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The Wrist, the Neck, and the Waist: Articulations of Female Sexuality in Mid-Nineteenth Century Culture

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PhD

January 2016

Author's Declaration

I, Beatrice Bazell, declare that this thesis is entirely my own work.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This thesis explores how mid-Victorian representations of the wrist, neck, and waist can be read as expressive of female sexuality. I read the appearance of these pieces of the body for their potential to contradict, challenge, or elude ideologies of nineteenth-century sexual regulation and control of women. In studying how desire could be displaced to portions of the body whose display was sanctioned, I draw together two key mid-Victorian preoccupations: the visibility of female sexuality and the subjectivity of artistic consumption.

Successive chapters focus on different art forms between the 1850s and the 1870s, including some of the most popular works of the period, alongside critical and social perspectives on the era. I examine how concepts of agency of expression and interpretation negotiate with the strictures, social and physical, that shaped and curated the display of the female body. In doing so, I perform readings of poetry, painting, illustration, photography, art criticism, fashion journalism, and novels.

The first chapter examines the representation of the neck in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, both in the titular poem and illustrations by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. I interpret the neck as a spatially and sensually disruptive element of these works, which can facilitate a subjective physical experience of art by the consumer.

In the second chapter I scrutinise the appearance of the waist in the photographs of Lady Clementina Hawarden, and in fashion criticism written by women. I analyse how women exercised creative agency by shaping representations of themselves, through the use of the corset and the camera.

The final chapter looks at representations of the wrist and its coverings in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. I read the wrist's erotic significance in these novels, not as a space of subjugation or repression, but as one of sensual agency.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>DFA</i>	Mary Merrifield – <i>Dress as a Fine Art</i>
<i>DD</i>	George Eliot – <i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>EDM</i>	<i>Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine</i>
<i>EWJ</i>	<i>English Woman's Journal</i>
<i>GM</i>	Christina Rossetti – 'Goblin Market'
<i>MAD</i>	Elizabeth Eastlake – <i>Music and the Art of Dress</i>
<i>MF</i>	George Eliot – <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>
<i>MM</i>	George Eliot – <i>Middlemarch</i>
<i>P</i>	Elizabeth Eastlake – 'Photography'

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Introduction: Girls of the Period

On January 8th 1870 a cartoon appeared in *Punch*, entitled ‘The Venus of Milo, or, Girls of Two Different Periods’, depicting a crowd of contemporary, fashionable young women around the famous statue. The image is accompanied by their reactions to a past ideal of beauty:

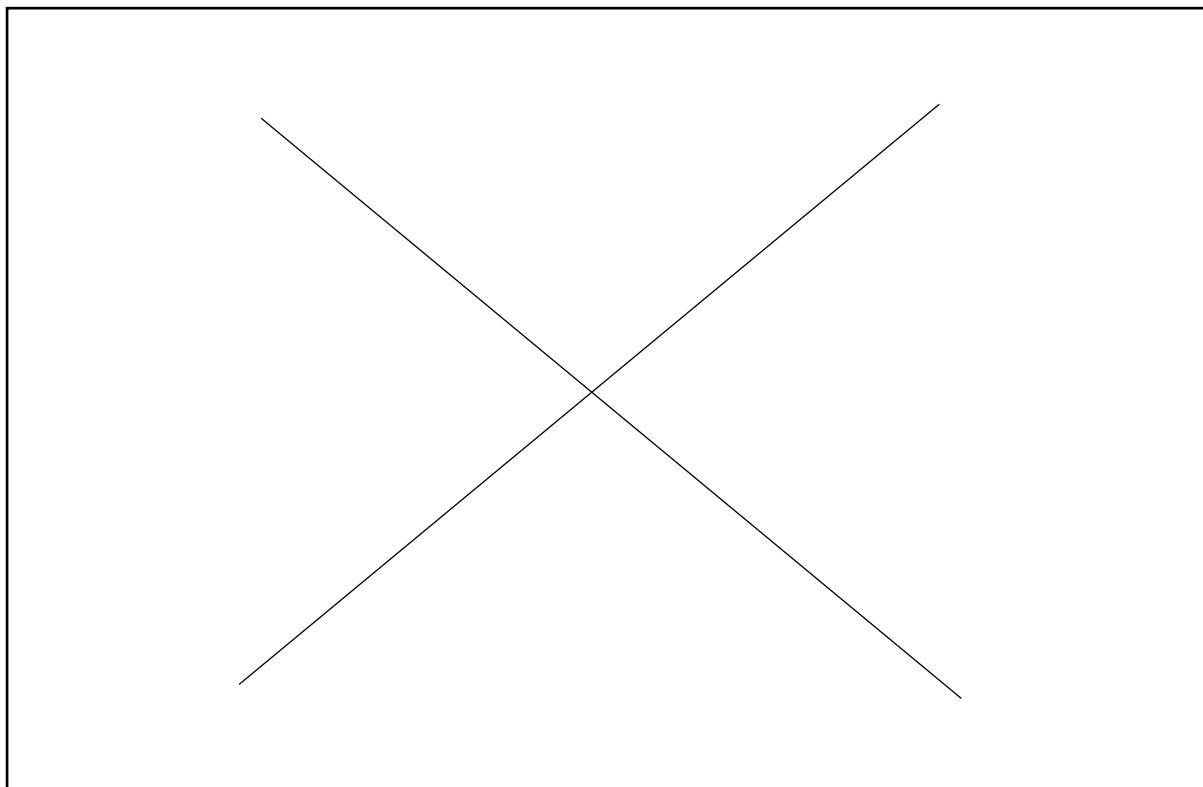


Fig. 1. ‘The Venus of Milo; or, Girls of Two Different Periods’, *Punch*, 8th January 1870.

Chorus: ‘Look at her big foot! Oh, what a waist! – and what a ridiculous little head! – and *no* chignon! She’s no lady! Oh, what a fright!’

These women know exactly what a ‘lady’ looks like, and model her attributes; their ‘Grecian bend’ silhouette can only be maintained through the fashionably restrictive corset, bustle, and high heels, and topped by the outsized *chignon* of false hair. The composition of the image underscores the slightly stooped posture enforced by this silhouette, ranging the chorus of women behind the famous sculpture, while Venus rises serenely above their petty concerns. The two foremost figures on the left even seem to be comparing physiques, drawing back their drapery and each thrusting forward a single – exaggeratedly small – foot. The distorted proportions and tilting poses of the observing women make them as vulnerable to the assessment and ridicule of a viewer in their turn.

The cartoon satirises the artificiality of modern ideas of beauty, and the socially-prescribed components – narrow waist, false hair, small foot – by which contemporary female desirability is understood. While it

mocks the young women for their adherence to this rigid template, it simultaneously seems to relish the sexualised spectacle. It derides their ignorance of history and lack of aesthetic knowledge, implying that their perception is too myopic to benefit from exposure to great art. Through the choice of title *Punch* can also exploit the sensational implications of Eliza Lynn Linton's 1868 article, 'The Girl of the Period'. Linton famously proclaimed that the modern English girl had become almost irredeemably materialistic, and that in tastelessly striving to imitate the extreme fashions of the *demi-mondaine* she had also lost a 'far more precious purity and delicacy of perception which sometimes means more than appears in the surface'.¹ Yet the image patently shows young women using their discerning perception of the surface of the female body and its attributes, exercising their ability to 'make aesthetic judgements, and wield the social powers'.² The Venus is supposedly the centrepiece and counterpoint of the image, yet its visual treatment only serves to underscore the shared properties of all the female figures. The famous whiteness of the sculpture is negated by the illustration's hatching, which modestly throws most of the figure's upper torso into shadow. This deflects the eye of the viewer to the element which it shares with the dense surrounding mass of 'ladies': the profusion of drapery which both reveals, and conceals, sexuality. The *Punch* cartoon underscores the young women's estrangement from the power of art through their fixation on the body; this project reframes the women's interest in components of the body as a means of empowering individual engagement with art.

The thesis aims to reframe the relationship between attention to the representation of the female body and its exploitation in Victorian culture. I read works of art for how they contradict, challenge, or elude ideologies of nineteenth-century sexual regulation and control through the representation of specific pieces of the body: the wrist, the neck and the waist. In studying the displacement of expressions or concepts of female sexuality to portions of the body which Victorian culture considered acceptable for a woman to display I can draw together two key mid-century preoccupations: the visibility of female sexuality and the subjectivity of artistic consumption. I explore the range of potential expressions of female sexuality within the most respectable forms of culture, examining how the female body could voice the innovations as well as the anxieties of mid-century Britain.

Criticism of the nineteenth-century can use the word 'Victorian' to 'describe not only a historical moment, but also a cultural consciousness',³ which functioned as repressive or censorious about expressions of sexuality in public culture. Yet we do a disservice to the Victorian art consumer, as we do to Victorian society in general, when we fail to account for the ways in which works of art subverted ideologies of sexuality which were already under debate and dispute, even in the most conventional spheres. This thesis finds evidence of such subversions in many locations, from the Royal Academy and the family publishing company, to the woman's magazine and the domestic photography studio.

¹ Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Girl of the Period', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 14 March 1868, 339–40 (p. 340).

² 'Reflections on Victorian Fashion Plates', *Differences*, 14 (2003), 4–33 (p. 16).

³ Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art* (Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 14.

Successive chapters examine the wrist, the neck, and the waist in different sets of art forms between the 1850s and the 1870s, and the thesis explores a range of disciplines, media and methodologies, while always maintaining the close reading of artistic texts as its primary focus. The texts under scrutiny range from some of the best-known art works of mid-Victorian culture to its more obscure products, and each chapter mimics its referent's physical function as a pivot. I use these pieces of the body to re-situate contextual material and critical perspectives on sexuality and artistic consumption, examining how concepts of agency of expression and interpretation negotiate with the strictures, social and physical, that supposedly shaped and curated the display of the female body. In all the texts in question, whether literary, visual, or critical, I read the depiction of these components of the body as able to facilitate engaged and individuated readings of the female body.

While I have not restricted this study to the female author, artist, or critic, in examining how bodily representations engage with individuation and female sexuality I have selected primary texts which were authored or facilitated by women. Pamela Gilbert observes feminist criticism's tendency to stress authorial biography, warning that this emphasis can perpetuate the practice of reading male-authored texts as 'acts of self-contained "art"' and female-authored texts as simple extensions of reflections of personal experience.⁴ However, just as I address women as a group as social agents within their historical context, the experiences of women as individual and embodied creative agents have proved valuable to this study.

Simon Morgan frames the nineteenth century as a cultural moment in which the bourgeois respectability of a 'hegemonic public sphere [...] co-existed with numerous counter-publics which could and did provide platforms for women.'⁵ This model of a range of public spheres, with their shared audiences, is particularly useful to my project, since the texts I treat range from novels and poetry to art criticism and etiquette books, and encompass visual material such as illustration, photography and painting. Chief among them are the work of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in their collaboration on *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, the photography of Clementina, Lady Hawarden and George Eliot's final novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. These are framed with carefully-chosen elements of historical context to account for how ingrained cross-disciplinary practices of art became within Victorian culture itself.

Bodies in Pieces, Bodies in Public

In 1860 Henry Peach Robinson attempted to persuade his fellow photographers to practise composition techniques, arguing that the classical precedence of Zeuxis – who selected the most beautiful physical components of different models for figures in his paintings – should embolden them to 'take the best and most beautiful parts you can obtain suitable for your picture, and join them together into one perfect

⁴ *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 7.

⁵ *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), pp. 4–5.

whole.⁶ Interest in the body in the mid-nineteenth century often took the form of fragmentation and atomisation, which stemmed from the desire to ‘make the body legible’⁷ in every field, from the visual arts and medical practice, to the demands of etiquette which surrounded dress and physical display.

Within the realm of scientific endeavour, the parasciences of phrenology and physiognomy read different ‘organs’ of the head and created taxonomies of features in order to interpret the personality they contained. While the scientific legitimacy of such practices had long been contested within the medical establishment, and was effectively void by the 1860s, public fascination ensured their popularity within British cultural life, particularly in novels, until well into the twentieth century.⁸ The display and curation of the body was also increasingly important as part of the development of public culture and education. The middle decades of the Victorian era witnessed a proliferation of museums of natural history and anthropology, alongside art galleries and large-scale public exhibitions, while medical schools devoted large amounts of space and resources to founding pathology museums for the benefit of students.⁹

The social arts as well as the scientific ones relied on techniques of measurement, assessment, and shaping of the body’s component parts, and fashion and etiquette increasingly ‘refined separate gender roles for women’¹⁰ throughout the period. Developments in 1850s and 1860s fashion meant that a woman’s appearance was intricately encoded with specific social and sexual implications; details as minute as how, and when, gloves were buttoned became imbued with the power of communication. Etiquette books promulgated the contemporary taste for dainty feet and hands, plump bosoms and rounded arms but narrow waists, while critics deplored the artificiality of the means used to achieve them. One author protested at the level of fabrication in the contemporary figure, noting with prurience that there was no

⁶ Address to the Photographic Society of Scotland, printed verbatim under the title ‘On Printing Photographic Prints from Several Negatives’, *British Journal of Photography*, 2 April 1860, 94–95 (p. 94).

⁷ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 17.

⁸ Janis McLarren Caldwell scrutinises how ‘imaginative literature’ addresses the interests of contemporary sciences, including the parasciences, while Graeme Tytler analyses how, despite the disillusionment with physiognomy and phrenology among the general public by the 1860s and 1870s, cultures of the novel ‘reaped the aesthetic benefits’ of these practices for decades: *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2; *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. xv; p. 320. I briefly address the cultural ramifications of phrenology in the chapter on the neck.

⁹ In his consideration of provincial British pathology museums Jonathan Reinartz notes that they had a particularly important role in the practical education of the first generation of female medical students, since their experience in lecture theatres often proved them ‘inhospitable’ learning environments. ‘The Age of Museum Medicine: The Rise and Fall of the Medical Museum at Birmingham’s School of Medicine’, *Social History of Medicine*, 18 (2005), 419–37 (p. 420).

