paternal influence, Susan pointedly reminds him that he had squandered his parental opportunities while on earth, indicating that ‘[a]ll of them that belonged to you lies in Kensal Green Cemetery’.⁴⁴ Here, Marryat’s arresting reminder of corporeal death boldly exemplifies her prioritisation of familial relations which valued an unyielding connection with – and commitment to – the spirit world. By depicting the empowering of Susan through her continuing maternal role as the psychically attuned and spiritually responsible parent, Marryat underlines the overriding endeavour which drives her Spiritualist literature: to nurture and promote the ceaseless spirit-world love between parent and child and, most prominently, between mothers and their prematurely deceased infants.

‘[S]entiment is not excluded’: Oliver Lodge and *Raymond*

By contrast, *Raymond*, the later Spiritualist memoir of physicist and author Oliver Lodge, demonstrates how the patriarchal horrors of war induced a shift

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Determined Spirits*, 105.

⁴² Pope, *Florence Marryat*, 148, 145.

⁴³ Marryat, *The Dead Man’s Message*, 78.

⁴⁴ Marryat, *The Dead Man’s Message*, 71.



Figure 6.2. Frontispiece of Raymond Lodge in *Raymond, or Life and Death* by Oliver Lodge (New York: George H. Doran, 1916). Internet Archive.

in Spiritualist literary aesthetics. This shift prioritised mediumistic reconnection with young adult male soldiers among the many millions of military casualties caused by the First World War. The Great War itself had engendered a darkly fitting affective climate for Spiritualism, which helped to revive enthusiasm for a psychical cause marred by accusations of fraudulent mediumship and the transatlantic commercialisation of planchette or Ouija boards. The horrors of war were compounded by the tragic dearth of human remains, denying many bereaved parents the corporeal evidence needed for closure and for acknowledging loss. George M. Johnson highlights that ‘[t]hese men’s bodies – nearly half of those killed – were never recovered, and this distressing situation encouraged mystical responses to loss’.⁴⁵ Lodge begins *Raymond* with a sobering acknowledgement of

⁴⁵ George M. Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xi.

the ‘appalling’ amount of ‘premature and unnatural bereavement at the present time’ and stresses his profound sense of civic ‘duty’, that he should risk ‘possible scoffers’ by ‘exposing one’s own sorrow and its alleviation’. Lodge then articulates the prevailing bibliotherapeutic intent of his Spiritualist memoir: of a ‘service [...] rendered to mourners’ so that they ‘can derive comfort by learning that communication across the gulf is possible’.⁴⁶ Though certainly reminiscent of Marryat’s Spiritualist mission to provide comfort to bereaved parents, Lodge’s acknowledgement of the wounded cultural milieu and evident shadow that physical death on a mass scale was causing across the globe, dismisses the energetic optimism of Marryat’s prose and suggests an understandably more pessimistic and, rather paradoxically, realist eschatological worldview.

Raymond is Lodge’s influential meditation upon the loss, and allegedly renewed existence of his son (Figure 6.2) who had been wounded by a fragment of shell and killed in battle on 14 September 1915. It is an assemblage of letters, reminiscences and ‘unusual communications’ with mediums, and, upon its publication, it was an exceedingly popular text, as demonstrated by its multiple print editions which sparked a Spiritualist literary trend, through which ‘numerous spirit soldier testimonies [...] followed in its wake’.⁴⁷ For Lodge, *Raymond* also ‘became the most famous of his books on the war’, even surpassing that of *The War and After* (1915) which was ‘an earlier, almost as popular book’.⁴⁸ Ardent Spiritualist and friend Doyle praised *Raymond* as a crowning glory for England, citing Lodge as one who, by publicising Spiritualism in such a confessional manner, helped ‘to rescue this system from being a mere playing with *Poltergeists*’.⁴⁹ Lodge’s initial interest in Spiritualism was piqued at the same time that Marryat was publishing her Spiritualist works. He was especially impressed by the séance materialisations of spirits, particularly of his Aunt Anne, and his involvement in, and later presidency of, the Society for Psychical Research stimulated his specific interests in ‘physical phenomena’ and the persistence of human ‘personality’ post-mortem.⁵⁰

The opening of *Raymond* is especially striking in the way in which the memoir’s array of paratexts (which includes, among others, an obituary from his brother, an epitaph from Raymond’s headstone, and a brief reflective portrait of his son’s

⁴⁶ Oliver J. Lodge, *Raymond, or Life and Death* (New York: George H. Doran and Company, 1916), viii.

⁴⁷ Lodge, *Raymond*, 3; Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 230.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 75.

⁴⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘Is Sir Oliver Lodge Right?: “Yes.” by A. Conan Doyle. “No.” by Edward Clodd’, *The Strand* (January–July 1917b), 49–54, 51.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 73–75.

curtailed life) at first betrays such a starkly confessional disclosure of Lodge's emotional pain – that 'the outlook of life felt irretrievably darkened' – but then quickly resolves to underscore the industrious 'service' that his son was completing in the spirit world.⁵¹ Lodge assures readers that Raymond 'has entered another region of service now' and that 'his activity is not over', while another of Lodge's sons entreats readers not to think of Raymond 'lying near Ypres with all his work ended, but rather, after due rest and refreshment, continuing his noble and useful career in more peaceful surroundings'.⁵² Despite some Christians perceiving the messages in *Raymond* to be of demonic origin, emerging 'not from above, but below', Lodge's portrayal of Raymond's continued communications and dutiful sense of love and familial devotion reflect Christian ideals of spiritual diligence by literalising the concept of a 'labour of love'.⁵³ In another episode which would have been particularly compelling for readers (the spirit of Raymond castigates his father, exclaiming 'For God's sake, father, do it'), Raymond emotively implores Lodge to match his same work ethic when conducting his psychical research, warning him that 'if you [...] could only see what I see: hundreds of men and women heart-broken [...] you would throw the whole strength of yourself into this work'.⁵⁴ Clear parallels emerge here between Raymond and the busy spirit of Marryat's 'Florence'; 'Florence' is not only tasked with taking care of her own mother, but also claims to be employed as 'mamma's nurse maid', while exasperatedly suggesting she is also overworked, having 'enough to do to look after her babies'.⁵⁵ Resisting literary iterations of lost children as the 'glorious carefree child-emblems of heaven', 'Florence' and Raymond are instead put to work post-mortem.⁵⁶ The conflict presented here between Lodge's confessional expression of emotional pain, and his belief in the continued utility of his son's spirit, is one which pervades the narrative of *Raymond* and suggests how the traumatic wartime context of this later iteration of Spiritualism was one through which a hopeful afterlife was tainted by the attendant horrors of a deferential war. What is also evident is the pragmatic approach to, and reframing of, loss that pre- and post-war Spiritualists sought to promote through their influential

⁵¹ Lodge, *Raymond*, 10.

⁵² Lodge, *Raymond*, 10, 6.

⁵³ Charles Lindley Wood Halifax (Viscount), "Raymond;" *Some Criticisms* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Company, 1917), 6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (KJV).

⁵⁴ Lodge, *Raymond*, 102–3

⁵⁵ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 323.

⁵⁶ Jen Baker, 'Death (un)Personified: Pronouns, Patriarchy, and the Child Ghost', in *Vision, Contestation and Deception: Interrogating Gender and the Supernatural in Victorian Shorter Fiction*, ed. Oindrila Ghosh (Kolkata: Avenel Press, 2021), 52–80, 64.

séance-room literature. While Lodge's and Marryat's representations of the Spiritualist expectation to continue working is most at odds with the sentimentalised ideal of being 'at rest' after death, it reinforces the need for the continued development of their loved ones post-mortem, even if, rather oddly, this spiritual 'development' was conceived in industrious vocational terms.

Lodge begins the 'supernormal portion' of his work with an emphasis on the affective weight of assembling *Raymond*.⁵⁷ He outlines that, despite his readers' expectations for his famed scientific objectivity (citing his psychical research tendencies for being 'intellectual rather than emotional') he acknowledges that, when it came to such a deeply personal family account concerning his lost son, 'sentiment is not excluded'.⁵⁸ In contrast to Marryat's devout Spiritualist manifesto, Lodge's memoir is far more willing to acknowledge the fallibility and limitations of Spiritualist belief, especially in relation to the heartbreak of a bereaved parent. Recalling the first séance that he attended after Raymond's death, he describes how his intent was, in fact, not to contact his lost son, but to comfort a bereaved French acquaintance who 'was in great distress at the loss of both her beloved sons in the war, within a week of each other'. Lodge does not idealise the mourning process and underscores her emotional emptiness in admitting that 'she was left desolate'. He consequently arranges sittings with a medium in which the 'sons of Madame communicated, on both occasions, though with difficulty', and highlights that it was these linguistic and interpretative difficulties – 'that one of them gave his name completely, the other approximately' – led the mother, a woman uninitiated into the Spiritualist cause, to be only 'partially consoled'.⁵⁹ This aligns with what Andrew Smith identifies as the core theme of *Raymond*: the 'pursuit of coherence'. This motif is typified by instances such as this when '[m]essages appear to be fragmentary or incomplete, and the desire to make sense of them is in part linked to a desire to make sense of World War One as a whole'.⁶⁰ This fragmentary style of narrative is reinforced by the paratexts of the opening section and the epistolary format of the third chapter, which showcases a multitude of letters concerning Raymond. In many of these epistle fragments, military colleagues are frequently reassuring that Lodge's son was not understood to have 'suffered much pain'.⁶¹ In underscoring the emotional gravity of the French woman's loss and highlighting letters which accentuate Lodge's parental

⁵⁷ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.

⁵⁸ Lodge, *Raymond*, 83.

⁵⁹ Lodge, *Raymond*, 97.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914–1934*, 124.

⁶¹ Lodge, *Raymond*, 76.

anxieties concerning the extent of his son's suffering, Lodge's representations of the nature of Spiritualist love when encountering loss are shown to be far more realist, visceral and marred by the dark shadow of war than those of his pre-1914 predecessor, Marryat. The shifted character of post-war Spiritualist texts like *Raymond* therefore overshadowed the diligent Spiritualist optimism of believers that had come before; they presented a stark juxtaposition through representations of a spirit-world love which was irrevocably imprinted with, and inseparable from, the wartime trauma from which they were inevitably engendered.

As the 'supernormal portion' of *Raymond* develops, Lodge bolsters a theme common to both his and Marryat's Spiritualist works by reinforcing the inversion of domestic hierarchies between parent and child when faced with bodily death. He recounts his first sitting with medium, Mrs Leonard, taking place less than two weeks after Raymond's death when he learns that Raymond was tasked with 'a great deal of work to do'.⁶² It is specified that Raymond's spirit-world duties included being a guiding caretaker for his father, and of bolstering Lodge's Spiritualist cause, as the medium relays that Raymond 'is going to be a light that will help you; he is going to help too to prove to the world the Truth'.⁶³ Here, we see the reemergence of the Spiritualist literary tendency to empower its spirit-world children, imbuing them with active caregiving responsibilities, all necessitated by the implied fact that the bereaved parents are indeed in need of such psychical 'help'. Johnson's claim that *Raymond* 'enabled Lodge to renegotiate his distant relationship with his son, to take responsibility for the loss as both father and non-combatant and to find a larger purpose' highlights this idea of a renegotiation, of a dramatic reformulation of parent-child relationships that such open and expressive Spiritualist texts could enable.⁶⁴

Lodge's text, however, was also 'not beyond mockery from sceptics'. *Raymond* was accused of alienating readers through its evidently upper-class markers of spirit-world life, in which 'spirits can wear tweeds, smoke cigars [...] like a gentleman's club to many'.⁶⁵ In these moments, Lodge's suggestion of a wealthy and patriarchal spirit world tends toward a more exclusionary visualisation of life after death which, I argue, sits in contrast to the more ubiquitous theme of premature child loss which permeates Marryat's bibliotherapeutic Spiritualist works. By openly sharing their séance experiences with their departed children as a means of comforting comparably bereaved and grieving parents who could

⁶² Lodge, *Raymond*, 98.

⁶³ Lodge, *Raymond*, 99.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 63.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma*, 125.

also be persuaded into communing with the other side, Lodge and Marryat clearly reinforce that the representation of an unending, productive and matured spiritual love is the most important lasting impression with which to leave their readers. Moreover, though the fragmentary and visceral character of *Raymond* foregrounds the spectre of wartime trauma and thereby distinctly contrasts with Marryat's narrative optimism, it still stands as a proudly sentimental text with a shared impetus for consolation.

‘[A] family-party, met for family-purposes’: The Brownings and ‘Mr Sludge’

In 1917, fellow supporter of the psychical, Doyle, wrote a column for the *Strand* magazine prompted by the popularity of *Raymond* in support of Lodge's beliefs in spirit phenomena. Doyle reflects back to the mid-nineteenth century, to a time when he had not yet encountered Spiritualism:

My knowledge of the subject at the time was confined to Browning's ‘Sludge’, and to occasional police reports of the exposure of fraudulent mediums. I thought the whole ritual consisted of dark séances, floating tambourines, and absurd messages got by very dubious means. [...] This deepened my distrust of the whole subject.⁶⁶

Given that Doyle later grew to become one of the country's most vocal public advocates of the veracity of séance phenomena, spirit photography, and of Spiritualist doctrine, his acknowledgement that Browning's dramatic monologue, ‘Mr Sludge’, ‘deepened his distrust’ of ‘dark séances’ which ‘seemed impossible’, underscores how influential Browning's piece was for shaping early cultural perceptions of Spiritualism. By 1894, Browning's poem was still causing a stir; a derisive article in the *Saturday Review* expressed concern over Marryat's Spiritualist inclinations, claiming that: ‘Miss Marryat, we fear, has not nearly enough sense to mind [...] people who indulge in these amusements have [...] learnt positively nothing since Mr Browning's “Sludge” put them in their places once and for all.’⁶⁷ Yet, at the same time, when writing in *The Spirit World*, Marryat idealises the work of Browning's wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB), citing the seventh stanza of her poem ‘Bertha in the Lane’ (1844) and asserting it as evidence of a materialised female spirit, centralising the lines: ‘Mother [...] | Thou art standing in the room.’⁶⁸ Alongside extracts from other major poems, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ‘Christabel’

⁶⁶ Doyle, ‘Is Sir Oliver Lodge Right?’, 50.

⁶⁷ ‘Materialist *Malgré Elle*’, *The Saturday Review*, 78:2034 (1894), 436–37.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 69. Hereafter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning will be referred to as EBB and Robert Browning will be referred to as Browning.

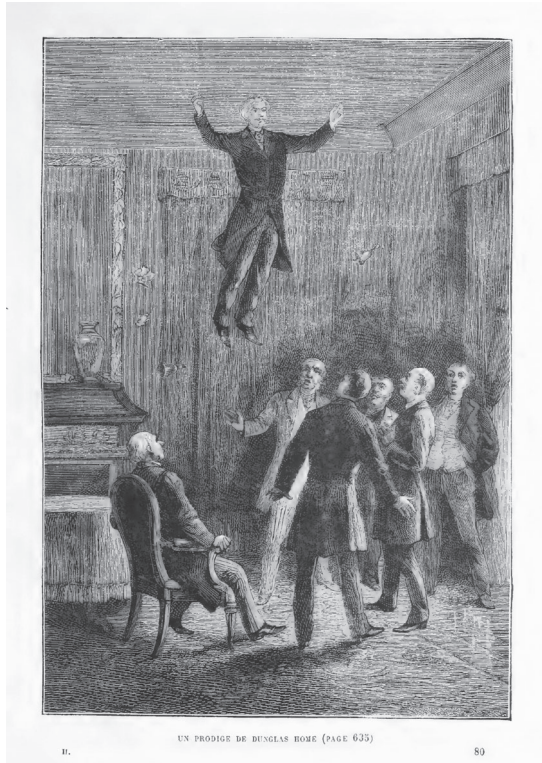


Figure 6.3. ‘Un prodige de Dunglas Home (Page 635)’ illustration from *Les Mystères de la Science* by Louis Figuier (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1880). Wellcome Library.

(1816), Marryat showcases EBB’s poetics as those ‘which prove the universality of this belief’ in Spiritualism.⁶⁹ So how then, did the Brownings navigate their radically oppositional literary impact on the beliefs of potential Spiritualists, especially when it came to poetically representing lived moments of loss in the séance room?

As Marryat’s and Lodge’s work demonstrate, Spiritualism could, on the one hand, offer a unifying promise for reconnecting parents with the phantasms of their departed loved ones, but, on the other, the act of engaging in Spiritualist practice could also become exceedingly polarising for the family unit. In July 1855, the Brownings accepted an invitation to attend a séance hosted at ‘Ealing Villa’, the home of John Rymer and his wife who had been bereaved of their twelve-year-old son, ‘Wat’, three years prior. The Rymers invited Daniel Dunglas Home, a Scottish medium ‘who had previously mystified New England with his spiritualist phenomena and was recently arrived in England’ to host the séance in

⁶⁹ Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 67.

the hopes of making contact with the spirit of their departed son.⁷⁰ For Browning, the séance experience was far from positive and he developed a strong dislike for Home, publicly professing a ‘real anger’ towards him, and later invoking him as inspiration for his fictionalised sham medium, the first-person speaker of ‘Mr Sludge’.⁷¹ Many assumed Browning’s distaste was a result of a creative or sexual jealousy provoked by Home who, in praise of EBB’s poetic genius during the séance, was ‘placing a wreath on the brow of his wife and [was] omitting to crown his [Browning’s] own’; commentators speculated that this interaction ‘may possibly have given him deep offence’.⁷² Browning vehemently denied this in an attack on Home’s account of the séance (‘a fresh vomit of lies’) in which he scoffs at how Home ‘attributed all my unbelief to my “ludicrous jealousy” of my wife’, resolving that Home was ‘a beast’.⁷³

Though largely considered a definite Spiritualist sceptic, recent critics turn to Browning’s poetics to evidence his ‘strong fascination’ with Spiritualism, as well as the ‘affirmation of its most basic principles – the faith in the immortality of the human spirit and the belief that that spirit could be made visible to others’.⁷⁴ Indeed, though Browning was evidently vexed by Home’s claims to clairvoyancy and the ‘vulgar fraud’ of the event, the Ealing séance did not entirely destroy his curiosity for the psychical. In a letter written two days after the séance, he affirmed that he would ‘like to go again and propose to try a simple experiment or two’, though he feared this ‘out of my power – my wife having told one of the party that I was “unconvinced”’.⁷⁵ In contrast to Browning’s equivocations, EBB wrote to a friend one month after the Home séance to confirm that it left her wholly convinced, remarking that, though materialised spirits were often too indistinct to be perceived as identifiable figures, they were certainly ‘a shadow on the window: the sign of something moving without – the proof of a beginning of access from a spiritual world’.⁷⁶ For EBB, the arrival of Spiritualism ‘fit

⁷⁰ Richard Kelly, ‘Daniel Home, Mr Sludge, and a Forgotten Browning Letter’, *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 1:2 (1973), 44–49, 44.

⁷¹ David F. Goslee, ‘Mr Sludge the Medium – Mr Browning the Possessed’, *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 3:2 (1975), 40–58, 41.

⁷² Madame Douglas Home, *D. D. Home: His Life and Mission* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1921), 34.

⁷³ Letter published by William Lyon Phelps, ‘Robert Browning on Spiritualism’, *Yale Review* 23 (1933), 125–38, 138.

⁷⁴ Randa Helfield, ‘Dead Women Do Tell Tales: Spiritualism, Browning, and the Dramatic Monologue’, *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 27 (2006), 7–25, 7.

⁷⁵ Phelps, ‘Robert Browning on Spiritualism’, 125, 135.

⁷⁶ ‘Letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Miss M. A. de Gaudrion’ (29 August 1855), London, Senate House Library, Harry Price Library of Magical Literature, HPC/4C/3.

naturally and easily' into her life because it aligned with her political activism; she 'detested barriers of nation, class, sect, and gender, and spiritualism seemed to be dissolving not only these but also the greatest barriers of all: between life and death, the human and the divine'.⁷⁷ Despite Browning's equivocal desire to return to the séance room for further observation, his scepticism prevailed, while, in contrast, EBB had an ease of belief which threatened to create a schism. Contemporaries remarked that 'Mr Browning cannot believe, and Mrs Browning cannot help believing', while critics regard it as the 'only subject' on which they disagreed.⁷⁸ I suggest, more specifically, that it was the prospect of the emotional manipulation of bereaved family members, especially in clear cases of fraudulency, combined with Browning's wanting physical contact with spirits, which divided EBB's and Browning's conceptualisations of Spiritualism. Browning, for instance, clarifies the 'honesty & veracity of the [Rymer] family', acknowledging that, during their 'family-party, met for family-purposes', Home's manipulation was the worst 'outrage on their feelings'.⁷⁹ Browning's defence of the wholesome and consolatory intent of the séance 'family-party' in turn reinforces Isobel Armstrong's observation that, in *Mr Sludge*, 'Browning seems to have seen in the subject an opportunity for writing more than a topical poem'.⁸⁰ Therefore, I highlight Browning's fiery moral defence of mourners as a stirring undercurrent of 'Mr Sludge' which brings attention to the distinctively haptic desires of the séance for bereaved parents.

'Mr Sludge' is an extended dramatic monologue replete with rousing and provocative rhetorics as the eponymous medium considers the varying levels of duplicity inherent within his mediumistic practice. At one pivotal point in his defence, he asks how his clients would respond if table 'raps' were shown to be 'just a certain child who died [...] | And whose last breath you thought your lips had felt?'.⁸¹ Browning's depersonalisation in using 'just' and the 'certain' child, as well as his use of highly emotive deathbed language reinforces the affective 'outrage' that Browning believed false mediums like Home caused when claiming to contact the spirits of deceased children. This motif of emotional commodification was something cemented by Browning's séance with Home, and, as a

⁷⁷ Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 179.

⁷⁸ Mrs Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Notes in England and Italy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1875), 346; Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 125.

⁷⁹ Letter published in Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 132.

⁸⁰ Isobel Armstrong, 'Browning's Mr Sludge, "The Medium"', *Victorian Poetry*, 2:1 (1964), 1–9, 1.

⁸¹ Robert Browning, 'Mr Sludge, "The Medium"', *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, 17 vols (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1888), 7:182–245, 202.

result, he aestheticises the haptics of the séance in ‘Mr Sludge’ as a pointed poetic response to what he perceived as a practice built on mediums taking advantage of mourners. When recalling his unsavoury experiences during the Home séance, the ‘usual spirit’ of Wat was said to have appeared and, much to Browning’s dismay, neglected to physically engage with him, though doing so with the other attendees: ‘Mrs & Mr Rymer were touched by what they recognized as the spirit of their child, & next my wife’.⁸² He continues that Wat was ‘kissing the family abundantly’ and that ‘the family like the caresses [...] and reciprocate them’.⁸³ Though Browning admits he was ‘touched several times under the table on one knee & the other, – and on my hands alternately (a kind of soft & fleshy pat)’, he is denied a sustained touch as he ‘desired leave to hold the spirit-hand’.⁸⁴ Richard Kelly attributes Browning’s frustration to the fact that the ‘séance was carefully regulated to preclude serious questioning’ and his requests for hand-holding were ‘flatly denied’.⁸⁵ Yet Browning’s irritation appears to stem from the spirit’s selective haptic neglect, a theme he later reinscribes into ‘Mr Sludge’.

Browning’s animated letter recounting the séance is deeply preoccupied with corporeal proof, with repeated references to his ‘desire’ for touch which convey a yearning for contact uncharacteristic of a sceptic and more reminiscent of eager séance participants. Brother of Raymond Lodge, Alec, for instance, who, despite his ‘healthy scepticism’, recalls séances with the apparent spirit of his brother and found its physical elements ‘very impressive’.⁸⁶ He claimed he was being clutched ‘exactly as if my hand was being held in both Raymond’s’ and ‘felt that his hands were being gripped in a grasp just like Raymond’s’.⁸⁷ Similarly, when Marryat first encounters ‘Florence’, it is her spirit hand, ‘thrust [...] outside the curtain’, which was most convincing because ‘it was so much like my own’.⁸⁸ Nicola Bown brings attention to Victorian post-mortem photographs of children and identifies how, just as the promise of physical contact with a materialised child spirit could soften the pain of grief, photographs filled the ‘empty hands of the bereaved parents’ with a ‘materiality [...] central to its ability to console’.⁸⁹ It is significant then that Browning’s hands, in being denied the

⁸² Letter published in Phelps, ‘Robert Browning on Spiritualism’, 129.

⁸³ Letter published in Phelps, ‘Robert Browning on Spiritualism’, 135.

⁸⁴ Letter published in Phelps, ‘Robert Browning on Spiritualism’, 130.

⁸⁵ Kelly, ‘Daniel Home, Mr Sludge, and a Forgotten Browning Letter’, 45.

⁸⁶ Lodge, *Raymond*, 162.

⁸⁷ Lodge, *Raymond*, 163, 167.

⁸⁸ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 114.

⁸⁹ Nicola Bown, ‘Empty Hands and Precious Pictures: Post-Mortem Portrait Photographs of Children’, *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 14:2 (2009), 8–24, 9.

sustained touch of the child spirit during his séance experience, are most literally empty, while Home (as the medium supposedly controlling the spirit) displays preferential physical treatment only for unquestioning believers, the Rymers and EBB. Contrastingly, when retelling her 'convinced' account of the séance, EBB expresses being content when 'touched by the invisible' and having 'sight of the hands', yet, unlike her husband, feels no need to clutch the materialised spectre. She is instead enamoured by the aesthetic beauty of the spirit hand, remarking that it was 'of the largest human size, as white as snow, and very beautiful' and, like Marryat, 'saw it as distinctly' as her own hand.⁹⁰ Where EBB found contentment in observing and passively experiencing the hands, Browning insisted upon returning and sustaining the touch of the apparent spirit. While EBB exhibits a more physically passive acceptance of the phenomena, Browning literally grasps for more evidentiary proof, foreshadowing the 'investigations into the science of Spiritualism' that would later enamour Spiritualists like Marryat by the *fin de siècle*.⁹¹ When exploring the transgressive physical nature of the séance room, Marlene Tromp exemplifies how such highly sensual aspects of mediumship reconfigured relations between men and women to the point that it 'fragmented [...] social dichotomies' and, more alarmingly, 'splintered [...] an understanding of women's identities and marriage'.⁹² Considering in this way the gravity of feminine-coded Spiritualist practice in the context of Victorian love and marriage thus reinforces how EBB's and Browning's conflicting behavioural and ideological approaches to the séance did, in fact, pose a real-world threat to loving relations between a husband and wife.

A decade after his formative séance experience, Browning's evident preoccupation with the haptic proof of the psychical, the apparently selective and unjust nature of the spirit world, and the emotional exploitation of the bereaved by mediums who claimed to invoke child spirits, all reemerge as dominant themes with the publication of 'Mr Sludge'. In addition to its provocative treatment of an array of mourning family members, the dramatic monologue contains twenty-three mentions of the word 'hand' or 'hands' and there is a fixation throughout on the unfulfilled prospect of them being pressed, squeezed, or shaken by both spirit and medium, reinforcing how the physicality of the séance room is a poignant theme throughout.⁹³ Hands then, in the accounts of the Home séance and through how they resurface in *Mr Sludge*, come to represent credulity and

⁹⁰ Quoted in Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 180.

⁹¹ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.

⁹² Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality', 78.

⁹³ Browning, 'Mr Sludge, "The Medium"'.

belief in the beyond, while their spectral emergence also threatened to fracture social codes between husband and wife. Hands symbolise the varying degrees to which, in the case of the Home séance for EBB and the Rymers, and for ardent believers like Marryat and Lodge, séance participants bereaved of their children used their Spiritualist literature to represent how they could be, even literally, touched, by Spiritualism. Those like Browning, who tended toward the sceptical or equivocal in their eschatological belief systems, instead turned to alternative creative expressions, as exemplified by the extended rhetorical poetics of the dramatic monologue form to depict how they felt neglected, excluded, and even rejected, by the sentimental activities of the séance room.

Spiritualist texts which centralised representations of the renewal of contact between a bereaved parent on earth and their spirit-world child, as this chapter has demonstrated, were deeply invested in depicting not only the continuation, but the strengthening and maturing of love, and of parent-child relationships, post-mortem. In surveying a range of differing iterations of Spiritualist text, I considered the tenaciously hopeful, frank and proof-centric timbre of Marryat's non-fictional *There Is No Death* and fictional *The Dead Man's Message*, to the more sentimental and fragmentary, yet similarly pragmatic, accounts of psychical contact inflected with wartime trauma in Lodge's *Raymond*. I closed by looking to Browning's provocative dramatic monologue 'Mr Sludge' and confessional letters of the Brownings which demonstrate how the prospect of fraudulence or the insufficiency of haptic contact threatened to taint the consolatory potential of the séance, as well as the marital unit. Though nuanced in their forms and tones, these authors all stress that Spiritualism led to a reconstitution of what loss, mourning, and (re)connection could mean for mourners who so desperately sought communicative proof that two-way connections of love continued beyond the veil.

Spiritualist ideology, one predicated on the erasure of death yet continuation of contact, dramatically complicated the idea of what 'loss' entailed and so Spiritualist aesthetics thereby responded by inverting expected hierarchies between parent and child. This was seen most strikingly through the usurping of caregiving roles enacted by the spectral 'Florence' and Raymond, as well as through the promotion of an industrious spirit-world existence. Through their tantalising and empowering representations of benevolent contact with the departed, Marryat and Lodge sought to persuade and comfort fellow mourners that death could be seen as a salvation and that two-way feelings of love could not only be idealised, but actualised, during the séance. While Marryat's Spiritualist studies foreground the continuation of a revered maternal bond and continued growth of children – especially of still-born or ailing infants – upon their

ascendance into the spiritual realm, Lodge views parent-child psychic phenomena through a patriarchal and marital lens. Browning, in vivifying his spoiled séance experiences through 'Mr Sludge', offered an alternative depiction of Spiritualist practice to stress how failed and unsatisfying experiences of the séance room could lead to domestic disagreement, alongside sensations of spiritual and physical neglect, and even rejection, in the pursuit of love after loss. Yet Browning's literal grasping at the prospect of physical contact with departed spirits further demonstrates the enticing nature of the movement when it came to particularly provocative instances of familial loss. This was most clearly shown by Browning's encounter with the Rymers and his witnessing of the alluring potential for communication with the returned spirit of their young son. Ultimately, my approach in looking beyond earthly and heteronormative romantic love in the nineteenth century, has looked towards pre- and post-war Victorian Spiritualist literature as representing a movement which was nuanced and fluctuating, but one which invariably returned to its ceaseless foregrounding of an enduring and communicative kind of love not broken, but strengthened, by bodily death.

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From the Linden Trees to the Willows: Female Mourners of Goethe's Werther in Eighteenth-Century England

Lene Østermark-Johansen

Shortly before Goethe's Werther puts the pistols to his head, he gives directives to his beloved Charlotte about how and where he wishes to be buried. Werther's carefully staged death reflects the schism of partaking in a Christian worldview, while being about to commit the unchristian deed of suicide, which will forever set him outside the community. Ostracised after his death, will his mortal remains have a place, will his tomb have a monument, will people pause to mourn him? His concern with the site for his burial reveals a striving for the love that happens after death, for grieving and recollection as expressions of love, when love in the world of the living has become an impossibility. Werther's last words oscillate between detailed guidelines and uncontrolled ravings, taking the reader away from the specific corner of the local churchyard to imagined valleys and waysides where biblical figures may pass by and shed a tear or two:

I have written a note to your father, requesting him to take my body into his protection. In the churchyard there are two linden trees in the far corner near the field; that is where I should like to lie. He can and will do this for his friend. Do you ask it of him too. I do not mean to impose on pious Christians who might not care to lie beside some poor unfortunate. Ah, I wish you would bury me by the wayside, or in a lonely valley, where the priest and Levite might call blessings upon themselves and pass by the stone that marks my grave, and the Samaritan might shed a tear.¹

Werther does not picture Charlotte as a mourner by his grave; her task lies in securing him the right burial spot and garments. Imagining his dead body in the coffin, in fabrics rendered magical by his lover's touch, while taking the secrets of unsearched pockets with him into a grave watched over by his ghost, Werther transitions from sentimental into Gothic: 'I wish to be buried in these clothes, Lotte; you touched them and they are sacred; I have made the request of your father also. My soul will be keeping watch over my coffin. I do not want anyone going through my pockets.'² The two linden trees, imaginary frames of his tomb, carry a complex symbolism of peace, healing and fertility. Dedicated to Venus, goddess of love, the linden is a sacred tree, its heart-shaped leaves a subtle reminder of the organ, the vital muscle of the human body, in which love

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Hulse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 132.

² Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 133.

conventionally resides. Its medicinal powers as a sedative and a tranquilliser make this fragrant tree a restorer of past conditions, and, looking ahead to Marcel Proust, of nothing less than the past.

The pathos of Werther's last moments is replaced by the laconic account of his burial and the reverberations of his death. Short, declarative sentences conclude the novel, suggesting tragic closure and a world of emotional turmoil after Werther is 'buried at the place he had chosen for himself. The old gentleman and his sons followed the corpse, but Albert was unable to. There were fears for Lotte's life. Guildsmen bore the body. No priest attended him'.³ An unchristian midnight burial sends the mortal remains of Goethe's protagonist to rest, but the fate of Lotte's life is left curiously unsettled. Charlotte Buff, the young woman who had caused Goethe's own unhappy romance, went on to become Frau Kestner in Hannover,⁴ yet millions of readers were left wondering what happened to her namesake in the novel.

This chapter is concerned with the fictitious Charlotte's English afterlife, in crafts, poetry and the visual arts. A remarkable shift of focus to the figure of Charlotte took place in England, almost immediately after the novel had been translated (from a French translation) in 1779.⁵ Female poets and artisans produced a staggering amount of poetry and mourning objects, revolving around the grieving female lover left behind at Werther's death. But what does it signify to create a cult of mourning which takes a fictitious character as its focusing point? What kind of love is expressed in mourning trinkets and samplers grieving the loss of a suicide protagonist in a German novel? Where, in the 1780s, English male readers mainly saw the tempestuous and self-destructive nature of Werther's love within Jacobite and revolutionary contexts, a force of uncontrollable emotions threatening to upset conventional courtship rituals and the institution of marriage,⁶ we detect different reading practices and ways of engaging with the novel when we turn to Goethe's female readers. The interest in the mourning

³ Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 134.

⁴ See the exhibition catalogue *Goethes Lotte: Ein Frauenleben um 1800* (Hannover: Historisches Museum, 2003). See also Thomas Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) (English: *The Beloved Returns* (1940)) for a fictitious recreation of Charlotte Buff's re-encounter with Goethe later in life.

⁵ *The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story*, 2 vols, anon. trans. (London: J. Dodsley, 1779). For a discussion of the translator's identity, see Tom Baynes, 'The Authorship of the First English Translation of Goethe', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 90:2 (2021), 91–108.

⁶ Stuart Pratt Atkins, *The Testament of Werther in Poetry and Drama* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) is still the pioneering work in the uncovering of the vast Werther literature in France, England, and Germany. Most subsequent critical discussions rest on his extensive bibliography. See also Robyn L. Schiffman, 'A Concert of Werthers', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43:2 (Winter 2010), 207–22.

Charlotte would seem to be peculiarly English without counterparts in any of the other European cultures which adopted the 'Werther fever'. Syndy McMillen Conger has uncovered part of the female literary response to Goethe's book, pointing out how

Well over a dozen women poets, songwriters, and novelists pondered the fates of Charlotte and Werther in print: in addition to Austen, Anne Bannerman, Lady Sophia Burrell, Mrs Sarah Farrell, Anne Francis, Anne Harrison, Barbara Hoole, Mrs Horrel, Mrs Hughes, Maria Montolieu, Amelia Pickering, Mary Robinson, Olivia Serres, Anna Seward, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Tomlins, and Lady Eglantine Wallace.⁷

This practice of foregrounding Goethe's female protagonist gives voice to Charlotte in sonnets, heroic epistles, novelistic discourse, in close dialogue with representations of her as Werther's chief mourner in prints, Staffordshire figurines, embroideries, samplers and lockets. What does this commodification of grief tell us about love beyond death, the public expression of a private love that, because of its adulterous nature, was inexpressible when the beloved was alive? Charlotte is included in an already existing popular culture of mourning practices rooted in funeral rituals and the public performance of private grief as an easily recognisable figure, a pattern of constancy and enduring love in a public display of emotions. Essentially the widow of an extramarital affair, she performs love as grief in an Elysian landscape of weeping willows framing a classical urn, taking us far away from the all-male Gothic midnight burial which concludes Goethe's novel. This new English practice of shifting attention to Charlotte's love for the dead Werther is a rehabilitation of Goethe's controversial protagonist and his problematic love. Charlotte mourns Werther not as a conventional member of the Foucaultian heterotopia of the cemetery;⁸ his solitary urn does not form part of a larger community of the dead but is the focusing point in a mourning landscape which revolves around the commemoration of a unique individual. The absence that Roland Barthes defines as such an important component of the lover's discourse has taken a new turn:

Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject's place and the other's place cannot permute; it is to say: 'I am loved less than I love'.⁹

⁷ Syndy McMillen Conger, 'The Sorrows of Young Charlotte: Werther's English Sisters', *Goethe Yearbook*, 3 (1986), 21–56, 21.

⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' (1967), *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984), 1–9.

⁹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin, 1990), 13.

Werther's permanent absence has transformed Charlotte into the main lover, absorbed by a perpetual longing that can only, perhaps, be satisfied in death. Andrew Marvell's seventeenth-century approach to the subject of love and death – 'The grave's a fine and private place / But none, I think, do there embrace' – may not have suited the Romantics with their cult of the *Liebstedt*.¹⁰ I am interested in the ways in which English eighteenth-century female poets tap into an existing elegiac literary mode established in the 1740s and '50s by the 'Graveyard School of Poetry', headed by Robert Blair, Edward Young and Thomas Gray, how they transform male into female grief, subduing the Gothic elements of the grave while exploring emotions in a sunny English garden full of classical allusions. The fundamental question raised by Goethe – can Charlotte survive Werther's death? – divides English readers, as does the debate about who to blame for Werther's tragic ending (his own hyper-sensitivity and lack of ethical standards? or, was Charlotte, in fact, coquettishly leading him on against her better judgement?). Is Charlotte victim or agent, a woman whose identity and fall are defined by Werther's or is she a woman with a free will of her own? Does the commodification of grief, which Werther's immediate English afterlife entails, serve to display or control violent emotions? Thinking about the female practices of reading, writing, drawing, dressing, embroidering, decorating interior spaces and engaging with the world outside the private sphere, what can we say about the ways in which literary and visual responses to Goethe's novel interact? As we shall see, objects depicting the mourning Charlotte become love tokens between real-life romantic lovers, as Goethe's fictitious heroine transcends the world of literature and becomes a go-between, mediating between the worlds of the living and the dead. Late eighteenth-century print culture connects translations with new poems, and engravings and illustrations become patterns for embroideries. In my attempt to map the English cult of the mourning Charlotte, spanning a period of less than two decades (ca. 1780–95), I hope to uncover some of the intersecting links between an emerging generation of women writers, popular culture and the ways in which they added a peculiarly national and elegiac twist to the afterlife of one of the great eighteenth-century European novels.

The poet Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) felt so attracted to Goethe's romance that she composed no fewer than three Werther sonnets, later expanded to five, included in her first volume *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, Sussex*. The slim quarto appeared in June 1784 from James Dodsley,¹¹

¹⁰ Andrew Marvell, 'To his Coy Mistress', ll. 31–32.

¹¹ See the ODNB entry by Sarah M. Zimmerman for 'Charlotte Smith': <<https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25790?rskey=p8aXMX&result=4>>, accessed on 20 November 2023.

who five years previously had published the first English translation of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. James had taken over his brother Robert's publishing house at 'Tully's Head', a house that through the 1740s, '50s, '60s and '70s had become the dominating London publisher of *belles-lettres* and translations, printing the writings of Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke and leading works in the 'Graveyard School', such as Thomas Gray's 'An Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard' (1751) and Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1743).¹² By pitching her first volume with Dodsley, Smith was self-consciously placing herself with an elitist publisher who already had a leaning towards the elegiac. She had her own sorrows: twelve pregnancies and the early loss of several of those children, together with a spendthrift husband who had squandered the family fortune and ended up in debtors' prison. Her private condition as a gentlewoman was, in other words, very different from the plotline in Goethe's novel, but sorrow and melancholy attracted her to the German characters and to the public staging of grief. Despite sharing the name of Goethe's female protagonist, Smith let all five Werther sonnets be spoken in the male lover's voice, at times a histrionic Petrarchan lunatic adrift towards the path of death (Smith was one of the important translators of Petrarch at the time), at other times calmly composed, in control of both his own desire to die and of the cult of mourning following his death. She engaged with the final chapter in Goethe's novel by placing Werther in a landscape setting, pointing deictically at his preferred burial spot, while meditating on his lack of a monument and his preferred sequence of solitary mourners:

SONNET XXIV

MAKE there my tomb; beneath the lime trees' shade,
 Where grass and flow'rs, in wild luxuriance wave;
 Let no memorial mark where I am laid,
 Or point to common eyes the lover's grave!
 But oft at twilight morn, or closing day,
 The faithful friend, with fault'ring step shall glide,
 Tributes of fond regret by stealth to pay,
 And sigh o'er the unhappy suicide!
 And sometimes, when the Sun with parting rays
 Gilds the long grass that hides my silent bed,

¹² See James E. Tierney's entries for 'Robert Dodsley' in the ODNB: <<https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7755#odnb-9780198614128-e-7755>> and 'James Dodsley': <<https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7754?rskey=2a85f7&result=2>>, both accessed on 20 November 2023.

The tear shall tremble in my CHARLOTTE's eyes,
 Dear, precious drops!—they shall embalm the dead!
 Yes!—CHARLOTTE o'er the mournful spot shall weep,
 Where her poor WERTER—and his sorrows sleep.¹³

Smith's strange ventriloquism – she is Charlotte but speaks as Werther about Goethe's Charlotte – thus addressing self as other,¹⁴ toys with male and female voices, with the feminine and sentimental within Werther, drawing attention to the new man of sensibility. Who is Werther addressing here? Charlotte, yet picturing her as a figure seen from a distance, whether from the grave or by a stranger passing by? Or some unknown other? The spot of his grave, a place and a non-place at the same time, not marked by any monument, grows romantic and wild, watered by Charlotte's tears which serve as balm to Werther's wounds and contribute to the natural cycle of life. The contrast between the deictic 'there' and the diffusely overgrown spot, which only those in the know can locate, draws our attention to the controversial issue of how and where to bury a suicide. In England, until the 1823 Burial of Suicide Act, interment in consecrated ground would have been forbidden by law, and similar rules applied on the continent. Michael Hulse notes that Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem (1747–72), the young German lawyer whose suicide spurred by unrequited love inspired Goethe's novel, was buried in the far corner of the cemetery in Wetzlar.¹⁵ When Jerusalem's grave became a site of pilgrimage in the 1770s and 1780s as a result of the 'Werther fever', the local authorities removed all signs of where he had been put to rest, and only in 1947, in the bicentenary of Jerusalem's birth, did the municipality erect a memorial stone in the cemetery without any clear indication of where his earthly remains were buried.

Emma Crewe's drawing, multiplied through engravings to become one of the most frequently repeated renditions of *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werther* (Figure 7.1), transferred the suicide's grave to a shady spot under the weeping willows, a

¹³ *Elegiac Sonnets by Charlotte Smith*, Sixth Edition, with Additional Sonnets and Other Poems (Dublin: Bernard Dornin, 1790), 24.

¹⁴ See Anne Myers, 'Charlotte Smith's Androgynous Sonnets', *European Romantic Review*, 13:4 (2002), 379–82.

¹⁵ 'After Jerusalem's death it was uncertain whether he would find a resting place in the churchyard, since the Rev. Pilger, a churlish priest of the kind Laertes complained of, opposed the idea. The Count von Spauer, a friend of the deceased, supported the efforts of Heinrich Buff, and Jerusalem was buried in a remote corner of the churchyard; but the Rev. Pilger, according to Friedrich Christian Laukhard, then a student in Giessen, could not forebear from preaching repeated sermons on the evil of suicide'. Hulse in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 144.



Figure 7.1. John Raphael Smith, after Emma Crewe, *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werther* (1783), stipple engraving, 40.2 x 35.5 cm, British Museum London.

classical urn inscribed with the lover's name, transforming the tomb to a site of memory, a sculptural receptacle of the past.

Tomb or cenotaph? Do we imagine Werther's ashes within the urn, or is it merely an empty memorial without relics? This encounter between stone and flesh suggests that the sculptural monument will outlive the female mourner in white: frail, petite and delicate, more girl than woman, Charlotte clutches an open book in her hands. Has she been reading *Werther*, we wonder? Is Crewe constructing a meta discourse in which Charlotte, one step removed from the epistolary novel in which she appears as a character, meditates on a tragic tale of love? Or is she holding a conduct book, instructing how appropriately to mourn her dead lover? Mourning is a ritualised display of love, allowing for a highly codified language of love reminiscent of the codified language of courtship. The rhetoric of love, in life, in death, speaks according to rules established in social practice in order to regulate uncontrolled emotion. The division of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* into 'In Vita' and 'In Morte' (before and after Laura's death) is suggestive of the ways in

which the two kinds of love hold almost equal weight in one of the greatest collections of love poetry in Western literature. Crewe's image becomes a pattern in more than one sense: a pattern of female mourning in dialogue with mourning samplers and rings (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) and a pattern for further dissemination of Goethe's love story. Mourning locketts (Figure 7.4) and decorative fancywork embroideries (Figure 7.5) testify to the spreading of the motif and its integration in many different kinds of female social practices.



Figure 7.2. Embroidered picture, depicting a mourning female figure leaning on a tomb surmounted by an urn under the shade of a weeping willow. The tomb bears the inscription: Sacred to the memory of Dr Robt Rogerson. obt. 1 April 1806, AE 49 y's. Lucy Rogerson. obt. 4 March 1807, AE 39. Danl. H. Rogerson. obt., 25 March 1808, AE 14. Lucy H. Rogerson. obt. 1803, AE 11 months. Embroidered in tan silk on silk foundation with toned watercolour washes. (ca 1810), 41 x 39.5 cm, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Gift of Anonymous Donor from the Fraser/Martin Collection, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_Sampler_\(England\),_ca._1810_\(CH_18482639\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_Sampler_(England),_ca._1810_(CH_18482639).jpg)>.



Figure 7.3. Mourning ring, depicting a woman by an urn and a weeping willow, 1779, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin's work on women and the material culture of death reminds us of women's important status as memory keepers for families, local communities, and the nation through a sharing of objects conveying sentiments about the dead.¹⁶ Stressing the permanence of death and the impermanence of life, their volume examines the power of objects as mediators between the living and the dead. Pointing out how subjects become objects in death, they make us aware of the ways in which objects challenge the distinction between what is present and what is absent, what is public and what is private. They employ anthropologist Mary Douglas and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject – that which was once a subject and is now an object – exploring 'in their discussions of the subject/object divide the ways in which cultural practices are designed to deal with the fluidity and instability

¹⁶ Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds, *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).



Figure 7.4. Mourning locket, engraved gilded copper alloy locket with hair, ivory painted in watercolour with Charlotte at the tomb of Werther after an etching by J. R. Smith inscribed ‘May Saints Embrace Thee with a Love Like Mine’ (quotation from Alexander Pope ‘Eloisa to Abelard’) (1717), height: 7.8 cm, width: 5.4 cm, depth: 1.2 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

of these boundaries’.¹⁷ Goethe’s Charlotte has already undergone several processes of objectification: from the real Charlotte Buff, with whom the author fell unhappily in love, to the fictitious Charlotte in his novel. Barthes employs Lotte’s objectification in Goethe’s novel to address one of the most fundamental aspects of the lover’s discourse:

To Love Love

annulation/annulment

Exposition of language during which the subject manages to annul the loved object under the volume of love itself: by a specifically amorous perversion, it is love the subject loves, not the object.

¹⁷ Goggin and Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*, 2.



Figure 7.5. Stumpwork embroidery of Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter, paper, glass, wood, felt, silk, diameter 39 cm, On sale at Worth Point.com, <<https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/victorian-embroidery-mourning-art-1825889596>>.

1. Charlotte is quite insipid; she is the paltry character of the powerful, tormented, flamboyant drama staged by the subject Werther; by a kindly decision of this subject, a colorless object is placed in the center of the stage and there adored, idolized, *taken to task*, covered with discourse, with prayers (and perhaps, surreptitiously, with invectives); as if she were a huge motionless hen huddled amid her feathers, around which circles a slightly mad cock.¹⁸

In the ‘Lotte cult’, Goethe’s female protagonist becomes both subject and object, the surviving lover ‘half in love with easeful death’, performing her emotions as a mourning figure around the urn under the willow tree, if not herself transformed into a dead figure, as in several of the poems about her. Symbol of death, grief and forsaken love, the willow has far more sinister connotations than the linden tree; Desdemona’s ‘Willow Song’ in *Othello* (IV,

¹⁸ Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse*, 31.

iii, 24–58), with its refrain of ‘Sing willow, willow, willow, willow’, transforms male into female mourning. The mournful folk ballad, first registered in a book of lute music of 1583, has a melancholy male lover mourn the loss of an unfaithful woman, yet nevertheless insisting in the final lines to be remembered: ‘take this for my farewell and latest adieu ... / Write this on my tomb, that in love I was true’. By letting Desdemona sing the song, Shakespeare transforms the forsaken lover into a female subject, melancholy with the loss of her husband’s love, in dark premonition of her own imminent death. The willow scene was significantly reduced in most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performances of Shakespeare’s play,¹⁹ while the willow tree itself, introduced to England from China in the eighteenth century, was becoming increasingly popular; its ubiquity as a prop in mourning scenes invested it with sadness and grieving which gradually conflated with the refrain of Desdemona’s song. Exactly what kind of tree the sixteenth-century text referred to (apart from the sycamore, i.e. ‘sick-amour’ tree, in the first line), I shall leave it to the early modernists to discuss.

Charlotte’s iconic appearance on a wide series of artefacts as chief mourner objectifies her even further. The mourning objects depicting Charlotte at Werther’s tomb partake in a widespread culture of mourning in which such artefacts, as Arianne Fennetaux points out, are not just ‘passive registers of cultural changes but actually shape and mediate them’.²⁰ Fennetaux examines how in the course of the eighteenth century mourning jewellery becomes not just a sign of wealth but even more a sign of sentiment, publicly displayed on the body in the form of lockets, rings and brooches, concluding that the seventeenth-century visual language of mourning (skulls, bones, skeletons) becomes gendered and feminised in the early romantic period, as it moves away from death: ‘the *memento mori* was gradually replaced by what could be called a *memento moveri*’.²¹ In the light of this, it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that the protagonists of one of the most sentimental novels should find their way into the material culture of mourning in England. The depictions of Charlotte comply with the images of the female mourner found in such pattern books as Garnet Terry’s *Book of New and Allegorical Devices for Artists in General* (1795) which offered standard

¹⁹ See Chantal Schütz, ‘Desdemona’s changing voices: from the “Willow Song” to the “Canzona del Salice”’, *Sillages critiques*, 16 (2013), ‘Métamorphoses de la voix en scène’, <<https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.2847>>, accessed on 11 December 2023.

²⁰ Arianne Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment: Mourning Jewelry in Britain in the Eighteenth Century’ in Goggin and Tobin, 27–50, 27.

²¹ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, 28.

designs for jewellery.²² ‘Clasped hands, clenched bosoms, drooping heads, or demonstrative weeping, in oversized handkerchiefs: the plates run the whole gamut of the somatic vocabulary of grief with mourners under willow trees sitting by or standing next to tombs or embracing urns’.²³ By far the largest number of the mourning figures in the pattern books were women, hardly surprising, given that in Christian iconography most scenes depicting the death of Christ involve the grieving Marys, the Holy Virgin and Mary Magdalene, sometimes accompanied by Martha. The female mourners often function as intercessory figures, praying for the souls and pleading for the redemption of the dead; early romantic mourning jewellery thus partly functions as a ‘secular transposition of former Catholic rituals of intercession’.²⁴ Excessively governed by his emotions, Goethe’s Werther, controversial ‘self-slayer’ as he was, needed an intercessor more than most others, and the function of Charlotte as that intercessor makes good sense within the predominantly Christian framework of late eighteenth-century England.

The mourning locket with a braid of hair (Figure 7.4) expresses that sense of intercession: ‘May saints embrace thee with a love like mine’, we read on the plinth, perhaps recognising the quotation as one from Alexander Pope’s popular verse epistle ‘Eloisa to Abelard’ (1717), reprinted repeatedly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often in editions of the correspondence between the two medieval, and likewise star-crossed, lovers. Accompanied by a dog, the very symbol of fidelity, the aristocratic Lotte points towards the inscription, perhaps with the purpose of making us believe that the words are hers? The pastoral figure of the shepherd in the background may at first confuse the idea of eternal love for the deceased. Inevitably one wonders about the history of this object, with its carefully braided frame of brown hair. The locket acts as a secular reliquary, containing body parts of a real human being (presumably, judging from the length of the hair, a female), and one begins to question who is mourning whom, who is speaking the words of Pope’s Eloisa? Is the locket actually mourning a woman rather than a man? Is the shepherd in the background grieving over his wife (perhaps a Charlotte?) by having her depicted as the eternally faithful female lover while retaining a small sample of her physical body? The agency of such mourning objects, merging the real

²² A digital copy can be found on <<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/7d9c7bb0-9a87-0132-8af8-58d385a7bbd0>>, accessed on 24 November 2023.

²³ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, 36.

²⁴ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, 36.

with the fictitious, confounds and confuses discourses and genders; perhaps this locket was actually intended to be worn by a male rather than a female lover? Fennetaux draws our attention to the fact that eighteenth-century man could also parade mourning jewellery in public:

The ambiguous status of manly tears is encapsulated by the paradoxical status of the pendants and brooches, which in practice were worn by men as well as women but whose iconography represented female rather than male figures of mourning. Big boys were not supposed to cry anymore, but the female mourner they wore on a locket could. Offering a socially condoned and socially contained expression of grief with their formulaic weeping women, the brooch or the locket could be worn by a man without undermining his masculinity.²⁵

Werther had been awfully sentimental about his own death, but he was far from alone in this. Fennetaux quotes the valedictory letter (1818) of James T. Power to his sweetheart Julia Woodforde ‘as he was about to set off for Sierra Leona, where, true to his misgivings, he would die’:

I purchased yesterday a Diamond Mourning ring. I will place a brade [sic] of your hair and mine in it. On the inside I will inscribe ‘James T. Power, died ...’ leaving a vacancy for the date if this should be my fate shortly you will receive an account of the time and get it filled up and I have no doubt you will regard the ring with affection and wear it on my account. You will consider this a romantic proceeding, anticipating what may not happen, very true, but as it may happen will it not be a pleasure in my last moments to think you possess such a memento besides you ask for a lock of my hair, your desire will be thus gratified. Please send me a small lock of yours to place it in as soon as possible.²⁶

There is something morbid and macabre about Power’s anticipation of his own death and his imposition of mourning upon his betrothed in the form of an object with an empty space left for the date of his expiration. Sinister prophecies fulfilled always carry something of the uncanny about them, as does the ring’s double function as love token and mourning memento: love in this life is familiar, but the love that awaits after death is a ghostly, yet unknown, echo. The ring unites the betrothed in love and death, with their earthly remains intertwined in a kind of microcosmic *Liebestod*. The language of courtship toys with anticipated death as romance: ‘You will consider this a romantic proceeding, anticipating what may not happen’; the imagined death, united in the ring, takes on almost erotic dimensions, while also casting a long shadow of enduring love on the woman left behind. We are reminded of the magic powers of the braids of hair in such

²⁵ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, 46.

²⁶ Fennetaux, ‘Fashioning Death/Gendering Sentiment’, 32.

poems by John Donne as ‘The Funerall’ and ‘The Relique’ where they preserve the spiritual and physical intimacy of the two lovers:

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harme
 Nor question much
 The subtile wreath of hair, which crowns my arme;
 The mystery, the signe you must not touch,
 For ‘tis my outward Soule,
 Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
 Will leave this to controule,
 And keepe these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution.
 (‘The Funerall’, ll. 1–8)

Julia Woodforde’s reply to James Powers does not form part of Fennetaux’s discussion, and we can only guess. Did she send him the desired lock of hair, and were the two lovers, at least, united in the ring? And did she turn to mourning embroidery after the announcement of his death, with the implied duty to mourn him imposed by his letter? If so, she would have joined the thousands of other women, stitching emotions into silken thread and fabric, confining their grief into material form which could decorate the walls of the domestic interior.

The engraving after Emma Crewe’s drawing served as pattern for fancywork stitching, the sophisticated and expensive embroidery with silk thread on delicate fabric which upper-class women practiced as the culmination of their long education in how to sew and embroider.²⁷ Such techniques were employed for the mourning sampler (Figure 7.2), a piece of cultural memory, outliving its maker, to be hung on the walls of bedrooms and parlours, memorialising both those who had passed and the woman who had done the stitching, which she would frequently sign. In terms of iconography, Crewe’s image imitates the standard mourning sampler in which the conventional cherubs from the mid-eighteenth century were replaced with the willow trees overhanging a pedestalled urn venerated by a mourning female figure.²⁸ The embroidered Charlottes (Figure 7.5), of which, judging from auctioneers’ catalogues, several exist, are in mixed media: felt, silk thread, water colour on paper, even including the face and arms from Crewe’s drawing, and neatly framed. With a diameter of some 30 cm, they are slightly larger than the human face and were likely used as decorations on pole screens, those eighteenth-century adjustable fire screens which would shield both men and women, all wearing makeup, from reddened faces or running makeup

²⁷ See Maureen Daly Goggin, ‘Stitching (in) Death: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American and English Mourning Samplers’, in Goggin and Tobin, 63–89.

²⁸ Goggin, ‘Stitching (in) Death’, 76.

when sitting in front of the fire. They would, in other words, have had an audience which consisted of both sexes. As late as 1855, Mrs Merrifield would recollect how the motif was one of the most popular ones for embroidery when she was a girl:

The two favourite subjects, and in fact the only two that I remember, were 'The Sacrifice of Abraham' and 'Charlotte Weeping at the Tomb of Werther'. In these, gaudy and crude colours attracted the eye without satisfying the taste, and the fine pink and white complexions were scarcely in harmony with the subjects. As for the last-mentioned composition the common-place sentimentality of the design was on a par with the morality of the subject, the introduction of which into a lady's school must ever be a matter of surprise. And who was Charlotte? who was Werther? were questions which the school-girls might have asked to this day, had not one of the pupils, with a full appreciation of the sweetness of stolen joys, smuggled into the school a copy of the novel in which the history of the lovers is related. Considering the tendency of the book, its extreme popularity in this country is quite astonishing.²⁹

This is the mid-Victorian woman looking back at the frivolity of an earlier period; even though the motif of the embroideries is an unerotic celebration of love beyond death, the suicide and adulterous romance still summoned moral condemnation some eighty years after the publication of Goethe's novel. Angelica Kauffmann's *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare* (1782), likewise engraved and embroidered (Figure 7.6) to adorn domestic spaces, contextualises the embroideries after Crewe's image: the classical tomb, the Elysian landscape, the female, here allegorical, mourner (this may make us question the extent to which Charlotte was already being allegorised), give a new twist to the idea of mourning 'the one and only'. Was the canonical status given to Charlotte and Werther (and implicitly to Goethe) already in subtle dialogue with the attention granted the national bard?

The decorative qualities of the mourning Charlotte within the domestic interior take sculptural form in this Staffordshire figurine (Figure 7.7), existing in a range of different glazes. The tender embrace of the urn is both pornographic and necrophiliac; the proximity of the phallic plinth to the lower part of Charlotte's body might well have seemed indecent to a Victorian spectator. Yet the Victorians could do even more erotically charged works of art: William Holman Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (Figure 7.8) took its motif from John Keats poem based on a tale from Boccaccio. The woman depicted in a close embrace with the pot hiding the head of her dead lover Lorenzo was modelled on Hunt's recently deceased wife Fanny: her posture imitates that of the Staffordshire Charlotte, and the intense intertwining of erotic love, longing, and mourning over a dead spouse may perhaps suggest to us that the eighteenth-century cult of the female mourner was long-lived. It possibly

²⁹ Mrs Merrifield, 'On Design as applied to Ladies' Work', *Art Journal*, 1:2 (February 1855), 37–41, 38.



Figure 7.6. *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare*, embroidered picture from a painting by Angelica Kauffmann, after a print by Francesco Bartolozzi, 1782–1800, coloured silk on white satin ground worked in feather stitch, height: 44.5 cm, width: 39.5 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

even gained new relevance in a culture where the Queen from 1861 and until her death 40 years later would perform most of her public duties as the mourning widow.

Late eighteenth-century London staged the death of Werther in a rather spectacular context. At 189, Fleet Street, Mrs Salmon's Royal Wax-Works had among its display of some 200 life-sized figures 'A fine Representation of the Death of *Werter*, attended by *Charlotte* and her Family', we learn from an advertisement of the contents of the four rooms in the museum.³⁰ On show

³⁰ 'At Mrs Salmon's Royal Wax-Works', <https://go-gale-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/ps-retrieve.do?tabID=Monographs&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=96c9f257-fc27-45f8-b90f-5ed1b7ddc5dc&hitCount=1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCW0102381051&docType=Monograph&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZCET&prodId=ECCO&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCW0102381051&searchId=R1&userGroupName=dkb&inPS=true>, accessed on 27 November 2023.



Figure 7.7. Figure of Charlotte weeping for Werther, lead-glazed earthenware, made in Staffordshire, ca. 1780–1800, height: 22.9 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

alongside ‘The chaste Nuns of Collingham, who slit their Noses and upper Lips to preserve their Virgin Vow, when the *Danes* invaded this Land’ and ‘*Marc Anthony* and *Cleopatra*, with their two Twin Children weeping over them, and their proper Attendants’, Werther’s last moments were here blessed by the company of Charlotte and her siblings. Real hair and teeth, glass eyes, theatrical poses, and strategic lighting would have given the visitors a spine-chilling experience as the translucent wax imitating human skin made the figures more than usually life-like.³¹ This interaction between the artificial and the animate, dead matter and life-likeness, gave Goethe’s figures a new presence. The very same institution which advertised its creation of ‘*Exact Likenesses taken from*

³¹ For a good discussion of Mrs Salmon’s Wax-Works in the late eighteenth century, see Ianna Recco, ‘In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire: Life-Likeness in Wax Representations of the 1762 Cherokee Delegation in London’, *British Art Studies*, Issue 21, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-21/irecco>>, accessed on 27 November 2023.

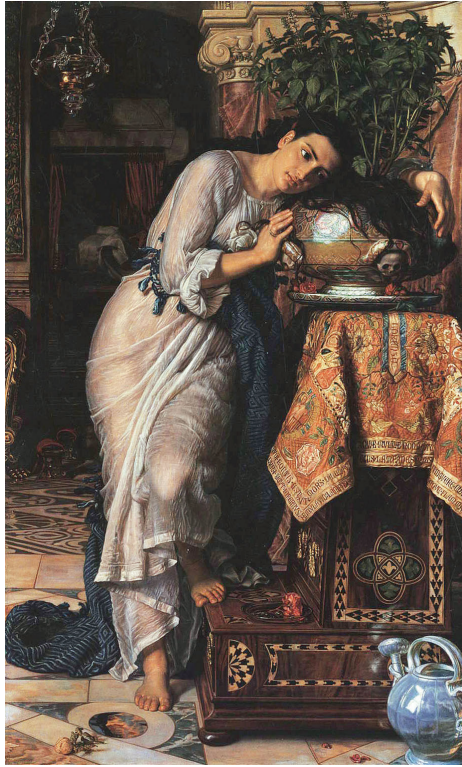


Figure 7.8. William Holman Hunt, *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1867), oil on canvas, 187 x 116 cm, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Holman_Hunt_-_Isabella_and_the_Pot_of_Basil.jpg>.

Dead Faces on reasonable Terms brought Goethe's fictitious characters to life, inventing a scene which the German author deliberately avoided. Sadly, the group has not survived, but it is hard not to imagine it being full of pathos, with the children as innocent spectators, features which linked them to the accompanying group of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra. At a time when there was a craze for the automaton, Charlotte at the Wax-Works would have brought English female visitors one step closer to being Charlotte.

In Naples, Emma Hamilton was developing her famous attitudes, embodying figures from ancient vases and mythology. Embodying Charlotte might have been a popular pastime among Emma's English sisters, as suggested in Charlotte Smith's novel *Emmeline* (1788). The fictitious Mrs James Croft arrives at a party accompanied by her two eldest daughters, 'one, drest in the character of Charlotte in the Sorrows of Werter; and the other, as Emma, the nut brown



Figure 7.9. Etching after Robert Smirke, *Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter* (1780s), 29.5 x 20.8 cm, British Museum, London.

maid. Their air and manner were adapted, as they believed, to the figures of those characters as they appeared in the print shops; and their excessive affectation, together with the gaudy appearance of their mama, nearly conquered the gravity of Emmeline and of many others of the company'.³² Within four years, Smith had come a long way from her Werther sonnets, reflecting the spread of the 'Lotte fever' in the meantime. A young girl impersonating Charlotte with 'excessive affectation' must suggest something about the rise of her popularity, while the reference to the ubiquity of representations of her in the print shops must indicate something about the proliferation of her image. Smith may well have had in mind the two companion pieces by Robert Smirke (Figures 7.9 and 7.10). A very intense-looking Charlotte, with a Phrygian cap, is strewing roses on

³² Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline: The Orphan of the Castle*, ed. and intro. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 506–7. The 'nut brown maid' is a reference to Prior's ballad 'Henry and Emma' (1709).



Figure 7.10. Etching after Robert Smirke, *The Nut Brown Maid* (1780s), 29.8 x 19.4 cm, British Museum, London.

a monument, mirroring Kauffmann's *Fame at the Tomb of Shakespeare*. The rose as the flower of love is hardly surprising, but the Phrygian cap is. Charlotte's loose hair and garments in a wild romantic landscape, combined with her determined flower strewing, may suggest a woman who has broken free of conventions and is now following her own will.

Smirke was stressing Charlotte's passion; indeed, the boundary between passion and madness is a delicate one. In several of the women's poems about Charlotte, she does not survive Werther's death. Anne Francis (1738–1800) had in 1787 published her 'Poetical Epistle from Charlotte to Werther', in which the heroine's sad affection for her unfortunate lover was expressed. Three years later she returned to the couple in a poem where the ghost of Charlotte frequents Werther's grave. Elegiac, atmospheric, haunting in its dactylic rhythm, the poem recalls the visual representations just discussed. The anonymous mid-night observer evokes a willow-ridden landscape in which sounds from above and below the grave make the dead communicate with each other in a world

of cosmic grieving where the sequence of rhyming words 'below, grove, woe, love' sum up the major ideas:

By the willow that waves o'er the tomb,
O, think not 'twas Charlotte, you spied;
When Werter had seal'd his sad doom,
She heard, – she despair'd – and she died!
How deep, and how awful the sound –
Of the bell, – as it broke on the gale!
From the steep-rock I heard it rebound,
And it plaintively poured through the vale.

...

Oft-times, at the noon of the night,
Pale Charlotte appears on the green,
When the moon strikes askant on the sight,
And fancy emblazons the scene;
Her cheeks all bereft of their bloom!
Her eye-balls no lustre retain!
She steals, a wan ghost, from the tomb,
And glides to the verge of the plain

Where Werter's cold relics repose;
(Neath the willow impregnate with dew,
Where the green-grass luxuriantly grows
Round the tomb – half conceal'd from the view),
I've seen the light phantom recline,
The marble sustain'd her white breast;
In sounds that were almost divine,
I've heard her fond passion express:

'Dear shade! to thy Charlotte attend,
Tho' fate have deprived her of breath,
She hangs o'er the urn of her friend,
And love's in the mansion of death:'
Soft murmurs ensued from below –
Faint echoes were heard thro' the grove,
The accents were mingled with woe –
But woe – that was sweeten'd with love.³³

The green and the white, signs of life and of ghostliness, flow through the poem: the willow and the grass, the moonlight, the marble and the breast divide the worlds of the living and the dead. Francis's poem may not be great literature, but it taps

³³ Anne Francis, 'The Ghost of Charlotte at the Tomb of Werter' in *Miscellaneous Poems by Anne Francis* (London: T. Becket & R. Baldwin, 1790), 213–15.

into the 1790s taste for the Gothic, and the restless lovers prepare us for other great love stories to follow in the nineteenth century like that of Cathy and Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In death, the ghostly Charlotte has the agency to chase her lover which she never had when alive, and her flitting spirit cannot be contained by family duties or decorum. Her face may be pale, and the relics of Werther and the marble monument which covers them may be cold, but warm passion transcends cold materiality and there is hope for love, even in death. Sophia Burrell's (1753–1802) 'Charlotte's Lamentation' (1793) was less hopeful; seated on Werther's grave, she evokes both inner and outer turmoil in her monologue, and cosmic chaos becomes comic chaos when she expires on his tombstone:

Loud thunder burst over her head,
 The tempest dishevel'd her hair;
 She clung to the moss-cover'd stone,
 Till the lightening affected her frame –
 To Werter she gave her last groan,
 And dy'd, in pronouncing his name.³⁴

Theatrical thunder and lightning, followed by a groan, death and curtain – Lady Burrell's verse is neither subtle nor moving, but at least she managed to kill off Charlotte once and for all. Interestingly, the poet who did have a background on the stage, Mary Robinson (1756/1758–1800) – actress, wife, mother, mistress to the Prince Regent, exiled wanderer across the European continent in the mid-1780s – was the most sensitive of the three and the least dramatic, writing a poem on site imbued with sentiment.³⁵ Her 'Elegy to the Memory of Werter, written in Germany, in the year 1786' is composed by the literary tourist/reader and lover, merging place, time and moment of composition in a way that the romantic poets would develop further. With its long vowels and diphthongs, its atmospheric landscape descriptions, the poem is a celebration of Werther rather than of Charlotte. The lonely wanderer is a pilgrim at the shrine of love, and Robinson merges the poet with the sequence of visitors to Werther's grave: the lovelorn girl, the male pilgrim and Charlotte. Touched by love, they have all come to weep together and bring forgiveness of sins to the lonely Werther in his grave. His solitude is mirrored by the sequence of solitary visitors to his

³⁴ Sophia Burrell, *Poems* 2 vols (London: printed by J. Cooper, Bow Street, Covent Garden, 1793), 2:134.

³⁵ See Martin J. Levy's entry for 'Mary Robinson' in the *ODNB*: <<https://www-oxforddnb-com.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23857?rskey=CA6Af7&result=4>>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

spot between the lime trees; although together they form a tearful community of Wertherians, unhappy lovers and mourners, the ritualistic visit to the tomb must be solitary. Denied a Christian burial, Werther and his sins are exonerated by nature and fellow lovers, and human tears and nature's balmy dew provide the lover with the absolution he desired.

'With female Fairies will thy tomb be haunted
And worms will not come to thee'. SHAKESPEARE. [Cymbeline, IV, 2]

WHEN from Day's closing eye the lucid tears
Fall lightly on the bending lily's head;
When o'er the blushing sky night's curtains spread,
And the tall mountain's summit scarce appears;
When languid Evening, sinking to repose,
Her filmy mantle o'er the landscape throws;
Of THEE I'll sing; and as the mournful song
Glides in slow numbers the dark woods among;
My wand'ring steps shall seek the lonely shade,
Where all thy virtues, all thy griefs are laid !

...

Oft by the moon's wan beam the love-lorn maid,
Led by soft SYMPATHY, shall stroll along;
Oft shall she listen in the Lime-tree's* shade,
Her cold blood freezing at the night-owl's song:
Or, when she hears the death-bell's solemn sound,
Her light steps echoing o'er the hollow ground;
Oft shall the trickling tear adorn her cheek,
Thy pow'r, O SENSIBILITY ! in magic charms to speak !

...

So from the mournful CHARLOTTE's dark-orb'd lids,
The sainted tear of pitying VIRTUE flows;
And the last boon, the 'churlish priest' forbids,
On thy lone grave the sacred drop bestows;
There shall the sparkling dews of Evening shine,
AND HEAVEN'S OWN INCENSE CONSECRATE THE SHRINE.³⁶

* 'At the corner of the church-yard are two Lime-trees, 'tis there I wish to rest'.
SORROWS OF WERTER.

Soon English caricaturists, undoubtedly catering for a voracious audience, had had their fill of the 'Lotte cult'. This anonymous caricature of January 1788 (Figure

³⁶ Mary Robinson, 'Elegy to the Memory of Werter, written in Germany, in the year 1786', in *Poems by Mrs M. Robinson* (London: J. Bell, 1791), 1:80–81.



Figure 7.11. Anon., *Charlotte at the Grave of Werter*, 1788, etching, 23.2 x 23.5 cm, Lettered with the title 'Pubd. Jan. 1 1788 by S W Fores, at the Caracature Warehouse no. 3 Piccadilly', British Museum, London.

7.11) reminds us what perpetual mourning looks like: skulls, bones, shovels, and pickaxes are what death is really about, forget all about willows and the Elysian fields. Suicides belong outside the city gates, and the two histrionic middle-aged crones, toothless, with sagging breasts, strip death of all sentimentality. The broadside with the title 'The Last Dying Speech of Werter' has commercialised the staging of death and public mourning. Rather than mourning lockets and brooches, the broadside seller has marketable prints pinned to her front, selling her sentimental texts as she might be selling her body, a living advertisement for erotica and sentiment. The same year, George Wright published the combination of a very free translation of Goethe's novel and a conduct book for women: *The Unfortunate Lovers... to which is added the Lady's Counsellor respecting Love, Courtship, Marriage, &c...* A ventriloquist text, it pretended to be written by a woman, giving good advice to young girls on how to succeed in marriage, while

running a commentary in the notes to the Werther text which pointed out every time Lotte made the wrong decisions in her male relationships. The good marriage should be founded on love and trust, common good sense and no excessive sentimentality, were the well-meaning messages of the ‘Lady Counsellor’, a term behind which was hidden a man of leisure with a propensity for books on the pleasures of the retired life and ‘Pleasing melancholy’, as was the title of one of his other books.³⁷

Did Lotte and Werther end up at the very heart of the English battle between the sexes? It would seem that certain male readers and writers felt the need to ‘answer back’ in response to the overwhelming female interest in Goethe’s book and the material and literary culture it generated. A cult springing up around a dead excessively sentimental suicide, thwarted in love, must be problematic for any sense of male identity. What is interesting, however, is the extent to which late eighteenth-century female readers seem to have sympathised, if not even identified, with Werther as much as with Charlotte. Mary Wollstonecraft’s two suicide attempts related to her unhappy affair with George Imlay, together with her sentimental correspondence, made her widower William Godwin compare her to a female Werther in an attempt to transform her to the heroine of a sentimental novel.³⁸ Praising her letters as

the finest examples of the language of sentiment and passion ever presented to the world’, he pointed out how ‘They bear a striking resemblance to the celebrated romance of Werter, though the incidents to which they relate are of a very different cast. Probably the readers to whom Werter is incapable of affording pleasure, will receive no delight from the present publication. The editor apprehends that, in the judgment of those best qualified to decide upon the comparison, these Letters will be admitted to have the superiority over the fiction of Goethe. They are the offspring of a glowing imagination, and a heart penetrated with the passion it essays to describe.’³⁹

Yet as Michelle Faubert asserts, in her own writings (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Maria, Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*), Wollstonecraft was actually promoting suicide as a woman’s free choice, an entirely reasonable act setting her

³⁷ *The Unfortunate Lovers, abridged from The Sorrows of Werter, to which is added the Lady’s Counsellor, Respecting Love, Courtship, Marriage, etc., in Prose and Verse with Occasional Notes, by the Author of Retired Pleasures* (London: C. Stalker, 1788). For bibliographical information about George Wright, see Edward W. Pitcher, ‘The Periodical and Miscellaneous Publications of George Wright (“Bob Short Junior.”)’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74:4 (1980), 379–408 and ‘New Facts on George Wright’s Eighteenth-Century Miscellaneous Publications’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 80:2 (1986), 237–40.

³⁸ Roswitha Burwick, ‘Goethe’s *Werther* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 24:1 (Winter 1993), 47–52, 48.

³⁹ *Posthumous Works of the Author of The Vindication of the Rights of Woman by William Godwin in Four Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), vol. 3, Preface.

free from the slavery of human life, drawing parallels to the ways Black slaves often chose suicide above thralldom.⁴⁰ Asserting women's rights to take their lives and loves into their own hands, Wollstonecraft was far more revolutionary than her widower would concede to. The little vignette, reported by Claire Tomalin, that Godwin and Wollstonecraft read *Werther* together the evening before the birth of their daughter Mary seems almost too good to be true.⁴¹ Shortly afterwards, of course, Wollstonecraft would die from complications following childbirth; so much for women's rights. The future Mary Shelley would read Wollstonecraft, *Werther*, and the texts *Werther* read before dying (Ossian, Lessing) and make Goethe's novel one of the three civilising texts which the monster in her own first novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) read (alongside Plutarch and Milton). In her novel, *Werther* teaches suffering and empathy to the monster, who is, of course, far less monstrous than his creator. In search of love, the monster is denied one of the most fundamental of human needs and is left to roam the world alone.

Was *Werther* only a text for the civilised? Was Goethe's novel the key to the *éducation sentimentale* of modern men and women? This anonymous caricature from around 1810 (Figure 7.12) with the title 'A Naturel Genius' is suggestive of a great many things when it comes to the English reception of Goethe's novel in the early nineteenth century: the headmistress of a finishing school is receiving a new pupil and her mother, garishly clad in loud colours. Next to the piano is an embroidery of Charlotte at the tomb of *Werther*. The exchange between the three ladies is as follows: Headmistress: 'You would perhaps like the Young Lady to work something in silks Madam! there is a pretty subject, Charlotte at the Tomb of *Werther*'. The visitor exclaims: 'A very pretty piece I pertest! my Dater has a Genii for Drawing! Penelope my dear! you shall work Charlotte at the Tub of Water'. The girl, delighted, answers: 'La Mother! I shall like that! you know Mounseer Gumboge says: I make Water as natural as Life'. The joke is a bad one: while the exchange reveals the complete lack of education of the two female visitors and the transformation of Goethe's text into a pattern for embroidery, the impact of *Werther* has literally become diluted. As '*Werther*' becomes '*Water*', and all German puns on '*werth*' as '*worth*' seem to be forgotten or transformed into the crude appetite of the new mercantile classes, all emotional havoc can be contained by needle and thread. Charlotte's English sisters, touched and moved by her fate as they were in the eighteenth century, left a far more complex bequest to the

⁴⁰ See Michelle Faubert, 'The Fictional Suicides of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Literature Compass* 12:12 (2015), 652–59.

⁴¹ Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 273.



Figure 7.12. *A Naturel Genius*, ca. 1810, hand-coloured etching, 23 x 32.9 cm, British Museum, London.

nineteenth century than can be surmised by this caricature, and they certainly managed to put a woman on the map who might otherwise have been forgotten.

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Intimate Communication: Romantic Love as a Social Practice in Bettina von Arnim's *Clemens Brentano's Frühlingskranz* and *Die Gänderode*

Alexander Knopf

Wenn mir mein Feind das Messer an die Kehle gesetzt hätte und ich hätte so viele beweis seiner liebe, so freundliche so aufrichtige Briefe von ihm in Händen gehabt, ich würde ihm dennoch getraut haben, die Briefe must du mir wieder geben, denn du kömmt mir falsch vor so lang du sie besizest, auch leg ich einen Werth darauf, ich habe mein Herz hinein geschrieben.¹

[If my enemy had put a knife to my throat and I had had so many proofs of his love, such friendly and sincere letters from him in my hands, I would still have trusted him, you must give the letters back to me, because you seem wrong to me as long as you have them, I also value them, I have written my heart into them.]²

These were the last words that Bettina von Arnim (née Brentano) addressed to Karoline von Günderode after she had unilaterally ended their friendship of barely two years. They bear witness to the unwavering trust that Brentano von Arnim placed in writing even in this extreme situation. She sees her letters as a testimony to the sincerity of her love that dispels all doubt. The scripture alone should have been scrutinised, even if everything else had spoken against her. The close connection between love and communication, which is expressed in this trust, is undoubtedly a fundamental feature of Brentano von Arnim's thinking. However, it is striking that the semantics of love are applied here in a relationship that is not a love relationship in the narrower sense. The following considerations seek to explain this observation. Using selected texts by Brentano von Arnim, I attempt to describe love as a social practice that is differentiated into various types of intimacy.

In his classic study, Theodore Schatzki describes practices as 'the site where understanding is structured and intelligibility (*Verständlichkeit* and *Bedeutung*) articulated (*gegliedert*)'.³ Insofar as 'understanding' and 'intelligibility' structure the social realm as well as the domain of individual thinking and doing,

¹ Letter from July 1806 in *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, ed. Heinz Härtl and Ursula Härtl (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 186.

² My translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

³ Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12. For a theory of social practices, see also Hilmar Schäfer, ed., *Praxistheorie: Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm* (Bielefeld:

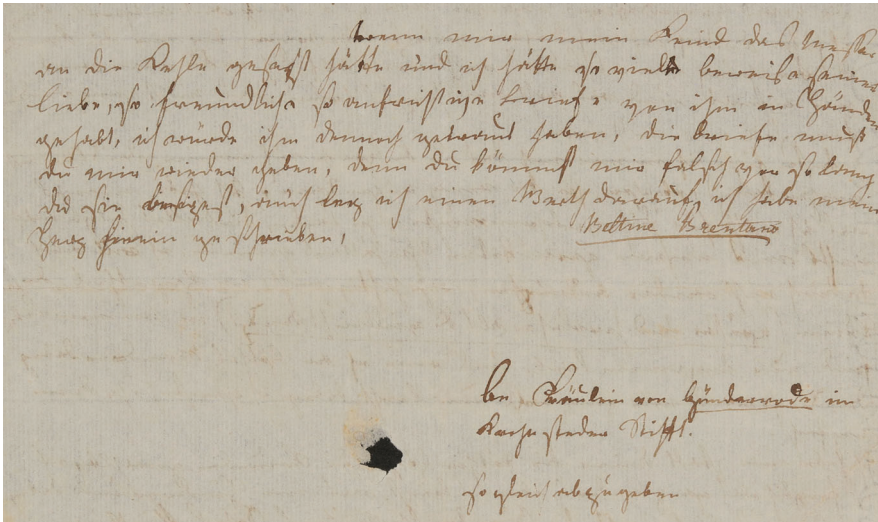


Figure 8.1 Postscript to Bettina Brentano von Arnim's last letter to Karoline von Günderrode Hs. 8304 (extract), Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurt/Main.

Schatzki understands practices as that which links and organises both.⁴ It is therefore primarily its communicative function that makes an action a socially relevant or even constitutive practice. Although practices may thus be seen as a 'fundamental social phenomenon',⁵ this does not mean that they can be isolated as autonomous entities. Practices are always embedded in a social context that determines the conditions under which they are possible. Their development is linked to the evolution of social systems in a relationship of mutual dependence. As the complexity of the social system grows, the demands on practices will also increase, just as the nuancing of these practices will continue to drive the differentiation of society.

If a practice becomes socially effective by fulfilling its communicative function, then romantic love must be considered a social practice par excellence. According to Niklas Luhmann, romantic love is a 'communication medium' or a code that emerged around 1800 in response to certain social changes.⁶ Luhmann thus refers

transcript, 2016); Andreas Reckwitz, 'Grundzüge einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken: Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive', in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 2:4 (2003), 282–301.

⁴ See Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 13: 'Both social order and individuality [...] result from social practices'.

⁵ Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 12.

⁶ See *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 19, where Luhmann makes a clear distinction between love as a medium of communication and love

to a historical process of individualisation linked to the gradual dissolution of stratified society, which permanently changed the conditions of communication.⁷ This process of individualisation culminated in Romanticism. Romantic individuality encompasses both the person and their relationship to the world.⁸ In other words: a person is an individual not least because they develop their own world view. As personal and general (anonymously constituted) worldviews diverge, all information doubles in terms of its referentiality. From now on, social relationships are confronted with the problem that each individual is required to decide whether to accept or reject the other's idiosyncratic world view.⁹

In principle, symbolically generated means of communication, such as truth, love, money and power, 'enable essentially improbable communications nevertheless to be made successfully'.¹⁰ Love has to solve the particular problem of a 'highly personalized' communication, that is, the communication by which individuals seek to distinguish and differentiate themselves from others. As a code, love provides the rules and semantics that allow both partners to transform the mutual imposition of an individual worldview into a state of agreement. According to Luhmann, love requires the recognition of the other worldview in its entirety, for this is the only way to ensure that the person who holds that worldview is fully embraced by love. The link that practices create between the social and the individual sphere is thus particularly evident in the case of love, in that it makes possible social relationships in which the individuals see themselves affirmed as such. At the same time, it is clear that the meaning of love goes beyond the relationship between two people. The communication medium serves to stabilise and develop a society in which the same process of individualisation has invalidated the traditional institution of arranged marriage.

as a real fact or, in the English translation, the specific 'factual circumstances', in this case the actual feeling of love. The medium merely refers to the fact; it is not the fact itself. In thinking about love, however, we rely only on the medium. The actual feeling remains inaccessible to us.

⁷ See Niklas Luhmann, 'Individuum, Individualität, Individualismus', in Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998, 2nd edition), 3:149–258.

⁸ For the concept of Romantic individuality see, among others, Markus Schwering, 'Romantische Theorie der Gesellschaft', in Helmut Schanze, ed., *Romantik-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2003) 2nd edition, 510–18; Gerald N. Izenberg, *Impossible Individuality: Romanticism, Revolution and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1787–1802* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). María Verónica Galfione and Alexander Knopf, eds., *Abschied vom Individuum? Romantische Konzeptionen von Individualität und ihre Kritik* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2021).

⁹ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 21.

¹⁰ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 18.

Luhmann's considerations are tailored to sexually based intimate relationships. In such relationships, the communication medium of romantic love consists of the following five characteristics: 1) Communication is largely non-verbal, that is, reduced to the permanent mutual assurance that one understands the other completely even without words, for example, through the exchange of glances. This goes so far that too much communication represents a potential threat to the love relationship, because the danger of not being understood or of being misunderstood reveals the untenability of the assumption of an existing unity on which the whole relationship is based. 2) Within the communication medium, 'passion' is elevated to a leading symbol. Love is suffered; it overcomes the lovers like a force of nature or a disease, without the possibility of resistance. The loving subject is essentially passive. 3) Another feature of love as a medium of communication is the symbolisation of the bodily relationship in what Luhmann calls 'symbiotic mechanisms'. Communication is effected 'with reference to sexuality'.¹¹ It is not only mediated through the body, but also lends a sexual ambiguity to linguistic communication. 4) Self-reference is yet another essential characteristic of romantic love. This means that love is motivated and justified by itself (I love because I love ...). Moreover, it is transparent to itself. Communication takes place in the knowledge that the other person knows the rules of the code. 5) Luhmann also describes the love relationship as asymmetrical. This assumed imbalance is caused by the fact that the work of recognising the individual world view can only be done by one part, namely the lover, who in so doing testifies its love to the beloved. What remains incomprehensible about this interpretation is why Luhmann does not describe the process of recognition as a reciprocal achievement, thus creating symmetry in the love relationship. Just as no one can remain only the lover or the beloved in the love relationship if it is to be fulfilled, neither can recognition be one-sided. Indeed, reciprocity is one of the conditions for the success of recognition. I cannot recognise anything that refuses to recognise me.¹²

Anyone studying German Romanticism, however, quickly realises that the communication medium of love is also used in relationships that are characterised by intimacy but are not sexually based. The fact that social subjects not only experience themselves as individuals, but also insist on their individuality being recognised, threatens the success of communication in general. The more intimate the relationship, the greater the imposition associated with the demand for recognition. The intimacy of a relationship is determined by what each person

¹¹ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 28.

¹² See Alexander Knopf, 'Das Schweigen der Sirenen: Zum Begriff der Anerkennung in der Literaturwissenschaft', in *Orbis Litterarum*, 71:6 (2016), 525–48, 533.

reveals about themselves. In love, this is everything, which is why Romantics see love as the ideal of intersubjectivity.¹³ In no other case of this-worldly communication is such a high degree of mutual understanding achieved. In no other case are the possibilities of individual connection so fully realised. In no other case does the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ disappear so completely into a higher synthesis. In this function, to achieve an ideal state of communication, the code of love is also mobilised in non-sexual intimate relationships (friendship, kinship, etc.). However, Luhmann’s analysis is only partially applicable to such relationships in that bodies, for instance, are not involved in the same way. Moreover, his analysis neglects all relationships in which the partners feel that they have not yet reached the ideal state of love, that is, in which their communication is accompanied by the experience of certain thresholds that impair or prevent mutual understanding.

This chapter therefore proposes, on the one hand, to extend Luhmann’s concept of intimacy. Intimacy (Latin *intimus* for superlative ‘innermost, most secret and most intimate’) refers to all those social relationships that are characterised by a particular closeness, familiarity or mutual support. As much as this intimacy (in the extended sense) turns them into highly personal relationships, it also makes communication more difficult, which is why they require a means to facilitate its successful outcome. On the other hand, it is argued here that the ‘codification of intimacy’ pursued by the Romantics should also be extended to cases where communication appears problematic. As evidence of highly personal communication, letters provide information about the attention with which every disagreement, every irritation, every sign of misunderstanding is registered and addressed. Romantic correspondence is characterised by the development of a meta discourse that accompanies the actual discourse, the epistolary conversation, and constantly comments on language and understanding. But the same reflexivity that immediately puts every utterance to the test is also at work in poetic and literary texts. Thresholds of communication that seem to endanger intimacy are responded to by developing a code that, if not dismantles them, at least makes them visible and allows them to be dealt with.

The following considerations are limited to Bettina Brentano von Arnim’s (1785–1859) work, which is unique in many respects. They focus on her

¹³ See Alexander Knopf, *Begeisterung der Sprache: Poesie und Poetik in Novalis’ Heinrich von Afterdingen* (Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld, 2015), 143–57. See also Alexander Knopf, ‘Vom romantischen Individuum zur singularisierten Einheit des Sozialen: Individualität im Lichte von Andreas Reckwitz’ Sozialtheorie’, in Galfione, Knopf, eds., *Abschied vom Individuum?*, 177–211, 204.

correspondence with her brother Clemens Brentano and the befriended poet Karoline von Günderode. It is clear that the romantic codification of intimacy can only be partially presented on the basis of a single case study. However, this chapter links up with studies of epistolary communication in the Schlegel circle, which are based on the same theoretical premises.¹⁴

‘Love is only divine dialogue’¹⁵

Perhaps no other Romantic author identified love so exclusively and unconditionally with the ideal of perfect understanding as Bettina Brentano von Arnim. In her view, love is the precondition for successful communication, in which it also fulfils itself. The close connection between love and communication is expressed in the fact that even those of her intimate relationships that can be considered love relationships in the conventional sense were largely epistolary. They were maintained and nurtured through written correspondence. But this connection is also evident in relationships of friendship or kinship, insofar as they are accompanied by the experience of an emerging state of unity. Thus, the boundaries between sexual love and non-sexual intimacy are constantly blurred.

The observation that Brentano von Arnim’s intimate relationships were primarily realised in writing is also confirmed by the fact that, with the exception of Achim von Arnim, she transferred much of her correspondence into semi-fictional letter books. In the case of Karoline von Günderode and Clemens Brentano, the letter books are further the only evidence that gives us an insight into these relationships, as all but a few of the original letters have been lost. Communication is a constant theme in both the authentic letters and the literary letter books. Indeed, the intimacy of these relationships is expressed in the specific ways in which mutual understanding or misunderstanding is perceived and reflected upon. Whether these reflections are authentic or the result of the author’s later creative will is of no consequence. It is well known that Brentano von Arnim sometimes intervened heavily in the material she presented in the letter books.¹⁶ But the modification or even manipulation of the original documents also obeys

¹⁴ See Alexander Knopf, ‘Am Rande des Gesprächs: Untersuchungen zur epistolaren Kommunikation im Schlegel-Kreis (Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel, Friedrich von Hardenberg/Novalis, Dorothea Veit)’, *literatur für leser:innen* 21:2 (2023), 125–39.

¹⁵ Bettina von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, in *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Konrad (Frechen/Köln: Bartmann, 1959), 1:215–536, 370.

¹⁶ See Waldermar Oehlke, *Bettina von Arnims Briefromane* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1905); Lieselotte Kinskofer, ‘Zur Edition des *Frühlingskranzes*’, in Clemens Brentano, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 30, ed. Lieselotte Kinskofer (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1990).

the rules of the code that this study is concerned with. The letter books can be understood as the author's attempt to fully appropriate her relationships retrospectively. In this sense, the transformation of her intimate correspondence into literary monuments could be read as a way of dealing with communication thresholds. The letter books are perhaps also late gestures of reconciliation in relationships that broke down, not least due to a lack of understanding. They show that Brentano von Arnim's attempt to understand the other person continued long after the correspondence had ended or after her correspondent had fallen silent.

A few more words on Brentano von Arnim's biographical background. The Brentanos belonged to the wealthy families of the Free Imperial City of Frankfurt.¹⁷ Their wealth was based on the business acumen of Brentano von Arnim's father, Peter Anton (Pietro Antonio) Brentano, who himself came from a large Italian merchant family. When Bettina was born, she was his thirteenth child and the seventh child of his second wife, Maximiliane (née La Roche). Seven other siblings followed. Bettina lost her mother when she was eight. She was orphaned at the age of eleven. Although her half-brother Franz took her father's place as head of the family and managing director of the trading company, it is clear that finding one's role and asserting one's position in such a family constellation is fraught with particular challenges.¹⁸ In addition, the Brentanos were denied citizenship because of their Catholic faith in strictly Lutheran Frankfurt. The family's marginal position in the social fabric of the city, due to their denomination, created a certain pressure to assimilate, coupled with the expectation of conforming behaviour.¹⁹ In the case of the female members of the family, this included the expectation that they should marry as early as possible in accordance with their status. Brentano von Arnim's response was refusal and rebellion.²⁰ She experienced the conflicts with her social environment caused by her attitude as lack of understanding, rejection and isolation.²¹

¹⁷ See Bernd Heidenreich, Evelyn Brockhoff, Anne Bohnenkamp-Renken and Wolfgang Bunzel, eds., *Die Brentanos: Eine romantische Familie?* (Frankfurt/M.: Henrich Editionen, 2016); Konrad Feilchenfeldt, Luciano Zagari, eds: *Die Brentano: Eine europäische Familie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992).

¹⁸ See Bettina von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, in *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Konrad (Frechen/Köln: Bartmann, 1959), 1:11–214, 142–3, 161.

¹⁹ See Wolfgang Bunzel, *'Die Welt umwälzen': Bettine von Arnim geb. Brentano [1785–1859]* (Frankfurt/M.: Freies Deutsches Hochstift, 2009), 5.