¹⁰ Jean Arnold, *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), p. 10. The significance of how contemporary clothing and accessories are portrayed, both in creative and critical representations, are accounted for throughout the thesis, and particularly in the chapters on the waist and the wrist.

way to know if a young lady was wearing ‘padding to give shape or plumpness where there is none; [and] corsets and belts to reduce, by compression, the exuberant mass of flesh’.¹¹

The development of aniline dyes meant that display of the female body became more confrontational as an aesthetic display, and colour, trimming, and decoration proliferated on every article of dress. Women could enjoy greater scope for their tastes through synthetic colours than ever before, but they also provided critics of fashion and aesthetics with the opportunity to exercise their knowledge and faculties, and critique the state of women’s taste and education. Over a decade before *Punch* made the comparison Mary Merrifield illustrated the difference between the torso of the ‘Venus of antiquity’ and the contemporary corseted woman in ‘Dress as A Fine Art’, alongside images which she sourced from the *Illustrated London News*. These examples nicely illustrated Merrifield’s argument – that modern fashion distorted a woman’s naturally beautiful proportions – but they also demonstrated her familiarity with contemporary sculpture and journalism as well as the Classical and European art traditions.¹²

The decades between the 1850s and the 1880s were subject to particularly intense debate about the visibility of sexuality and how to determine whether women in public were ‘public women.’¹³ In 1862 the *Saturday Review* discussed the difficulty of differentiating between respectable women and prostitutes in the metropolis, both indulging and satirising the British fascination with prostitutes in an article tellingly entitled ‘The Rape of the Glances’, which concluded with a helpful piece of advice for the respectable young woman in the street: ‘cultivate sad-coloured underclothing.’¹⁴ This was one of the many contributions to the intense mid-century debates on prostitution, which would eventually generate the ultimate reaction to the threat of women’s physical presence in public: the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. When added to concurrent legislation which addressed women’s property, fitness as parental guardians, and ability to divorce during this era, the manner of reading women’s bodies in order to discover their social and sexual status (and the ways in which the arts questioned and troubled these readings) during mid-century can be seen as a question of national significance. Representations of the virtuous and cultivated surface of clothed female bodies – which the *Spectator* would derisively term ‘moral sphygmography’¹⁵ – therefore gained even more significance as partaking in a coded language. In

¹¹ Arnold James Cooley, *The Toilet and Cosmetic Arts in Ancient and Modern Times: With a Review of the Different Theories of Beauty, and ... Instructions ... Respecting the Selection and Use of Perfumes, Cosmetics, and Other Toilet Articles, and a Comprehensive Collection of Formulae and Directions for Their Preparation* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1866), p. 153.

¹² Mrs [Mary] Merrifield, *Dress as a Fine Art* (London: Hall, Virtue, 1854), pp. 38–9. Plate 4 depicts the torso comparison alongside figures of a woman in contemporary British evening dress as well as national costumes copied from the work of archaeologist and art historian Otto Magnus von Stackelberg and by Sir Charles Eastlake, and she refers to the work of several modern German sculptors on the adjacent pages. I analyse her criticism of fashion in detail as part of the chapter on the waist.

¹³ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 213. Arnold theorises that anxieties over correct readings of groups of women, as well as individuals, were exacerbated by urbanisation in tandem with an accelerated rate of sartorial change in the era, since fashion works as ‘a visual language to be read in the newly expanding city as a method for conceptually processing crowds of strangers at a glance’, p. 105.

¹⁴ ‘The Rape of the Glances’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 1 February 1862, 124–25 (p. 125).

¹⁵ ‘The Guild of Plain Dressers’, *Spectator*, 28 October 1871, pp. 10–11 (p. 10).

1878 the critic Mary Eliza Haweis mused, '[i]t is almost appalling to think of all we may have implied in our dress without knowing it'.¹⁶

This thesis looks predominantly at women as they were represented in art forms and venues designed to appeal to the middle and upper classes of Victorian society, and seeks to examine the representation of sexuality in public forms of art, rather than of illicit sexual conduct *per se*. As Lynda Nead states in her seminal work *Myths of Sexuality*, congregation around high culture in events such as exhibitions was significant to the national psyche as a unifying thread of middle-class experience, for these were venues 'in which class and national identities were proposed and where definitions of normality and deviancy were shaped.'¹⁷ But critical models of representation in public culture tend to use the power dynamic in which women's sexuality is objectified, appropriated by a male viewer whose knowledge and visual agency constitutes power.¹⁸ My argument seeks out opportunities within texts and creative encounters to counter this power dynamic of seeing, and reading, sexuality, in which sexualised women are automatically disempowered by being looked at, and who cannot look themselves.

This thesis aims to re-integrate ideas of sexuality into the hypothetical Victorian experience of creative engagement with art, rather than taking part in what some critical models frame as 'contests for power'¹⁹ which deprive representations and their consumers alike of agency. For this reason, I avoid models of scholarship which centre on critical structures such as the 'gaze'²⁰ and the 'fetish'.²¹ This thesis doesn't read the body pieces under scrutiny as ineluctably subject to patriarchal constructions of sexuality. Instead it treats them, and their potential for expressing female sexuality, as integrated into wider mid-Victorian culture. This accords with critical narratives such as William Cohen's, who identifies the ways in which Victorian authors were 'grappling tenaciously with the material existence of the human body'²² as part of the nineteenth-century drive to challenge entrenched Enlightenment narratives of human subjectivity as confined to the cerebral.

¹⁶ *The Art of Beauty* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), p. 20.

¹⁷ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 8.

¹⁸ One notable proponent of this idea is John Berger, in his seminal *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁹ Mary Poovey, 'Speaking of the Body: Mid-Victorian Constructions of Female Desire', in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 29–46 (p. 30).

²⁰ Laura Mulvey's origination of the concept of the 'male gaze' as central to Western culture's approach to the representation of women has been an essential concept in feminist scholarship, and its critical legacy is ongoing. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6–18 (p. 11).

²¹ In the criticism of sexuality as focused on specific tropes of the body the significance of the idea of the 'fetish' is undisputed, yet it proves less useful to the analysis of media which are not created with pornographic use-value. The Freudian concept of the 'fetish' can overpower the creative use of spaces of negotiation between power and the individual, which many of the authors and thinkers represented in this study exploit in their treatment of specific areas of the body. This is compounded by the fact that, as Galia Ofek notes in her study of representations of hair, the concept of the 'fetish' in the nineteenth century was not a stable one, and by the end of the century had been annexed by critical culture predominately for the expression of male desires. *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 18–20.

²² William A Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. xii.

This thesis focuses on works which feature no nudity, and which do not explicitly take part in the cultural phenomenon of the ‘fallen woman’. I propose to avoid using this terminology within the project; I agree with J. B. Bullen’s statement that its use obscures readings of representation of women ‘in whom the expression of sexual desire or the possession of sexual attractiveness might be perceived as both powerful and enhancing’.²³ I also feel that, despite its currency in mid-Victorian culture, it can thwart the critical interpretation of works and their female characters which feature this label: we risk falling into the trap of believing the self-projection of Victorian print and visual cultures.

Above all, my argument is that sexuality as it appears in the works I examine here renders the female characters more interpretable, not less. I examine how the representation of sexuality became coded into forms and expressions available to the respectable gallery-going, book-buying, periodical-reading Victorian citizens, and how forms of female sexuality could be made visible in tacit ways within sanctioned cultural forms which underscored their individuality of experience, and can be interpreted as affirming the individuality of women’s sexuality. Sally Mitchell caustically notes that mid-century culture ‘had no term short of the clinical or barbarous to describe, as a group, all women who have sexual experience that is not sanctioned by marriage’,²⁴ yet that omission leaves a conceptual space in which Victorian women’s (possibly unsanctioned) sexual experiences are left to the individual to define.

In acknowledging how rapidly Victorian models of visual consumption changed, particularly during the middle years of the century, Kate Flint observes that it is unwise to attempt ‘anything like an unproblematised reconstruction of Victorian modes of “reading” art’.²⁵ As Susan P. Casteras notes, ‘extremes of femininity [...] obsessed Victorian artists’,²⁶ and for this reason I use the moment at which the Pre-Raphaelites first made their mark on the public consciousness as an approximate chronological boundary for my study. I exploit their controversial effect on representational culture, as well as their overt emphasis on specific components of the female body in their early works. The unabashed interest in the representation of women and sexuality throughout the (somewhat erratic) development of this group of artists inaugurated new discussions about what it meant to perceive sexuality within a work of art, whether in terms of technical treatment, subject matter, or supplementary material. As a movement, Pre-Raphaelitism capitalised on the phenomenon of the “lone woman” picture (which stressed the representation of sexuality through the depiction of physical features rather than contextual material) whose popularity in the late 1850s would develop into a defining art form of the mid-Victorian age.²⁷

²³ *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 50.

²⁴ *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women’s Reading 1835-1880* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), p. x.

²⁵ *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 86.

²⁶ *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), p. 12.

²⁷ Elizabeth Prettejohn notes that while this popular subject is often attributed to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in 1859 Frederick Leighton exhibited several supposedly subjectless images of beautiful women at the Royal Academy exhibition, in the same year that Rossetti himself painted his famous *Bocca Baciata*, which I consider in detail in the chapter on the neck. *Rossetti and His Circle* (London: Tate, 1997), p. 15.

The Brotherhood's defiance of conventional art curricula and practices, particularly their treatment of the human form, also aligns chronologically with campaigns for women's access to expression through art training, and education more generally. By 1851 the Female School of Art, which has only been established nine years before, had expanded so rapidly that it was forced to move to new premises. These were in the Strand, one of those areas of London which, as 'The Rape of the Glances' had pruriently observed, was dominated by the street prostitution trade. The 'public outcry'²⁸ against the school's disreputable surroundings, and the risk to respectable pupils, led to its removal to Gower Street, in the heart of Bloomsbury – where the Rossettis and other artistic and literary figures would later make their home – until the withdrawal of its public funds in 1860.

Necks, Waists and Wrists

In the first chapter I examine representations of the neck as sensually and spatially disruptive in the collaboration of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti during the composition and publication of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. I integrate art historical and philosophical theories of seeing and interpretation in considering how sexuality can be recognised as a theme in the titular poem and its illustrations, alongside an analysis of the 'sister arts' and sibling artists. I study the volume's publishing history, the obscured history of the female engraver who contributed to the volume, and the circumscribed narratives of cultural participation and expression available to contemporary women.

This chapter considers how Christina, Gabriel, and their publisher Alexander Macmillan worked together to create the image of a respectable poetess whose writing dealt, both obliquely and explicitly, with sexuality in contemporary culture. I also scrutinise the recurrence of the association between the neck and sexuality in an article from the *English Woman's Journal*, which reported on the Highgate Penitentiary where Christina lived as a lay sister during the period in which she first composed 'Goblin Market'. An analysis of one of Gabriel's most famous works, *Bocca Baciata*, whose elusive subject but undeniable sensual presence still challenges critical perception, concludes the chapter.

In all of these works I consider how the recognition of sexuality as a theme within a work of art, invoked in coded yet ostensible ways, facilitates a subjective physical experience of art by the consumer. I read the siblings' work, independently and collaboratively, as constructing new relationships between media and consumer in their representation of sexuality. I consider how it might be possible to *see* sexuality as a theme, and how to approach the spectacle of sexuality within the Victorian visual context, while negotiating the nexus of power bound up in critical traditions of gaze theory. My reading argues that 'Goblin Market,' the vignettes and designs which illustrate the volume, and *Bocca Baciata* all use the neck as an emblem of powerful female sexuality which destabilises generic, thematic, and sensory boundaries between works of art and their consumers.

²⁸ Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006), p. 86n62. The Female School of Art and its development are considered in more detail in relation to women's participation in public culture on the chapter devoted to the waist.

The second chapter looks at the work of amateur photographer Lady Clementina Hawarden, whose body of work takes a conspicuous interest in perspective, clothing, and the waist. The waist is a culturally-determined point on the body, achieved through the shaping forces of fashion and technology, making it an ideal space for women to negotiate with social constructions of acceptable sexuality, and potentially shape forms of representation themselves. I scrutinise how photographic priorities – particularly those to do with focus and perspective – became incorporated into the development of the fashionable silhouette which made the narrow waist the hallmark of the feminine form, and situate fashion and corsetry of the 1850s and 1860s as another way of ‘shaping’ the representation of women. The chapter considers the corset and the camera alike as tools for women’s engagement, rather than instruments of their repression.

I examine how photography’s crystallization as a discipline at mid-century was articulated in relation to the female form, the mainstay of the Western art canon. The female body was often central to contemporary debates around regimes of focus and the prioritisation of perspective, while behind the camera female photographers and critics played a significant role in the development of photography as a creative medium. Models of ‘art’ and ‘documentary’ photography were developed through the originality of practitioners such as Hawarden, and her more famous counterpart Julia Margaret Cameron, in their representation of women.

I compare Hawarden’s representation of the dressed female forms of her own daughters with the outspoken criticism of mid-Victorian styles by two of the era’s most important art historians, Mary Merrifield and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake. Both critics mounted an impassioned condemnation of the mid-century silhouette for its distortive emphasis on the waist, and exploited the opportunity offered by criticism of fashion to propound better art education for women as the solution to the problem of their supposedly unbecoming appearance. They also encouraged young women to consider dress and the aesthetic as part of their communication, an aspect of their lives over which they had more control than simply the tightening of a corset lace. I conclude by considering examples from the controversial series of letters debating the practice of tight-lacing, written by readers of the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* in the late 1860s.

As in the previous chapter, questions of the agency of perception are examined in relation to ideas of genre and template. I argue that the emerging art form offered women a way to visibly negotiate with external structures, such as the orthodoxies of visual representation and the demands of fashion, in order to facilitate their own creativity and their own sense of sexual agency. I read the photographs Hawarden took for what they communicate about the negotiation between art and power, and I examine what her remarkable achievements within Victorian amateur photography can tell us about women’s artistic agency at mid-century.

The final chapter looks at the significance of the wrist in George Eliot’s final novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. The chapter examines how the wrist can represent sensuality which belongs to the

heroine, rather than participating in narratives of subjugation and control of women. I begin the chapter by examining how Eliot evokes the complexities around representing women's sexuality considered in the previous chapters in a scene from her earlier work *The Mill on the Floss*, in which Maggie Tulliver's wrist is passionately kissed. But in my scrutiny of her later heroines, I argue that the erotic potential of the wrist is most fully exploited when it is used as a space to represent the development of their individuation of desire, and sensual agency.

I examine the resonances of the wrist's symbolic history of sensual significance, and examine its physiological importance in the Victorian age. I also read Eliot's use of accoutrements such as jewellery and clothing to communicate on behalf of the protagonist, expanding on the previous chapter's interest in dress. In my reading of *Middlemarch*, I scrutinise the eroticisation of Dorothea's wrists, a component of her misapprehension of her own sexuality which has, so far, been overlooked by scholarship. I read her integration of sensory pleasure into her life, whether in her passionate attraction to Will Ladislaw or her delight in watching an emerald sparkle in the famous jewel-casket scene, as articulated through carefully-filtered references to her wrists, a significant component of Dorothea's narrative of sensual education.

In the case of Gwendolen Harleth, I read her wrists as expressing her subjugation of her own longings and instincts, whether to the titular hero of *Daniel Deronda*, the object of her desire, or to her husband Grandcourt, the source of her fear. I analyse the feminist and imperialist implications of Eliot's treatment of the wrist, and the imagery of enslavement and domination with which it is associated once Gwendolen has made a brilliant social match. I argue that Gwendolen can only recognise her sensual individuation through a re-articulation of her wrist, which transforms it from a space of subjugation to a site of agency and action.

Helena Michie accounts for the expressive and sexual significance of hands within nineteenth-century novels in arguing that their representation within the restrictions of middle-class courtship sets up 'a synecdochal chain'²⁹ where hand represents heart, which in turn signifies the sexual drives of the heroine. I don't propose to forge this type of chain of meaning, rather to argue that in representing portions of the body which are not erogenous *per se*, but which can be interpreted as a locus for sublimated sexuality, it may be possible to see how participants in such an encoded culture might re-work concepts of what respectable femininity *looks like* in order to express an individuated sexuality.

²⁹ *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 98.