²⁰ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 51, 146, 156, 163–4; von Arnim, *Die Günderröde*, 319. See also Wolfgang Bunzel, 'Bettine Brentano/von Arnim: Selbstinszenierung als Wirkungsstrategie', in Heidenreich et al., eds., *Die Brentanos*, 171–90.

²¹ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 141; von Arnim, *Die Günderröde*, 307, 316.

In these particular circumstances, Brentano von Arnim developed a strong sense of individuality and began early on to claim for herself (and others) the right to the unhindered development of her inclinations and talents. This forced individualisation is particularly evident in her correspondence.²² In her letters, communication seems to be so important because the chances of it succeeding in the case of two complex individuals who deviate greatly from the social norm are considered extremely small from the outset. Conversely, the improbability of the success of such communication is the very reason why it is experienced as unique happiness when it does occur. Brentano von Arnim is not the only one to lend this experience the name of love.

‘First sibling love’²³

The letters from Brentano von Arnim’s correspondence with her brother, collected in *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz* (1844), date from her youth. The first letter was written by Clemens after he had left Frankfurt at the end of April 1802, when Bettina had just turned seventeen and Clemens was twenty-three. The collection ends with a letter from September 1803, a spring that lasted less than eighteen months. In the end, there was no rupture, but an estrangement. In this respect, the image of the wreath is misleading. The harmony with which this correspondence begins, and the disintegration it documents, remains disturbed. Unless, as has already been suggested, one wants to see a gesture of reconciliation in Brentano von Arnim’s publication itself.²⁴

Brentano von Arnim cherished the memory of her brother’s importance to her for the rest of her life. The ‘first sibling love’ that bound her to him was regarded by her as ‘the narrow green spot of the unforgettable’, as the ‘first appearance of life’, even at a time when the relationship had already broken down.²⁵ The mutual feeling of ‘unity’ and ‘agreement in everything, even if we think differently in some things’,²⁶ from which this correspondence emerges, is probably due to the resonance with their own character that each of them found in the other. The fact

²² See Ulrike Growe, *Das Briefleben Bettine von Arnims – Vom Musenanruf zur Selbstreflexion: Studie zu ‘Goethe’s Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde’, ‘Die Günderröde’ und ‘Clemens Brentano’s Frühlingskranz’* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003).

²³ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 175: ‘erste[] Geschwisterliebe’.

²⁴ The history of their relationship has been written by Hartwig Schulz, *‘Unsre Lieb aber ist außerköhren’: Die Geschichte der Geschwister Clemens und Bettine Brentano* (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 2004).

²⁵ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 175.

²⁶ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 33.

that the autonomy with which brother and sister, each in their own way, sought to assert the development of their own individuality against all conventions and social role models isolated them from their surroundings was an experience that they shared and that united them. If Brentano von Arnim felt connected to her brother, it was in his independence, in his selfhood:

Clemens, Du bist so gut und so schön, wenn Du singst, bist Du so besonders liebend noch dazu, und mir der Liebste, der Trefflichste, nicht aller Menschen, denn Menschen kenne ich, glaub ich, gar nicht, mir sind sie nicht aufgestoßen, das lieblichste *Du selbst* bist Du mir, die andern sind mir kein Selbst, sie sind zusammengeliene, durch Umstände und Eigenheiten, die ich besser noch Verkehrtheiten nenne, entstandne Unselbstheiten.²⁷

[*Clemens*, you are so good and so beautiful, when you sing, you are so especially loving, and to me the dearest, the most excellent, not of all people, because I don't know people at all, I think, they have not struck me, you are the loveliest *yourself* to me, the others are not a self to me, they are borrowed, through circumstances and peculiarities, which I better still call perversities, un-selfnesses.]

While the closeness and familiarity of the siblings, which both describe as love from the outset, may not have been created by their common position as social outsiders, it was certainly intensified by it. In other words: the lack of understanding that each of the siblings encounters in their respective social environments is the basis for their understanding of each other, yet a very narrow basis, as soon becomes clear. The unity that the external resistance gives to their relationship does not prevent differences from appearing within it as soon as the two turn towards each other, and these differences become apparent in the course of the correspondence. That Brentano von Arnim in particular sees mutual understanding as proof of love is shown by the fact that she immediately questions this love when understanding fails to materialise. At one point she says imperatively: 'Understand me, that is, love me for it!'²⁸

As can be seen from the previous quote, for Brentano von Arnim the fundamental understanding in which love manifests itself does not exclude minor disagreements. Differences are inevitable in a relationship between two complex individuals. Both 'form their own world',²⁹ which can never fully coincide with that of the other. Recognising the individuality of the other therefore means, above all, recognising these differences. But Brentano von Arnim is denied this recognition by her brother. Brentano wants to mould her according to his own

²⁷ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 42.

²⁸ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 147.

²⁹ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 33.

ideas.³⁰ She reacts to his great expectations and strict demands with alienation and rejection. Just as Brentano von Arnim resists his attempts to educate her more and more vehemently,³¹ she is finally forced to recognize that Brentano loves an image of her that she does not and will not conform to,³² that he does not love *her*, and therefore does not love at all.

[Clemens an Bettine]: ‘Gott will’s so haben, daß wir uns lieben und einander belehren sollen, ich sehe es in allen Dingen und gebe mich dem offen hin, denn ich will nicht mit der Wahrheit streiten, denn es ist nicht möglich, sich zu trennen von dem, in dem man sich begriffen fühlt’.³³

[[Clemens to Bettine]: ‘God wants it so that we should love and teach each other, I see it in all things and give myself openly to it, for I do not want to argue with the truth, for it is not possible to separate oneself from that in which one feels oneself comprehended’.]

[Bettine an Clemens]: ‘[...] ich fühl, daß solche tief durchdachte Gedanken, die Du an mich zwar richtest, doch vielmehr der Welt angehören [...] Hat’s Gott gewollt, daß man euch liebe, wie der *Clemens* mir sagt: ich sei berufen mit ihm zusammen, daß wir einander lieben, wenn das so wär, daß Gott wolle, wo er gar nicht zu wollen hat, ich würde ihm widerspenstig sein und den grad nicht wollen lieben den er dazu geschaffen’.³⁴

[[Bettine to Clemens]: ‘[...] I feel that such deeply thought-out thoughts, which you address to me, belong rather to the world [...]. Has God willed that you should be loved, as *Clemens* tells me: I am called together with him, that we should love one another, if it were so, that God willed where he has no will at all, I would be rebellious to him and not want to love the very one he created for this purpose’.]

Brentano von Arnim’s impression that her brother’s declarations of love were addressed to her, but did not mean her, is strangely echoed in one of his earlier letters. It reads: ‘If you were to think that in your letters only your love, your answering spirit speaks to me, you are mistaken, they are your love for everything, just as it is your reflecting spirit about everything and in everything that you entrust to me’.³⁵ Brentano von Arnim does not answer this, but it can be

³⁰ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 64. See also Ursula Isselstein, ‘Briefwechsel als Bildungsprojekt: Dialogische Konstellationen im “Frühlingkranz” Bettine von Arnims’, in Konrad Feilchenfeldt and Luciano Zagari, eds., *Die Brentano: Eine europäische Familie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 208–18.

³¹ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 52, 66–7, 76, 87, 115.

³² von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 66, 146–7, 201–2.

³³ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 106.

³⁴ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 109.

³⁵ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 78: ‘Wolltest Du meinen, in Deinen Briefen spräche bloß Deine Liebe, Dein antwortender Geist zu mir, so täuschest Du Dich, sie sind

assumed that the opposite is the case and that she always meant her brother, even if she did not address her love directly to him. For Brentano von Arnim, love as understanding has to prove itself precisely in the individuality of the other person.

Remarkably, it is above all the concept of love expressed by her brother that shows Brentano von Arnim that he did not understand her and that his love was at best a misjudgement, at worst a masquerade. Her feelings were perhaps not mistaken, as a passage from a letter written by Clemens Brentano to Achim von Arnim on 8 September 1802 shows: ‘My love for her [i.e. Bettina] is itself not real, I stand beside her with shyness because she shows me nothing but a more beautiful image of myself, I can no longer understand her because I am not allowed to help her out of her captivity’.³⁶ But the basis of the intimate relationship has already collapsed with the suspicion. As a result, the misunderstandings accumulate. The initial estrangement turns into open rejection, at first of individual letters,³⁷ until Brentano von Arnim realises that she can no longer translate the ‘tonality’ in which her brother writes to her; that they speak two languages that only seem to coincide but are in fact alien to each other:

Du hast mich nicht in meiner Sprache gelesen; Du hast eine andre Natur herausgekriegt, die Dir nur *dann und wann* nicht gefällt, meistens aber doch. Wenn Du aber in der meinigen Sprache mich gefaßt hättest, so würde ich keinen Augenblick Dir gefallen, nein, davon nicht, von andern Dingen wär die Rede. Ein Gewimmel von Mißverständnissen.³⁸

[You have not read me in my language; you have got out a different nature, which only *now and then* you do not like, but mostly you do. But if you had understood me in my own language, you would not like me for a moment, no, not of that, there would be talk of other things. A seething mass of misunderstandings.]

If the letter book is understood as a composition, the image of the wreath could perhaps be read as the young author being led back to herself in her relationship with her brother. She has left the ‘home’ that his letters gave her – ‘I was born in them’³⁹ – in order to find a new home within herself. In the correspondence, she discovers this self and defends it against the claims of her brother, who in turn

Deine Liebe zu allem, so wie es Dein reflektierender Geist über alles und in allem ist, den Du mir anvertraust’.

³⁶ Clemens Brentano, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Lieselotte Kinskofer (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1988), 29:503: ‘Meine Liebe zu ihr [i.e. Bettina] ist selbst nicht ächt, ich stehe mit Scheu neben ihr, weil sie mir nichts zeigt, als ein schöneres Bild meiner selbst, ich kann sie nicht mehr begreifen, da ich ihr nicht aus ihrer Gefangenschaft helfen darf’.

³⁷ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 66, 107.

³⁸ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 146.

³⁹ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 147.

has to learn that he is dealing with an individuality in its own right. Brentano von Arnim describes this process very precisely in a letter dated 13/14 February 1804, which is not in the letter book:

Du glaubst ich liebe Dich weniger (oder viel mehr) nicht mehr recht – was nennst Du denn recht lieben? ehemals sagtest Du mir immer, ich sei in Dich verliebt und das wäre nicht recht, und da es anders zu sein scheint, so ist es wieder nicht recht. Sieh, ich will Dir den ganzen Unterschied meiner jetzigen und ehemaligen Liebe zu Dir aus einander setzen. Ehmals war ich wie ein blindes Kind, und Du wie mein Führer, ich kannte Niemand als Dich, ich war Niemand etwas schuldig als Dir, und warf also meine ganze Verehrung, meine Anbetung, die eigentlich der Natur, der Sonne, Mond und Sternen gehörten, nur auf Dich; und nun da ich sehend bin, sind mir alle diese Gegenstände vor Augen gekommen und ich kann ihnen meine Liebe nicht verweigern. [...] Daß Du meine Liebe jetzt nicht mehr so deutlich fühlst, ist weil sie jetzt mehr verbreitet ist, weil Du mich jetzt nicht mehr so wie sonst immer an Deiner Hand fühlst mit dem Begehren von Dir geleitet zu werden, dieß soll Dich freuen und nicht niederschlagen.⁴⁰

[You think I love you less (or rather) not properly – what do you call loving properly? You used to tell me I was in love with you and that wasn't right, and since it seems to be different, it's not right again. Look, I will tell you the whole difference between my present and former love for you. Once I was like a blind child, and you like my guide, I knew no one but you, I owed nothing to anyone but you, and so I threw all my worship, my adoration, which actually belonged to nature, the sun, moon and stars, only on you; and now that I am seeing, all these objects have come before my eyes and I cannot deny them my love. [...] The fact that you no longer feel my love so clearly is because it is now more widespread, because you no longer feel me at your hand as you used to with the desire to be led by you, this should make you happy and not put you down.]

Not least, the passage shows that even in sibling relationships, different concepts of love are used, which have to be worked out in a differentiated consideration of encoded intimacy.

‘Cries of my heart for you’⁴¹

The study of the intimate communication between Brentano von Arnim and Karoline von Günderode has to rely almost exclusively on the letter book *Die Günderode* (1840). Of the original correspondence, which took place between 1804 and 1806, only nine letters have survived.⁴² In fact, it is not even possible to say how extensive the correspondence actually was. Of the letters presented in *Die*

⁴⁰ Letter to Clemens Brentano, in *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 49–50.

⁴¹ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 480.

⁴² See *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 51, 137, 140, 142, 144, 151, 156, 184, 185.

Günderode (1840), several are fake; the majority are suspected to have been written by the author at a later date.⁴³ If the letter book gives us any idea of the nature of the relationship between the two young women and how it was expressed in their letters, it is largely due to later staging.

This literarisation, however, does not change the fact that the letters show how the communicative event is thematised through the codification of intimacy. This close connection between intimacy and communication, which can also be found in *Die Günderode*, does not seem to have been introduced into the correspondence by the author retrospectively. This is evidenced by the surviving letters, several of which explicitly reflect this connection. The letter from Brentano von Arnim to von Günderode, which the editors have dated to the second third of 1805, reveals something of the uncertain status of the friendship. Even at this late stage in the relationship, Brentano von Arnim is unsure whether the addressee ‘attaches sufficient importance to [their] friendship’. She wants to know the ‘true opinion’ that von Günderode has of the letter-writer, and she is troubled by the thought that her friend might laugh when she reads the letter and think her a ‘fool’.⁴⁴ This self-doubt contrasts clearly with the confident familiarity that prevails in *Die Günderode* from the outset. In its brevity and sobriety, von Günderode’s reply letter also reflects the imbalance that characterises the entire letter book and is itself addressed in it.⁴⁵ It is one of the peculiarities of Brentano von Arnim’s intimate relationships that she does not mind their one-sidedness; that she does not need any *signs* of reciprocity for her love.⁴⁶ This largely monological situation – as a speech that requires no response – is taken to an extreme in *Goethe’s Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835).

How closely intimacy and writing belonged together for Brentano von Arnim, becomes clear from the last surviving letter to von Günderode. This letter was written after von Günderode had broken up with Brentano von Arnim and shortly before the former took her own life.⁴⁷ Von Günderode had left her in

⁴³ See Oehlke, *Bettina von Arnims Briefromane*, 361–2.

⁴⁴ *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 143–4.

⁴⁵ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 489: ‘I wrote Clemens a long letter and told him that you think good of him, that I write you long letters to which you only reply briefly or not at all’. [‘Dem Clemens hab ich geschrieben, einen langen Brief, und ihm auch von Dir gesagt, daß Du ihm gut bist, daß ich Dir lange Briefe schreibe, auf die Du nur kurz oder auch wohl gar nicht antwortest’.]

⁴⁶ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 483–4. See also Ingrid Leitner, ‘Kommunikationsstrukturen bei Bettine von Arnim: Ein Vergleich fiktiven Sprechens mit Gesprächen im Salon’, in Hartwig Schulz, ed., *Salons der Romantik: Beiträge eines Wiepersdorfer Kolloquiums zu Theorie und Geschichte des Salons* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1997), 235–50, 238.

⁴⁷ See Dagmar von Gersdorff, ‘*Die Erde ist mir Heimat nicht geworden*’: *Das Leben der Karoline von Günderode* (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 2011), 237–61.

the dark about the reasons, which is why Brentano von Arnim saw the break as an even more serious violation of her trust. The postscript, which was quoted at the beginning, she writes without any rhetorical gestures. This letter was not included in the letter book. The end of the friendship is omitted, as is the end of the poet. However, the letter book can be seen as a testimony to the affection Brentano von Arnim had for Karoline von Günderode throughout her life. It is also a monument to a friendship that is emphatically understood as love: ‘There is nothing like love! But you know well! People distinguish between love and friendship and between special loyalty for this or that person, but not me and you?’⁴⁸

Die Günderode can also be seen as a depiction of emancipation. Five years her senior, Karoline von Günderode (1780–1806) was already an established poet when she came into Brentano von Arnim’s life. Both in poetry and in the philosophical and historical sciences, she regarded her as an authority to whom she willingly submitted.⁴⁹ As in the case of Clemens Brentano, it was Günderode’s poetic talent and great linguistic sensitivity that made this communicative closeness possible. And here, too, the unity achieved is experienced as an isolated, outwardly closed dyad. Even more than in her correspondence with her brother, this is reflected in *The Günderode* in scenes of exclusivity, in secluded togetherness.⁵⁰ This intimate understanding differs from other social relationships not only in the feeling of being able to speak exclusively to and with the other person and being understood by them;⁵¹ rather, the shared interaction is experienced as the attainment of a new linguistic quality: ‘We have to close ourselves off with each other, in nature, we have to walk hand in hand and talk to each other not about things, but a big language’.⁵² At the same time, Brentano von Arnim realises, especially in her dealings with von Günderode, that she has a voice of her own and that she must assert it in order to be heard. Although her friend is more cautious than her brother, Brentano von Arnim also has to defend herself against her expectations, admonitions and concerns, which she sees as interfering with her development.⁵³

⁴⁸ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 479: ‘Es gibt nichts wie die Liebe! Doch weißt Du wohl! Menschen unterscheiden zwischen Lieb und Freundschaft und zwischen besonderer Treue für diesen oder jenen, aber nicht ich und Du?’

⁴⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 230, 267, 283.

⁵⁰ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 246, 300, 322.

⁵¹ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 228, 252, 277.

⁵² von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 323: ‘Wir müssen uns miteinander abschließen, in der Natur, da müssen wir Hand in Hand gehen und miteinander sprechen nicht von Dingen, sondern eine große Sprache’.

⁵³ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 345: ‘Now I want to tell you something: I no longer want you to sigh in anguish over my doing nothing!’ [‘Jetzt will ich Dir was sagen: ich will nicht mehr haben, daß Du voll Angst seufzest um mein Nichtstun!’]

What means does the author use to address and reflect on communication? First of all, in *Die Gunderode*, even more than in *Fruhlingskranz*, a repertoire of binary oppositions is used to explain the success or failure of communication. Music plays a central role. Brentano von Arnim understands musicality as a characteristic of creation. The universe is pervaded by music. Animals have music, and humans also have an innate ‘melody’. It determines how near or far something is. For music is spirit. It harmonises everything which is capable of feeling it.⁵⁴ It enables ‘understanding’ on a deeper level than that of the mind, and where it expresses itself, it is a sign of love: ‘[...] all language must be music, which is first of all spirit, not content, which only becomes a dialogue of love through the music of language’.⁵⁵

The idea that music enables a sensual understanding, a harmony of feeling, refers to an immediacy that is seen as a condition for the success of communication. The sound that underpins speech does not allow any pretence, and therefore excludes misunderstanding. It reveals the ‘soul [...] naked and bare’.⁵⁶ This refers to another set of motifs through which understanding is thematised. Understanding is only possible when the interlocutors reveal their ‘innermost being’.⁵⁷ The self, however, only communicates ‘authentically’ when it follows its ‘nature’. Nature is a key concept in Brentano von Arnim’s thought. It refers to a law which determines individualisation but which initially remains hidden from the individual himself.⁵⁸ Successful communication therefore always leads the individual back to themselves. In understanding the other, one recognises oneself. The process of emancipation that *Die Gunderode* represents takes place on the basis of progressive self-knowledge. In conversation with her poet friend, Brentano von Arnim realises that she cannot put the poetry into verbal reflections and book form.⁵⁹ Rather, the poetry that others ascribe to her is already her nature, the direct expressions of which are the only way to preserve that poetry. This is her own voice, which she only finds by hearing

⁵⁴ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 229, 288, 293.

⁵⁵ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 371: ‘[...] alle Sprache mu Musik sein, die erst ist der Geist, nicht der Inhalt, der wird nur Liebesgesprch durch die Musik der Sprache’. See also 228: ‘The musical sound of those words expresses itself like the pulse of your feelings, that is living love, which you feel for me’ [‘Der musikalische Klang jener Worte uert sich wie der Pulsschlag Deiner Empfindung, das ist lebendige Liebe, die fuhlst Du fur mich’].

⁵⁶ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 316.

⁵⁷ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 352–3. Schleiermacher’s *Monologen* (1800) is cited in this context; one of the few places where a philosophical reference text is mentioned.

⁵⁸ See Knopf, ‘Begeisterung der Sprache’, 65–6, 105–7.

⁵⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 310.

its 'echo' in others.⁶⁰ In the words she puts in von Günderode's mouth: 'You can't write poetry because you are what poets call poetic'.⁶¹

There is a third set of motifs that is important for the intimate communication in *Die Günderode*. It could be called the set of vegetal motifs. It includes the various flowers, trees and other plants mentioned in the text. Thus, as Brentano von Arnim recalls, the first encounter takes place in a garden shed; the name of a plant is 'our first word'.⁶² Here, it is not the correspondence of the words – on the contrary, von Günderode rebukes Brentano von Arnim for using the word 'Hahnenfuß' [crow-foot] and suggests that she call the plant 'Geißblatt' [goat-leaf honeysuckle]⁶³ – but the correspondence of 'thought' and 'nature' that Brentano von Arnim thinks she notices in von Günderode, which makes her feel close to her.⁶⁴ It seems plausible to associate the mediating function of plants with the 'third divine', whose 'vivacious work' [*Lebensvolles Wirken*] is necessary 'if two are to understand each other'.⁶⁵ This third is always the spirit, whose manifestations are music, nature and poetry.

However, intimacy is coded both positively and negatively. For the code not only serves to help intimate communication succeed; it also makes it possible to deal with communication thresholds that potentially disrupt or prevent understanding. In the case of *Die Günderode*, this double coding can be seen in the fact that all the motifs have an antithesis. While the music creates harmony, the philosophy 'drives into the language with hacks and crowbars', so that the philosopher's thought falls 'like a chip from a wood lathe'.⁶⁶ Philosophy such as in the books by Kant, Fichte and Schelling, which Brentano von Arnim was recommended to study by her friend, therefore does not impart any wisdom. The philosopher takes all this effort 'to teach others from above how high he has climbed'.⁶⁷ The same applies to history. The preoccupation with dead history is just as far removed from living nature as philosophy's breakneck abstractions of felt sound. The nature of the individual, on the other hand, is not compatible with the conventions on which

⁶⁰ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 299: 'You are only the echo through which my earthly life hears the spirit that lives in me, otherwise I would not have it, otherwise I would not know it if I did not say it before you'. ['Du bist der Widerhall nur, durch den mein irdisch Leben den Geist vernimmt, der in mir lebt, sonst hätt ich's nicht, sonst wüßt ich's nicht, wenn ich's vor Dir nicht ausspräch'.]

⁶¹ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 318.

⁶² von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 322.

⁶³ However, it appears that they are different plants: *Ranunculus* (Hahnenfuß) und *Lonicera caprifolium* (Gartengeißblatt).

⁶⁴ See also von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 328, 370.

⁶⁵ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 305.

⁶⁶ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 229.

⁶⁷ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 282.

social interaction is based. Those who bow to their demands deny themselves and become untrue.⁶⁸ A last opposition is that between feeling and understanding. The mind is the organ of the Philistines. Music, poetry and nature remain alien to it.⁶⁹ It therefore misses the very thing that brings about the unity of understanding. Contrary to what the etymology suggests, he who understands with the understanding alone does not really understand.

Conclusion

Bettina Brentano von Arnim's correspondence is an almost ideal example of the extent to which communication is linked to processes of individualisation. This can be seen above all in how the insistence on one's own individuality, that is, on a world view that deviates from the social consensus, makes communication more difficult. The frequency with which communication is thematised in these letters corresponds to the rarity with which it succeeds. It would therefore also be inaccurate to associate Brentano von Arnim's correspondence with early Romantic ideas such as 'symphilosophy' or 'sociability' in the sense of Friedrich Schlegel or Schleiermacher.⁷⁰ While Schleiermacher's theory of sociable behaviour aims to mediate between the individual and the public,⁷¹ for Brentano von Arnim the two are mutually exclusive. Even the idea of a symphilosophy⁷² is not compatible with the relationships as they are presented to us in Brentano von Arnim's correspondence. The monological situation in which her correspondence takes place has already been pointed out. In general, however, it can be said that in Brentano von Arnim's work, the individuality that characterises each person also asserts itself in the case of successful communication. Understanding the other person

⁶⁸ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 323, 374.

⁶⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 287, 292.

⁷⁰ As does Renata Fuchs, "I Drink Love to Get Strong": Bettina Brentano von Arnim's Romantic Philosophy and Dialogue in *Die Gunderode*, in *Women in German Yearbook* 32 (2016), 1–24. The fact that Brentano von Arnim ran salons in Landshtut and Berlin in later years does not change this. As Ingrid Leitner has shown, the dialogue situation in her salons is also hierarchically structured. At the centre is an intellectual authority, often the hostess herself, who speaks to an audience to be instructed (see Leitner, 'Kommunikationsstrukturen bei Bettine von Arnim', 236–9).

⁷¹ See Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, 'Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens', in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/2, ed. Gunter Meckenstock (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1984), 163–84.

⁷² For Schlegel's concept of 'symphilosophy' see Birgit Rehme-Iffert, *Skepsis und Enthusiasmus: Friedrich Schlegels philosophischer Grundgedanke zwischen 1796 und 1805* (Wurzburg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2001), 89–92.

does not mean that the differences between the individuals are levelled out. Yet individuality is only realised in relation to another individual. In this sense, each of Brentano von Arnim's correspondences creates a space of intimacy that is carefully shielded from the outside world. This individualisation of relationships in turn finds its expression in communication. Just as the relationships differ from one another, so Brentano von Arnim finds in her correspondence her own tone, a particular way of speaking.

Against this background, Luhmann's analysis of the codification of intimacy needs to be supplemented in several respects. First, it has been shown that love is also used as a medium of communication in non-sexual intimate relationships. Even in friendly or kinship relationships, love is perceived as the ideal of total unity and is reflected accordingly. This also means that the function of love as a social practice goes far beyond ensuring reproduction within a society. However, the texts analysed here also show that the codification of friendly and kinship intimacy is different from that of physical love. Communication is by no means abandoned, if only because in the case of friendly and kinship intimacy it cannot be replaced by physical closeness, or only inadequately. In the case of Brentano von Arnim, it would be more appropriate to speak of a communicative excess. Intimacy generates communication, which at the same time increases the risk of its failure. In contrast to Luhmann, it can be assumed that communication takes the place of corporeality, which is expressed not least in the fact that the characteristic of the symbolisation of bodily reference is largely, if not completely, absent. With Brentano von Arnim, the substitution goes so far that even her love relationships are more or less realised in writing. In addition, the moment of the 'passio' is absent. Love for a friend or brother is not suffered. Rather, it is based on a free and voluntary decision made on the basis of a perceived or assumed similarity. What we do find in the present correspondence, however, is the self-referentiality of love. It constantly addresses itself and reflects on the conditions of its success or failure. Insofar as love is always linked to the success of communication, the code of intimacy mobilises above all metaphors, symbols and concepts that possess a linguistic dimension. At the same time, it has been shown that Brentano von Arnim not only regards each love as unique, but also recognises different types of love. Luhmann's study should therefore also be modified in such a way that the idea of a single type of intimacy – called romantic love – gives way to a multiplicity of intimacies, which can also differ in their codification.

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Love Illuminated: Transforming ‘Cold Philosophy’

Fairy Lights: Light and a Changing Paradigm of Love at the End of the Nineteenth Century

Joanna Beaufoy

In an essay in *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination*, Murray Pomerance argues that the character Tinker Bell in the 1904 play *Peter Pan* represented *la fée électricité* – the electricity fairy.¹ ‘In Tinker Bell’, Pomerance writes, ‘Barrie was embodying the idea and myth of “la fée électricité”, an enchanter but also a servant’.² A ubiquitous figure of the 1900 Paris World Fair, the *fée électricité* was the winged goddess who crowned the fair’s Palais de l’Électricité, shown in Figure 9.1 in an illustration from the newspaper *Le Petit Journal*.³ She stands above the year ‘1900’, engraved in stone, suggesting electricity as the deity of the new century. Placed at the closest point to the sun, she emits rays of light that evoke depictions of Louis XIV, the ‘Sun King’, above fountains in the courtyard that recall those of Versailles.

Assimilated into the popular imagination of the Belle époque and its associated imagery of femininity in the art nouveau mode, she remains a recognisable icon of the early twentieth century. At the 1937 World Fair, a gargantuan fresco was commissioned by La Compagnie parisienne de distribution de l’électricité, a private utilities company, entitled *La Fée électricité*. On display today at the Musée d’art moderne de Paris, it measures over 600 square metres and shows the electricity fairy bringing light and energy to everything she touches. Because of its scale and how it is painted on a curved wall, it is difficult to reproduce in print, so Figure 9.2 shows a lithograph print made subsequently of a detail of the fresco. In this small section – only a fragment of the whole piece – the goddess Iris enters in naked flight from the right, illuminating part of the string section of an orchestra; flying over deserts and the pyramids of Egypt; over towards skyscrapers and domes, with farmland in the distance, still in shadow, mirroring the coming of the dawn. By assimilating the *fée électricité* with the classical imagery of the messenger goddess of rainbows, the electricity company sought to show the *fée électricité* as the sun of the new century, bringing light and colour to the world.

¹ Murray Pomerance, ‘Tinker Bell, the Fairy of Electricity’, in Alison B. Kavey and Lester D. Friedman, eds., *Second Star to the Right* (Ithaca: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 13.

² Pomerance, ‘Tinker Bell, the Fairy of Electricity’, 17.

³ A newspaper article from May 1900 described this statue as ‘la fée de l’électricité’, but *l’électricité* soon lost its definite article and she became *la fée électricité*, showing the contraction of the two images into one. (Maurice Normand, ‘A travers l’exposition’, *L’Illustration* 2987 (26 May 1900), 335. With thanks to Anne O’Neil-Henry for this reference.)



Figure 9.1. Henri Meyer, A poster offered as a supplement to *Le Petit Journal*, showing the Palais de l'Électricité at the 1900 Paris World Fair, reproduced with permission from Le Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris.

Much has been written about the use of the eroticised female form to conjure an aura around commodities, invoking erotic power to stand for industrial and commercial power, and *la fée électricité* is in many ways emblematic of this practice. The question of the role played by this fairy and other fairies of light in the history of love as part of social practices has, on the other hand, been neglected. The commodified fairy we see in Dufy's commission by the electricity company and, later, in Disney's version of Tinker Bell, has a more complex history in the nineteenth century, which this essay investigates as part of a paradigm shift in the place of love in society. I will argue that the popularity of 'fairy light' as an aesthetic of popular entertainment in the late nineteenth century had a philosophical parallel in the changing role of love towards children. Secondly, I will examine the annexation of the figure of the fairy from the theatre stage to the electricity industry towards the turn of the century to look at social shifts, asking what they suggest about changing expressions of love.

According to Simon May in his book *Love: A New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion*, it was in this same period, from the 1870s onwards, that the love of children began to replace erotic love, which in turn had replaced the love of God,



Figure 9.2. Atelier Sorlier-Mourlot under the direction of Raoul Dufy, Lithograph print made in 1952 reproducing a detail of Dufy's 600 m² fresco *La Fee Électricité* (1937), Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Dist. RMN-GP / Georges Meguerditchian.

as the highest possible form of love.⁴ Indications May gives that such a paradigm shift was happening include the idea that ‘an idiom of “becoming”’ began to be privileged ‘over “being”’,⁵ and in the first part of this essay, I will argue for the role

⁴ Simon May, *Love: A New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). May identifies three shifts in love occurring in the nineteenth century: first, the flowering of high romantic love around 1800, based on a divine model of love of God, where sex is transfigured into spiritual intimacy. Second, erotic love taking over from the love of God around 1830, which was intrinsically unconditional: the sense that lovers could be star-crossed or doomed, the power of erotic attraction fusing them and defining their destiny. Thirdly, around 1870, love for one's children becoming the highest possible form of love, replacing the erotic lover.

⁵ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 230.

played by fairy lights in representing this ontological shift. Another indication May gives is discussed in the second part: that we began to wage a ‘war on risk’.⁶ ‘This epochal change’, May writes, ‘which dawns, with remarkable suddenness, between the mid- to late nineteenth centuries, when, as the sociologist Viviana Zelizer has shown, children under fourteen went from being objects of “utility” to objects of “sentiment”’.⁷ I consider May’s ‘war on risk’ in light of the electricity fairy’s incarnation as Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*. In the final part, I explore the electricity fairy’s role in a shift towards a greater valuing of domesticity, what May refers to as an increased ‘affirmation of the everyday’,⁸ in his argument that the love of the child became late-modernity’s archetypal model of love.

Dance, surge and flash: The aesthetics of ‘becoming’ over ‘being’

The place of the magical within late nineteenth-century modernity as first seems paradoxical: how could the great accumulation and propagation of scientific knowledge during this period be coupled with a desire to confuse and confound and, most importantly, a desire to be confused and confounded? A cursory examination of popular advertising material in late nineteenth-century Paris reveals the audience’s desire to *not* understand how a magic trick is performed, how a set is lit, how an orb of light appears on the wall before them. One Belle époque poster seems full of contradictions, as it implores spectators to come and see, ‘Nouveaux tours de physique amusante et de secrets utiles’ [New tricks of amusing physics and useful secrets].⁹ The transformation of magical crafts that came with inventions of complex optical instruments, allowing, by the end of the eighteenth century, convincing optical illusions, began the trajectory that created modern cinema. Technology was becoming the magic of the modern age, and the incarnation of electricity as fairy shows how readily it was depicted as magic: something that could transform one thing into another. It could transform darkness into light and vice versa, but also conjure one atmosphere, then another, instantaneously.

Simon May’s argument that a paradigm shift in the way we love in the late nineteenth century reflects this dynamic in his suggestion that the new dominant paradigm of love of children had its own time form:

⁶ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 205.

⁷ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 199.

⁸ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 218.

⁹ ed. Salanon, René and Samson, Claude, *Cent ans d’affiches: ‘La Belle époque’* (Paris: UCAD, 1964), 82.

Its time, unlike the way we experience climactic moments in romantic love, doesn't 'stand still' but is in perpetual motion. It chimes with modernity's veneration of the new: our reverence for the instant when a life, an act, a thought that has never existed before comes into being; our reverence for possibility, for the radical event, for the open horizon, for the contemporary.¹⁰

The popularity of fairy narratives – part of the wider context of the vogue for spiritualism – and the development of the electricity fairy in the same period – resonates with May's observation. His thesis that the love of the child becomes the supreme form of love at a time when an idiom of 'becoming' begins to be favoured over 'being' invites contextualisation within the history of technology.¹¹

Electric lighting was a new technology. The end of the nineteenth century was a luminous crossroads, when antiquated and modern lighting were used simultaneously. Although first demonstrated in the 1850s in the form of arc lights, the lightbulb was not patented until 1880 by Edison followed by Swan (although Swan appears to have demonstrated his model earlier). At the turn of the twentieth century, most homes in European cities were still lit with gas, oil and candles, with some having electricity installed in reception rooms as a luxury; it was not yet common in domestic sleeping quarters. To appreciate how magical it seemed to contemporaries, we can consider how electricity was steeped in vitalist ideas from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that saw electric activity in bodies as coming from the soul. The idea of encasing this magic in glass and putting it in your drawing room would have been highly novel and at first fantastical, an example of 'a radical event' that May says contemporaries were increasingly yearning for. In her passage in *Orlando*, evoking the feelings of looking out onto a new century, Virginia Woolf captures the magic of the 'switch', how it created a new relationship between light and time: 'Look at the lights in the houses! At a touch, the whole room was lit; hundreds of rooms were lit [...] At a touch, the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright all night long; and the pavements were bright; everything was bright'.¹²

A look into the aesthetics of lighting in the period May is referencing reveals characteristics that correlate with this idea of a greater ideal of privileging the 'becoming' over the 'being'. While the Modernists have given us an image of electricity as the static, glaring electric lamp post, or the cold and still bar lighting of a Hopper painting, electric light in its earliest uses (ca. 1878–90) was on the contrary associated with movement, vitality and play. This fairy of the 1880s was

¹⁰ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 217.

¹¹ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 230.

¹² Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

a different fairy to the one who would go on to be captured by the electricity industry in the form of the *fée électricité*. One of the key reasons Edison became the most successful manufacturer of electric bulbs was that his competitors did not foresee their mass use outside of popular spectacle.¹³ The fact that electric Christmas tree lights were tested for the first time in a New York apartment less than two years after Edison and Swan first exhibited their light bulbs demonstrates how electric light was seen foremost as a spectacular technology in the early 1880s. Movement, vitality and play explain electric light's embodiment as a fairy, an ontological representation of 'becoming'.

The ability to create electric fairy lights was a technological development that made it possible to create lighting effects that were not previously technically or safely feasible on stage. In advance of electric bulbs being used on stage for the first time in theatre history for *Patience* at the Savoy theatre on 28 December 1881, *The Daily News* reported that 'the little rows of lamps [were] in close a line as the hammers of a pianoforte'.¹⁴ A production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* had been running since the 1882 season opening, but on 15 February 1883 there was a novelty: the fairies filling the stage were now wearing lightbulb costumes with tiny bulbs mounted on their headdresses.¹⁵ To sense the aesthetics of 'becoming' in relation to electric light and love, it is important to consider the technical history of these lights, known in British English as 'fairy lights', alongside the metaphor of the fairy.

'Fairy lights' are multiple, small lights in a row, twinkling lights which appear magical, but the uncanny sense of movement is due to an optical illusion: each individual light is too small for the eye to process; seen together, the miniature lights are interpreted by the eye as twinkling. The term 'fairy lights' was not coined by their use with electricity, as many online sources claim; the term appears in the British Newspaper Archive as early as 1820 referring to candles placed close together. The idea of moving, minuscule lights can be traced to *feux follets* (from *fou*, *folle* meaning mad): misleading lights in bogs that led travellers to their deaths, confounding a traveller in darkness (scientifically speaking, a form of bioluminescence). There is therefore a seductive and elusive semantics of fairy lights, beyond the 'magical' or 'pretty' atmosphere rendered, where their movement provides a sense of an unknown ending. Furthermore, folklore

¹³ Bähr, Johannes, and Patricia C. Sutcliffe. 'To Sustain the Position Achieved', *Werner von Siemens: 1816–1892*, 1st ed. (Verlag C.H.Beck, 2017), 355–56.

¹⁴ *The Daily News*, 28 December 1881, 2.

¹⁵ Seeley, Paul, *The first Savoy operas* (Routledge, 2018), 84. Many sources date the lightbulb costumes to 1882, mistakenly taking the date when the production opened. Seeley's book informs us that the lightbulb costumes were a later addition.

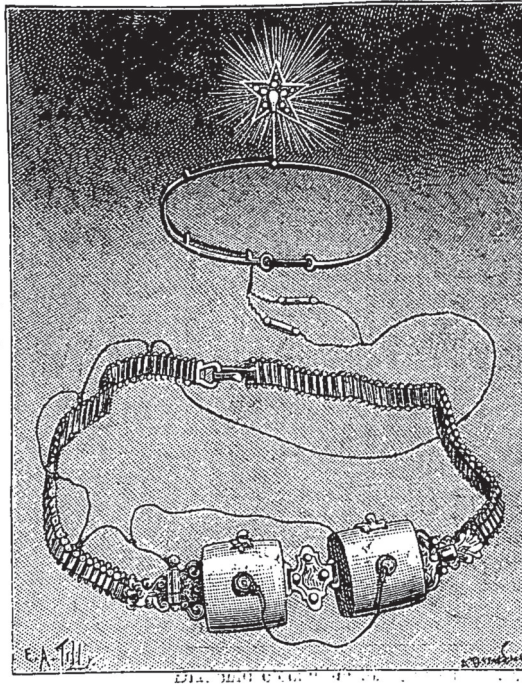


Figure 9.3. Electric diadem and belt, with two battery elements, used in the Paris Opera's ballet *La Farandole* (Edouard Hospitalier: *L'Électricité dans la Maison* (Gallica, 1885), 261). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

explanations of *feux follets* (*will-o'-the-wisp*, in English) tell that these lights are the souls of children who died before they could be baptised, carrying a sense of entrapment in perpetual 'becoming'.

Developments in battery technology were also crucial to achieving an aesthetic of becoming. The fairy dancers in *Iolanthe* wore miniature battery packs hidden in their costumes, resembling those patented by the French inventor of 'electric jewellery', Gustave Trouvé during the 1870s.¹⁶ Gustave Trouvé's descriptions in his various patent applications during the 1870s and 1880s tell part of the story of how it became possible to articulate new moods like surges

¹⁶ Indeed, Arthur Sullivan travelled to Paris one month before these electric costumes were added to the theatre's production of the fairy opera, suggesting the idea may have come from the electric jewellery on display in the windows of Trouvé's shop on 14, rue Vivienne. Electric jewellery by Scrivanow, a rival of Trouvé, was used at the Paris ballet's production of *La Farandole*, later in 1883 (Otto, Ulf. 'Industrial Ballets'. In: *The Theater of Electricity* (Stuttgart: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 193–221.

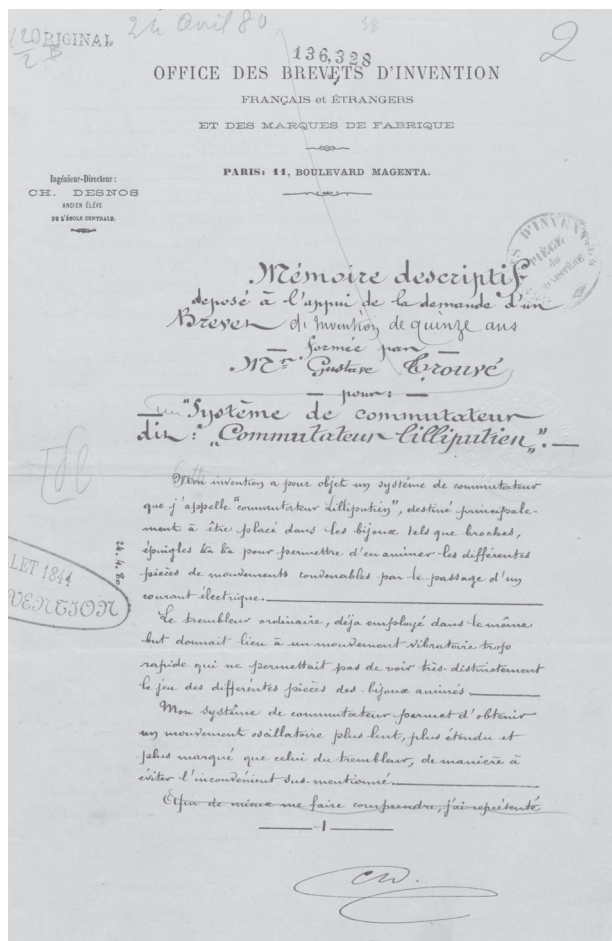


Figure 9.4. Gustave Trouvé, Patent number 136328: ‘lilliputian switch’, a technology identical or similar to that used in the 15 February 1883 performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Iolanthe* at the Savoy Theatre in London. Reproduced with permission from L’Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle, France.

of light, flashes and sudden illumination thanks to the new technologies of fairy lights. His ‘lilliputian switch’, patented in 1880, is designed to ‘make it possible to obtain an oscillatory movement that is slower, more spread out, and more pronounced’.¹⁷

¹⁷ Gustave Trouvé, ‘Système de commutateur dit commutateur lilliputien’, Patent number 136328, 24 April 1880, French National Archives.

A later version of the concept that combined the inventions of Swan, Edison and Trouvé is shown on the poster for *Electric dancers* (ca 1900). The poster reads: ‘Alone and Unique / Waltzing and Cascading / with / 1200 Electric Lamps’ (my translation). In these costumes, tiny light bulbs fan out from the heart of the male dancer, whose costume bears the shapes of a Renaissance courtier but where the motifs are replaced by lightbulbs. Like the electricity fairies in the other images before, the female dancer is in flight, her foot lightly resting on the thigh of her partner, her gaze far away, looking perhaps to a future time rather than to the now: a narrative of ‘becoming’ over ‘being’.

Before the 1880s, mentions of *électricité* or *électrique* relating to fairies in French texts place her in various contexts, especially medicine and industry, but not

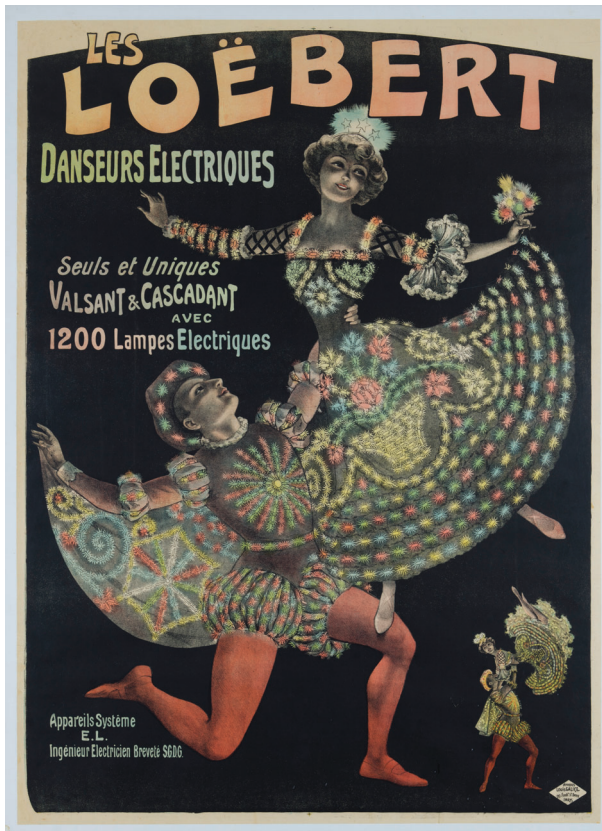


Figure 9.5. Anon., c/o Affiches Louis Galice, 99 rue du Faubourg St Denis, Les Loëbert, *Danseurs Electriques* (ca 1900), Reproduced with permission from Philippe Lortscher / Musée Electropolis, France.

necessarily in the context of lighting. From the 1880s onwards, however, analysis of linguistic trends shows that she is associated increasingly and quickly with electric lighting primarily. It was therefore because of this theatrical production in London, I argue, that the figure of the fairy began to be associated indissociably with electricity and spread internationally, leading to the *féé électricité* in France that would eventually inspire the Dufy mural shown in Figure 9.2. The technical innovations of bulbs and lilliputian batteries enabled the theatrical fairy worlds that were popular among all ages, a vogue for magic and illusion that reflects society's renewed love and interest in childhood.

The history of the emotions and the history of lighting technologies seem, at first glance, to be strange bedfellows. When we notice, however, how developing lighting technologies made it possible to use light to describe and provoke emotions in terms of dancing movement, surges and sudden flashes, it emerges that these technologies are not only representational tools but also in themselves emotional experiences: falling in love, for example, is often described in terms of light. With respect to parental love, May is perceptive that 'becoming' trumps 'being': the knowledge of the future self which the parent helps to create makes it possible to survive or thrive beyond the often arduous 'being'. The child represents the future, and it seems to fit that a greater focus on the love of children would correlate with this period of the industrial revolution.

However, May appears to argue that a greater interest in 'everyday' loving participated in the shift to the child over the romantic lover as being the dominant paradigm of love: 'As every exhausted parent knows, love for your child, unlike romantic love, is not manifested or proved by exciting daily life – let alone by yearning to transcend the limits of space, time, and individuality'.¹⁸ On the contrary, I would argue that the popularity of fairy plays and childlike forms of entertainment in this period suggest an ever greater appetite to transcend these limits, precisely because of the ambivalent nature of parental love. The theatre with its hidden functionalities and its darkened wings, lit by electric light, provides an aesthetic parallel with experiences of parental love: the everyday experience of caring for children is largely drudgery, a laborious backdrop illuminated with loving moments and surges of charm. One could argue that it is only by transcending the limits of time: by collecting love into moments of passion, rather than considering the long hours of labour, that the love of the child becomes possible. Taking a child to a fairy play, engaging in their ephemeral imaginative play that is mostly lost in adulthood, are moments of earthbound twinkling that make it easier to pick out bits of soggy bread from a woollen jumper. Love

¹⁸ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 218.

of the child is a kind of magical servitude, reflected by the domestication of *la fée électricité* towards 1900.

The electricity fairy's protective magic in a 'war on risk'

At a performance of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* on 8 December 1881 at the Ringtheater in Vienna, between 384 and 620 theatregoers – the exact number is unknown, and accounts vary – were killed: burnt alive or crushed in panicked crowds as they tried to flee a fire that engulfed the auditorium in minutes, sparked by the stage gas lighting. These gas disasters were frequent tragedies in theatres all over Europe. In *Les Nouvelles conquêtes de la science: l'électricité* [New conquests of science: electricity] (1884), Louis Figuier conveys the horror:

dans cinq minutes, la fumée remplit tout, et commence à asphyxier les spectateurs. Alors, une personne malavisée a l'idée de fermer le compteur à gaz; et voilà, comme à Nice, la salle subitement plongée dans une obscurité totale. [...] Au milieu de l'obscurité, les spectateurs cherchent à gagner les issues; mais ils ne les trouvent pas, et s'écrasent, s'étouffent, aux portes des couloirs.¹⁹

[within five minutes, smoke is everywhere, and begins to suffocate the theatre-goers; next, an ill-advised person has the idea of shutting off the gas; and then, just like in Nice, the auditorium is suddenly plunged into total darkness [...] In the darkness, the theatre-goers try to find the exits; but in vain, and they get crushed, suffocated, at the doors to the corridors] (my translation).

Gas lighting was deadly, killing theatregoers at the Théâtre des Célestins in Lyon in 1873, the Opéra de Paris in 1874, the Brooklyn theatre in New York City and the Théâtre des arts in Rouen in 1876, the Théâtre de Montpellier in 1879, and at the Théâtre italien in Nice in 1880, killing seventy people just six months before the Ringtheater disaster. A fire caused by gas lighting would kill 186 people in the Exeter Theatre Royal in 1886.

In light of the gas fires described earlier, the development of electric lighting is emblematic of how, as May writes: 'Comfort and safety [...] are no longer merely practical goals driven by the human instinct to maximize pleasure and minimize pain: they have become moral imperatives of the first order [which are] a central theme of the Western mind in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.²⁰ For

¹⁹ Louis Figuier, *Les nouvelles conquêtes de la science. L'électricité* [New conquests of science. Electricity], Gallica (1884). <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k105447t.>>, accessed 14 February 2023, 286.

²⁰ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 205–6.

May, developments that help to reduce risk and increase comfort and safety in this period participate in a paradigm shift towards love of children becoming more dominant than erotic love, and it is in this light that I consider the electricity fairy. The promise of electricity, as suggested in Figuiet's decrying of the dangers of gas, is to reduce risk; in this context she would be part of a new paradigm of love that placed the child in the centre.

Although the reduction of risk may be a determinant motivation for technological progress, a closer look at what was happening in popular entertainment in this period complicates May's thesis. Figuiet at first blames 'gas' as such for the disasters, fittingly in a book which seeks to praise electricity. He ends his description of the Ringtheater fire with: 'Quelle est la cause de toutes ces catastrophes ? La même : le gaz' [What is the cause of all these catastrophes? The same: gas] (my translation).²¹ A few pages later, however, another culprit emerges, one belonging to the aesthetic and emotional worlds rather than the technological: audiences were demanding ever greater intensity in the theatrical spectacle.

Aujourd'hui que le nombre des pièces a féerie s'accroît tous les jours, par suite de l'abaissement du goût du public, par l'effet de la décadence et la gènérescence des théâtres, les représentations deviennent un danger permanent. A certains tableaux de féerie, la scène ne peut être regardée sans frémir [...] Des tuyaux flexibles sillonnent le plancher de traînées laissant jaillir des languettes de feu sous les pas des acteurs et actrices, qui, au milieu de ces flammes sans protection, vont et viennent avec leurs manteaux, leurs robes traînantes, leurs jupons de gaze et de mousseline. Une étincelle, un tuyau crevé, et tout cela s'embrase.²²

[With the number of fairy plays growing daily, corresponding to the lowering standards of taste among audiences, and the effects of the decadence and degeneracy of theatres, performances have become a permanent danger. Certain fairy tableaux can no longer be watched without some frisson of terror [...] Flexible pipes snake along the boards in tendrils allowing flickers of fire to burst from beneath the footsteps of the actors and actresses who, amongst these unprotected flames, come and go trailing their cloaks, their long dresses with trains, their gauze and muslin petticoats. One spark, one faulty pipe, and it all goes up in flames] (my translation).

The fact that the new electric stage lights at the Savoy theatre were first used in the same month as the Ringtheater fire illustrates the extent to which light-bulb technology was developed in direct response to gas light theatre disasters. During the interval before the second act of *Patience* on 28 December 1881,

²¹ Figuiet, *Les nouvelles conquêtes de la science*, 286.

²² Figuiet, *Les nouvelles conquêtes de la science*, 289.

D'Oyly Carte, the owner of the theatre, demonstrated how gauze cloth would not ignite when wrapped around a lightbulb: 'Mr Carte made a speech, in which he apparently stressed more than anything else the safety of electricity'.²³ This supports the idea of electricity being a part of a 'war on risk' on an infrastructural level at least, even if the 'war on risk' on a cultural level appears more dubious.

Figuier here correlates the demand for *féerie* or fairy plays with the number of disasters: *féerie* was causing gas lighting to be used in more risky ways. The vogue for lavishly dangerous theatre lighting suggests that it was powered by a demand 'to feel'; to experience the theatrical spectacle in ever more sensational ways. In this sense, it was not simply that gas lighting was dangerous and that it was replaced by the safer electric lighting; but that a desire to produce heightened emotions, sensory and magical experiences on stage surpassed the technical possibility to create these with gas light without the risk of entailing loss of life. *Féerie* literally brought the house down. Seen in this way, electricity can be understood as an achievement to stage ever greater risk, in a spectacular setting, while avoiding actual loss of life (and livelihoods).

The staging of emotions through *féerie* was produced by the Victorians' desire to be more confounded and amazed. While electricity would eventually mean that magic became more domesticated and quotidian, this was not yet the case in the 1880s, when it was part of magical entertainment. In their mid-late nineteenth-century guise, fairies of light were therefore treading a line between being technically safer, thanks to electricity, while trying to hold onto their bewitching and suspect lineage through *feux follets*, candlelight and gas light. There is a contradiction in terms in the name *fee électricité*, where the semantics of fairy light were encoded by less predictable, more risky forms of light. One wonders whether electricity companies' use of fairy imagery was an attempt to disguise the industrial, 'cold', characteristics of electricity, and connect it older forms of lighting that consumers were more comfortable with.²⁴

In fiction, too, a 'war on risk' is not immediately identifiable. It is true that lighting entered the sphere of literary childhood at the turn of the twentieth century, in, for example, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1900) and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904 for the play, 1911 for the novel).²⁵ In Marcel Proust's

²³ Fletcher, 'Electricity at the Savoy', *Studies in English*, 158.

²⁴ The German electricity company AEG was the first to launch a logo showing a winged, naked goddess holding aloft a lightbulb, in 1888.

²⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* (London: Penguin, 2002); J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* [play], Project Gutenberg (2003), <<https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300081h.html>>, accessed 7 November 2023; J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [*Peter and*

Swann's Way (1913) artificial light was the primary motif of childhood memory as the magic lantern. Possibly, lighting was a greater and more playful part of children's fiction now that – in the theatre – light (=electricity) signified safety, whereas before light (= gas) signified danger. Following May's argument, one reason why electricity seemed to be the pinnacle of modernity – exemplified by the fairy figure atop the palace at the 1900 World Fair – could be that it reflected and participated in wider social practices of love, in the domestic sphere such as the role of light in providing a home, to the artistic when conjuring representations of emotions on the stage. In this reading, electricity would be part of a broader emotional zeitgeist, with the concern for safety growing as love of children became the dominant paradigm of love. The stories themselves, however, have other ideas. The fictionalisation of the electricity fairy as Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan* complicates the idea of her electric status being part of a 'war on risk', as she is a fraught figure, threatening the core of parental love in the form of fear and risk of death. Rather than the domesticated, 'pretty' lighting that the term 'fairy lights' evokes today, in this era these lights belonged to the theatre, not yet to the nursery. Deceitful and manipulative, she embodies parents' anxieties about children being lured away 'to Neverland' or growing up away from parental influence to end up like Peter Pan and the 'lost boys'. She can be read as representing anxieties around changing technologies, a version of the electricity fairy who it might be wise not to trust. Tinker Bell is therefore an example of the ability of fiction to critique technological change, as opposed to the institutional representations of the electricity fairy introduced previously, in the public monument and the company-commissioned fresco.

Night lights

'Can anything harm us, mother, after the night-lights are lit?' asks Michael Darling in the first scene of *Peter Pan*. 'Nothing, precious', replies Mrs Darling, 'they are the eyes a mother leaves behind to guard her children'.²⁶ The foundational position that night lights occupy in *Peter Pan* as guardians of safety representing parental love ('Parental love is talismanic of the war on risk'²⁷) could therefore support May's argument about a heightened awareness of risk concerning children at the time. The following illustration dramatically depicts the new light source

Wendy], Project Gutenberg (2008), <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/16/pg16-images.html>>, accessed 7 November 2023.

²⁶ Barrie 2003 [1904].

²⁷ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 208.



Figure 9.6. F. D. Bedford, *Peter Flew In*, illustration from J. M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), based on his play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Never Grew Up* (1904), F. D. Bedford, public domain.

that enters the children's bedroom through the window. Tinkerbell is shown in this image as a ball of light, emanating sharp rays like a flash, the light casting dark shadows on the nursery wall. This image illustrates the striking influence of the electric light bulb on the figure of Tinkerbell. The ultimate 'fairy light', she outshines the light of the night lights apparently to such an extent that the illustrator has chosen not to depict them.

Giving a light to a child is certainly an ancient tool used by parents in a belief that it will calm children's imaginations at night. In his essay 'Tinker Bell, the Fairy of Electricity', Pomerance describes the Darlings' night lights

as ‘vigilant’.²⁸ In French, a night light is *une veilleuse*, from the verb *veiller*, to watch over. The *veilleuse* therefore contains in French the idea of surveillance and supervision, of course linked etymologically to ‘vigil’. *Une veillée* means an evening of collectively watching over or waiting for something, whether it is Christmas Eve, *la veillée de Noël*, or *la veillée mortuaire*, watching over a corpse on the night of a death. The idea of light-as-safety provided by a figure of authority, represented in *Peter Pan* by the children’s night light (or so we are at first led to believe), recalls the nativity star sent by God to guide the three magi to the birth of Christ, recalling the confluence of light and power in Genesis: *fiat lux et facta est lux*. Barrie employs a well-used fairy tale technique by opening with a false sense of security.

Peter Pan’s play on security/insecurity is structured using literary lighting, and at first glance it seems there is a simple dichotomy: the fantasy and danger animated by the light of the fairy, Tinkerbell, acts as a foil to the safety of home, represented by the nursery night lights. The literary lighting describes emotional landscapes: emotions associated with the safety of home, and their negative: risk. In the story, night lights are clearly placed to stand in the place of the absent Mr and Mrs Darling, with the stage direction in the play version: ‘MRS DARLING lights the night-lights over the beds’.²⁹ As we read in the novel version, ‘For a moment after Mr and Mrs Darling left the house the night-lights by the beds of the three children continued to burn clearly’.³⁰ As Elisabeth Bronfen writes in *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film*, parents are ‘placeholders of the nocturnal’: it is the parents who decide whether there is light after the sun has set.³¹ For a child, it is the adult caregiver, rather than their own bodies’ circadian response to light and dark, that decide when night has begun, such as in the light evenings of summer. In fairy tales, this notion of power is taken up by the image of the fairy, whose powers of flight and casting spells undermine those of the mortal parent or nursery maid. The fairy-as-light is light that takes matters into their own hands, a perversion of the steady night light.

In *Peter Pan*, the night lights’ correct functioning, however, depends on the parents’ presence: they still burn clearly ‘for a moment after’ they leave the house.³² Once gone, they lose control, and Barrie shows that there is something more sinister about these night lights, portrayed as being alive – but rather complacent

²⁸ Pomerance, ‘Tinker Bell, the Fairy of Electricity’, 19.

²⁹ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*.

³⁰ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan [Peter and Wendy]*.

³¹ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 408.

³² J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan [Peter and Wendy]*.

– guardians: ‘They were awfully nice little night-lights, and one cannot help wishing that they could have kept awake to see Peter; but Wendy’s light blinked and gave such a yawn that the other two yawned also, and before they could close their mouths all the three went out’.³³ The fact of going out is suggested to be involuntary (‘before they could close their mouths’), suggesting that another force has extinguished them. Mr and Mrs Darling have left the night lights in charge of the children, who are then extinguished. The children are vulnerable to what comes in the next sentence: ‘There was another light in the room now, a thousand times brighter than the night-lights’.³⁴

Fairy light is a direct challenge to parental control of lighting. Mrs Darling was initially in control of the night lights that were probably gas, oil or candles, but not this electric light, burning so much brighter, the ‘thousand times’ suggesting a scale out of a mortal parent’s reach. Tinker Bell will lure Michael and his siblings to Neverland, making true the narrator’s ominous statement about Michael’s goodnight dialogue with his mother: ‘They were the last words she was to hear from him for a long time’.³⁵ The night lights are therefore portrayed both as being innocent, ‘awfully nice’, but it is their complacency that allows the plot to unfold in risky ways. At the end of *Peter Pan*, the night lights are innocent again, placed in the same safety sphere as the family dog, Nana: ‘Of course the Neverland had been make-believe in those days, but it was real now, and there were no night-lights, and it was getting darker every moment, and where was Nana?’ The sense of rising panic of the children conveyed by the repeating ‘and’ which removes the syntactic security of the sense that the sentence will come to a close.³⁶ The way that Barrie plays with ambivalence in relation to night lights successfully undermines an artificial, fantasy vision of the nocturnal world that parents believe in, in which it could really be possible to shut out the darkness. As Jacqueline Rose points out in *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, children’s literature is an adult’s fantasy of the child.³⁷ With its simplified linguistic forms, it presents an infantile view of innocence, imagined by the adult. In this way, the novel is speaking to an adult readership more than to that of a child: ‘children’s literature cannot be understood as the passive reflection of changing values and conceptions of the child (images of childhood); instead I see it as one of the central means through which we regulate our relationship to language

³³ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [*Peter and Wendy*].

³⁴ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [*Peter and Wendy*].

³⁵ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [*Peter and Wendy*].

³⁶ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* [*Peter and Wendy*].

³⁷ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*. (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 5.

and images as such'.³⁸ *Peter Pan* pokes fun at the fantasy of control and influence by way of light over a night-time world of genuine and unknowable danger, that will enter the minds of sleeping children whatever they try to do to prevent it.

Domesticating the electric fairy

May writes about how the shift towards the love of the child as the archetypal model of love coincides with a greater interest in everyday existence; of the 'the child's role in relocating the sacred to this finite, everyday life'.³⁹ Charting archetypes of love from the divine to the domestic, this is also (perhaps coincidentally) the trajectory of the relationship between fairies and lights, as light is domesticated, enclosed in bulbs, and turned into a servant.