Chapter One: Neck

In 1865, Dante Gabriel Rossetti insisted that one of his designs for a woodcut had yet to be successfully translated to the page, over three years after its initial appearance.¹ The work in question was the illustrated vignette from title page he had designed for his sister Christina's debut volume of poetry, *Goblin Market and other Poems* (1862) (see Fig. 2). The work's success had led to a second edition, giving him the chance to correct what he considered the misinterpretation of his design for 'Golden Head by Golden Head' at the hands of the first edition's engraver, W. J. Linton. Gabriel's dissatisfaction with the translation of his design from pen to press spurred him to send it to one of the Faulkner sisters, whose brother had engraved the book's frontispiece. The *coup de grâce* was delivered when, upon seeing this version, Gabriel rejected prints from both the original and revised woodblocks, asking that a third version be made.² He had improved upon his design, re-working a central element of the composition of two young women entwined in sleep: the neck.

Gabriel had found fault with the jawline of one of the growing cluster of statuesque and languorous women in his opus; Linton's burin had turned what ought to have been a sensuous curve into a collection of swellings, not unlike a goitre.³ The significance of the neck becomes apparent through Rossetti's preoccupation with this detail at one of the busiest professional periods of his life. His work on the new volume of Christina's work *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, their second publishing collaboration, was already delayed. His dissatisfaction seems symptomatic of the concern for a unified aesthetic which he and Christina made the hallmark not only of their collaborations in print, but of their independent work.

This chapter scrutinises works produced by the Rossettis between 1859 and 1865, the period in which *Goblin Market and Other Poems* was composed, published, and altered, demonstrating how the neck features as a key symbolic element of both image and text.⁴ This period would ultimately confirm their significance within mid-century culture, as it was one of intense artistic development for both artists, united by blood and collaboration but divided by practice, gender, and temperament. The treatment of the neck in the title poem is set alongside its significance in Gabriel's designs for the volume, including his various versions of the title page vignette, the frontispiece, and the cover design.

¹ For the sake of clarity I refer to both Rossetti siblings by their given names; accordingly, I use the form 'Gabriel', since this is how Christina addressed him, and referred to him in her correspondence.

² Gail Lynn Goldberg, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Revising Hand": His Illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems', *Victorian Poetry*, 20 (1982), 145–59 (p. 158).

³ Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 279n11.

⁴ For the purposes of this chapter I analyse the volume's titular poem alone; hereafter, 'Goblin Market' refers specifically to the poem, while the italicised form denotes the project as a whole within its cultural context, encompassing all its elements, such as illustrations, binding, and design. When discussed as independent components of the volume, the frontispiece and title page vignette are referred to by their captions.

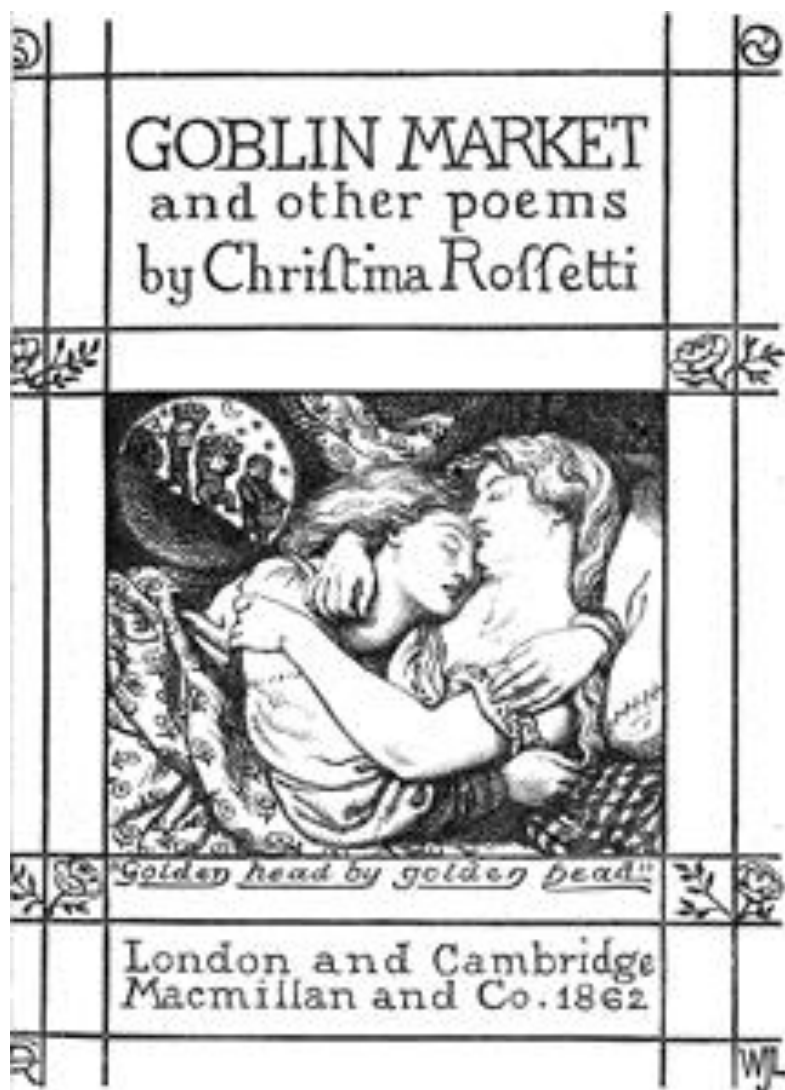


Fig. 2. Title page to *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, 'Golden head by golden head', designed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, engraved by William James Linton, 1861-2, 132 x 96 mm, London Library Collection, The Database of Mid-Victorian Wood-Engraved Illustration <<http://www.dmvi.cf.ac.uk/imageDetail.asp?illus=GM002>> [accessed 7 December 2015].

I situate the volume within its contemporary cultural milieu, and show the ways in which it reflects aesthetic theories about the interaction between verbal and visual. I set its convoluted publication history alongside a piece of journalism written about the residents of the penitentiary at which Christina was a volunteer during the germination of 'Goblin Market'. I examine the development of Gabriel's pictorial art in the years surrounding the poem's composition and publication, culminating in an analysis of his controversial painting *Bocca Baciata*. Throughout the chapter I scrutinise the ways in which the siblings' representations of this component of the female body show the complexity of mid-nineteenth century constructions and perceptions of sexuality.

In this chapter I posit that for Christina the neck is a place to play, to go – just – beyond the limits of what mid-century public culture constructed as acceptable. In manipulating archetypal and original tropes to represent women's bodies, she experiments with the representation of sexuality as it impinges on, and belongs to, women. Her artistic persona as a respectable middle-class poetess can safeguard her

from the suspicion of such subversive ambitions, although it also disguises the shrewdness which such an experiment demands. For her brother, using the visual forms at his disposal but eschewing the narrative and technical confines of many of his peers, the neck is a form which can negotiate with the challenges of artistic orthodoxies and the vagaries of the market in a public (and publishing) culture which seems to want to confine the expression of sexuality to other spheres. This approach to the aesthetic ambition of the volume means that the poem and its sister-images can be self-consciously poised as an innocent allegory, sheltered from the significances which frolic in parallel with its morality tale, while allowing them space to blossom and, eventually, tower over its ostensible narrative.

Remarkably, considering the tradition of biographical interpretations of their work by critics, the health problems experienced by both Rossetti siblings have been relatively overlooked in accounts of their working lives. In this light, their thematic preoccupation with the body accrues an extra layer of artistic poignancy, but it also gains another dimension when accounting for the prominence of the neck in their works, since the experience of art and the experience of the body become imbricated in this feature of the body, for both artists. Christina was among Gabriel's earliest models and artistic champions, and would continue to pose for him throughout her life; her brother may have been one of the first to note an early symptom of Graves' disease: the smooth distension of the neck. As an adolescent Gabriel suffered from 'boils and skin eruptions'⁵ and the pain caused by respectable clothing – particularly the starched collars mandatory for a Victorian gentleman – on the sores around his neck particularly affected both his daily life and his artistic development. In her biography of the artist Jan Marsh juxtaposes two of the most severe incidences of the troublesome abscesses with the young artist's quest for training which could reflect his tastes and beliefs. The orthodoxies of Sass's Academy and the Royal Academy Schools meant that students learned to draw from classical statuary, and Gabriel was 'frustrated beyond measure by the barren teaching and the absence of imagination'⁶ in this regime. This method of learning to render the human body by copying whitened stone dominated London's art schools, and neatly conveys the orthodoxies of the mid-century art climate against which he was to strive throughout the course of his career. His outcrop of boils returned for a time in 1848, a year full of rebellion and revolution, and confined him to home for some time; after this seclusion Ford Madox Brown waived his own teaching fee so that Dante Gabriel could attend Dickson's life class.⁷ In this detail of the Rossettis' lives the neck acts as a space to re-evaluate what the combination of art and flesh can achieve, and through its many revisions it becomes a rebuttal of the notion that sexuality and beauty can ever be represented in uniform, or universal, ways.

Imagining, and Imaging, the Body

The Rossettis' work still constitutes a challenge, since it exploits the tension between art as it exists and art as it communicates. Christina and Gabriel matured as artists during a period which was accustomed to

⁵ Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 11.

⁶ Raymond Watkinson, *Pre-Raphaelite Art and Design*, rev. edn (London: Trefoil Publications, 1990), p. 30.

⁷ Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 11; p. 35.

highly narrativised art, and yet troubled by the subjective nature of perception, in artistic, scientific and moral terms. In this chapter I explore the ways in which the mid-nineteenth century response negotiated this friction, and examine both the pleasure and the suspicion provoked by their works in contemporary readings, as well as later ones. I look at the connections the Rossettis construct between their work and the consumer in addressing the question “What are we *meant* to see?”

Both *Goblin Market* and *Bocca Baciata* address questions of human appetites, and as such they walk the tightrope of art: they expose the interpretative drive which the perceptive subject is most prone to indulge. And when art is framed as an indulgence, questions of physical and imaginative licence come to the fore. Sexuality’s relationship to art as a component of interpretation is important in this case, because *Goblin Market* is *about* the human appetite, both physical and imaginative. Since this chapter – and this thesis – attends to the symbolism of displaced desire on the body, questions of how the material body and the material text can be referents for immaterial desires are crucial.

W. J. T. Mitchell suggests that the individual response to representation is always implicated in ideas of its production, and urges the critic to acknowledge the temptations of figurative art, attending to

the way in which images (and ideas) double themselves: the way we depict the act of picturing, imagine the act of imagination, figure the practice of figuration. These doubled pictures, images, and figures [...] are strategies for both giving into [*vis*] and resisting the temptation to see ideas as images.⁸

Mitchell’s work can particularly speak to critics of the Rossettis, and of the wider Pre-Raphaelite movement, in considering how artists use both images and words to suggest ideas as images, or imagery as ideas.⁹ But I suggest that the siblings were uniquely placed to exploit the para-texts of meaning and representation which could communicate concepts of sexuality. In this chapter I look at how, in acknowledging the ‘temptation to see’ which Mitchell acknowledges, the Rossettis can empower individual agency of perception and engagement with art.

Arguably, the Victorian era was as preoccupied with perception as it was with sexuality. There has been a wealth of recent scholarship on the production of nineteenth-century concepts of vision, from regimes of perspective to the philosophical and political factors at play.¹⁰ As a society steeped in a rapidly proliferating media landscape, the strong associations between text, narrative painting and illustration naturally developed in new ways. This awareness of their interconnection demands that we deem the

⁸ *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 5–6.

⁹ From the moment of their foundation the Pre-Raphaelites were intensely interested in language. Almost all the founder members were interested in writing as well as creating visual arts, which they showcased in their short-lived journal *The Germ*. William Michael Rossetti retrospectively emphasised the diversity of its contributors’ talents across media in his critical narrative of the movement. See ‘Introduction’, in *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, facsimile rpt. (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), pp. 5–30 (pp. 7–8).

¹⁰ Notable examples of works which examine how concepts of vision were generated and regulated in the nineteenth century include Flint; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Linda M. Shires, *Perspectives: Modes of Viewing and Knowing in Nineteenth-Century England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009). Ideas on the production of sight will be scrutinised in greater detail in the subsequent chapter on the waist.

interpretation of artworks a practice which depends, not solely on its proprietary method of consumption, but, as Julia Thomas frames it, 'on an interaction between them that throws into question any idea that either process should be seen as self-contained.'¹¹

The siblings' proficiency across disciplines tends to be overlooked in criticism, but it was there even in the first flush of Pre-Raphaelitism, in which Christina was a participant; the eldest brother William Michael Rossetti recalls the sensual but rarefied expression of both Gabriel and Christina when he theorises their cross-media expressions as 'the intimate intertexture of a spiritual sense with a material form'.¹² In making works which are powerfully engrossing for the reader/viewer, yet self-conscious as representational efforts, the Rossettis acknowledge that works of art exist as physical entities as well as subjectively consumed aesthetic stimuli. Such depictions of bodies and forms of sexuality can engage responses from the intellect, as well as appealing to the senses. The twentieth-century philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty sets up this acknowledgement as a form of wistful recognition by the body of what it can perceive, situating itself as a two-dimensional being:

[t]he body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but *sensible for itself* [...] that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.¹³

In this reading, represented bodies gain agency through sensory engagement, and even their interstices, such as the neck, can be imbued with the energy of empathetic perception. The Rossettis disturb artistic and aesthetic boundaries, and in doing so they create a space where articulating potentially female sexuality becomes a play on the idea of consuming culture. In the shared themes of the poem and the illustrations there can be a mutual and self-conscious recognition of human desires, which exists between the represented body offered by the text and the reading/looking body of the consumer. In this figuration the spectator is not scrabbling to unlock the significance of sensual themes, nor do they have visual agency in order to exploit the represented body. Instead, the body – not the idea of the body – leaps out of its cultural figuration and into glorious dimensionality, to feel for itself.

Within this interpretation sexuality is the thematic element which transcends structures of confinement, whether of artistic form or of social proscription. I argue that through the collusion of the textual and visual, and the planar and the dimensional, the force of a projectile form of sexuality is portrayed as disrupting the traditional divisions of form, genre and even sense-perception within Victorian art. In the works I examine here I figure the neck as the agent of this protrusive engagement, which can pierce not only the boundaries between media, but the material separation of the physical entities of printed page or canvas, and perceptive subject. Through this disruption, and readings which acknowledge the critical

¹¹ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 5.

¹² 'Introduction', p. 18.

¹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. by Claude Lefort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1975), pp. 135–6. Emphasis original.

complexity of Victorian discourses on art and sexuality, it is possible to figure the experience of the contemporary perceptive subject of these works as open to readings of sexuality which engage with subjective physical and sensual response. In this way, I read Christina and Gabriel's works as using the neck to destabilise fixed boundaries, encouraging the recursive play of ideas between forms of media, between ideas and imagery, between artwork and perceptive subject.

Christina and Gabriel both worked across media, but even where their works were grouped under the same title or theme, they were always creative works in their own right. Gabriel's poems and paintings often shared the same title, but were not always designed to hang together; additions or re-workings were provoked by his own sustained interest in a motif. Christina's working methods made visual consciousness an integral part of her poetic practice, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra asserts that the synergy of word and image in her work capitalised on her own personal 'hermeneutic framework.'¹⁴ I would take this concept even further and argue that the Rossettis collaborated in creating such a framework to benefit their individual practice as well as their joint endeavours. However, their cross-pollination of creative work was accompanied by strict forms of technical control, and nowhere is this more evident than in the case of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*.

The volume launched Christina's career as a published and celebrated poet of the day, and put Gabriel's work before the eyes of a wider public for the first time. In reading the Rossettis' works for their representations of sexuality I approach their practice as articulating a mutual aesthetic ambition which manifests in different media. The term 'sister arts'¹⁵ refers to different models of the relationship between artistic media and expression, but it accrues new significance in the context of sibling artists – and even sibling artisans in the case of the Faulkner sisters – whose practice extends across multiple disciplines in shared endeavours.

So how can the Rossettis, in Mitchell's words, 'make the reader see?'¹⁶ By making them aware that they are seeing, that they are consuming, that they are interpreting, almost ineluctably. By presenting the perceptive subject with fables about consumption itself, they can leap through the fraught questions of usage and destabilise the very process of perception involved in consuming art. Within a dimensional model of consumption it must be possible to project a fresh dimension of the work of art in which the politically inflected and sexually exploitative gaze is neutralised. In this way the concept of the depicted body – which recognised its own condition of depiction – cannot be dismembered by a perceptive subject aware of its process, and perhaps even its mechanism, of perceiving.

¹⁴ For more on Christina's complex relationship with imagery and the illustrative, see Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, p. 6.

¹⁵ For the most comprehensive account of the concept, see Jean Howard Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 114.

David Peters Corbett has argued that one source of Gabriel's artistic development was his increasingly skilful manipulation of the 'scepticism about the capacity of the visual to penetrate to the inner meanings of the word, and to carry the perceptions of the spiritualized understanding of experience'¹⁷ which was integral to the Pre-Raphaelite project. In this light, being prepared to exploit the rules belonging to categories of representation as well as the constraints of what was considered publicly proper makes his work – even those pieces which doesn't, ostensibly, treat sexuality – subject to suspicion as indulging the worst excesses of art and human behaviour. Macleod asserts that 'a pleasurable response was acceptable as long as it encompassed the intellectual and the spiritual, as well as the sensory', and while she situates the deliberate choice of artists to produce works 'devoid of sexuality'¹⁸ as a coda to this idea, I see it as a crucial counterpart to the suspicion of potentially sexualised indulgence in various formats.

A. N. Wilson mocks the caprice of scholars who attempt to ascribe their own interpretative narratives to a text like 'Goblin Market', cataloguing the many thematic significances which have been read into it, from anorexia to commodity culture. Yet even he feels empowered to discern that there is no other significance embedded or encoded within it, designating the dangers of 'unbridled appetite', as its 'surface meaning'.¹⁹ The representation of sexuality was an endeavour which mid-Victorian culture treated very carefully, even respectfully. Christina's collaborators and reviewers occupied a milieu which was increasingly scrutinising and legislating sexual behaviour; I argue that her work finds ways to negotiate between the sexual correlations of the imagery contained in the poem, and the coded nature of its ostensible morality tale.

In the context of an expression of the tensions between imagination, desire and creativity, the most revealing corollary of the poem's power is the way in which its deliberative symbolism appeals to the imaginative subjectivity of the perceptive subject. Christina Rossetti generates an economy of representation which can flex itself to serve many and various meanings, as preferred by – or available to – its consumer. At various times this has been both asset and handicap to the poem as read through critical frameworks, but here I propose to argue that, at all times, its self-consciousness and self-reflexivity as a representational effort *about representation* finds its ultimate consummation in the portrayal of the human body. The poem takes the form of a warning against greed, yet it seems to stimulate the reader's appetite, and the sense of desire, through its own sensuous indulgence. I argue that this mechanism can be read as permissive of the expression of a form of female sexual appetite, acknowledging what Krista Lysack frames as women's drive to 'exceed their cultural prescriptions'²⁰ in acts of consumption. But it is

¹⁷ "'A Soul of the Age': Rossetti's Words and Images 1848-73", in *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*, ed. by Michaela Giebelhausen and T. J. Barringer (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 81–99 (p. 92).

¹⁸ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 272.

¹⁹ It is revealing that Wilson, even in debunking previous interpretations, succumbs to the temptation of seeing the interpretation of 'Goblin Market' as a question of the critic mastering the 'surface' and 'depth' of the narrative sited on the smooth page. *The Victorians*, illustrated edition (London: Hutchinson, 2007), p. 151.

²⁰ Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 14.

always negotiating with the ideological freight of acknowledging a contemporary social ‘spectre’²¹ among the winsome and fantastic creatures which populate its pastoral landscape. In the representation of the neck the poem’s interplay of disruption and interpretability with definitive meaning and didacticism becomes especially evident.

‘Goblin Market’: Spatial Interpretations and Suspect Pleasures

To read ‘Goblin Market’ is to become conscious of the sensual demands of reading. Its imagery, its rhythms and rhyme schemes, and its vocabulary all conspire to make it an experience in which desire must be interpreted. Reading the poem – or having it read aloud – is to become hyper-aware of the sensual demands of reading, and of the work of interpretation which the body, imagination and culture collude to perform. William Michael Rossetti, though asserting that his sister intended no overarching meaning, sheepishly admitted that the poem’s ‘incidents’ were ‘suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them.’²² Whatever the poet meant, or did not mean by the poem, to read it is to be asked to revel in poetic pleasure, and to be made aware of this indulgence. I argue that it is in representations of the neck that the poem’s interplay of disruption and interpretability becomes most visible. The neck of each of the two protagonists appears only once in turn during the course of the whole poem, yet these appearances are staged at key moments whose dramatic impact rests on the excitement of watching a female protagonist at differing stages of consumption (in every sense of the word).

The poem tells the story of Lizzie and Laura, whose idyllic pastoral existence is disrupted by goblins who extol the pleasures of the luscious fruit they sell. Laura succumbs to temptation, and they demand a lock of her hair as payment; pining for more she finds that she can no longer perceive the fantastical vendors. She is on the brink of wasting away when her sister resolves to go to the goblins on her behalf. Lizzie attempts to pay the goblins with coin, and refuses to eat in their presence, enraging them, who pelt her with their fruit. Having returned to their cottage, Laura feeds on the illicit juices smeared on Lizzie’s body, and at last is cured of her longing and restored to health. The power of the redemptive sibling relationship is underscored by the poem’s ending, which the sisters recount as a tale to their children, with the closing epigram ‘there is no friend like a sister’.²³

The poem’s opening is rightly famous for its mouth-watering inventory of the fruit which the goblins make available to unsuspecting (and unspecified) ‘maidens’. However, as soon as the narrative has sated itself, it turns its gaze on these allegorical girls and the poem begins to stage its double agenda. The fruit, and the euphony of the fruit’s description, is only a lure with which to shift the focus away from the spectacle; the viewer is set up to indulge the sensuous temptation of the fruit before consuming the figure

²¹ Michie, p. 18.

²² ‘Notes’, in *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes by William Michael Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904), pp. 459–94.

²³ ‘Goblin Market’ in *Christina Rossetti: Selected Poems*, ed. by Dinah Roe (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 67–83, l. 562. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parentheses in the text.

of the woman as she consumes. In every sense, and appealing to every sense, the imaginative potency of *Goblin Market* rests on harnessing its consumer. In this moment it makes prominent not what Laura and Lizzie (in their first introduction as named characters) think of the cornucopia, but how they receive the message, scrutinising not only how the maidens police their own desires but what they are allowed – or allow themselves – to consume:

Evening by evening
 Among the brookside rushes,
 Laura bow'd her head to hear,
 Lizzie veil'd her blushes:
 Crouching close together
 In the cooling weather,
 With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
 With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
 "Lie close," Laura said,
 Pricking up her golden head:
 "We must not look at goblin men,
 We must not buy their fruits:
 Who knows upon what soil they fed
 Their hungry thirsty roots?"
 "Come buy," call the goblins
 Hobbling down the glen.

"Oh," cried Lizzie, "Laura, Laura,
 You should not peep at goblin men."
 Lizzie cover'd up her eyes,
 Cover'd close lest they should look;
 Laura rear'd her glossy head,
 And whisper'd like the restless brook:
 "Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie [""] (ll. 32-54)

This character exposition embeds the perceptive subject into a deliberately-constructed, yet deliberately-concealed, audience for this orgy of described dainties. Christina exploits the grammatical ambiguity of the 'bow'd' head; Laura could be cringing in shame that she has heard of such tempting but forbidden indulgences, or she could be concentrating, considering the range of wares which the goblins advertise. Laura submits her body to the scrutiny of the goblins, but also to the reader, who is transformed from an observer of abstract 'maids' (l. 2), to the voyeur of the poem's original title, 'A Peep at the Goblins'.²⁴ The sisters are not prettily allegorical ciphers, but two active – 'clasping' and 'tingling' – young women, fully aware of the consequences of their behaviour, knowing what they 'must not' and 'should not' do. Even within a supposedly fantastical universe, spying on women trying to resist their own desire to consume the spectacle and indulge their senses excites a frisson. Bound together by their overstimulated fears and desires the two figures become a jumble of cheeks, fingertips, eyes, ears and heads, only distinguishable

²⁴ Christina's working title was 'A Peep at the Goblins'; Alison Chapman astutely observes that the change instigated by Gabriel removes the presence of a subject, which she incorporates into her argument that he was guilty of an 'imposition' of an aesthetic on his sister, partly attributable to Victorian gender positioning. See 'Defining the Feminine Subject: D. G. Rossetti's Manuscript Revisions to Christina Rossetti's Poetry', *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1997), 139–56 (p. 139).

where the narrative specifies. All these components of the body are surfaces or orifices, means of sensory interaction.

Despite her knowledge that she should not look, Laura's body is activated by her desire: 'pricking' (l. 41) and 'rearing' (l. 52) are verbs with violent – not to say phallic – overtones. Her yearning to follow her instincts, and her inability to resist this stimulus, makes her irrepressively penetrative. I read this as a foreshadowing of the power that Laura's body will have, throughout the poem, to destabilise the integrity of her space; her body can 'prick'²⁵ through the artistic construct. The sisters are described as ready to consume and be consumed, but at this stage Christina lays careful and continued emphasis on Laura physically and mentally opening, as well as submitting, her body for new experience. The neck is the agent of this growing receptiveness, straining so her ears might catch the sound of the goblin wares, and thrusting upward so her eyes may glimpse the promised delights, and so that the narrative has a pretext on which to depict them. It is at this point that the reader must confront the knowledge that Laura must consume the fruit, and the spectacle, on our behalf. There can be no poem (or at least no poetic display) if Laura elects, as Lizzie does, to cover her eyes and veil her own fruit-like bloom.

Laura 'pricks up' her head, and in doing so, she pierces the narrative. Lizzie's action is one of obedience to a hierarchy of consumption; she is so embedded into the didactic function of the narrative that she plays the part of a reader who would cease to read the story for fear of perceiving anything which would taint or damage their moral purity. She covers her eyes 'lest they should look' (l. 51), and 'thrust a dimpled finger | In each ear, shut eyes and ran' (ll. 67-8). This action is certainly a product of modesty and shame, but perhaps also a fear of what she might be capable. She stops up her channels of perception: instead of subjecting herself to the test, she chooses to avoid the possibility of being tempted, or led astray by bodily or imaginative infiltration. Within the model set up by Merleau-Ponty, she prevents her body being 'sensible for itself'²⁶ in many senses; that of a fictional body recognising its textual vulnerability in extending itself outward to the world; that of her body recognising itself as just such a component of nature and the fruit (and even the goblins); that of allowing her fictional body to receive impressions without social prescriptions intervening.

Christina delicately plays on the fear and pleasure excited by the notion of young women interacting with the spectre of their own sexuality. Sensuous excitement runs through the passage, 'tingling' (l. 39) with the illicit thrill of young women on the edge of corruption. But while the fantastic location appears to stress the 'fable' aspect of the plot – that it is a woman's role to guard her purity – she exploits its potential to express women's creative engagement with the world. Deborah Harter positions fantasy as one of many narrative formats which might 'articulate the visible contours of the nineteenth-century world they

²⁵ The word has many uses apart from the one I emphasise, but all of them imply an agency, not to say destructive force, with meanings such as to raise, incite, or burst. "Prick", v., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/151148>> [accessed 28 December 2015].

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. 135.

engage'.²⁷ Christina uses the 'visible contours' of her protagonists' bodies to reflect mid-nineteenth century culture's interest in consuming the bodies of women, but in tracing these curves her heroines are allowed their own sensual expression. This play on an exploitative model of representation is developed further in a later striking stanza which stands apart from the rest of the poem, in which tendrils of significance snake around the neck, when Laura allows herself to 'linger | Wondering at each merchant man (ll. 69-70), which signals to the goblins that she is ready to deal with them:

Laura stretch'd her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,
Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch
When its last restraint is gone. (ll. 81-6)

The neck is still a site of Laura's physical agency, although here it is figured as an otherworldly limb, with a function and agency all its own, rather than a connection between the body and the head. Through such specific means of embodiment Christina can make Laura an even more powerful thematic figure to the reader. Christina conveys Laura's revolt against being 'imbedded' (l. 82) amongst the rush-like fibres of a flat page – and against the confinement of the 'fallen' narrative for which she is apparently being prepared – through sinuous similes which seem to move her outwards from the page: the lily, with its distinctively long stems, the straight branch of the poplar, and the swan's flexuous neck. While Lizzie has eyes and ears, by default sensorily receptive organs whose intake she must diligently police, Laura's body is becoming a porous column of flesh, an irresistible object of desire to the reading body, 'sensible for itself'.

Having whetted the reader's appetite with descriptions of fruit which both entice and warn the indulgent consumer, in this passage Christina notably deploys two floral motifs with potent symbolic associations. Her tacit disruption of the depiction of the female form comes in the form of the type of religious emblem which her brother used in his early career to symbolise the highest achievements of art.²⁸ It supposedly referred to the Virgin Mary's purity, but in the language of flowers a change of the lily's colour could indicate deceptiveness, instability, worldliness, and even infidelity.²⁹ In one tradition the tall, straight-branched poplar gave its wood for Christ's cross, and a derivative story reports that Judas Iscariot hung himself from its branches; its susceptibility to even the lightest winds has been figured as the tree quivering with shame, and as a result it has been used as a metaphor for human inconstancy.³⁰ Whatever

²⁷ *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 2.

²⁸ The lily was prominent in Gabriel's first two oil paintings, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850), for both of which Christina sat as a model. Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 90; p. 115.

²⁹ Given the description of the girls as 'golden' haired, it is worth noting that yellow had negative connotations in many types of flower, according to this set of codes. See Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 182; p. 119.

³⁰ D. I. Dickmann notes that these superstitions have been attributed to other varieties as well, but this notion of a tree so full of shame that it is brought to 'shudder' is a powerful one. 'An Overview of the Genus *Populus*', in *Poplar Culture in North America*, ed. by D. I. Dickmann and others (Ottawa: NRC Research Press, 2001), pp. 1–42 (p. 1).

Christina's intention, the association of the curious woman with growth and nature, as well as shame, is a potent mixture. Then Laura's body swiftly reverts back to the proverbially-female ship, an entity for the containment of actions and ideas. The notion of a woman as 'vessel' (l. 85), however, comes with the stinging proviso that any attempt at 'restraint' (l. 86) of the living, breathing woman, once she has dispensed with a need for self-imposed ignorance, is a futile endeavour.