The iconographic history of *la fée électricité* is not linear, as she moves between representations as a goddess to those of a slave between the 1880s and 1930s. In Tinker Bell, electricity has become the 'diligent worker'. Quoting Alexandre Fernandez' 1998 book *Économie et Politique de l'Électricité de Bordeaux, 1887–1956*, Pomerance observes that 'electricity had been seen as a "fairy" form because of its association with luxury, play, and fun; and that it became, after its use as a utility, a servant'. Yet he wonders about how useful this simplistic chronology can be, because electricity was applied in so many different areas of life that it has multiple significations.⁴⁰ Albert Robida's 1890 book of satirical drawings: *Le Vingtième siècle: La Vie Electrique*, places *la fée électricité* in the science fiction genre as a slave-like Andromeda charged with engines.⁴¹ Satire is useful, here, to understand the place of *la fée électricité* as it appeals to a popular version of her, reassessing her as a cultural figure as she is being established. The sense of insecurity brought by the electric presence in the night nursery of Tinker Bell can be understood in the context of Robida's representation of electricity, in which she is a dead-eyed but highly eroticised presence, generating power in the company of hordes of demonic nymphs.

On this cover of a 1923 book about the benefits of electricity, written by an electrical engineer, the *fée électricité* is depicted as a winged goddess with neoclassical coiled hair and tiered dress.⁴² In her left hand she holds aloft a lightbulb of

³⁸ Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 138–9.

³⁹ May, *Love: A New Understanding*, 232.

⁴⁰ Pomerance, 'Tinker Bell, the Fairy of Electricity', 17.

⁴¹ Albert Robida, *La vie électrique: le vingtième siècle* (1892), <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k101948n>>, accessed 16 February 2023.

⁴² Henri Letorey, *Je vous offre la santé, la gaieté, l'économie, le bien être. Je suis la fée électricité*, Gallica (1923). <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5496070z>>, accessed 14 February 2023.



Figure 9.7 Albert Robida, Frontispiece of *La Vie Électrique* by Albert Robida (1890), public domain. Version produced by Bruce Albrecht, Claudine Corbasson, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <<http://www.pgdp.net>>.

the Edison design. In her right hand an object, either a mirror or a magnifying glass, sends out jagged rays like lightning. In the lightning's path, antiquated technologies are tumbling into an abyss: a lump of coal is helpfully labelled as such – 'CHARBON' – and is caught in an ungainly fall; a canister of oil wearing heeled ankle boots sprints to the exit in a wide stride, as does a traditional-looking bell in trousers and shoes, its pull-cord swirling behind it as it runs. At the top of the falling rubbish, a horse is bolting from its stable, and what looks like a gasworks is in mid-explosion.

On the other side of the image, a romantic landscape with tall pine trees, a majestic waterfall and towering peaks is crisscrossed by a nifty little tram, its electric wires neatly threading through the tree line and taking over the geometric trajectory of the waterfall as if they were a part of the natural landscape. While the



Figure 9.8. Anon., Front cover of Henri Letorey, *Je vous offre la santé, la gaieté, l'économie, le bien être. Je suis la fée électricité* (1923). Reproduced with permission from Philippe Lortscher / Musée Electropolis, Mulhouse, France.

left side of the image is a tumble of broken bric-à-brac, the right side is an ideal of nature in harmony with human invention. The middle prominently features an electricity generator, between the contrasting sides. The fairy's dainty toe touches it, as if it were her plinth. Through ringlet wires, the fairy's divine power is carried to the electric tram. Harmony is thus made possible by the electricity fairy as though, having experimented during the previous century with all the junk on the left side of the image, humankind has at last invented a harmonious coexistence between nature and artifice.

The text, translated as, 'I give you health, joy, economy, well-being. I am the electricity fairy', uses typesetting to place electricity on the same plane as four other fundamentals of human flourishing. The Dufy fresco pictured at the start of this essay and the book cover show how the electricity fairy was portrayed as

a divine power that touched everyday objects and social practices, where ‘joy’ appears next to ‘economy’ in a list as if they were part of the same sphere of meaning. The electricity fairy operates a collapse between the everyday act of turning on a lamp and conjuring beauty or restoring harmony to nature. Everyday domestic acts are therefore imbued with the magical or the sacred. Rather than having been sacred to then become banal, she exists somewhere between the divine and the housewife’s companion. The fairy seems to have assumed her most stable cultural form as Disney’s Tinker Bell,⁴³ whose use by the US Department for Energy has a ‘revamped’ energy-saving fairy. Lisa Rowe Fraustino amusingly critiques in a 2013 essay, quoting a 2009 public service advertisement: ‘The magical thing about using energy wisely [...] is that anyone can do it. Use energy saving light bulbs [...] energy smart power strips [...] Learn what you can do today at energy.gov/tink’.⁴⁴ Following the arc of domestication to this public service advertisement, it is certain that the electricity fairy participated in an emotional paradigm shift from extraordinary spectacle to dull infomercial. It seems that the imaginary figure of the fairy has been instrumentalised to associate electricity with the childhood magic of *féerie* and fairy plays, displacing awe and wonder from the domains of science and industry to those of fiction and entertainment. While this domestication signalling a turn towards the love of the child replacing erotic love as a dominant form of love is a bold claim, May’s conclusions are appealing. The new focus on everyday existence perhaps needs to be examined alongside the philosophical move discussed in the first section to merit being called a paradigm shift.

Conclusion

Writing the story of the electricity fairy into the story of the development of love has shown the extent to which technological innovations are bound up in social and cultural change, and vice versa. The association of the fairy with electric light from the 1800s onwards coincided with phenomena identified by May that signal a paradigm shift towards the love of children replacing erotic love as the dominant form. Fairy light was part of this paradigm shift, where ‘becoming’ was privileged over ‘being’, where notions of risk entered a new age of ambivalence related to fiction and illusions, and growing domestication dampened the age of *féerie*, before the First World War would put an end to the Belle époque.

⁴³ Geronimi, Clyde, et al., *Peter Pan* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1953).

⁴⁴ Lisa Rowe Fraustino, ‘Disney Neverland’s Tinker Bell’, in Anja Müller ed., *Adapting Canonical Texts in Children’s Literature* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 215.

As well as new lighting technologies articulating a changing emotional landscape, the ability to create new lighting effects of sudden light and darkness, twinkling and light in motion may, of course, have influenced these emotions themselves. As we know from twenty-first century living, technological devices have affordances that can give way to new emotions and guide the arcs of emotional lives. Studying this historically presents particular challenges, but exploring the role of technological devices in the arts has provided insight in the case of *Peter Pan*.

Further investigation could take the idea of childhood and magic and extend it to the notion of ‘beginnings’: like the beginning of any story, the love of children may be bound up in the potential of transformation that the child represents. In the same way, the beginning of a romantic or erotic love story is given privilege in fiction over the later everyday developments of the relationship. The popularity of lighting devices in fiction, theatre, advertising and statecraft we have explored in this piece emphasises the desire to believe in things that carry a potential for transformation, and this magic may be what we mean by love.

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‘Wherefore Flout / the Silent Blessing Fate’: Love, Fate and Metaphysics in John Keats and His Legacy

James Dowthwaite

In a famous letter of 3 July 1819, John Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne, asking her if she was aware of the power that she held over him: ‘Ask yourself my love’, he implores her, ‘whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom’.¹ This sense that love has contravened his liberty is even stronger in a later letter dated 13 October of the same year:

I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion – I have shudder’d at it. I shudder no more – I could be martyr’d for my Religion – Love is my religion – I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. You have ravish’d me away by a Power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often ‘to reason against the reasons of my Love’. I can do that no more – the pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.²

Keats’ letter performs love as a domineering force, one which dissolves the individual from without, and his melancholy tone suggests that love was for him a kind of doom, something not only beyond his control but which dissipated all his faculties, consuming him. It is a ‘Power’ he cannot resist, though this power is concretely bound up with the person to whom he writes, not an abstract force but an intimate relation between two people. In the earlier letter, Keats expresses surprise that love should come to him in this manner. This is corroborated by sentiments expressed in an earlier letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey, in which he lists love amongst the ‘things semireal’: ‘such as love, the Clouds etc., which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist’.³ This statement has long caused confusion amongst readers. The poet Anthony Hecht, otherwise sympathetic to Keats’ thought, finds the passage leaves much to be desired, philosophically. He argues Keats’ use of ‘semireal’ implies that he ‘does not altogether believe what he is saying. His tone *is* sceptical and worldly, though perhaps not sceptical enough to please us’.⁴ Hecht’s intuition that this is sceptical

¹ John Keats, *Letters to Fanny Brawne*, ed. Harry Buxton Forman (London: Reeves & Turner, 1878), 5.

² Keats, *Letters to Fanny Brawne*, 36–37.

³ John Keats, *Letters to Family and Friends*, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Macmillan, 1925), 81.

⁴ Anthony Hecht, ‘Shades of Keats and Marvell’, *The Hudson Review*, 15:1 (1962), 50–71, 69.

comes from the fact that love and clouds should require different epistemological modes of thought to validate them, the one apprehended by the senses, the other extrapolated from the physical to the metaphysical. The only way to bring them together is if one is sceptical about actuality in general.⁵ What is important, however, is less what Keats thought than how he framed the concept. In 1818, love was to Keats theoretical, and metaphysical, one of those things that the poet of negative capability should be able to suspend in their poetic apprehension of the life of sensations. Eighteen months later, after his encounter with Fanny Brawne, love is a totalising, semi-religious force, but one embodied wholly in his feelings for an individual: it is a real, perhaps even the most real, force in his life. It is easy to characterise Keats' and Fanny Brawne's relationship as 'tragic', and as with the tragic, to associate it with a sense of fateful destruction. Keats frames his love as a contravention of freedom, a power which works without him and destroys his will. We might easily put the two with other tragic lovers: Tristram and Isolde, Heloise and Abelard, Romeo and Juliet, lovers for whom fate provided an ill star. The relationship between love and fate being, in this case, the tragic sense of doom. Yet such a clear association ignores the most fascinating aspect of love and fate, one which is the source of the sense of the tragic: disjunction. Fate wills the lovers apart and yet love binds them; Keats' love for Fanny Brawne is the one aspect in which he wishes to defy the death to which his tuberculosis will soon consign him. The idea that love and fate are at cross-purposes is there too in Tristram and Isolde, in Romeo and Juliet: fate goes one way, and love is defeated, but love has defied the march of events.

The sense of incongruity between love and fate sets the two up in a dichotomy, and this dichotomy is the subject of this chapter. I will first address the way that Keats sets them up as rival forces in his work, particularly in *Endymion* (1818) and *Lamia* (1820). It is worth remembering in the context of grand metaphysical speculations which always accompany notions of fate that romantic love is intimate. Though it may be public, shown in letters or in poetry, the fundamental social relation it concerns is between individuals: in Keats' case between him and Fanny Brawne, *Endymion* and Cynthia, *Lamia* and Lycius – and, of course, the other forms of love in kinship and friendship. This intimate, concrete social relation is part of the dichotomy with the vague, circumstantial nature of a surrounding fate. Despite an intense critical focus on

⁵ Bysse Inigo Coffey's recent reassessment of Shelley's thought about actuality, *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermittent Song* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), makes the case that Shelley's work manifests a sense that actuality is itself weak. We might consider Keats in light of his reflections.

negative capability, one can make the case that Keats' personae are both strong individuals and engaging with broader ideas than sensory perception: 'Keats' speakers, characters, and figures', Magdalena Ostas reminds us, 'find that their "selves" are the openings to a precisely social, shared, and common experience'.⁶ This, I argue, is the case with love and the importance of its relation to fate. Keats was writing at an important moment in Romantic thought. In his history of the concept of love, Simon May sees the eighteenth century as the time of what he calls the 'fourth transformation' in the way we conceive love.⁷ This transformation 'which concerns *the lover*, who becomes authentic through love', is still going on today, placing Keats very much at the centre of a romantic (and Romantic) shift. May describes the 'fourth transformation' of the figure of the lover in the following way:

In love he becomes not selfless but a self. He doesn't lose himself but finds himself. Far from striving to transcend nature he seeks to be guided by and in a sense to actualise his own nature. The true and the good lie not beyond the individual subject's experience but in an exploration of it. Indeed, as this transformation develops, the lover becomes the focus of love to such an extent that there are moments when the loved one almost drops out of the picture, reduced to a substitutable stage prop in the drama of the lover's life. Love comes to fall in love with itself.⁸

There is much here that applies to Keats and much that Keats' work complicates – though the complications in their own way confirm May's insights. Some of Keats' lovers, and perhaps even the Keats of the letters, struggle with the emotional turmoil of such a transformation: in 'Bright Star' (1820), for example, the object of the beloved is an occasion for the self-reflection of the lover. In other works, it is less that the lover is wilfully dropped out of the picture than that they drop through circumstances beyond the self's control: having become so attached to, so dependent on, the object of love, one might say, fate then works to remove them. I will return to this quotation at the close of this essay. May's reflections focus primarily on love as an emotion felt by a subject, but I wish to argue that the social dimension of Keats' work lies in the fact that lovers, as a plural entity, constitute an intimate relationship. Love, if unrequited or if non-dialogic (as in 'Bright Star'), is self-reflective, but if love takes the form of

⁶ Magdalena Ostas, 'Keats's Voice', *Studies in Romanticism*, 50:2 (2011), 335–50, 336.

⁷ The preceding transformations occur in the ancient world, in which love is made a value, the second in the early middle ages, when love is conceived as a human power, and the third in the late middle ages, concerns the blurring of divine and secular love.

⁸ Simon May, *Love: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

a romance, in which both characters play their part, then it is reflective of an intimate social relation. And this intimate social relation takes place within the broader context of wider relations: those of society at large. The rituals of love happen in private and in public, and these two strain against one another. As evidence of this we might think of another important shift in the concept of love also occurring at Keats' time: the love marriage. The turn of the nineteenth century saw a shift in the concept of marriage: the love match had been a part of the romance artistic tradition for millennia, but by 1800 – in line with the transformation May describes – it was increasingly seen as socially desirable. Once a confirmation of social and religious responsibility, marriage had now become the symbolic consummation of enduring romantic feeling.⁹ As May writes, this is a phase we are still in. In part, we are still in it because such transformations are never smooth nor complete. As Hilary Schor has demonstrated, love in the nineteenth century underwent transformations of its own: romantic love had to contend with traditional visions, visions which are regulated by social norms.¹⁰

There is a question, of course, in how far Keats' views are reflective of his era. This question is difficult to answer insofar that Keats is, for us, an indelible part of his age, and part of what makes it such a formative part of literary, artistic, and social history. In his literary history of love, Robert M. Polhemus writes of Keats' era as transformative for the quotidian role of love: shifting from being the elevated theme of romance only, 'Erotic love became an important basis of everyday faith in the nineteenth century'.¹¹ Keats was part of a generation which made love part of the domestic and the everyday. If we follow May's and Polhemus' accounts of love, it is clear that Keats was part of a change from inherited ideas. Even if his treatment of love is still represented with figures from mythology and fancy, it is presented as part of a domestic, daily sphere. We see from Keats' letters to Brawne how deeply he struggled with these issues as part of daily existence. It is between social expectation and the expression of intimate desire that Keats' figures, and their author, suffer their tragic fates.

⁹ See Christopher Matthews, 'Love at First Site: The Velocity of Victorian Heterosexuality', *Victorian Studies*, 46:3 (2004), 425–54; Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Maggie Kalenak, "'Consider yourself kissed": Intimacy, Engagement, and Material Culture in Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class English Love Letters', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 28:2 (2023), 243–62.

¹⁰ H. M. Schor, 'Love', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46:3–4 (2018), 752–56.

¹¹ Robert M. Polhemus, *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 2.

Love and fate in Keats' work

There has long been a suspicion that despite Keats' claims for a life of sensations over a life of thoughts, his work is an attempt to philosophise in a radically different form. Paul Bentley understands Keats' poetic strategies as Romantic irony, part of a particular dialogue with his critics: 'the indeterminacies and contradictions of the poems are those into which the critics are led as a result of Keats's Socratic method'.¹² E. Douka Kabitoglou has also demonstrated that Keats clearly engaged with the Platonic tradition.¹³ It is certainly true of Keats' letters that his protests against a 'life of thoughts' are nestled between long philosophical speculations, and his poetry has clearly been fruitful for philosophical discussion, but does this apply to love? Though Keats initially conceived of love as a metaphysical force, something which the speculations of philosophy might approach, he seems later to have considered it amongst sensations. Reflecting on Keats' famous 'last sonnet', 'Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art', Emily Gosholz argues that 'Keats must reject this distanced perspective that denatures as it observes', but he maintains his identification with the pole star. In the end, 'he will lie down besides his life, but – insofar as their closeness fills all his awareness – their place will be nowhere in particular and everywhere'. Ultimately, she concludes, the poet must 'have his last word: perhaps love is stronger than death'.¹⁴ This might be an optimistic reading: one could easily conclude that the tragedy of Keats' final letters is that love does not survive death. Nevertheless, the significance of the argument lies in what is immortalised in poetry, not what survives of the person after death – that doom to which we are all fated. And what did 'fate' mean to Keats? The answer seems to be rather mundane: it meant much the same it means to most people when they use the term. That is to say, 'fate' is a vague – or at the very least vaguely defined – sense of circumstances beyond one's control, and in its most intense form the sequence of events leading to one's death. This may take the form of a named or implied force, or it may remain open and symbolic. The meaning of fate for Keats is less significant, however, than the use to which the term is put in poetry, and the particular relationship that it has to the other of his grand themes: love. Consider the following presentation of the role of the poet in 'I Stood a Tip-Toe Upon a Little Hill' from Keats' first volume of poems:

¹² Paul Bentley, 'Keats's Ode, Socratic Irony, and Regency Reviewers', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 62 (2013), 114–132, 132.

¹³ E. Douka Kabitoglou, 'Adapting Philosophy to Literature: The Case of John Keats', *Studies in Philology*, 89:1 (1992), 115–36, 119.

¹⁴ Emily Grosholz, 'Clouds, Sensation and the Infinite in the Poetry of John Keats', *The Hudson Review*, 53:4 (2001), 599–606, 605–606.

The Poet wept at her so piteous fate,
 Wept that such beauty should be so desolate:
 So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,
 And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion.¹⁵

Here, the poet offers poetry, ‘golden sounds’, as recompense for ‘piteous fate’, while ‘fate’ remains undefined. Against this ‘piteous fate’, he also sets up a rival force, one which should not only redeem the situation, but offer a more fitting conduit for her beauty: love. The relation between love and fate is thus a dichotomy: fate casts down and love lifts up; love is conceived as passionate defiance against the cold capricious affordance of the universe. This is not to imply that love is successful in a conflict with fate: some of the most famous examples, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, demonstrate the opposite. It simply means that the tension between what the lovers desired and what transpired can be conceived in terms of resistance, however failed. Fate may work to keep lovers apart, but there are enough examples of refusal to acquiesce into fate’s demands. Even if that way lies tragedy.

The dichotomy between love and fate cannot be so easily mapped onto the deterministic theories of Keats’ day; it is not the conflict between free will and determinism as Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, or William Godwin may have addressed it, and much less LaPlace – though it does have an interesting bearing on them.¹⁶ Keats’ fate is literary, inspired not by philosophical doctrine, but by inhabiting a symbolic world of Graeco-Roman mythology and poetry: and even here his models of fate are Homer and Virgil, rather than Epictetus or Seneca, though undoubtedly the broad influence of the latter is felt in any consideration of the concept. We should think most readily of the *Moirai* (from *moira*, meaning ‘portion’ or ‘part’ but also ‘destiny’), who apportioned lives to individual human beings in the form of spun pieces of thread.¹⁷ Although the *Moirai* are not themselves featured in Homer’s poem per se, the *Iliad* contains a similar figuration of fate as a metadivine determination. We might think of Zeus’ famous weighing of the scales in Book 8, in which he turns

¹⁵ John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin, 1977), 81

¹⁶ For famous examples of the enlightenment treatment of the longstanding conflict between free will and necessity, see Chapter 21, ‘Of the Liberty of Subjects’ in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), Part III, ‘Of the Will and Direct Passions’ of David Hume’s *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739), and William Godwin’s later discussion of the same subject in the twelfth essay of *Thoughts on Man* (1831). Pierre-Simon LaPlace’s essay *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities* (1814) was a well-known and succinct argument for determinism, though its influence waned as its scientific assumptions were considerably challenged later in the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ See Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. and ed. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 217.

the fortunes of the war in the directions of the Trojans, or, in Book 20, when he balances the lot of Achilles against that of Hector. This act of weighing, known as *Keroustasia*, has been read as Zeus' consultation of fate, the scales showing him whom the power of the universe favours. Zeus apportions death rather than decides for it, and it is the case that he himself anguishes over his role as the arbiter, yet not the decider, of fate. In Book 16, Zeus is pained by his role, watching his son Sarpedon struggling on the battlefield. Zeus knows that he is fated to die at this point, and yet is tempted in his role as head god to save him. The implication is that Zeus is indeed free to work against fate, though he is reminded, sternly, by Hera that acting against fate will have dire consequences. Zeus thus maintains the order of the universe, dictated by fate, but this remains a divine choice. This is a kind of divine compatibilism, where fate is undoubtedly a metadivine force but one which the gods are able to work against. We see fate as situational, but in a much more concrete form: it is the allotted situation, and more importantly the length of situation, of an individual human being. Fate is not just disposition or *habitus* or even external circumstances, but also the manner of one's death. From a human perspective, there is no question of this being altered, unless via the whim of a reckless god. Homer does not give much information about fate as power, but simply demonstrates an attitudinal stance towards it.

Keats' next treatment of the Endymion myth, in *Endymion* (1818), fleshes out the dichotomy. In Book I, Endymion sits with the shepherds, watching the heavens, the clouds 'ministering the potent rule of fate' (I.366).¹⁸ In Book II, searching for his lost love in the underworld, he comes across Arethusa lamenting her own 'persecuting fate' (1006, 160). But the narrator of the poem seems to imply in Book III that even fate itself is subject to other powers: 'bove the withering of old-lipp'd Fate / A thousand powers keep religious state', (29–30, 161). This sets up a dramatic tension between the gods and the metadivine, one which is recognised by Cynthia herself at the end of Book III, telling Endymion, though he does not grasp it, that she has 'dwelt in fear of fate' (1034). Though the narrator never reveals the nature of this 'fate', it is significant that it serves the same role for the gods that divine caprice does for human beings: it is a perceived external pressure that has, at best, a limiting affect, and at worst dooms. That it exists as a metadivine force thus gives the gods their own dramatic situations and tensions, a conception of the external against which their will and desire strains.

The dramatic force of *Endymion* is built entirely on Cynthia's divine wrestling with metadivine fate. In Book III, she expresses her fear of fate, and in Book IV this comes to a dramatic head. As Cynthia reveals that she was the Indian maid

¹⁸ Keats, *Complete Poems*, 116.

with whom Endymion felt he had fallen into a betraying love, she then justifies her delay in coming to him with the following words:

Drear, drear
 Has our delaying been; but foolish fear
 Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
 And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
 Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change
 Be spiritualiz'd.

(997–1002, 216)

Endymion has struggled to reconcile himself with his fate throughout the poem, lamenting his condition and ultimately giving up on love; Cynthia has mirrored this, in that she has acquiesced into the decrees of fate throughout, obeying an undefined metadivine law. At the end, however, she chooses to appear to him and to cross the immortal-mortal gap, taking him with her to the skies. The poem is unclear on whether this is a resolution that necessitated defying the decrees of fate or whether it was licensed by them, but what is clear is that the intimate relation between two individuals is measured against an external force; the dramatic tension of the romance relies on a conflict between love and fate, one which *Endymion* resolves by bringing the two into accord. The question of what fate is, the sort of question that might satisfy the philosopher or the scientist, is poorly answered by the poem: all that the reader knows, and perhaps needs to know, is that it is perceived as a metaphysical force, measured against the sensual and the sensory power of love.

Endymion ends with a resolution between the divine and the earthly, between the metaphysical and the physical, as the mortal subject of the poem is reconciled to his beloved goddess. This kind of material-metaphysical sublimation is not what we often associate with Keats, however, and particularly not in his more mature poetry of 1819 onwards. After this point, love, let alone fate, is conceived in more persecuting terms. Stanley C. Russell claims that we should not be led by the resolution at the end of *Endymion* into thinking that love held a redemption quality for the poet: 'love was a threat to Keats, a threat to his poetic creativity, to his identity as an artist'.¹⁹ In *Endymion*, he claims, rather than offering a redemptive vision, 'love acts as a paralyzing and disintegrating agent on the will; its force is so powerful that it drains men of the desire to do great things'.²⁰ Alternatively, one may suggest that love is clearly idealised in the poem, in part by setting it against adverse powers of fate, 'idealized in *Endymion*; but it is idealized perforce

¹⁹ Stanley C. Russell, "Self-Destroying" Love in Keats, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 16 (1967), 79–91, 84.

²⁰ Russell, 84.

against the realisation of its potential destructiveness'.²¹ Russell's argument is that love brought a destruction of Keats's liberty and artistic integrity and that this is clearly reflected in *Endymion*.

One of the issues with Russell's approach is that he believes that Keats maintained a stable concept of love across his short career. My own view is that there is a radical shift in his treatment of the concept, a difference between love in *Endymion* and love in *Lamia* (1820)– between the two lies his meeting Brawne. Russell applies biographical details from after their meeting to a poem (*Endymion*) written before it. Between the completion of the two poems there were other shifts. Brittany Pladek has argued that 'between 1817 and 1819 Keats reoriented his aesthetic and ethical perspective to accommodate a poetry tasked with transmitting suffering instead of alleviating', something she considers in light of his idea of the world as 'vale of soul-making'.²² J. Robert Barth, drawing partly on Robert M. Ryan's work on Keats' religious sense, argues that the last years of Keats' life must be seen in the context of his attempt to wrestle with the problem of 'evil and suffering ... rejecting as he did the doctrine of the Atonement, Keats was left to grapple in his own terms with this central mystery of human life – a mystery he was to experience so profoundly in his own life'.²³ And all of this was taking place while Keats was dealing with the failure of his first collection, which Duncan Wu claims, 'sucked its author into the oubliette of physical and mental strife within which he always seemed to have struggled'.²⁴

Lamia is a markedly different poem from *Endymion*, in terms of poetic mastery and in terms of plot resolution. What it shares is a sense of earthly love in conflict with divine being, and both being held in dynamic conflict with external force. Fate as concept is present, but more implicitly than in *Endymion*: the poem is characterised by a series of interventions. First Hermes searches for the nymph he desires, and she is revealed by Lamia. When Hermes meets Lamia, she has been trapped in the form of a serpent. As thanks for her assistance in finding the nymph, he transforms her into a beautiful woman, returning her to her original

²¹ Russell, 85.

²² Brittany Pladek, "In Sickness not ignoble": Soul-making and the Pains of Identity in the "Hyperion" Poems", *Studies in Romanticism*, 54:3 (2015), 401–27, 403.

²³ J. Robert Barth, 'Keats's Way of Salvation', *Studies in Romanticism*, 45:2 (2006), 285–97, 288. Barth refers extensively to two works by Robert M. Ryan, first *Keats: The Religious Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); second, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789–1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In both, Ryan explores the various dimensions of Keats' religious thought, in its unorthodox and its Christian aspects. He argues ultimately that Keats' work has a concern with the divine and theodicy at its centre.

²⁴ Duncan Wu, 'Constructing Keats', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 67 (2018), 122–39, 134.

human form; Lamia then positions herself to entice Lycius, and together they go to Corinth where they construct a palace, away from the interventions of the city, and above all from the philosopher Apollonius. At their wedding, Lamia having reluctantly given in to Lycius' desire to celebrate their love in society, the philosopher then intervenes with his hard, rationalising stare, revealing Lamia's 'true' form. The poem is thus about doomed love, but it is not a love which is doomed in and of itself; rather it is the fragile and precarious nature of it that opens it up to the destructive power of external intervention. Love as the passionate, intimate relation between Lamia and Lycius is destroyed by a pressure which relents in *Endymion*. The poem opens with a rudimentary conception of love: Lamia tells Hermes of her love for the 'youth of Corinth' and reveals the nymph for whom he searches. She, on seeing Lycius, initially cowers but then is immediately won over by the warmth of his touch, and then 'Into the green-recessed woods they flew; / Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do' (144–45, 418).²⁵ Lamia's love, established having seen Lycius in a dream-vision while still in serpent form, is also presented in conventional terms:

And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,
She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
Charioting foremost in the envious race,
Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
And fell into a swooning love of him.
(214–19, 420)

Hermes' and Lamia's love is drawn in distinctly aesthetic terms: it is appearance, accompanied by a sense of the mystical, which is the sounding note for love. The same goes for Lycius, though his aesthetic response is first acoustic, and then visual. Still, he swoons, 'murmuring love' (289, 422) immediately on meeting Lamia. She then sings 'A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres' (299, 422) and tells him of her long-held love for him. This, the narrator tells us, is an explicitly human love, for it is in the intimacy and candour of her admission of her love for him that he was truly won over, and not by her invocation of heavenly decree: she 'won his heart / More pleasantly by playing woman's part' (337, 423). This mood is disturbed only when they enter Corinth and they gain sight of Apollonius, the old philosopher (and Lycius' tutor) who seems 'The ghost of folly' (377, 424) haunting Lycius's 'sweet dreams'. We learn in part II, after a brief description of the 'palace' in which they have sequestered, and above which Love itself keeps a jealous watch, that 'For all this came a ruin' (16, 425). The first condition of this 'ruin', which accelerates a sense of doom, is social: Lycius wishes to expand

²⁵ John Keats, *Complete Poems*, 418.

the dimensions of their love beyond the intimate space of the palace and parade their happiness around Corinth. Lycius dismisses Lamia's tearful fears, and she agrees to a public wedding; this contravention of the intimate sphere by the wider social should be understood as setting up the conditions for what dooms them.

Lamia clearly recognises that the conditions of their intimacy depend on her present state, and that exposure to the public realm exposes too the fragility of her ability to maintain appearances. It is at this moment that the narrator introduces the fateful dimension, asking of Lycius: 'Madman, wherefore flout / The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours'; why, he asks, 'show to common eyes these secret bowers?' (147–48, 429). But the use of the term can only be understood ironically: fate has not blessed Lycius; if anything, Hermes has by magic, and Lamia by intimacy. The narrative imperative of the poem is fate of a different kind: namely, Apollonius, who arrives at the wedding uninvited, suspicious of Lamia. This causes the narrator to speculate, famously, on the nature of rationality:

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine –
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.

(229–38, 431)

On this, Richard Benvenuto argues that 'what Keats calls "philosophy" includes all systemic thinking whose procedure is to categorize realities into fixed, exclusive quantities'. The two representatives of this he sees as Apollonius and Lycius (though one might insist on a major degree of difference between the two), as both 'judge [Lamia] according to *a priori* standards of good and evil'.²⁶ This clearly applies to Apollonius, though there may be mitigating circumstances for Lycius, whose subsequent death would seem to testify to the depth of his Romantic proclivities and his symbolic significance as a lover. Lamia is doomed by Apollonius' appearance, which is the negative correlative of the 'silent, blessing fate'; he is a corrosive, public fate. She cannot bear his stare, turns pale, and disappears, causing Lycius to die of a broken heart. This narrative intervention

²⁶ Richard Benvenuto, "The Ballance of Good and Evil" in Keats's Letters and "Lamia", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 71:1 (1972), 1–11, 6.

at the very least predisposes the reader to favour the world of charms, the world of passionate love that Lamia and Lycius briefly inhabited together, against the world of cold philosophy. Why, the narrator seems to imply, does it matter that Lamia was once a serpent? There is nothing in the story to justify Apollonius's suspicions, other than adherence to an abstract essential truth.