Mitchell's phrasing of the constant imaginative reverberations between the differing shapes of our conceptions – how we 'figure the practice of figuration'³¹ – can come into its own here. The playful imagination, which works to see its own conjurations as fed by aesthetics and context, can accept such dualities of conception and form propounded by Christina and Gabriel. Here the 'gleaming neck' (l. 81) forms a beacon to which all the obliquely structured references of sexuality, self-indulgence and purity can anchor themselves and coalesce, and yet destabilise the very motif to which they seem attached. This could be approached as a paradigm of the ideas which might be flourishing unchecked, like weeds in the proverbial walled garden.

The botanical comparisons, which explore traditional poetic referents for female figures in poetry, are contained in a stand-alone verse. This stanza maintains the variations of rhyme scheme which run throughout the poem, but its rhythmic uniformity is marked, compared with the risky metrical variations found elsewhere. The fastidious Ruskin would have approved of maintaining the stress pattern consistently throughout the verse: his famously short-sighted prediction that the poem would not be to public taste had its basis in what he termed Christina's 'irregular measure'.³² It is a delicious irony that the poem both upholds and undermines his 'Of Queens' Gardens' edicts on women in the Victorian era, although a poet as talented and diligent as Christina would certainly have resented the sentiment that her mental capacity served 'not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.'³³ Yet she would have exploited his pronouncement that a young woman's artistic education should 'enable her to understand more than she accomplishes.'³⁴ The poem lulls the reader rhythmically, in a near-parody of the lullaby genre to which twentieth-century 'scholarly fallacies'³⁵ attributed it, and Christina destabilises, through symbols and through sound, such traditional tropes of Western literature, as her protagonist is propelled towards a choice made in favour of inspiration, opportunity, and even adventure. Christina's talent for 'ordering' and sequences of imagery is best deployed when she can use

³¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 5.

³² When asked for his opinion by Gabriel, Ruskin declared unequivocally: 'No publisher [...] would take them, so full are they of quaintness and other offences.' Quoted in Chapman, p. 148.

³³ In his work about the use of books as a form of education, Ruskin ordained that a woman's physical and intellectual life should be conducted as if within a walled garden, protected and nourished, and above all, judiciously censored. 'Of Queens' Gardens', in *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864*, 2nd edn (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865), pp. 119–96 (p. 147).

³⁴ Ruskin, p. 167.

³⁵ Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, pp. 14–5; p. 14.

the 'doubled pictures, images, and figures'³⁶ on her own terms, compounding their subversive significance through juxtaposition, in defiance of censorious ideologies such as Ruskin's.

Eventually Laura sates her appetites with goblin fruit, and having been defiled she cannot whet her appetite for the 'cakes for dainty mouths to eat' (l. 206). She physically 'dwindle[s]' (l. 278; l. 320), and the narrative now brings her collapsing body, with its 'sunk eyes and faded mouth' (l. 288) to the fore. Christina then creates another lone stanza, and fashions a structural sibling out of Lizzie's body, imbued with the erotic force of her sister when she returns to tempt the neck-obsessed goblins. Lizzie is prepared to do business with them for her sister's sake, risking her own neck in the process, and the verse recalls the scene of Laura's moment of consuming-cum-consumption:

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood, –
Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone
Lash'd by tides obstreperously, –
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire, –
Like a fruit-crown'd orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee, –
Like a royal virgin town
Topp'd with gilded dome and spire
Close beleaguer'd by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down. (ll. 408-421)

The lily simile is found in both the sisters' descriptive verses, but since Lizzie's belongs to a different order of self-exposure, the imagery has free rein to be more referentially violent. The inferences here are of noble sacrifice, rather than self-indulgence, and the sexualised dynamics here are those of rape, rather than seduction. The poetic vocabulary encompasses desecration and plundering, dealing in forceful incursion into entities other than the body, recalling Classical narratives of the siege and the exposed heroine such as Andromeda as an offering. However, as if to weigh against this, the verse also incorporates an alarmingly suggestive floral comparison, with the forces of pollination and impregnation poised at the threshold of the fertile (and flowering) organism, 'White with blossoms honey-sweet' (l. 416).³⁷ As a poetic construct, her body fluctuates between the impermeable and the porous, from flower to stone, but is always a fixed point in the midst of turbulent external agents.

In the treatment of their assailed bodies, the narrative has fluctuated too: from Laura's self-willed stretching to perceive, to Lizzie's stillness even while she is violated by perception. Lizzie is examined in greater length and with greater prurience than Laura, within the tradition of the fixed woman's body

³⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 5.

³⁷ This blossoming imagery has already been established as a false promise, since despite the fruits' promise of fecundity, the 'kernel-stone' (l. 281) of goblin fruit which Laura plants refuses to grow, and this barrenness saps her will to live. It also recalls the awful warning of Jeanie, who 'dwindled and grew grey' (l. 156) after her own frenzied fruit-eating.

pinned down by the male gaze. Yet Lizzie is assaulted by the goblins, mythologised men and ‘evil people’ (l. 437), who use the very symbol of woman’s fecundity and Eve’s temptation, and *is not defiled*. In this passage she operates both from the fertile and organic position of a woman endowed with regulated but productive sexuality, and from the wonted woman’s position as an upholder of her own purity, as a mainstay of society’s ‘standard’ (l. 421) – with all its attendant meanings – the ‘virgin’ (l. 418) settlement whose walls are unbreached. She has learned that a limited amount of exposure to external temptations, and her subjective judgement in selecting a response, is hers to exercise.

Lizzie’s symbolic trial is what makes the second appearance of the neck so shocking, as the physical and sexualised body supersedes all else, becoming the site of the accumulated force of all these poetic sequences:

Lizzie utter’d not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laugh’d in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrapp’d all her face,
And lodg’d in dimples of her chin,
And streak’d her neck which quaked like curd. (ll. 430-36)

Lizzie’s body is transformed from mythical referent to a feature (not to say by-product) of an economy of rural productivity, while still resisting reification. For the neck is still hovering between systems of classifying the female body, whether as impermeable symbol or a biological entity capable of transmutation. The reader is presented with as near an approximation of a sexual neck as will ever be offered by the poem, and it is bound up with the politics of sexualising the female body for the ends of art. The ‘quaking’ neck articulates that the goblins are purveyors not only of ‘syrupy’ goods but of objectification itself. Goblin wares are the product of temptation, and their vendors will go to violent lengths to impose their will onto, and derive their ends from, the female object of their attentions. The goblin men fail to get a purchase on her imagination or her sensory organs because Lizzie presents the goblin men with nothing to implicate her. She only participates in their world as a blank canvas: white, textured, and without inherent meaning or value, which cannot be exploited or invaded.

The poetic narrative performs a neat side-step in its portrayal of female strength in the face of objectification: Lizzie thwarts their attempts to compress her into their narrative, while acknowledging that she forfeits her right to her own. She must be present, and any attempt to verbally object would give them an opening. In this moment Lizzie appears to defy the Merleau-Ponty framework, since Christina has constructed her as the subject who would ‘survey [...] from above’³⁸ the spectacle of her sexuality, and yet acknowledges that she shares this sexuality with an economy of consumption, both within the poem and as part of a textual construct for a reader’s all-consuming eye, which in turn surveys. She can

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, p. 136.

simultaneously be among the 'flat beings' and 'beings in depth'³⁹ through the hermeneutically elongated, dimensionally flattened neck.

Scrutinising Lizzie's body in such detail forces the reader to readdress our potential voyeurism, by drawing attention to a visualisation of the conjured neck. The preoccupation with the fleshly texture of Lizzie's neck is shared with Gabriel's experiments with tone and composition, and her appearance is the result of a collusion of techniques calculated to engage the perceptive subject on grounds of intimacy with the neck. Such a moment of close scrutiny is uncovered in likening the neck to 'curd' (l. 436), a mutable substance which seems smooth and blank from a distance, but reveals the dimples in its surface, and its mutable consistency only when the eye draws nearer. Even the clear film of whey which sometimes stands on the surface of curd could be approached as a prism of representation akin to a canvas, or even a photographic lens. From an ostensible link to rustic purity and vulnerability, Christina treats the pure woman's body – the body which belongs to a wilfully self-sealed, and therefore pure woman – as one more destabilised element in her representational politics.

Christina finds a way to make the goblins' debasement of the female characters into a means by which Lizzie and Laura (if not the hapless Jeanie) can claim representational agency. The thwarted goblin men disappear utterly, 'Not leaving root or stone or shoot' (l. 441), potentially proving themselves constructs of a social rhetoric which posits that there are 'right' and 'wrong' types of consumption. At least within the world of the poem, rejecting such a false dichotomy is all that is required to dismantle it. The potency of male objectification is translated into rebirth, through the neck. Lizzie exhorts Laura to 'Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices' (l. 468), reanimating Laura, but reminds us that her sister is cured of the longing, not of the *taste*, for forbidden fruit. This tension speaks to the conflict between the search for definitive interpretations and an awareness of the freedom of expression necessary to art. Perhaps in reading the poem we can be encouraged to scrutinize our desire to seek out the 'idea' in art, but it is arguable that we can ever be rid of the drive towards such identification of it.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah! fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense fail'd in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topp'd waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 136.

Is it death or is it life? (ll. 507-523)

Laura's second indulgence is framed as a punishment fitted to the crime; her sensory organs are first rendered painful, and then incapable: 'Sense fail'd in the mortal strife' (l. 513). The second 'fall' destroys the agency of action and consumption which brought Laura and Lizzie their growth through their new-found aesthetic consciousness. This 'bitter' re-education (and re-integration) violently topples the poetic imagery which previously stood for the maidens' ambition of experience, which was bound up in the power of the female neck. The tree is uprooted, and the tower is not only brought down, but shattered. Here Christina alters her similes to indicate not the lasting presence of rock faces or ancient monuments, but the flux of nature. The 'waterspout' (l. 519) is the last simile in the sequence, and the last incidence of the artistic ambiguity with which she has intrigued the reader. The word can refer either to man's manipulation of the force of water, or the natural phenomenon which causes sea water to rise in a 'gyrating column'⁴⁰ and its dissipation back into the medium from whence it came. Laura's body, in a last burst of dimensional transgression, is returned to the norms and constraints of the poem's world.

Flesh to text, rushes to pages: the passage signals a 'death' (l. 523) in Laura's capacity to consume, which has previously disregarded the diegetic constraints of her society and the physical confinements of the page alike. Christina even disturbs the metric patterns she has established, leaving space on the page as if to emphasise the mutilation of bodies (and the changing pace of the 'feet' of the lines of poetry) that the experiences have necessitated. Laura is 'cast down headlong', entering a catatonia which leaves her past perceiving anything, let alone responding to what she perceives or feels. So the poem brings us from Lizzie beginning 'for the first time in her life | [...] to listen and look' (l. 327-8) to Laura's 'Life out of death' (l. 524) at the hands of their consuming and consumptive trials. Laura is so chastened that she is only permitted even to recall these experiences while reframing them as part of a straightforwardly didactic genre. This reworking turns her neck into a dupe of sensory indulgence, rather than an agent of her independent tastes and volition, in defiance of a social setting which urges on her only wilful ignorance and fear of the body's capacity to consume, experience, and to desire. This shift into the dogmatic narrative effectively shuts out the reader, switching from the immediacy of, and their complicity in, Laura's ordeal and Lizzie's vigil to an elision of time, compressing the aesthetic experience of the poem back into a flat fable. By the tale's end, the perceptive subject is transformed into a mere accessory to facilitate the tale-telling.

In 1871 Christina was finally diagnosed with Graves' disease, or 'Exophthalmic goitre', whose etymology neatly – if gruesomely – combines the twin preoccupations of visuality and the body distorted in representation. 'Exophthalmos' is a medical term for 'protrusion of the eyeball',⁴¹ and a goitre indicates the enlargement of the thyroid gland, and the condition is indicated by bulging eyes and engorged necks,

⁴⁰ "Waterspout", N., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/226313>> [accessed 28 December 2015].

⁴¹ 'Exophthalmus | Exophthalmos, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/66337>> [accessed 28 December 2015].

as well as psychological symptoms.⁴² Whether the condition had impinged on her own experience of the body or not, Christina's physiological experience calls attention to her interest in violating what are deemed acceptable or normal confines for bodies and art. To stretch this configuration further, it is possible to posit the conjured eye of the beholder rounding itself to come into contact with page or canvas, and the conjured neck distending itself out of its proper sphere. Suitable behaviour in women – whether writing or reading – thus becomes a question of the containment of physical as well as mental energy. Physical proximity to potentially tainting elements must negotiate through the senses, but frustrations of consumption and production become as much questions of the body's agency as of social constraint.

One of the most potent representations of Christina herself is an unfinished portrait by John Brett (whose relationship to Christina is still unclear) predates the poem's composition by two years, and shows huge, limpid eyes which clearly register the reflection of external objects in their protrusive surface.⁴³ A curious feature of the work is the noticeable, and seemingly unnatural, shadow thrown across the plane of her cheek and neck, which originates just beneath her mouth. The portrait's idiosyncrasies curiously capture the difficulties of 'making' a body in art, as well as the challenges of gleaning information from the body about the sensations it communicates and conceals.

Goblin Publishing, or, How to Read Books, Periodicals, Pictures and Penitent Women

On receipt of Christina's manuscript Alexander Macmillan wrote to Gabriel:

I enclose a rough specimen of the sort of style I thought of printing it in. I took the liberty of reading the *GM* [*sic*] aloud to a number of people belonging to a small working-man's society [in Cambridge]. They seemed at first to wonder whether I was making fun of them; by degrees they got as still as death, and when I finished there was a tremendous burst of applause. I wish Miss Rossetti could have heard it. A quaint wood-cut initial – not elaborate and not [*sic*] sprawling down the page, but with a queer goblin, say, grinning at a sweet, patient woman face – or something else of the kind would make a nice addition.⁴⁴

Even the publisher of 'Goblin Market' could not resist the temptation to conjure the poem's presence in other realms of physical experience, whether of sound or sight. He felt that words and reported actions were inadequate to the task of conveying to Christina the extent of pride and congratulation which the sight of an audience's initial suspicion, the sound of their growing hush of concentration, and the impact of their hands striking each other, might provoke in her. In his own way, he was figuring an audience's response for the benefit of a reticent artist's benefit, and creating his own hypothetical picture of her

⁴² Diane D'Amico notes that having received her diagnosis in 1871 she resigned her work at the Highgate Penitentiary, but that she continued to visit the establishment until 1884. "Equal before God": Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of the Highgate Penitentiary', in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. by Anthony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 67–83 (p. 73).

⁴³ Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 202–208.

⁴⁴ Letter, Macmillan to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 28 October 1861, quoted in *The Rossetti-Macmillan Letters: Some 133 Unpublished Letters Written to Alexander Macmillan, F. S. Ellis, and Others, by Dante Gabriel, Christina, and William Michael Rossetti, 1861-1889*, ed. by Lona Mosk Packer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 7.

response based on the stimulus of this reaction. Macmillan recognised that 'Goblin Market' was a work which could find expression in many different media, and that it was peculiarly situated to express the preoccupations, anxieties and exhilarations of the era.

Macmillan and Co. would publish the poem and its fellows only a few months later, and the process was distinguished by an unusual degree of collaboration between artists and artisans, and between the commercial forces of publishing and the wider art world. But it also occasioned practical and aesthetic conflict, and the correspondence between the Rossetti siblings and Macmillan conveys the era's struggle with artworks which dealt in the elusive distinctions between the permissible and the taboo. If the project seemed a manifestation of the allied powers of the sibling arts, the practical effort was curiously rich in sibling artists and artisans: the Rossettis devised, the Faulkner sisters interpreted, and the firm of the Macmillan brothers published.

The Rossetti siblings influenced each other creatively from early on, and may have developed their habit of doubling artistic texts and motifs, grouped under a theme or a title, together. Christina had talents of her own in drawing and illustration, and from what we know of her craft she used her own sketches as an aid to composition.⁴⁵ However, her early attempts to gain an art education in the early 1850s proved unsuccessful.⁴⁶ Like her brother she had found the process of formal training dispiriting, and lacking his flair as well as his social advantages, she felt unable to earn by her art as he could.⁴⁷ Their care for the visual appearance of the work was a key factor in their dealings with Macmillan, though it would manifest in different ways. There are no indications of how the siblings negotiated the terms of their co-operation with each other, but Gabriel was heavily involved from the beginning; he had just made his own print debut, and so acted as a form of agent between Christina and the great literary men of her era.⁴⁸ He had a decisive role in the design of both volumes which Christina undertook with Macmillan, waiving his fee

⁴⁵ Kooistra notes that Christina 'had a habit of drawing small sketches in pencil or watercolour, both in the formative stages of a poetic project [...] and, after a book was completed, in the marginal illustrations she added to published volumes.' William Michael Rossetti was her legal and literary executor (and also the last survivor of the siblings), and Roger Peattie notes that a catalogue of his books records a volume of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* which William had inherited from her estate, which featured 'coloured drawings' by Christina. *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, p. 8; 'William Michael Rossetti and the Making of Christina Rossetti's Reputation', in *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism in Honour of William E. Fredeman*, ed. by David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 71–90 (p. 89n10).

⁴⁶ Marsh hypothesises that she possessed less 'natural facility' than her brother, but this idea seems grounded in problematic cultural assumptions, given that the technical skill shown in his oeuvre, let alone its thematic calibre, is still a matter for contention in art criticism. Her tendency to become 'quickly bored with looking at paintings' would surely have proved more of an obstacle to her sustained efforts in the visual arts. *Christina Rossetti*, p. 128. For a more detailed analysis of the difference of the siblings' access to art education, see Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, pp. 22–6.

⁴⁷ Early in his career Gabriel was advised by Leigh Hunt that, while he was talented in both art and literature, poetry was 'not a thing for a man to live upon when he is in the flesh'; Christina was the Rossetti, and the woman, to disprove this sentiment. Letter, Leigh Hunt to Gabriel, 31 March 1848, quoted in Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ Gabriel had a relationship with Macmillan and Co. having offered them his work of translation, *The Early Italian Poets*, the previous year, and rejected on the basis of his 'exorbitant demands'; it would eventually be published by Smith & Elder in December 1861, but only through the financial sponsorship of Ruskin. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'Christina Rossetti and Her Publishers', in *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. by David Clifford and Laurence Roussillon (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 61–75 (p. 62).

for the work on *Goblin Market*, and his only tangible compensation was receiving the same number of courtesy copies of the finished work as his sister.⁴⁹

Gabriel's role in the development of the volume and its successor, as well as his impact upon Christina's eventual career, had peculiarly biographical inflections. He had not facilitated her first named appearance in print, either in periodical or in book form, which came from her own efforts, a fact which is curiously overlooked in critical accounts of Christina's professional life.⁵⁰ Having judged *Macmillan's Magazine* to be in need of high-quality verse, she sent the editor her poems unsolicited, mitigating her boldness in her introductory letter with a self-deprecating tone to mitigate her boldness, and eventually secured the notice of Alexander Macmillan himself.⁵¹ While it may have suited both her siblings' purposes – and her own – to construct a narrative of Christina's supposedly reticent personality, her real breakthrough came about as a result of her lack of caution, Laura-like, in directly approaching an unfamiliar businessman for an exchange of goods: personal output for public notice and worldly gain.⁵² Yet elements of her poetic expression, and her feat of exposure, caused Ruskin, Macmillan, and Gabriel to demur. This is not to deny that her brother's involvement acted as a key bargaining tool. Although 'Up-hill' had been well received upon its appearance in *Macmillan's Magazine* in February 1861, it is understood that the 'cautious' Macmillan undertook the risk of large losses on an illustrated edition of an untried poet's work on the understanding that the collaboration of the Rossetti siblings would make it desirable to the public, and ideal for the lucrative Christmas market as a gift book.⁵³ Gabriel's name featured directly below his sister's author credit on advertisements, such as the one which appeared in the *Athenaeum*, which could be seen as both a canny business ploy and a form of chaperonage.⁵⁴

Macmillan's initial letter of response to Gabriel, while full of the envisioned volume's attractiveness to the public, contains hints of an uneasiness at the work of the new poetess they are to launch between them: 'I quite think a selection of [the poems submitted] would have a chance – or to put it more truly that with some omissions they might do.'⁵⁵ Macmillan's elaborate hesitancy seems to relate to the topics that Christina's work addressed, including the outright acknowledgement of fallen women and illegitimate children ('Cousin Kate'; 'A Triad'), and, more implicitly, of a lack of female self-control ('Apple

⁴⁹ Kooistra, 'Christina Rossetti and Her Publishers', p. 64.

⁵⁰ Christina's first poem to be published in a national magazine was 'The Round Tower at Jhansi: June 8, 1857' (on the theme of the Indian Mutiny), which had appeared on 13 August 1859 in *Once a Week*, but was printed at the foot of the final page, and incorrectly attributed to 'Caroline G. Rossetti', which perhaps has contributed to the perception that it was a less significant foray into print than the start of her long and productive publishing relationship with Macmillan. Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 247–8.

⁵¹ Gabriel had been attempting to have her work published in the *Cornhill* magazine, consulting with London literary connections, great men of the literary marketplace such as Thackeray (its editor at the time) and Ruskin. Marsh implies that Gabriel only discovered that she had secured her appearance in print while attending one of Macmillan's social occasions for his male cultural counterparts, see *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 267–8.

⁵² Peattie notes that William's posthumous account of her career was of independence, and even isolation, pp. 73–4.

⁵³ Kooistra notes that illustrated volumes were the most profitable type of poetry publication at mid-century, but generally at the hands of a well-established author, augmented by more capable illustrators than Rossetti's limited experience thus far had proved him. 'Christina Rossetti and Her Publishers', pp. 63–4.

⁵⁴ Advertisement, *The Athenaeum*, 5 April 1862, p. 475.

⁵⁵ Letter, Macmillan to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 28 October 1861, quoted in Packer, p. 7.

Gathering'; 'Goblin Market'); this may have been a result of the controversy provoked by works which his press had recently published.⁵⁶ While the volume took risks in other areas, at times it is difficult to see what logic dictated what was printed and what was excised.⁵⁷

Gabriel and Macmillan shaped the volume's contents, but the grounds on which they made such decisions are obscured. Jan Marsh attributes the omission of what are now considered among Christina's most 'impressive'⁵⁸ works to Gabriel's interference. While it is true that he did re-christen and veto poems from her three first volumes of poetry, there is no outright theme or stylistic feature which unifies the excluded material. The grounds for Gabriel's objections were not consistent, and the motives by which he justified his interference seem, at best, muddled. As in Macmillan's letter, the excluded material seems to stem from more nebulous questions of which topics, and which forms of treatment, Victorian cultural norms considered suitable and appropriate for a woman to articulate. Alison Chapman sees in Gabriel's revisions to Christina's poetry a campaign to expunge what she terms Christina's 'stylistic commerce with her contemporary women poets'⁵⁹ who had taken up public themes and styles which had been the sole preserve of male authors in the recent past. Yet this interpretation fits rather too easily into a critical narrative which situates Gabriel as the mentor to his neophyte younger sister, an example of what Constance Hassett sees as critical suspicion of the siblings' 'collegial practice'.⁶⁰

We can never know why certain works were omitted; we can only hope to reconsider the culture from which the volume came, and in which the Rossettis' art participated. Christina was unabashed in dealing directly with problematic subjects in her poetry, but how Macmillan and Gabriel communicated with her when broaching these topics is not known. This is the missing link in the story of the inter-relationships of a triangulated group of sibling artists and their business partner when considering questions of authorship, cultural norms and female sexuality in an about-to-be-public discourse.⁶¹ Macmillan and the

⁵⁶ In 1859 *Macmillan's Magazine* had published Henry Gladwyn Jebb's controversial work *Out of the Depths*, which was both praised and criticised for its explicit depiction of a servant girl's seduction by reviewers from the *Athenaeum* to *The Magdalen's Friend*. Sally Mitchell discusses the now almost-forgotten novel alongside the contemporary *Adam Bede* by George Eliot, and the impact of these novels on contemporary culture at length, pp. 54–7; pp. 65–6. Within the well-read and socially conscious milieu of the Rossetti home, one can imagine Christina taking note of just where realism should fear to tread.

⁵⁷ *Macmillan's Magazine* would publish 'Light Love' – a disquisition on illegitimacy – in 1863; Marsh suggests that Alexander Macmillan was unaware that his magazine was publishing work that had been removed from the proposed contents of *Goblin Market*, but without evidence of what he and Gabriel ensured was omitted and why, this is only an assumption. The potential significance of these choices and their logic suggests further avenues of research into the female poetic voice and publication in mid-Victorian culture. Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 295.

⁵⁸ *Christina Rossetti*, p. 271.

⁵⁹ Chapman, p. 150. While Chapman makes interesting points on Gabriel's interference in Christina's work and her relation to artistic cohorts and her female peers, my focus here lies away from the idea of Christina's female subjectivity finding its textual expression. Instead I see her verse and its containing design by Gabriel as enhancing the subjectivity of consumption of the perceptive subject. However, the theme of female objectification is key to an iconographic consideration of *Goblin Market*.

⁶⁰ *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 12.

⁶¹ Alison Chapman notes that, as a gesture of gratitude for Gabriel's work on their collaborations, Christina offered to include his wife Lizzie Siddall's verses in *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, and stresses the shared critical fate of Christina and Lizzie in scholarship which frames them as the 'deanimat[ed]' counterparts, sexual and pure, to Gabriel's simultaneously virile and ecstatic presence, p. 148. However, she does not account for Christina's intense

Rossettis may have communicated, albeit codedly, about sexuality, and hesitantly acknowledged what the era constructed as deviant practices, but the era was about to take responsibility for regulating the freedom of movement of an entire generation of women.

The 1864 Contagious Diseases Act sprang from concern for the high levels of venereal disease in the armed forces, and authorised plain-clothes police officers in garrison and dock towns to visually identify prostitutes and compel them to be medically examined: on the basis of nothing but her appearance and presence in public, a woman '[i]f found diseased, could be detained in a hospital for up to three months.'⁶² No matter how well-regulated her appearance, a woman of the time could lay herself open to accusations of sale of the self in its most literal terms. Christina may have sold the products of her fingers and not her sexual organs, but Gabriel's function as literary chaperone seems a more understandable intercession, as well as an expression of his own male and cultural privilege, in the light of such social touchstones. Her literary persona may have had something of the 'sweet, patient woman' of Macmillan's fond imagining, but Christina was prepared to fight for her own poetic judgement, and the volume appeared much as she had always intended; most of *Goblin Market's* contents appeared in type as they had been written.⁶³

There is another example of correspondence between artists and producers, and one which neatly synthesises the concerns of sexuality, private communications, sexual conduct, and the neck. Gabriel wrote a letter to Macmillan, explaining that the mis-cut profile in the title-page vignette had delayed progress on the release of the second edition:

The phenomenal stupidity of the fool who has plugged that block is enough to make one loathe one's kind. How the printer managed to give the appearance of a gap in the block I cannot think. But from the first proof taken by this plugger (really there is a nautical rhyme to the word which one would like to use!) it became evident that the block was all right, whereupon, without consulting me at all, the beastly ass goes and cuts half a face out.⁶⁴

Gabriel makes casual allusion not only to an oath – in a letter to a male colleague, no less – but to its doubled reference to a deviant sexual practice, and one which had, moreover, only ceased to be a capital offence in 1861.⁶⁵ This gesture to verbal affinities and sexuality when discussing the visual brings us back to Mitchell's question which I applied to the art to which this odd rejoinder applies: how do we make the reader see? Likewise, what can be seen in those woodcuts under scrutiny?

loyalty (characteristic of the whole family) to her brother spilling into her creative material as well as her personal life. We have no record of Siddall's reaction to sharing her name with a character who is the epitome of self-restraint and the harbinger of fertility. However, her personal history of anorexia, prolonged infertility and recent experience of a stillbirth in 1861, combined with her addiction to laudanum which led to her eventual death (whether by design or by accident) makes this choice on Christina's part – and Gabriel's failure to request an alteration – extremely loaded.

⁶² Walkowitz, p. 196.

⁶³ Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 269–71.

⁶⁴ Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, 24 January 1865, quoted in Packer, p. 40.

⁶⁵ The Offences Against the Person Act substituted 'life sentences of penal servitude' for the death penalty in sodomy cases. H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 30.



Fig. 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Golden head by golden head', design for title page of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, pen and ink, 6.5 x 8.5 cm, 1861, courtesy of the Rossetti Archive <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s143.rap.html> [accessed 7 December 2015].

Despite Gabriel's immense talents, he was not a natural illustrator of others' texts. Previous experiences (most famously the Moxon illustrated edition of Tennyson's poetry) had shown that he found assimilating his somewhat intractable style to the demands of a woodcut 'frustrating'.⁶⁶ He could not conform to the commercial pressures and deadlines of publishing, and he struggled to meet the needs of colleagues such as authors and engravers in translating his designs to the printed page.⁶⁷ MacLeod notes that in this respect Christina was his champion in the publishing world, since he had less experience of illustration than his Pre-Raphaelite peers; her work offered him further chances to learn to adapt his 'obscure and undraughtsmanlike images [...] to the engraver's burin'.⁶⁸ Christina was prepared to negotiate with Macmillan due to his care for the appearance of the firm's output, and her commercial expectations were more reasonable than Gabriel's.⁶⁹ She generally acquiesced to her brother's opinion in visual matters, and

⁶⁶ Maurie McInnis, 'Allegorizing on Their Own Hooks: The Book Illustrations of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Arthur Hughes', in *Pocket Cathedrals: Pre-Raphaelite Book Illustration*, ed. by Susan P. Casteras (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1991), pp. 67–77 (p. 68).

⁶⁷ Luisa Calè and Patrizia di Bello note that wood-engraved illustrations were still the provenance of specialist firms because they were 'designed after the text had been letter-pressed and [therefore] were expected to follow its narratives accurately.' Susan P. Casteras notes that when Millais, Rossetti and Hughes provided illustrations for William Allingham's *The Music Master* in 1855, the engravers (the noted Dalziel brothers) 'were paid more than all three artists combined.' 'Introduction: Nineteenth-Century Objects and Beholders', in *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1–21 (p. 15); "The Utmost Possible Variety in Our Combination": An Overview of the Pre-Raphaelite Circle as Book Illustrators', in *Pocket Cathedrals: Pre-Raphaelite Book Illustration*, ed. by Susan P. Casteras (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1991), pp. 13–41 (p. 17).