A complex story, treated delicately, *Lamia* has defied critical consensus, especially on the questions of love and fate. Donald Reiman concludes that *Lamia* hinges on a difference between the gods and human beings. For Hermes, 'existing in an entirely fictive realm, he is subject to none of the limitations of the real world, so long as the human desires that produced *him* continue to find value in imagining his adventures'; Lycius by contrast: 'the dreams of men are *not* of a piece with *their* existential reality, and men are thus subject to disillusionment'.²⁷ Thus, 'the basic weakness of both love and of the palace into which Lycius and Lamia retreat is that they are of human construction'.²⁸ But is love of human construction in the same way that the Palace is? Both share the possibility of being eroded, of decaying with time, or being destroyed from without, but the one is the product of human imagination and artifice, and the other is a motivating force of life; internal, certainly, but not a construct in the same way. Rather the palace and Lycius share the quality that they are contingent on love. The tragedy of the poem is that love is volatile, dynamic, and weak, rather than permanent. If there is a central theme in Keats' poetry, it is beauty being sought in the impermanent; the great tragedy is that love is amongst the impermanent things. It is a living force, less powerful than what we might call fate.

Reiman's reading is predicated on the idea that love is always destructive in Keats, as Russell argued with *Endymion*. Michael Lagory also claims that in *Lamia* 'a sympathetic but vulnerable pair of lovers is destroyed by their love'.²⁹ But this reading is slightly too abstract: are Lycius and Lamia destroyed by their love? Left alone in the sphere of their love, they survive well enough, and one could even describe them as happy. It is when they enter wider Corinthian society that their love is doomed. It is not that love is destructive in *Lamia*, but rather that it is destructible, considerably more fragile than its idealised presentation in the history of romance would suggest. Love, conceived as a precious intimate relation between two (at least in the cases under discussion) individuals is at

²⁷ Donald H. Reiman, 'Keats and the Humanistic Paradox: Mythological History in *Lamia*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 11:4 (1971), 659–69, 665.

²⁸ Reiman, 'Keats and the Humanistic Paradox', 667.

²⁹ Michael Lagory, 'Wormy Circumstance: Symbolism in Keats's "Isabella"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 34:3 (1995), 321–42, 323.

the mercy of a wider social sphere, a wider social sphere which serves to license doom. This should not be understood as a dichotomy of the personal and the social. Rather, it is a dichotomy of two different social spheres, the intimate and the public. The relationship between Lycius and Lamia is a social relation of one kind, and its intensity is drawn in part from emotional weight, but also from the exclusiveness of the parties. Love as practiced by Lycius and Lamia in the Palace is one of emotional rawness, ritualised in its own way, but responding only to the requirements of each other. Furthermore, Lamia is free to perform the role she chooses, idealising herself in womanly form. It is when Lycius introduces the necessity of appearing before the city that the note of doom is introduced. Here their intimacy is threatened because Lamia might be exposed: before the larger public of the city, where love is ritualised by the regulatory norms of society – the expected behaviour, presentation, and integrity of the bride – she is no longer beholden only to herself. Thus, beknown to Lamia and unbeknown to Lycius, their shift into the public sphere works like an adverse fate; the norms and rituals of society are what dooms their relationship. In other words, it is not love per se, but public love, that is destructive in the poem. Apollonius is the symbol of this force. Lamia does not need to explain herself to Lycius, and she cannot explain herself to the people of Corinth, and so she disappears.

Other critics have noticed the significance of this social sphere and its relation to love, though their response has generally been a demythologising of the poem. In 1971, Warren Stevenson offered a new interpretation of *Lamia*, seeing it as an ironic portrayal of predatory relationships driven by sexual desire (Hermes towards the nymph, Lamia for Lycius). This reading is a justification of Apollonius, dispelling the delusive hold that Lamia has over Lycius.³⁰ Thus, we have demythologising readings for what is seen as a demythologising poem, the agonies of which are to be recast as farce. In another kind of demythologising, Terrence Hoagwood offers a translation of Keats' poem into Marxist orthodoxy: 'the relevant opposition is not between beautiful imagination (Lycius's love) and cold reason (Apollonius); the relevant conflict obtains rather between material conditions and the delusions of idealism which mask them, thereby to entrap the deceived'.³¹ This reading is possible, though Keats' scepticism towards such thoroughgoing systemic explanations as such an interpretation implies should lead to some caution with it. But even then, the allegory does not fit completely.

³⁰ Warren Stevenson, "'Lamia': A Stab at the Gordian Knot', *Studies in Romanticism*, 11:3 (1972), 241–52 (see especially 250–52 for Stevenson's explication).

³¹ Terrence Allan Hoagwood, 'Keats and Social Context: *Lamia*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 29:4 (1989), 675–97, 691.

Hoagwood believes that the poem explicitly places love within a socio-economic context, and while this is true, his interpretation neglects the nature of love itself, leaving it purely idealist. Keats' treatment is more subtle and what love sets up in the poem, as figured by the palace, is a conflict between the intimate world of the two lovers and the broader socio-economic sphere of society. There are thus two competing social realities, the one between two people, governed by love, and an external social reality, governed by 'cold philosophy'. Certainly, these readings offer a rational basis for the poem, but they do so at the expense of the non-rational elements.

George C. Gross offers a useful warning about *Lamia* in comparing the poem to the Cupid and Psyche myth. Gross claims that the poem comprises Keats' recognition that there is a need for separation between dreams and reality, that the love between a mortal and immortal is doomed from the start because of an irreconcilability between the real and the ideal. That, in other words, Apollonius is correct. He concludes his essay, 'his deliberate denial of the possibility of lasting happiness in a mortal's love for an immortal, in contrast to the immortal bliss granted to Cupid and Psyche, reinforced the modern consensus that Keats is being very realistic in his exploration of illusion and reality in *Lamia*'.³² Gross is convincing on the conflict between dreams and reality, but there is a sense in which this argument conflates two separate points: the first is whether love between a mortal and an immortal is possible; the second is whether it survives. Bringing the two together relies on a notion of what constitutes 'success' in love. For the long-term marriage, undoubtedly *Lamia* offers no vision of hope, but for the poetic treatment of sensual and emotional depths, it offers a different measure of success. Romeo and Juliet are no less 'doomed' in their love, and yet their love itself is successful in its passionate intensity. We should once again bear in mind Simon May's argument that the Romantic era was one in which a transformation in love was taking place. The 'fourth transformation' of which he writes, and to which we can surely add Keats' voice, was also a disturbance in the relation between the human and the divine. May writes that 'at the limit, love falls in love with itself', or in other words, romantic love itself becomes the supreme virtue, and thus 'comes to hold the position once occupied by God'.³³ Keats' claim that love is his 'religion' in the letter of October 1819 seems to support this, but it is clearly a personal religion. Love in *Lamia* fails at the edge of the public sphere; its rituals are too private, they strain too much against social expectation.

³² George C. Gross, '*Lamia* and the Cupid-Psyche Myth', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 39 (1990), 151–65, 165.

³³ May, *Love: A History*, 164.

Paul Endo has written of *Lamia* that the poem ‘captures a sensitivity to the workings of romance that, rather than reductively opposing disenchantment to enchantment, foregrounds the mechanisms of romance – seeing, anticipating, and plotting – as they contribute to the very shaping of reality’.³⁴ And this reality is social. The social is important in the poem as the dichotomy between philosophy, or the metaphysical, systemic conception of the real, and the romantic is not the only one in operation: there is also the contrast between the intimate and the public. Left alone to themselves, Lamia and Lycius are happy; in public, their relationship is threatened. It is not solely the metaphysical cast of mind that dooms them, but also a sense of social propriety. It is in the social realm, presented before the whole city, and not Apollonius alone, that Lamia turns white, returns to her ‘true’ form, and disappears. This, also, is part of the lovers’ doom: their ‘fate’ lies in sense of propriety, expectation, and social norms: the question of whether Lycius can overcome his shock and horror and love Lamia in another form is foreclosed by her disappearance, and her choice to disappear was made in a highly pressured social environment.

The poem revolves around the same conflict between love and ‘fate’ as *Endymion*, but that this conflict is resolved for tragedy rather than comedy. ‘Fate’ need not be understood as anything more nor less than a term for the felt pressure of circumstance: there may be another force, a ‘silent blessing fate’, that takes the form of a metadivine power as in the *Iliad*, but this is never revealed. What matters is the conflict between the intimate, the sensual and sensory power of love, and the external, the circumstantial, that which cannot be controlled or which overwhelms a great effort: that which is felt as external circumstance and which is figured as ‘fate’. As Endo notes in his reflections on the poem, ‘the discourses of religion, ontology, and rationality are, no less than magic, grammars for shaping disorder into recognizable, ordered phenomena’, adding that ‘they neither impose order nor unveil it, but set up rules determining what will count as an “end”’. To the individual in society, this sense of being limited from without by powerful discursive ‘grammars’ can feel no less like ‘fate’ or ‘doom’ than a natural disaster.³⁵ Between two lovers, this can take the form of two modes of social interaction: the social world of the bower, which is composed of two people, and where Cupid sits jealously on the threshold, and the social world of polis, governed by social norms and by the rationalist power of ‘cold philosophers’ such as Apollonius. Endo thus argues that Apollonius destroys both Lamia and Lycius, because he destroys the shared space they have set up between each other,

³⁴ Paul Endo, ‘Seeing Romantically in “Lamia”’, *ELH*, 66:1 (1999), 111–28, 111.

³⁵ Endo, ‘Seeing Romantically in “Lamia”’, 113.

the death of one leading to the death of the other as ‘they prop up each other’s desires and exist only collectively’.³⁶

Endo’s account is very convincing, even if it tends towards demythologising what is a poem invested with the supernatural. Keats of course encourages such allegorical readings in his letters, but there is a way to preserve the mythological dimensions of the poem, which is to stress the mystery of Lamia’s and Lycius’ love. There is no reason given for their love than it itself, and thus it emerges as a counter-force, be it to fate, to societal norms, to metaphysical ‘reality’ (be they one and the same). What Endo sees as the dynamic spatial and social relation between the two may be motivated by something spiritual and magical – love is, after all, a narrative and motivational mystery – and it becomes a radical force of its own. Thus love is not the source of Lamia’s and Lycius’ doom, so much as a failing resistance; the tragedy of the story lies in the fact that it is not strong enough to overcome those external forces of society which doom it.

To return, finally, to the overall theme of this volume, it is worth bearing in mind that the conflict between earthly love – as embodied in this case in two individuals – with metaphysical fate is rooted in a social relation, rather than a myopic struggle of the individual and the universe. Love succumbs to fate because relationships are fragile and break apart. Keats died hundreds of miles away from Fanny Brawne, Lamia disappeared and Lycius passed away – but these cold philosophical facts do not change the passionate intensity of the love that existed between them, even if fate had other plans. We can easily see elements of May’s fourth transformation of love in *Endymion* and in *Lamia*. What good there is in both poems is revealed more in exploration than in experience (in *Endymion* the resolution is rushed at the end; *Lamia* ends in failure). But to this we need to add the difficulty of negotiating social relations, private and public. May points to the transformations of love in Keats’ era, but the strains and difficulties of these transformations are played out in public spaces. The intimate is fragile before society, which comes to it, inevitably, with regulatory norms. This is Lamia’s doom.

To appreciate Keats’ poetic vision we need to abandon a sense of resolution between love and fate: both in the positive sense, in which love is ordained by heavenly powers and the stars minister over the bringing together of soulmates, and in the negative sense that metadivine forces conceive tragic situations in which ‘star-crossed lovers’ are to be doomed, or in the sense that love is simply the capricious manifestation of an ill-fate itself. All of these are possible interpretation of Keats’ poems, but they rely on readings which elevate certain elements above others and

³⁶ Endo, ‘Seeing Romantically in “Lamia”’, 115.

diminish the paradoxes and complexities that he builds into them. I argue that Keats' understanding of 'fate' is more dynamic and flexible, perhaps even more rational: it is a figure, or a fiction, used to personify external forces and circumstances. I would not venture speculation on the ontology of those forces, suffice to say that they manifest themselves in philosophical abstractions, in divine whims, in narrative situations, and in broader societal pressures. Fate has, however, no objective correlative in Keats' work, whereas love does. Love is clearly manifest in the intensity of desire, an overwhelming passion of the will for the object of love, obsessive perhaps but earthly, sensual, and aesthetic – most importantly, it is an intimate concrete relation between two individuals. It is thus a mode of life separate from the caprices assigned to 'fate' or 'doom'. But it is, crucially, not a defence against them: it is temporal, mortal, and therefore fragile. The tragedy of *Lamia* hinges first on the question of whether reality, both social and philosophical, lies in the ontological space of fate or in the sensual aesthetics of love. It then hinges, second, on whether love can survive entrance into the broader social sphere.

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Teleoaffectivity: Love in *Casa Guidi Windows*

Jerome Wynter

Open my heart, and you will see,
Graved inside of it, Italy.¹

The above ‘lyrical outburst’ from Robert Browning’s poem ‘De Gustibus’ suggests more than an enduring interest that the English had in Italy or in its national politics. The diction and the rhyme invite spectatorship, offering viewers a glimpse into Browning’s metaphorical heart to find it inextricably linked with Italy. This trope of the heart, which serves as a symbol of his affection for the country, signifies the intense feeling and deep affection that Elizabeth Barrett Browning shared with her husband, Robert, for the people of Florence, Tuscany, where they lived after their marriage in September 1846. Indeed, Barrett Browning represents her feelings for Italy as ‘a warm affection for a beautiful and unfortunate country’, in the Preface to her first volume of Italian poems, *Casa Guidi Windows*, a bipartite work, published in 1851.² The first section, initially entitled ‘A Meditation in Tuscany’ was written in 1848, concerning the energy in Italy that year at the prospect of revolutionary political changes, but published three years later with a second part – representing Austrian suppression of the Italians and the failure of Italy’s unification – under the new title. Historically, Italy was a divided region, but in January 1848, it became the revolutionary vanguard of the uprisings in Europe, beginning with the revolt of Sicily that would eventually spread across the peninsula against various autocratic governments and growing foreign occupation. This revolutionary movement was a cause that Barrett Browning sympathised with, supported, and held dear to her ‘heart’.³

¹ Quoted in Giuliana Artom Treves in *The Golden Ring: The Anglo-Florentines, 1847–1862*, trans. Sylvia Sprigge (London: Longmans, Green and Co.), 75.

² Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor, eds, vol. 2, *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Gen. Ed. Sandra Donaldson, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), 481–566. All quotations from *Casa Guidi Windows* are from this edition and, hereafter, references to *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* will be abbreviated to *WEBB*, preceded by the name of the editor(s) and followed by the volume and page numbers.

³ For a detailed discussion of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the Italian Risorgimento, see Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Luigi Salvatorelli, *The Risorgimento: Thought and Action*, trans. Mario Domandi (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1970).

Casa Guidi Windows, then, is as much about affective politics as European democratic affairs. In this essay, I situate Barrett Browning's politics of the 'heart' – sentiments, affection, sympathy with the oppressed Italians, tender feelings, emotions, hopes and desires – in the context of creative 'teleoaffectivity'.⁴ This dyadic term combining 'teleology' and 'affectivity' I borrow from the work of the social theorist Theodore R. Schatzki, who conceptualises it as an integrative social practice.⁵ Before looking at his definition I want to set out a basic understanding of the terms of the dyad. By 'teleology', I mean two interrelated understandings: firstly, that human action can be explained in terms of purposes, that is, doing something for the sake of it or for the reason that it exists; and, secondly, that things can be explained 'in terms of final causes'.⁶ 'Affectivity' refers to the affections or emotions as opposed to the intellect or the rational. Schatzki defines 'teleoaffectivity' as 'a field of correct or acceptable ends, behaviours or 'projects to pursue for the sake of those ends' including 'a variety of acceptable and even correct emotions, feelings and passions'.⁷ His definition embraces the first explanation of teleology as well as terms associated with sentiments of the heart. This conjunction of doing something for its correct and hoped-for outcome with the more subjective quality of correct feelings and emotions suggest that teleoaffectivity might involve socially moral questions about rightness, appropriateness or even justice. Significantly, Schatzki locates teleoaffectivity firmly within social practice, 'practice' being 'a set of considerations that governs how people act'. Schatzki is careful to point out that action includes speech acts, doings and sayings. Thus, 'what a person does' or says 'on any occasion depends' on 'the understanding' 'of the situation', diagnosed 'as somehow unacceptable' and the desire for a 'condition that remedies the unacceptability that the action performed is designed to bring about'.⁸ Teleoaffectivity's distinctive character, therefore, lies in action that pertains to the emotions and is socially motivated, designed for the purpose of correcting an unacceptable situation.

⁴ I wish to acknowledge that my understanding and my use of the 'heart' trope, 'image of the heart' and 'affect' in this effort owes an enormous debt to the work of Kirstie Blair: *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵ See Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapters 4 and 6.

⁶ Thomas Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second Edition (New York: Penguin, 2005), 611–12; My goal is not to offer a strict teleological reading of *Casa Guidi Windows* in this second sense, though there will be instances when I read Barrett Browning's work retroactively.

⁷ Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 124.

⁸ Schatzki, *Social Practice*, 96.

Schatzki's notion of 'teleoaffectivity', I suggest, offers a productive way for reading *Casa Guidi Windows*. Thus a teleoaffective practice is crucial to our understanding of the poem's politics and poetics, especially when examined alongside her antislavery verse.⁹ Indeed, Barrett Browning's discursive engagement with Italy's political independence, her understanding of its politics and of the Italians themselves, her hoped-for outcome for their national unification, her demonstrated affection and tender feelings for the people confirm her participation in a nineteenth-century social practice of love.¹⁰ My use of the word 'love' to describe Barrett Browning's affection for the Italians should not be interpreted to mean love in a personal sense caused by desire. As one contemporary historian notes, the phases of Italy's struggle for independence were 'very near to her [Barrett Browning's] heart'.¹¹ In fact, she would often wonder 'that anybody in the world [could] think or *feel* anything else but Italy'.¹² No surprise therefore that she was considered the de facto poet of the Risorgimento,¹³ who possessed 'too high a conception of the poet's office and responsibility' to 'play at believing' in any position or a cause 'that she did not in her heart of hearts believe'.¹⁴ These statements reverberate with the tropes of the heart in *Casa Guidi Windows*, suggesting that it is Barrett Browning's love or affection that motivates her high level of social and political engagement.

Affective discourse as a politics of feeling inevitably raises questions with respect to the sentimentality and fellow-feeling of those who intervene in the sufferings of others. Is Barrett Browning's own politics of affect in *Casa Guidi Windows* particularly subject to this appraisal because of her gender? How does she forge a political community with the Italians from her own position of privilege? Is there a distancing effect that undermines her politics of feeling? Is her affection and sympathy for the oppressed Italians analogous to a sentimental

⁹ While it is not evident from her antislavery poems, Barrett Browning had a complicated relationship with slavery. Her family relied on and profited from slave labour from the three slave plantations that her father Edward Moulton Barrett owned in Jamaica, West Indies. See R. A. Barrett, *The Barretts of Jamaica: The Family of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Winfield, Kansas: Wedgstone Press, 2000), 89, 92–4. See also, Catherine Hall, et al. eds, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ See Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, 120.

¹¹ Thomas Trollope, *What I Remember in Two Volumes* (London: Richard, Bently and Son, 1887), 2:180.

¹² Quoted in the front matter of Alison Chapman's, *Networking the Nation: British and American Women's Poetry and Italy, 1840–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹³ Artom Treves, *The Golden Ring*, 76; see also Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Selected Poems: Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, selected and with an introduction and prefaces by Margaret Forster (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988), 240.

¹⁴ Trollope, *What I Remember in Two Volumes*, 2:179.

gaze? In the last few decades, critics such as Amit Rai in *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race and Power, 1750–1850* and, more recently, Stephen Ahern, in his Introduction to *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo Atlantic, 1770–1830*, have investigated these queries and dynamics in antislavery discourse. When ‘A Curse for a Nation’ (1855), considered one of Barrett Browning’s most controversial antislavery works, was republished in her second volume of Italian poems, *Poems Before Congress* (1860), the editor of the *Athenaeum*, Henry Chorley, condemned it and cynically concluded, ‘We may be allowed to ask, in the extenuation of our hasty and incorrect inference, – why a rhyme on Negro Slavery should appear among ‘Poems Before Congress’?¹⁵

While the Italians were not ‘colonised’ or ‘enslaved’ in the way we have come to understand those systems in transatlantic slavery, many passages in *Casa Guidi Windows* nonetheless reverberate with Barrett Browning’s earlier antislavery writings. I suggest that the politics and poetics of *Casa Guidi Windows* as well as its composition during Barrett Browning’s most active antislavery years favour reading it as an antislavery work.¹⁶ Notably, its publication is flanked by her three American abolitionist poems¹⁷ – ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’ (1847) and ‘Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave’ (1850) that precede it and ‘A Curse for a Nation’ which follows.¹⁸ I argue that Barrett Browning figures all forms of oppression as analogous to slavery, and that she unambiguously employs the abolitionist rhetoric and imagery of oppression and resistance in *Casa Guidi Windows* and throughout many of her poems of social protest such as ‘The Cry of the Children’ (1842),

¹⁵ See Donaldson, ed., *WEBB*, 4:447; *The Athenaeum*, No. 1693, 7 April 1860, 477–8, 477. Barrett Browning’s act of including this poem in the volume created a ‘scandal’ and generated enormous opprobrium when it was published in England. For discussions of this incident, see the essays by David J. DeLaura, ‘A Robert Browning Letter: The Occasion of Mrs Browning’s “A Curse for a Nation”’, *Victorian Poetry* 4:3 (1966), 210–12 and Leonid M. Arinshtein, ‘“A Curse for a Nation”: A Controversial Episode in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Political Poetry’, *The Review of English Studies* 20:77 (1969), 33–42. Notably, when the poem was published in a known antislavery periodical *The Liberty Bell* in 1855 for the 1856 issue, it received little critical attention. See Stone, ‘Cursing as One of the Fine Arts: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Political Poems’ in Donaldson, ed., *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: G. K. Hall and Co., 1999), 197.

¹⁶ Dorothy Mermin was the first critic to make a connection between *Casa Guidi Windows* and Barrett Browning’s *Liberty Bell poems*, noting that her Italian volume adds to the ‘defiant energy of the antislavery poems’, but she does not identify *Casa Guidi Windows* as an antislavery poem in itself. See *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 164.

¹⁷ Mermin identifies these three antislavery writings as Barrett Browning’s ‘poems about America ... and all three are denunciations of slavery’. See *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 154.

¹⁸ For ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’ and ‘Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave’, see Stone and Taylor, *WEBB*, 2:409–30 and *WEBB*, 1:147–50, respectively; for ‘A Curse for a Nation’, see Donaldson, *WEBB* 4:599–604.

‘The Cry of the Human’ (1844) and, to some extent, *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Barrett Browning often conflates the images and language of oppression, resistance and freedom in her dissenting politics, whether the work is antislavery, anti-imperial or anti-oppression, when writing about the condition of the oppressed, women, children and enslaved Africans.¹⁹

In *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning employs the language and imagery of antislavery to plead with England to help liberate Italy. She depicts England with ‘hands, stretched’ and to release | A bond-slave (Part I, 718–719). The term ‘bond-slave’ in abolition discourse describes the material condition of enslaved Blacks. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the earliest use of the term dates to the mid-sixteenth century and means ‘a person compelled to provide labour without pay; a person held in slavery’. The image of ‘hands, stretched’ recalls the Wedgwood antislavery medallion depicting a kneeling Black man in chains with his hands raised to the heavens. Such a point would not have been lost on a British or American audience. Barrett Browning draws on the same language and image in her abolitionist poem ‘A Curse for a Nation’ in which she depicts the enslaved Africans in American colonies as ‘writhing bond-slaves’ (l. 63), thus forging a thematic link with *Casa Guidi Windows*. In fact, the second part of *Casa Guidi Windows* continues this motif of enslavement, with the poet challenging the ubiquity of slavery in mock interrogation of America, ‘No mercy for the slave, America? –’ (II. 646), in an allusion to the oppression of captive Africans in the South.

Casa Guidi Windows may be linked with antislavery politics on another level. As Leigh Coral Harris points out, Italy experienced metaphorical as well as actual colonisation. She argues that the Austrian Empire’s imperial subjugation of Italy was analogous to colonial slavery:

Casa Guidi Windows unmasks the relationship between politics and aesthetics; it takes the popular clichéd British images of Italy as a feminine figure and idealized landscape and questions their truthfulness and use. The poem confronts its readers with the startling argument that worshipping Italy is a form of colonial condescension: an idealisation of Italy nullifies British recognition of its political identity. In fact, the poem suggests that the country’s actual colonization by the Austrian empire and figurative, aesthetic colonisation by the British empire effect a similar political subjugation.²⁰

¹⁹ See, for example, a passage in *Aurora Leigh* which alludes to her social protest poem ‘The Cry of the Children’ and to her American antislavery ballad ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’: [Romney Leigh]: ‘You ... | Will write of factories and slaves, as if | Your father was a negro, and your son | A spinner in the mills’ (Book II, lines 192–6). See Donaldson, ed, *WEBB* 3:1–317.

²⁰ Leigh Coral Harris, “‘Mythos’ to ‘Logos’: Political Aesthetics and Liminal Poetics in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Casa Guidi Windows*”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28:1 (2000), 110.

Matthew Reynolds makes a similar point about the attitude of English travellers who experienced the peninsula and viewed the Italians as what might be called other,²¹ defining their own identity against the Italians whom they considered as backward, simple, children of a larger growth who did not deserve liberty.²² Barrett Browning was not the only contemporary who recognised and challenged the discourse of the Italians as the other of Europe. In October 1847, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, an American journalist living in Rome, and a strong supporter of the Risorgimento, objected to what she viewed as the tendency of

a large proportion of my countrymen here [who] take the same slothful and prejudiced view as the English, and after many years' sojourn, betray entire ignorance of Italian literature and Italian life [...]. [T]hey talk about the corrupt and degenerate state of Italy as they do about that of our slaves at home. They come ready trained to that mode of reasoning which affirms that, because men are degraded by bad institutions, they are not fit for better. [...] I listen to the same argument against emancipation in Italy, that are used against emancipation of our blacks.²³

The implication is that the Italian Risorgimento and the antislavery movement in America shared the same problems of representation and subjugation. Fuller's comment gains force because of the comparison between the 'free' Italians and the enslaved Africans on American plantations. Rather than engaging in othering of the Italians, I suggest that Barrett Browning challenged the representational storehouse of Italy, a point that both Harris and Reynolds make. This may lead to some 'fantasies of identification'²⁴ but as Stone has noted, 'Barrett Browning's experience as a woman who had also 'learnt silence' – at least insofar as expressing her anger was concerned – contributed to her imaginative identification with the oppressed Italians'.²⁵

Few scholars have focused on the affective discourse in *Casa Guidi Windows*. Christopher M. Keirstead sees Barrett Browning's language in the poem 'as one of warm compassion, a "warm affection"', which she 'exploits' to disarm 'the

²¹ Matthew Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse, 1830–1870: English Poetry in the Time of Nation Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

²² David Brion Davis notes that the enslaved Africans in the West Indies were regarded as childlike, unreliable, backward, indolent and people who must be cared for and disciplined. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 555–7.

²³ Margaret Fuller, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 2 vols, (Boston: Phillips, Samson and Company, 1852), 2: 227 and 29, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39076006245497&seq=7>>. See also, Artom Treves, *The Golden Ring*, 33.

²⁴ Rai, *Rule of Sympathy*, 163.

²⁵ Stone, 'Cursing as One of the Fine Arts', 193.

critic ready to charge her with abandoning the domestic sphere'.²⁶ He notes that 'the nation becomes an emotive essence conveyed via the language of feeling to which the poet is especially attuned'.²⁷ For Alison Chapman, in her comprehensive account of Barrett Browning's life in Italy, especially at Casa Guidi, *Casa Guidi Windows* as an act of writing is 'a politicized salon poem, advertising and circulating the domestic space as a scene of writing, encoding it with pro-Risorgimento politics'.²⁸ Richard Bonfiglio analyses 'two overlapping' and 'conflicting domestic tropes': 'the politics of the heart' and 'the politics of the hearth' that he situates within 'a microcosm of national and international politics'.²⁹ He contends that Barrett Browning 'introduces the rhetoric of liberal cosmopolitanism into her poem *Casa Guidi Windows* in order to imagine the Italian cause as an English domestic duty'.³⁰ The notion of 'duty' is one that is central to the practice of teleoaffectivity, that purposiveness for the teleologically signified thing to do because things matter.

In her chapter on Barrett Browning in *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, Kirstie Blair contends that the poet 'interlace[s] personal and political events' to demonstrate that she sees the heart in terms of nationalism and politics as well as

romantic love and poetics. In *Casa Guidi Windows* Barrett Browning exploits the idea that her poem is subjective and heartfelt, yet she also intends it as a powerful intervention in Italian affairs through the affect which the poem might have upon its readers' hearts. *Casa Guidi Windows* uses heart as an image for the kind of sympathy the reader and poet should have for the cause of Italian liberation, and also attempts to stir up the hearts of the Italian people in order to foster revolution.³¹

Blair offers us a comprehensive metaphoric understanding of 'heart' without restricting its association to the domestic sphere. Barrett Browning was very much aware, Blair tells us, of how her personal emotions and feelings would influence her political poetics and transform the reader to her position. Indeed, her commingling of sympathy, politics and poetics arises out of a deep affection

²⁶ Christopher M. Keirstead, 'A "Bad Patriot"?: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Cosmopolitanism', *Victorian Studies Journal*, 33 (2005), 76.

²⁷ Keirstead, 'A "Bad Patriot"?', 76.

²⁸ Chapman, *Networking the Nation*, 72.

²⁹ Bonfiglio, 'Liberal Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of the Heart(h): Mazzini, Gladstone, and Barrett Browning's Domestication of the Italian Risorgimento', *Modern Philology*, 111:2 (2013), 300.

³⁰ Bonfiglio, 'Liberal Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of the Heart(h)', 300.

³¹ Blair, *Culture of the Heart*, 127.

and purposiveness of duty in the face of an injustice, or to use Schatzki's words, out of the motivation to correct an unacceptable situation. Following Blair's work, I add that 'heart' in *Casa Guidi Windows* paradoxically signifies affect and intellect, as so much of the poem achieves its rhetorical impact through emotive and rational argument for the teleological.

Teleoaffectivity in *Casa Guidi Windows*

When Barrett Browning resolved to write a poem in support of the Italian Risorgimento, it was not because it was commissioned.³² Rather, she was motivated by her love of freedom and sympathy with the Italian cause as well as her own philosophy of the poet's duty. By intervening in Italian affairs, she was resolutely participating in a nineteenth-century socio-political practice, a teleoaffective form that intertwines heartfelt emotions with action designed to correct an injustice or unacceptable situation. Linking the emotions with politics in poetry was considered somewhat of an improper admixture in Victorian culture though attitudes were beginning to change by the end of the 1840s.³³ However, the anonymous reviewer of *Casa Guidi Windows* in *The Christian Examiner* for January 1852, criticises Barrett Browning for what they consider to be the serious error of a woman mixing poetry with politics.³⁴ But as Blair has argued, the rhetoric of the heart could very well be a way to understand the politicisation of affect.³⁵

Barrett Browning's 'teleoaffective practice' in *Casa Guidi Windows* happens in rather complicated ways. She celebrates Italy's past, defends its right to independence, questions or challenges its commitment to achieving freedom, incites revolution and advocates for Italy's unity, synthesising these different roles of praise singer, defender, rallying war-figure and Victorian sage. Early in Part 1, Barrett Browning confirms her love for the Italians with an image of the heart: 'Shall I say | What made my heart beat with exulting love | A few weeks back' (1. 445–446)? The word 'beat' here is self-consciously chosen to connect the metrical beat of a line of poetry to the pulsating beat of the heart. Indeed, the language

³² The first poem Barrett Browning wrote after the 1845 incident was composed at the request of the Boston Antislavery Society in America to aid its antislavery cause. It would be her first abolitionist poem – and her most written about – 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point, whose compositional phase dates to around 1846. See Stone and Taylor, *WEBB* 1:409.

³³ Blair, *Victorian Poetry and Culture of the Heart*, 109–12.

³⁴ Clara Dawson, ed, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2: 220.

³⁵ Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, 118.

throughout Part 1 is arousing, evocative and fast-moving like the ‘golden Arno’ that ‘shoots away | Straight through the heart of Florence’ (1. 52–54). Commenting on this image, Reynolds notes that the shooting arrow into the heart of Florence could function as an allusion to Cupid, suggesting ‘a polity struck by the love of freedom’ while at the same time paradoxically setting off a war.³⁶ This kind of tension is common in *Casa Guidi Windows* and points to the complexity of the poem’s teleoaffective practice – the poet’s rhetoric of the heart and political imagining of Italy’s liberation.

In the following passage, Barrett Browning appropriates the role of praise singer for the Italian people and its cause. Her sentiments and desire express the political will of Italy whose prospects of liberty she celebrates after witnessing the popular movement towards political reform and nationhood started by Pope Pius IX and Leopold II, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, in early 1847:

Amen, great Angelo! the day’s at hand.

 The hopeful child, with leaps to catch his growth,
 Sings open-eyed for liberty’s sweet sake!
 And I, a singer also, from my youth,
 Prefer to sing with these who are awake,
 With birds, with babes, with men who will not fear
 The baptism of the holy morning dew,
 (And many of such wakers are here,
 Complete in their anointed manhood,
 Who will greatly dare and greatlier persevere).³⁷

This celebratory passage alludes to Michelangelo’s representation of his suppressed fellow Florentines, and himself who was forced to flee Florence into self-exile.³⁸ The first line is full of anticipation and the poet’s ‘hopeful’ and praiseful voice unites with a young boy’s, who sings ‘*O bella libertà*’ (I.3). There is a regenerative energy in the lines, and the imagery of a new beginning augurs liberation for all those who sing ‘open-eyed’ like the poet herself. This is one of the more joyful passages in *Casa Guidi Windows* in which Barrett Browning employs a preponderance of assonant syllables and arousing language for political affect.

³⁶ Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 92.

³⁷ *Casa Guidi Windows* I: 145–161.

³⁸ James M. Saslow points out that Michelangelo fled to Bologna at the fall of the Medici, never returning to live permanently in Florence though he sojourned there periodically. *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 10.

Yet, amid this celebration and praise, a note of caution creeps in – as in so many other passages in Part I. Barrett Browning warns that to achieve liberty will require ‘men who will not fear’, and sing ‘open-eyed for liberty’s sweet sake!’ The unusual syntax of line 154 (not the expected word order) creates consecutive alliterative sounds, cushioning any undercurrent of doubt about the Italians’ fortitude. Margaret Forster notes that Barrett Browning voiced ‘caution about the future of the liberal movement’.³⁹ However, the prosody of the lines suggests that she was very much attuned to the feelings of the Italians. In a later passage, she uses a swimming image, offering a similar cautionary message to the Italians, ‘Strike out, all swimmers! Cling not in the way | Of one another, so to sink: but learn | The strong man’s impulse, catch the fresh’ning spray’ (I. 399–401). This forthright warning – full of imperatives, ‘strike out’, ‘cling not’, ‘learn’, ‘catch’ – is nevertheless compassionate and motivating, suggesting that Barrett Browning discerned that the Italians’ desire for independence, since national unity might still prove illusory for Tuscany and Italy’s other divided independent states. These examples mark her tender feelings and duty of care as she seeks to correct an unacceptable situation by mobilising the Italians.

That mobilisation began with Michelangelo’s art. In several extraordinary passages in *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning represents the artist’s work as the first embers of resistance in solidarity with his fellow Florentines who are oppressed by despotic rulers. Portraying the sculptor’s series of antithetical marble statues *Night and Day* (1526–33) and *Dusk and Dawn* (1524–31) as engaging in subversive rebellion (see Figure 11.1), Barrett Browning reflects:

What word will God say? Michel’s Night and Day
 And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn,
 [.....]
 Three hundred years his patient statues wait
 In that small chapel of the dim St Lawrence.
 Day’s eyes are breaking bold and passionate
 Over his shoulder and will flash abhorrence
 On darkness and with level looks meet fate,
 When once loose from that marble film of theirs;
 The Night has wild dreams in her sleep, the Dawn
 Is haggard as the sleepless, Twilight wears
 A sort of horror. (I. 73–4; 80–8).

³⁹ Margaret Forster, *Selected Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1988), 240.

This protest that the statues perform in silence marks a paradoxical speechless outcry against the deprivation of liberty in Italy. ‘Marble scorn’ suggests the loathing of the statues’ respective providential duties as long as tyranny remains in Florence, writes Julia Markus.⁴⁰ She notes that the phrase evinces Michelangelo’s ‘feelings at the ruin of his country’.⁴¹ To show that the situation was unacceptable and needed remedy, Michelangelo created his protest-art to convey truths that were inconvenient or politically prohibited. In a poetic riposte to a fellow Florentine’s satire on his statue *Night*, the sculptor makes the statue declare her refusal to awake from slumber ‘as long as injury and shame endure’ in the land, avowing, ‘Not to see and hear is a great boon to me; | Therefore, do not wake me’.⁴² There is a passionate kinship between Barrett Browning’s poem and Michelangelo’s art and poetry. They both believe in the ‘ability of art to save, deliver, awaken or redeem society’;⁴³ both engage in the practice of diagnosing their respective social and political condition of Florence as unacceptable; and share the same purpose of wanting to relieve an injustice. Barrett Browning knew Michelangelo’s statues well and perhaps felt an affinity with him because of her own political interest in captive bodies,⁴⁴ which she explored in her 1850 ekphrastic sonnet of a marble statue of a female Greek slave as well as in her abolitionist poem about a fugitive slave woman.

In assuming the role of a rallying war-figure, Barrett Browning employs passionate appeals to the emotions to make the Italians think and act. First, she admonishes them to make a clean break with the past, for ‘We do not serve the dead – the past is past!’ (I. 217), if Italy is to achieve political liberation. However, she acknowledges the difficulty of shaking off that past. Chapman notes that Barrett Browning urges ‘the heart of Italy to beat again through the ossifying myths and legends circulating and strangling Italy’.⁴⁵ In other words, despite the ‘dust’ and ‘dregs’ (I.221–22) of literary tradition and other oppressive forms,

⁴⁰ Julia Markus, ed., *Casa Guidi Windows* (New York: The New York Browning Institute, 1977), 75.

⁴¹ Markus, 75

⁴² Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 247.

⁴³ See Michael Feola on the relation between aesthetics and politics. *The Powers of Sensibility: Aesthetic Politics Through Adorno, Foucault and Rancière* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 3.

⁴⁴ In addition to Michelangelo’s allegorical nude statues named for times of day, he worked on the politically leaning sculptures of four slaves. Naked and partly trapped in the rough-hewn marble block, these unfinished statues seem doubly oppressed as their emerging forms struggle to awake (*Slave*, awaking) and rebel (*Slave*, rebelling).

⁴⁵ Chapman, *Networking the Nation*, 255.

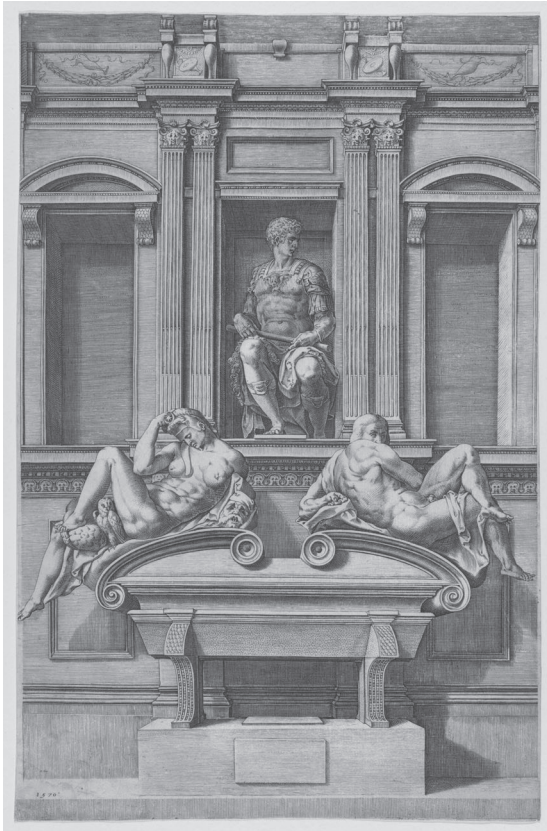


Figure 11.1. Cornelis Cort after Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Night and Day*, Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, 1526–1533 (1570). Engraving, 55.9 × 40.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1945, public domain.

Italians must persevere and shake off the lethargy of the past if they are to overcome imperial suppression. Barrett Browning exhorts them

Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy!
Will to be noble! Austrian Metternich
Can fix no yoke unless the neck agree;
And thine is like the lions when the thick
Dews shudder from it, and no man would be
The stroker of his mane, and much less would prick
His nostril with a reed. When nations roar
Like lions, who shall tame them, and defraud
Of the due pasture by the river-shore?

Roar, therefore! Shake your dew-laps dry abroad.
 The amphitheatre with open door
 Leads back upon the benchers, who applaud
 The last spear-thruster. (I. 661–73)

In this passage, Barrett Browning appeals to the Italians' pride ('be strong'), country ('be noble') and fear ('yoke') through stirring and emotive language to persuade them to actively participate in their own liberation. However, lacking in fighting spirit, the Italians must be roused. The overt persuasive language of the first two lines marks the passage's affective quality and conveys the poet's heartfelt feelings even when her words are hard to hear. Urging them to 'Will, therefore', 'Roar, therefore', Barrett Browning logically appeals to the Italians' emotions and intellect; the use of the anaphora reinforces the sad alternative that lies before them: rebel or be yoked. To win political freedom, the passage suggests, there must be a simultaneous working of 'heart and brain' (I. 426) to resist the yoke of subjugation.

The image of being yoked is a familiar one in transatlantic slavery. Captive Africans were fastened by the neck in pairs to be sold as chattel. Barrett Browning employs this image to rouse the Italians into bold action. Esther Schor suggests that she understood well the potential of images like these 'to evoke both sympathy and fear'.⁴⁶ In the line 'Austrian Metternich | Can fix no yoke' to the Italians' necks, Metternich becomes a proxy slave driver though any real threat of enslavement is allayed by the assurance that he will not prevail, as their necks are like 'lion's' with 'dew-laps' and one does not yoke lions – 'therefore! Shake your dew-laps'. 'Austrian Metternich' is a reference to Clemens von Metternich (1773–1859), who was a very influential figure in European politics before and during the revolution of 1848, and the chief instigator behind the Austrian-led suppression of democratic uprisings in Italy.⁴⁷ Barrett Browning felt that he was an evil man and referred to him in ugly reptilian terms.⁴⁸ In her attack on him, she rhymes 'Metternich', 'thick' and 'prick', producing a triple rhyme that

⁴⁶ Esther Schor, 'The Poetics of Politics: Barrett Browning's Casa Guidi Windows', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 17:2 (1998), 313.

⁴⁷ Stone and Taylor, *WEBB*, 2: 552, Note 98.

⁴⁸ Foster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 214. In a letter to her sister Arabella on 13 September 1847, Barrett Browning accused Metternich of orchestrating a disturbance of the peaceful celebrations in Tuscany to justify Austrian military interference and described him as a 'hateful and loathsome' man who 'puts out these fangs, ... trembling in his hole, poor reptile, for his power in Italy'. See Scott Lewis, ed, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her Sister Arabella*, 2 vols (Waco, Texas: Wedgestone Press, 2002), 1:132.

evokes distaste or perhaps humour, though the former is more likely. Naming him directly as an antagonist underscores her moral outrage and politics of feeling. The Shelleyan image of the lion as a symbol of resistance is a familiar one to Barrett Browning who knew Shelley's work well, and quoted his opening line, 'I am listening here in Rome' from 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819) in three stanzas of her 1854 poem 'A Song for the Ragged Schools of London'.⁴⁹ Shelley's lions are exhorted to shake their chains, but Barrett Browning's are unfettered, making her political statement a bolder one. In assuming the roles as rallying war-figure, defender and agitator, Barrett Browning is arousing the passions and emotions – the rhetoric of the heart – of the Italians and seeking to influence the audience, as she exercises the moral and ethical responsibility a poet has to correct an injustice.

As happens often in Part 1 of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning intertwines these roles with the prophetic voice of the Victorian sage. The notion of her appropriating the role of a sage may seem to run counter to the genre of this historically male preserve. However, George P. Landow, Linda Lewis and Thais E. Morgan among others have shown us that prophetic writing was not the sole preserve of male poets writing in prose. Morgan notes that 'sage discourse can be of any genre' and that women produced prophetic writing.⁵⁰ Barrett Browning could be said to adopt the prophetic pattern in *Casa Guidi Windows*, though only in a modified form, by giving public voice to a contemporary issue of interest to all in society.⁵¹ As she stated in 1845, in relation to writing a poem on the Corn Laws, she could not 'refuse to give or rather to refuse to attempt to give, a voice to a great public suffering, when I am asked to do it ... and when I recognize the existence of the suffering', announcing her intention to participate in the nineteenth-century social practice of seeking to correct an unacceptable situation or injustice.

In a key passage that forms the climatic end of Part 1 of *Casa Guidi Windows*, Barrett Browning writes prophetically:

When faithful spirits pray against a wrong)
To this great cause of southern men, who strive
In God's name for man's rights, and shall not fail!

⁴⁹ Donaldson, et al. *WEBB*, 5: 35, Note 1.

⁵⁰ Thais E. Morgan, ed., *Victorian Sage Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 3.

⁵¹ See George P. Landow's essay 'Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage: Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra*', in Morgan, *Victorian Sage Discourse*, 33. See also Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 188.

Behold, they shall not fail. The shouts ascend
 Above the shrieks in Naples, and prevail.
 Rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end
 Of burial, seems to smile up straight and pale
 Into the azure air and apprehend
 That final gun-flash from Palermo's coast
 Which lightens their apocalypse of death.
 So let them die! The world shows nothing lost;
 Therefore, not blood. Above or underneath,
 What matter, brothers, if you keep your post
 On duty's side? [...]

.....
 Heroic daring is the true success,
 The eucharistic bread requires no leaven;
 And though your ends were hopeless, we should bless
 Your cause as holy. Strive – and, having striven,
 Take, for God's recompense, that righteousness! (I. 1200–10; 1215–19)

Full of Christian fervour, the passage suggests reliance on God, hope in the afterlife and spiritual bliss; it denounces 'a wrong' perpetrated against Italy,⁵² and it incites revolution and war, and calls for deadly sacrifice. The rhetoric of these lines, and in *Casa Guidi Windows* on a whole, synthesises Barrett Browning's various philosophical positions on the place of affect in politics and poetry, as well as her moral and religious views in a modernising world. Angela Leighton views the poem as 'a summing up of [Barrett Browning's] lifelong preoccupations' and praises it for its 'rough energy and forthrightness'.⁵³ Reynolds's analysis of the poem finds it cavalier in its 'choice of metaphor', 'strident and headlong', and 'often strained'.⁵⁴

This conclusion is arguably one of the most uneasy passages in Part 1, with competing auditory and visual images. The 'shouts' which 'ascend' to the heaven could be either in prayer or praise to God, but they nonetheless are loud enough to drown out the 'shrieks' of pain from the wounded; paradoxically 'Rows of shot corpses' seem 'to smile'. Even more troubling in the passage is the ambiguity of the word 'lightens' which serves to illuminate the scene of the soldiers' bodies scattered on the ground but also possibly to relieve or lessen the number of the dead. In other words, fighting back by killing your opponents would likely reduce your

⁵² The word 'wrong' is Barrett Browning's byword for injustice, slavery and oppression in all its forms, creating a poetic echo chamber within and across her political and antislavery poems. The word also invariably rhymes with 'strong'.

⁵³ Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (London: University of West Virginia Press, 1992), 110.

⁵⁴ Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 93.

own casualties. Reynolds finds these images disturbing, singling out the ‘callous’ sentiment in the line, ‘So let them die!’. This outlandish declaration is perhaps meant to remind us that death is nothing to fear if one believes in immortality, as Reynolds suggests, offering this as a defence for the apparent opposites in the passage. He argues that a contemporary reader, if he held a firm belief in the hope of the resurrection, might not have found her language particularly bizarre.⁵⁵

I now want to render another way of reading of the passage. Amidst its rhetoric of violence and death, there is a more serene image of the Second Coming, when the dead in Christ shall awake, putting an end to all suffering. This is the hope that the lines express – hope for an end to dying for those ‘waiting for the end | Of burial’. This syntax does not suggest that the bodies are waiting to be buried; rather, they are waiting for that time when there will be no more deaths or burials. In anticipation of that day, the dead (‘shot corpses’), happy with this knowledge, ‘seem to smile straight up and pale | Into the azure air’ where Christ will descend from the clear blue sky, and God will reward them with his ‘recompense’. Thus, what seems like a disregard for the soldiers’ lives is Barrett Browning’s way of drawing together the struggle for liberty and spirituality. This reading may not fully account for the real material condition of the Italian fighters, but I do not think Barrett Browning is advocating literal violence, for as she says, ‘the Heavens forbid | That we should call on passion to confront | The brutal with the brutal’. The image of violent revolution (guns and blood and death) serves only to arouse passion, a show of ‘lion’s-vengeance for the wrong men did | And do now’. In a somewhat peculiar but nonetheless logical argument, she assures the Italians and the audience: ‘We only call, because’ ‘the sight’ ‘of lion-strength hurts nothing; and to show | A lion-heart’ ‘helps something’ ‘and will instruct a foe’ ‘to stand aloof’ (1. 676–83). Barrett Browning seems to be suggesting, as Blair has pointed out, that the rhetoric of the heart with its attendant emotions and feelings cannot be separated from politics and the role of poetry or religion.⁵⁶

I have attempted to provide an approach to reading *Casa Guidi Windows* which goes some way, I hope, to explaining how to situate and understand Barrett Browning’s love for the Italians – the tropes of the heart and her intervention in the nineteenth-century political affairs in Italy which are part and parcel of social practices. The concept of ‘teleoaffectivity’ seems a fitting approach for such a reading because it involves motive, intention, design, duty and responsibility alongside correct feelings, affection, passions and emotions. Teleoaffectivity helps us understand why the political poetics of *Casa Guidi Windows* is so often framed

⁵⁵ Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse*, 93.

⁵⁶ Blair, *Victorian Poetry and Culture of the Heart*, 118.

in terms of the heart. I have argued that love motivates Barrett Browning to support Italian unification and to appropriate the various roles that account for the latent analogy she makes between repression in Italy and antislavery. Although transatlantic slavery is not critical to the essay's argument, it nevertheless interlaces with teleoaffectivity and highlights the difficulty of writing about Barrett Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows* without considering her abolitionist poetics. My essay demonstrates that matters of the heart and matters of Italy are part of a larger continuum in Barrett Browning's political and poetic thought.

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Coda

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti's pen-and-ink drawing *Christina Rossetti in a Tantrum* (Figure 12.1), most likely from the spring of 1865, depicts his sister smashing up the living room with a hammer in a fit of rage, following a recent review of her verses. On 11 January 1865 in *The Times*, D. S. Dallas had compared the poems of Jean Ingelow with Christina Rossetti's first major volume of poetry, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862).¹ Although singling out the superiority of the latter, Dallas had, it would appear, called forth the tempestuous temper of the poetess at the suggestion, perhaps, of the faultlessness of her verses.² In the left side of the drawing, the artist had scrawled 'Miss Rossetti can point to work which could not easily be mended', with 'Times' underlined. Apparently 'given to outbursts and tantrums as a child',³ Christina was now acting out her brother's imaginary of artistic, female rage (and perhaps that complex blend of sibling rage and love, too). Raising (and certainly also stamping) her feet, Christina is swinging a rock hammer high above her head, of the type used for mountaineering and breaking up rocks and stones in geology and fossil-hunting. She has already smashed a table in half, and a mirror, window, chair, and a bust are cracked and shattered, the curtain torn to shreds. No doubt a copy of *The Times* is what is burning in the grate. In the foreground of the drawing, those psychoanalysts left still deluded as to the probability of penis envy might well attribute the snapped column of the table and the broken clock lying with its innards spewing out as classic phallic objects,⁴ but this must be left to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's unconscious, not that

¹ D. S. Dallas, 'Modern Poets', *The Times* (11 January 1865), 12.

² 'The poetical art of Miss Rossetti, although her book has as yet not received the same favour from the public, is simpler, firmer and deeper [than Ingelow's work]. Miss Ingelow is but a child of promise – of great promise certainly, but still only of the future. Her work as yet, with all its glow and radiance, is too nebulous, and much of it seems to come of that facility which is a young poet's greatest danger. Miss Rossetti, on the other hand, can point to finished work – to work which it would be difficult to mend. She is not so ambitious in her choice of subject as Miss Ingelow, and perhaps that is one reason why in what she attempts she is more successful'.

Quoted in the Rossetti Archive, <<https://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s601.raw.html>>, accessed on 26 August 2024.

³ Katharine McGowan, 'Introduction', *Selected Poems of Christina Rossetti*, rev. edition (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2001), v–xxiii, vi.

⁴ Cf. the opening lines of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 3: 'Is a pen a metaphorical penis?'



Figure 12.1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Christina Georgina Rossetti in a Tantrum and Destroying the Contents of a Room*, 1865, pen and wash on paper, 39.2 x 33.4 cm, Wightwick Manor, West Midlands, reproduced with the kind permission of the National Trust.

of his sister. In fact, only a few years later, on 28 April 1871, he would compose a limerick on the critic D. S. Dallas who had caused his sister's tantrum, leaving no one in doubts about the phallic practice of reviewing:

There is a poor devil named Dallas,
 Who tends, as I'm told, to the gallows,
 Yet if not so well hung,
 He might never have swung,
 For it's mostly along of his phallus.⁵

⁵ Quoted from the Rossetti Archive, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/37-1870.blms.rad.html>>, accessed on 26 August 2024. The manuscript for the limerick is in the British Library.

Yet, 'as in the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, phallic sexuality must finally destroy its object',⁶ and the impulse to destroy is a pre-phallic phenomenon. The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein attributed a sadistic period up to a child's second year, proposing that thereafter rage and self-destructive urges decrease.⁷ As Klein argued, the difference between infantile and adult phantasy (or creative) life may only be significant in as far as in infancy the unconscious lies nearer to the surface and influences behaviour more strongly. Yet this is not how Donald Winnicott saw it. Purposeful object-relating for Winnicott is a sophisticated and continued use of fantasy supporting reality. He argued: 'It is generally understood that the reality principle involves the individual in anger and reactive destruction, but my thesis is that the destruction plays its part in making the reality, placing the object outside the self'. 'A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object-relating. The subject says to the object: "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*.'" Here fantasy begins for the individual.⁸ (Winnicott's emphasis).

Similarly, for Simone Weil,

Love needs reality. What is more terrible than the discovery, that through a bodily appearance, we have been loving an imaginary being. It is much more terrible than death, for death does not prevent the beloved from having lived. That is the punishment for having fed love on imagination. It is an act of cowardice to seek from (or to wish to give) the people we love any other consolation than that which works of art give us. These help us through the mere fact that they exist. To love and to be loved only serves mutually to render this existence more concrete, more constantly present to the mind.⁹

Weil sees love as mediated through art as a kind of consolation for that punishment. To be loved and to love need existence, concrete presence, through creation as an 'act of love'. Weil's preposition that 'we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves' sits within her reflection on grace,¹⁰ where we might suggest it is love in the long nineteenth century. If creation is an act of

⁶ Barnaby B. Barrett, *Psychoanalysis and the Postmodern Impulse: Knowing and Being since Freud's Psychology* (Abingdon: Routledge 2015), 112.

⁷ Melanie Klein in Viktoria de Rijke, *The Untimely Art of Scribble* (Bern: Springer 2023), 57.

⁸ Donald W. Winnicott, 'The Use of An Object and Relating Through Identifications' in Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson, eds, *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott*, 12 volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 8: 355–64, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780190271404.003.0066>>.

⁹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario van der Ruhr (London: Routledge Classics, 1952), 65.

¹⁰ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 33.

love, Weil sees renouncing all its baggage – or its decreation – as vital to finding an energy which is free and capable of understanding the true relationship of things that allows for the grace not to remove but to transform our troubles. However deep love may be, Weil sees a ‘breaking point’ (like that sparked into rage by Christina Rossetti’s love for her work) as a key moment in its transformation. The social processes of love have brought our attention to the created aspects of nineteenth-century cultures – and cultures of love – made and remade by Ginev’s ‘faithful practitioners’ and their surroundings. Yet, where Winnicott would see Christina’s destruction of all the objects in her living room as a creative act of remaking her reality, Weil would perhaps see the Rossetti drawing as exemplifying reaction, destruction, re-creation.

In her essay ‘Doubting Love’, Judith Butler holds the idea of love as an abstraction in suspicion, stating: ‘when asked what my idea of love is, I always founder.’¹¹ Like Winnicott and Weil, Butler underscores the notion of love as through and beyond abstraction, as an event, a transformation; a thing that destroys, is destroyed and is remade again:

The idea of love is an assault against ideation itself. One knows love somehow only when all one’s ideas are destroyed, and this becoming unhinged from what one knows is the paradigmatic sign of love. Again, in the face of such views, I am full of admiration and I think that the people who believe that love shatters the idea of love are the ones who truly know what love is, who have love, who have done it, undergone it, had it done.¹²

If we compare the Rossetti drawing to the Hammershøi interior scene discussed in our ‘Introduction’, and at even greater length by James Hall, we can speculate that Christina is perhaps the wife that never was. This is Hammershøi’s ‘Rückenfigur’ turned around 180 degrees, acting out her passions and frustrations and insisting on not being the ‘angel in the house’. Like her sister Maria, Christina remained unmarried her entire life and had by 1865 turned down two suitors, both related to her Pre-Raphaelite brothers: the painters John Brett and James Collinson. Later, she would also reject the linguist Charles Bagot Cayley, translator of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, a codified collection of love poems if ever there was one. Hammer in her hand, she is ready to destroy and make the world anew in her poetry as words on paper. The 1862 volume *Goblin Market and Other Poems* had contained a poem inspired by her rejection of John Brett, an extraordinary piece of female

¹¹ Judith Butler, ‘Doubting Love’, in James L. Harmon (ed.), *Take My Advice: Letters to the Next Generation from People who Know a Thing or Two* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 62–66.

¹² Butler, ‘Doubting Love’, 64.

agency, of a mid-Victorian woman speaking out her own desires not to marry, not to go along with a male suitor's sense of entitlement. Although Christina Rossetti is in many ways one of the very finest of Victorian love poets, her frank offer of friendship rather than love and marriage may serve as a healthy (proto feminist) counterweight to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's enumeration of the elements of conjugal love:

No, Thank You, John

I never said I loved you, John:
 Why will you tease me, day by day,
 And wax a weariness to think upon
 With always 'do' and 'pray'?

You know I never loved you, John;
 No fault of mine made me your toast:
 Why will you haunt me with a face as wan
 As shows an hour-old ghost?

I dare say Meg or Moll would take
 Pity upon you, if you'd ask:
 And pray don't remain single for my sake
 Who can't perform that task.

I have no heart? – Perhaps I have not;
 But then you're mad to take offence
 That I don't give you what I have not got:
 Use your common sense.

Let bygones be bygones:
 Don't call me false, who owed not to be true:
 I'd rather answer 'No' to fifty Johns
 Than answer 'Yes' to you.

Let's mar our pleasant days no more,
 Song-birds of passage, days of youth:
 Catch at to-day, forget the days before:
 I'll wink at your untruth.

Let us strike hands as hearty friends;
 No more, no less: and friendship's good:
 Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
 And points not understood

In open treaty. Rise above
 Quibbles and shuffling off and on:
 Here's friendship for you if you like; but love, –
 No, thank you, John.

‘Catch at today’, Rossetti urges, ‘forget the days before. / I’ll wink at your untruth’. Any art historical and literary investigation of the long nineteenth century demands recognition of the tensions and slippages that result between what counts as love’s truths or evidence and modern interpretation, speculation and theorisation after the fact. Avoiding generalisations or universalisms, this collection does not imagine it could simply answer exactly where love might be found in the period. However, it does model and suggest that art historians and readers look in unusual places for the settings that signal love, by poking in corners and at the fringes of usual research interest. By way of examining literary and aesthetic corners, doorways, chairs, clocks, lightbulbs, letters, photographs, trinkets and more, the dark, dirt and the light, the self-referentiality of love *and* the ontological groundedness of love have found equal place in this collection. There is no doubt that the period was a hugely transformative one, going well beyond any stereotype of Victorian repression and propriety (wink at *that* untruth!) to grapple with everything love might mean, including cultural shifts from its utility to sentiment to commercial commodification, staging love in ways suggestive of a paradigm shift where complex and non-normative ‘becoming’ would be privileged over ‘being’. The sheer diversity and intensity of where and how love happened – the multiple social lives of love explored here – across the long nineteenth century demonstrate the period still has much to teach us about the continuing cultural practices of love today.

The claims we have made about love and material objects are ongoing and are now global, digital, as is evident by the collection of *The Museum of Broken Relationships*. As it explains, it ‘is a physical and virtual public space with the sole purpose of treasuring and sharing your heartbreak stories and symbolic possessions. It is a museum about you, about us, and the ways we love and lose’.¹³ Pieces in the collection include such surprising items as belly-button lint, two sets of dreadlocks, a ‘stupid frisbee’ and a ‘toaster of vindication’, as well as more familiar love tokens such as rings, photographs, postcards, and so on. While this collection is an important archive for the loss of love and the broken-hearted, we also end here to continue to decreate and enliven the clichés of happily ever after. Worthy of special mention is the therapeutic ‘Exe Axe’, posted from Berlin, which tells this story:

She was the first woman that I let move in with me. All my friends thought I needed to learn to let people in more. A few months after she moved in, I was offered to travel to the US. She could not come along. At the airport we said goodbye in tears, and she

¹³ *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, <<https://brokenships.com>>, accessed on 27 August 2024.



Figure 12.2. The Exe Axe, Museum of Broken Relationships, ‘An Exe Axe’ in *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, <<https://brokenships.com/feed/an-exe-axe>>, accessed on 27 August 2024.

was assuring me she could not survive three weeks without me. I returned after three weeks, and she said: ‘I fell in love with someone else. I have known her for just 4 days, but I know that she can give me everything that you cannot’. I was banal and asked about her plans regarding our life together. The next day she still had no answer, so I kicked her out. She immediately went on holiday with her new girlfriend while her furniture stayed with me. Not knowing what to do with my anger, I finally bought this axe at Karstadt to blow off steam and to give her at least a small feeling of loss – which she obviously did not have after our break-up. In the 14 days of her holiday, every day I axed one piece of her furniture. I kept the remains there, as an expression of my inner condition. The more her room filled with chopped furniture acquiring the look of my soul, the better I felt. Two weeks after she left, she came back for the furniture. It was neatly arranged in small heaps and fragments of wood. She took that trash and left my apartment for good. The axe was promoted to a therapy instrument.¹⁴

‘Unlike “destructive” self-help instructions for recovery from grief and loss, the Museum offers the chance to overcome an emotional collapse through creativity’,¹⁵ Ending with the compelling rhyming sentences, ‘It was neatly arranged in small heaps and fragments of wood. She took that trash and left my apartment

¹⁴ ‘An Exe Axe’ in *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, <<https://brokenships.com/feed/an-exe-axe>>, accessed on 27 August 2024.

¹⁵ *The Museum of Broken Relationships*, at <<https://brokenships.com/explore>>.

for good', and overall reading with the precision of a well-organised piece of conceptual art, this writing speaks exactly to the creation and destruction of the process of heartbreak, and what bell hooks describes as 'love's truths as we live them and the social life of love'.¹⁶

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¹⁶ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), 14.

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Edited by J.B. Bullen

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