⁶⁸ Macleod, p. 176.

⁶⁹ Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, pp. 9–10.

as a result Macmillan found that Gabriel gained the upper hand throughout most of their dealings together, in matters as diverse as missed deadlines, personal taste, and even advertising. From the available correspondence Kooistra judges that Christina's own perfectionist tendencies tended to make her sympathetic to Gabriel's slowness in completing projects, and therefore complicit in some of the delays to publishing their work.⁷⁰

The Rossettis' care for the appearance of their work delayed the volume by several months; it eventually appeared in March 1862. It featured a blue fabric binding with a deceptively simple gold-tooled cover design and a double-page spread of frontispiece and title page, all designed by Gabriel. It was not quite the commercial success that Macmillan may have hoped (having missed the lucrative Christmas market) but it was critically well received, and in time sold well enough to justify a further collection of poems, whose publications was timed to coincide with a second edition of *Goblin Market*. The volume was unusual for its time in taking a unified approach to the material aspect of the volume, and attempting to synthesise the vision of an author as channelled by one artist through several engravers. The aesthetic legacy of this approach would be seen in the publishing output of figures like Morris (and Gabriel himself) later in the century, but at the time it was something of an experiment for all the collaborators involved.

Gabriel's allusive talent within the visual realm rivals his sister's in that of the textual, and image selection and characteristics were subject to prolonged discussion between the Rossettis and Macmillan.⁷¹ The combination of density and opacity in Gabriel's design – the boldly abstract cover, sporadically swirling typography, the complex diptych of images – proves a match for its dynamic poetic content, if not its conventional textual form.⁷² All these elements work together to shape the aesthetic frameworks and priorities of the text as a whole, and the title poem in particular.

Rossetti's use of contrasts in his work on the volume is exemplified by his cover design (see Fig. 4), composed of a set of frames for his sister's poems, which construct themselves from – and dissolve themselves into – one another, offset by tiny circles at some of these intersections. Through their arrangement it is possible to see an artist teasing out the very notion of interpretability in tangible artistic objects. Its simplicity contrasts with the ornate double-page spread beneath the cover, but just as the two siblings had very different personalities and modes of expression, the three visual elements of *Goblin Market* share thematic antecedents, but achieve their ends in different ways.

⁷⁰ For a comprehensive account of the various delays in publishing *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, see Kooistra, 'Christina Rossetti and Her Publishers', pp. 63–66.

⁷¹ For an overview of the lengthy negotiations between author, illustrator, and publisher see Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, pp. 9–15.

⁷² The Rossettis did not exercise total aesthetic control over the printing of the text; Samuel D. Albert points out the 'visual disharmony' of the juxtaposition of Gabriel's carefully-considered work with the more prosaically printed contents. "'My Work Is the Embodiment of Dreams': Morris, Burne-Jones, and Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Book Design", in *Pocket Cathedrals: Pre-Raphaelite Book Illustration*, ed. by Susan P. Casteras (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1991), pp. 93–101 (p. 94).

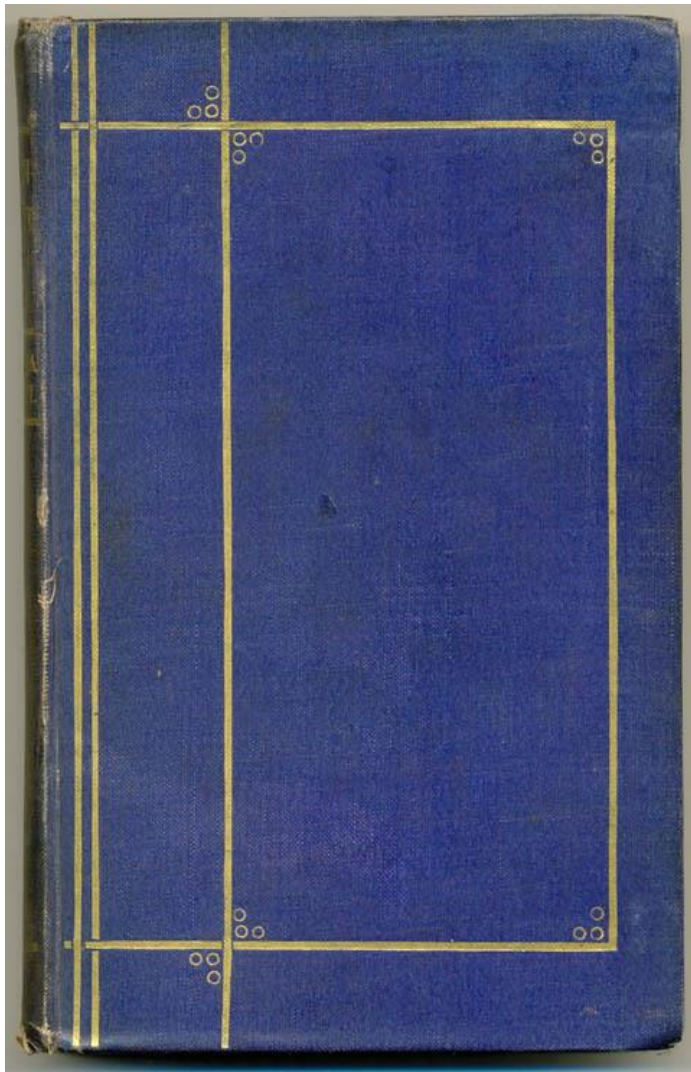


Fig. 4. Binding for *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (2nd edition), gold-blocked design on cloth boards, 171 x 133 mm, 1865, photographed by Simon Cooke for *The Victorian Web* <<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/design/books/34.html>> [accessed 7 December 2015].

The cover design not only gently parodies conservative styles of picture framing, but sets out many of the thematic preoccupations of the volume as a whole, articulating Gabriel's interest in the intersection, and the fulcrum.⁷³ These particular tropes capitalise on Christina's poetic interest in the planar and the dimensional, and exploits the creative tension between the rectilinear and curvilinear, demonstrated by his endeavours to avoid the appearance of a 'line' of a blank space within his carefully cut vignette.⁷⁴ The cover's intersections are not uniform; Gabriel's original design does not present an unequivocal visual border, but rather parallel sets of lines which overlap one another in turn, destabilising the boundary between the text, the cover and the reader. These intersections surround the poetry: they are duplicated on the back of the volume, where the cover design is blind-stamped, and hark forward to the title page,

⁷³ For more on Gabriel's innovative work on frames, see Alastair Grieve, 'The Applied Art of D. G. Rossetti – I. His Picture Frames', *Burlington Magazine*, 115 (1973), 16–24.

⁷⁴ Gabriel wrote to his publisher of Faulkner's report on the revised block for the second edition: 'She tells me that the plug is not quite perfect in the vignette, but is likely unless very carefully printed, to show a white line. Will you let me have a first proof or two that I may attend to this and the general printing which was very bad in the 1st [sic] edition.' Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, 11 February 1865, quoted in Packer, p. 42.

where a parallel layer of interlocking frames can be found.⁷⁵ The body of the perceptive subject is forced to re-assess its relationship to the artwork: is this layered frame an aperture through which to enter the treacherous economy hosted by *Goblin Market*? Or does it offer an acknowledgement of its own fictionality, a protective veneer to prevent contamination by any supposedly dangerous ideas which the poem might contain?⁷⁶

The volume's lack of ostentation is not typical of the mid-Victorian Christmas gift book, which generally took the form of colourful and highly decorated volumes of poetry or, less frequently, religious texts.⁷⁷ Aimed squarely at the educated middle classes, they were considered rather frivolous even in their own time. Its design deliberately sits in the middle ground between these ornate commodities and the more sober covers of conventional books of poetry.⁷⁸ Gabriel's design certainly makes the volume visually appealing, but endows it with a gravitas appropriate to the work of a serious poet. He also, subtly but emphatically, incorporates his sister's work into the wider Rossetti brand, worthy of standing alongside her literary and artistic brothers, and even their patriarch Gabriele, the poet, scholar and political exile. An uncharitable reading of Gabriel's work would suggest that the visual artist put forward something of an aesthetic manifesto, less as an illustration of his sister's work than an unequivocal avowal of his own. But that would be to ignore the strongly collaborative processes by which the poem and the volume came about, and the very theme of sympathy and dependability of siblings and their achievements which the title poem articulates.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Small but significant changes to the cover design were made in preparation for the second edition, but the question of who exactly made them is a rather vexed one, and discussed in detail both in William E. Fredeman, "Woodman, Spare That Block": The Published, Unpublished, and Projected Illustrations and Book Designs of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s., 5 (1996), 7–41; Alastair Grieve, 'The Applied Art of D. G. Rossetti – II. His Book Bindings', *Burlington Magazine*, 115 (1973), 79–84. Fredeman suggests that Macmillan used his cunning to secure retribution for Gabriel's high-handedness in amending the title page design, forcing him to claim the modified cover design as his own, and interprets the publisher's continued use the design as further retaliation, not only for Christina's later books but – after the deaths of both siblings – the work of an entirely unrelated author, "Woodman, Spare That Block" (pp. 18–20).

⁷⁶ Within the context of sexualised readings, potentially matter-of-fact elements of the work's production become loaded with sexuality's covert presence in Western art, such as the switch of the 2nd edition binding from the Rossettis' preferred colour red to blue. The era was peculiarly colour-conscious in all forms of design, invoking speculation through the change of colours from the hue of "passion" to the hallmark of "purity". Packer, p. 32n1.

⁷⁷ The volume was priced at five shillings, and by comparison a monthly instalment of Charles Dickens' 1861 novel *Great Expectations* cost 1 shilling, which Simon Eliot considers 'a middle class price'. The Rossettis' volume of poetry would have been luxurious enough to qualify as a gift, but not an extravagance. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture, 1855–1875* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), p. 259n15; Simon Eliot, 'The Business of Victorian Publishing', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 36–61 (p. 43).

⁷⁸ This was facilitated by the historical moment; in Paul Goldman's assessment the 1860s was 'one of the most remarkable, crowded and complex periods in English publishing and illustration'. *Victorian Illustration: The Pre-Raphaelites, the Idyllic School and the High Victorians*, rev. edn (Aldershot, Hants: Lund Humphries, 2004), p. xvii.

⁷⁹ 'Goblin Market' may be a fable of the "sibling arts", yet its failure to explain the relation of the two happily cohabiting maidens to one another until late in the poem is notable, occurring at line 165. Reading the poem according to its context provides a further ambiguity within the title of 'sister'; Christina would have been referred to by this title in her volunteer role at the Highgate Penitentiary.

Marsh suggests that Gabriel, even if only ‘half-consciously’,⁸⁰ orchestrated delays so that Christina’s book would not compete with his own works. He certainly hankered after poetic success, and by the end of the decade he had arranged the exhumation of his wife Elizabeth Siddall, in whose coffin he had laid a volume of what he considered his best work mere months before Christina’s print debut in 1862. Marsh notes that he chose not to inform his family of the circumstances of the poems’ recovery.⁸¹ Whatever the truth of his feelings about his sister’s success, it is undeniable that when placed side-by-side, the 1860s volumes which he designed (*The Early Italian Poets*, *Goblin Market*, *The Prince’s Progress* and William Michael Rossetti’s translation of *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Part I – Hell*) were siblings themselves: all had common traits such as dark bindings, boldly simple designs, and the repeated three-roundel motif.⁸² In their publishing efforts together the siblings joined forces to effect the projection of the possibilities of meaning outwards from the page. In the case of *Goblin Market*, the textual and pictorial incidents of the neck, as well as its graphic and symbolic equivalents, carry equal responsibility for this extrusion.

Frontispiece: ‘Buy from us with a Golden Curl’

Gabriel insisted that Macmillan employed the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., of which he had become a partner, to interpret his rather indistinct designs for the pictorial contents of the volume. Charles Faulkner (Pre-Raphaelite connection, Oxford don, and the firm’s book-keeper) made the first amateur attempt at the blocks for both title page and frontispiece. His work on the former was so delayed that the task was reassigned to W. J. Linton, a professional engraver of whom Gabriel had a low opinion from a previous collaboration. By the time of the second edition the firm was employing Faulkner’s sisters, Lucy and Kate, middle-class Bloomsbury residents who had much in common with Christina, and who, like the sisters depicted in Gabriel’s illustrations, have been confused by critical accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism.⁸³

When Gabriel wrote to Macmillan with a request to send ‘Miss Faulkner’ £2 he stressed her role as a ‘professional engraver’⁸⁴ who had corrected the work of a (male) colleague in producing the new block for the title page. It certainly took someone with ambition and creativity, as well as talent, to produce edited, linear translations of the dreamy sketches which Gabriel submitted to engravers. In his resentment at

⁸⁰ Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 278.

⁸¹ Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 385.

⁸² Fredeman demonstrates this similarity with a photograph of Rossetti’s works collected together on a shelf in “‘Woodman, Spare That Block’”, p. 32.

⁸³ Emma Ferry provides a fascinating account of how critical accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism have elided the identities of the two creative professionals. She suggests that due to a combination of Lucy Faulkner’s character and her marriage to Linton’s partner in the firm which trained her in woodcutting, her work has historically been attributed to her younger sister, the designer and craftswoman Kate Faulkner. Lucy would later become an authority on design and interior décor, publishing the influential *The Drawing Room* in 1877, under her married name of Orrinsmith. ‘Lucy Faulkner and the “Ghastly Grin”: Re-Working the Title Page Illustration to “[Goblin Market]”’, *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, 18 (2008), 65–84 (p. 75).

⁸⁴ Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, 11 February 1865, quoted in Ferry, p. 75.

what he deemed the ‘blurred’⁸⁵ appearance of the first edition’s print he may have been unable to appreciate the unintended comedy of his own hypocrisy. All of Gabriel’s visual materials revolve around themes of ambiguity and interpretation through his play on space, perhaps taking their cue from Christina’s poetic treatment of the female figures. The symbolic commentaries on the straight line that were glimpsed on the cover are continued in the frontispiece and title page; for example, the insertion of flowers, foliage, symbols and monograms at otherwise bald intersections.⁸⁶ Even Rossetti’s typeface avoids straightforward intersections within letters, and the caption creates unseen opportunities for sinuous, tail-like emphasis, reminiscent both of goblin tails and the embracing arms of sisters.

The frontispiece is a beautiful and engrossing fairy-tale picture, crammed with delightful details, but it is also replete with sexual significance for the informed reader, from the display of fruits to the significance of the moment Gabriel illustrates (see Fig. 5). Laura’s payment with ‘a precious golden lock’ (l. 126) invokes what Galia Ofek declares the ‘sexual over-determination of women’s hair’⁸⁷ in the Victorian era. Gabriel fills the image with fruit, in accordance with the famously mouth-watering list with which Christina begins the poem, and almost all (apart from the pumpkin) have sexual connotations in the iconology of Western Art History, whether of awakening, fall or decadence. A dish of apples and pomegranates sits parallel to Laura’s head, with their respective Biblical and Classical connections with Eve and Persephone, two fables which revolve around fertility and the terrible power of women’s appetites, and the taint of womanhood.

The largest dish of fruit is propped between the sanctioned and unsanctioned bodies of girl and bestial goblin vendor, on a level with Laura’s womb. The bowl, like the frames of the cover and title page, both tantalises the perceptive subject by revealing and concealing tempting treats. This dish is a parallel to the frames on which Rossetti is making such play in this work, and provides a referent for the significance of the parapet bearing a solitary apple in Gabriel’s *Bocca Baciata*, behind which the female subject of the picture is poised, ready for the viewer’s interpretative efforts. The dish which holds both figs and grapes is an emblem of the perils of trying to read the visual or verbal imagery of the poem. Both types of fruit have their own internal contradictory associations, all pertaining to sexuality: figs carry historic associations of lust, shame, and fertility, while grapes can stand for intemperance as well as chastity and resurrection in the earliest Christian traditions.⁸⁸ As with the process of reading the poem, the appetite is

⁸⁵ Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, 4 April 1862, quoted in William E. Fredeman, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 10 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002–2015), *Vols 1–2: The Formative Years: Charlotte Street to Cheyne Walk (1835–1862)*, II (2002), p. 467.

⁸⁶ It is impossible to state exactly which species the flowers (mirrored within the image on the bedspread) belong to, but their leaf structure seems to group them with the marigold family, a symbol which recurs near to another eroticised image of a woman in *Bocca Baciata*, which I discuss later in the chapter.

⁸⁷ Ofek interprets this as partly attributable to the relatively unregulated visibility of a lady’s hair, in contrast to other body parts, p. 3. See also Elisabeth G. Gitter, ‘The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination’, *PMLA*, 99 (1984), 936–54.

⁸⁸ Robert Palter, *The Duchess of Malfi’s Apricots, and Other Literary Fruits* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), p. 149; p. 158; pp. 509–512.

recognised, but whether the consumption is undertaken in a spirit of piety or intemperance is entirely a matter of interpretation.



Fig. 5. 'Buy from us with a golden curl', frontispiece to *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, designed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, engraved by Charles J. Faulkner, 1861-2, courtesy of the Rossetti Archive <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs.sa74.s143.rap.html> [accessed 7 December 2015].

The frontispiece, which takes up most of the page, is a striking articulation of the disruptive force of the female body; as with the text of the poem, her figure threatens to break through its textual containment, seeming to exist in relief from the surface of the page, which brings it closer to the eye of the perceptive

subject. Laura bulges with anticipation, and enclosing her desire proves difficult to the diegetic limitations of her overdress and chemise, straining the buttons at her waist, and the leitmotif of the triad of (first seen on the cover) recurs in the fabric of Laura's dress. The pattern forms a bridge between the pallor of Laura's skin and the hatching which is characteristic of the goblins' forms and clothing; the force of her dark desire seems to seep through these peepholes in the fabric.

The clarity of Laura's depiction does not make her the point of stillness; she is a mass of frenzied curves. Her clothing writhes around her, the muscles of her arm and throat are invoked through delicate shading, and her hair falls in wild curls, one of which she is about to 'clip' (l. 126). The apex of the neck's unnatural protrusive curve lies at the centre of the arrangement of figures; compositionally as well as scopically, the neck becomes the focus of the work. These elements combine to make her all the more appealing to the eye, to make her the tempting fruit of our own visual consumption. The two hungers – that of the perceptive subject for aesthetic pleasure, and Laura's metaphysical longing for fruit – meet in full force in the shape of this vignette, as if to uncover and shame both characters in this metanarrative of consumption. The bulge in Laura's throat is not a biological component of the neck's structure, but here the force of Laura's desire distorts the shape of her throat: in this image, she is composed of nothing but the drive to consume.

Title Page: 'Golden head by Golden Head'

As in the frontispiece, the neck is at the centre of the title page illustration. The vignette, though it occupies less space than its older sibling, achieves a similar impact, and the misjudgement in its transition from product to publishing entity, from the personal to the public, only emphasises its importance.⁸⁹ Laura and Lizzie recline (albeit at an unnaturally upright angle) enveloped in luxuriant fabric, and hemmed in by a portal, which allows us the 'peep at the goblins' which Christina's poem always meant to offer. Whether this orb is a vision or dream belonging to one of the figures, or merely a caprice, it stresses the triangular shape of the composition. The eye is drawn from left to right, as text in a codex, travelling along the slope of the projected hillside, into the almost-unshaded whiteness of one sister's arm and up to her head, level with the portal, and below which (in the first edition) lies the problematic and faint delineations of the jawline and throat. The unintentional incongruity of the faintness of the lines of the neck and jaw and the strong demarcation of the rest of the female figures' bodies allows us room to consider the relationship between the vignette and the wider title page design which contains it. Macmillan's 'sweet [...] woman face'⁹⁰ may be marred by the vague jawline, but the flaw makes the face

⁸⁹ In considering Gabriel's assertion that ham-fisted workmanship had marred the "face" of the block, it is difficult to know what that might tell us about his own interpretative faculty. Does it express his awareness that the broad, bowed neck was becoming something of a calling-card for his pictorial art? Or does it neatly encapsulate the neck's utter dominance over his representational mode when depicting the human woman? Perhaps such a sentiment might suggest that he saw all elements of the human body (and perhaps particularly the neck) as possessing the same expressive capacity as the face? It could be argued that Gabriel never mastered the complexity of expression of which Millais or Hunt were capable: this might be one reason behind the prevalence of gorgeously somnolent, unconscious, and bored-looking women in his oeuvre.

⁹⁰ Letter, Macmillan to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 28 October 1861, quoted in Packer, p. 7.

more interesting and complex than the second edition, providing a suggestive foil to the graphic uniformity of the title page.

The idea of the ‘gap’⁹¹ in the cut image of the title-page, against which Gabriel raged, although unintentional on the artist and engraver’s part, is an interesting literary-visual device. It presents the eye with a conjured absence, just as in his letter Gabriel presented Macmillan with a conjured obscenity. The idea of looking at a ‘gap’ serves to make the perceptive subject sensitive to the fact that all art and all writing must acknowledge its own pretence to some degree, and that this image must have passed through the interpretative filter, as well as under the hands, of many perceptive subjects already. The image in front of us may feign an organic wholeness, but it comes to us as a product of the commercial as well as the creative economy.

Perhaps the source of the unpleasantness in the neck is from this tension of the organic and the artificial; the blurred jawline is an unpleasant reminder of illness and malformation in what should be an idealised image of beauty, in which the consumer may immerse themselves. In her article on Christina’s volunteer work with fallen women Diane D’Amico refers to the contemporary notion that the woman who gained sexual experience outside marriage would be transformed ‘into a “horrible” spectre’,⁹² which plays further on the anxieties attending the enjoyment of a potentially morally-dubious beauty. Or indeed, two: here the pure and fallen woman lie side-by-side, with no distinguishing feature, which only becomes apparent once the poem has been read, and its message understood. When cross-referenced with the poem, this moment of rest can be recognised as post-lapsarian, taking place in the poem after Laura has been tainted by her taste – and knowledge – of goblin fruit. Once the flaw is rectified there is no way to distinguish the women, who appear similar enough in the second edition that they may be feasibly considered the two profiles of one face (see Fig. 3). Gail Lynn Goldberg is particularly interesting on this aspect of the image, remarking that Gabriel uses ‘a single outline to delineate twinlike forms: the heaving bosom of one suggests the curved neck of the other’⁹³ In the same terms, the presence of sexuality is planted both by the intimacy of the envisioned setting, but also by its inverse theme of innocence, hinted at by the framing device of the dream.

The notion of the image which has been mauled and falsified, creating division at its heart, has neat parallels with critical readings of the image. The figures can be understood as individuals, or interpreted as two interlocking halves of an emblematic whole woman, reflecting the small yin-yang figure at the top left hand corner of the page design. Fredeman states that originally a tissue guard was placed between the illustrated pages to protect them, and the idea is a pleasing parallel to Victorian notions that a virtuous sister should need protection from a promiscuous one, although I have not found a reference to this

⁹¹ Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, 24 January 1865, quoted in Packer, p. 40.

⁹² D’Amico, “‘Equal before God’: Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of the Highgate Penitentiary”, p. 69.

⁹³ Goldberg, p. 147.

‘offset tissue’ in other works of criticism.⁹⁴ Indeed, it proves the subversive power of applying Merleau-Ponty’s model of an immersive culture to art consumption in theorising the work of art as a body which is ‘sensible for itself’⁹⁵ and will strive to touch itself, unless physically prevented.

Gabriel may be deliberately playing on, and tripping up, the anxieties of the readers who return to the image, searching for clues as to the moral of the whole work in its illustrations. He illustrates experience on one page and innocence on the other, but with what end? The reading eye moves over the pages from left to right, from frontispiece to title page, which could be a way of emphasising the moral arc of the story. Yet Kooistra astutely observes that this progression ‘replaces sororal difference with feminine sameness, thereby displacing the moral story with sexual fantasy.’⁹⁶ In this way a combination of the eye, the art, Western reading practice, and the book’s composition can ‘bring us to the ... beings in depth’⁹⁷ because we are led through this sequence. The reader/viewer looks *at*, rather than *down on*, these figures. The uses of shading in the title page vignette compounds this effect; the female bodies seem on the verge of toppling out, making the throat of the nearest figure seem an inviting hollow of an almost tangible body.

The sensual suggestiveness of Gabriel’s double-page spread can be seen as either a cue for one’s perception of the poem’s subject matter, or a false trail, working to warn the perceptive subject, Laura-like, of the dangers of unthinking consumption of the tempting goods of strangers, whether books, pictures, or fruit. Within either scenario, the Rossetti siblings are co-operating to destabilise the comforting notion that art is something in which you lose yourself. In this fantasy, one is never very far from the darkest and most dangerous elements of the imagination.

The mis-cut neck serves to highlight the instinct for pleasure which is given free rein throughout the volume, as shown in the reaction of one of its first readers outside the family circle, and its earliest public audience. Macmillan’s response to ‘Goblin Market’ – inspired by that of the ‘working’ men – is informed by the poem’s ability to harness the body and mind through sensual captivation, disregarding the divisions of physical presence from imaginative experience. His letter fuses the prosaic and the fantastic in imagining a tangible printed product, a beautiful encasing physical form whose referent is the innocence, and yet availability, of a ‘sweet’ sensual female presence.⁹⁸ *Goblin Market* evokes this reaction in striving to dissolve its textual confines in order to make the act of artistic consumption a more aesthetically radical one, whether experienced in the head, read aloud, or envisioned through graphic representation.

⁹⁴ Fredeman, p. 17.

⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, p. 69.

⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Macmillan believed that the ‘prettiness’ of a book was a key quality of any book, and Kooistra makes a case that Macmillan’s output, particularly those he published with the Rossettis, were decades ahead of their time. Kooistra, ‘Christina Rossetti and Her Publishers’, p. 64.

The Rossettis confront the perceptive subject of art with fiction, destabilising and then re-establishing the means through which art keeps itself separate; the means of their creative engagement become immaterial. The siblings were prepared to exacerbate the delay in the object's release in striving for this, in order to make us consider more carefully our implicated position as consumers of what can be labelled female sexuality, whose thematic potency can in turn be transferred to the aesthetic exchange itself. The significance of the neck, in all the manifestations of *Goblin Market*, is in what it stands for interpretatively: that it forms a site of both indulgence and restraint, and as a threshold between different sexual iconographies of mid-Victorian culture.

Highgate Penitentiary: 'Desecrated Doves', Sisters, and the Apple of Knowledge

Lizzie and Laura's figures are intertwined and indistinguishable on the title page; as already noted in the introduction, the 1850s and 1860s witnessed increased levels of social and cultural concern for the correct visual interpretation of women. The 1851 census revealed the 'sheer surplus'⁹⁹ of unmarried women without reliable male support and protection, creating a panic over the lone woman, socially unproductive and without moral guidance.¹⁰⁰ A woman's legal identity and chastity related to her relationships to husband or father through laws of 'couverture',¹⁰¹ and an unchaperoned woman generated uncertainty through being uncategorisable by sight. A woman alone on the street, or in the (goblin) marketplace played into such anxieties, which were exacerbated by a panic over perceived increases in levels of prostitution in the 1850s, which became a preoccupation of the press and the arts across the nation.¹⁰² Such tropes prompted a cultural re-examination of women's position in a society which was deemed to possess the right to the physical regulation of women's bodies as they consumed (art or food with regards to the middle-class) or produced (sexual and reproductive output and labour). The term 'public woman'¹⁰³ was still a euphemism for a prostitute at the moment when Christina was preparing for her literary output to appear under her own name. Judith Walkowitz notes both that the Contagious Diseases Acts and the campaigns for their repeal rose from the cultural consciousness of middle-class women like Christina that

⁹⁹ Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality: Sexual Behaviour and Its Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 94.

¹⁰⁰ Deborah Anna Logan discusses the phenomenon of the 'redundant' single woman in terms of how it intersected with other narratives of women's sexuality in the era in *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 192–3.

¹⁰¹ Lyn Pykett links this practice, which meant that a woman who married lost her status as a legal subject to her husband being a '*femme covert*' ('covered woman'), with the wider nineteenth-century campaigns against women's legal under-representation in 'Women Writing Woman: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Gender and Sexuality', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 84.

¹⁰² In their works on this mid-century discourse both Eric Trudgill and Amanda Anderson examine the links between class and sexual regulation within wider economic frameworks, which have tended to be elided or obscured by Evangelical narratives morality and the Victorian dogma of "self-control" in criticism. Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1976); Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*, Reading Women Writing (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁰³ Walkowitz, p. 213.

their sexual function was subject, and subjugated through the policing of their appearance in ‘subjected districts’¹⁰⁴ to patriarchal supervision and control.

During the period in which Christina composed and published ‘Goblin Market’, she had spent much of her time among women who had exercised their sexuality. She had taken up a role as one of the lay sisters at the London Diocesan Penitentiary, otherwise known as the St Mary Magdalene Penitentiary, which was built to house young women who had sexually transgressed, but hoped to redeem themselves through education and training over the course of two years, in the hope that they would find either employment or marital prospects once they left. From its founding in 1855 it had structured the life of its inmates around these volunteers who were expected to live at the Penitentiary for certain periods, supervising specific groups of inmates to safeguard them against temptation. We know that Christina was one of these sisters, agreeing to take up residence on the condition that time was set aside for her to correct the proofs of *Goblin Market*.¹⁰⁵

Much of the evidence of her actual duties at Highgate is obscured, whether by subsequent interference, or a lack of information. Through a combination of aptitude and inclination, William Michael Rossetti took on the role of family biographer, but he is notably inconsistent in his accounts of Christina’s involvement at the institution. Her reluctance to pursue the respectable ‘woman’s work’¹⁰⁶ available – being a governess, contracting a marriage of convenience, or acting as dutiful mainstay to her family – is documented in her own correspondence, and William’s rather vague allusions to his sister’s Christian charity can be read as a way of glossing her satisfaction with life and work amongst other women who had, whether by choice or not, flouted such conventions.¹⁰⁷

The journalist Bessie Rayner Parkes visited the penitentiary in 1858, as part of her research for ‘A House of Mercy’, the second article of the first edition of the *English Woman’s Journal*.¹⁰⁸ Its founders were Barbara Leigh Bodichon, a family friend whose example Gabriel ‘tactlessly’ commended to his sister, and Parkes, who as early as 1855 had sent Christina a volume of her own poems ‘as a sign of a desire to meet

¹⁰⁴ The campaigns for repeal of Josephine Butler and her ilk went a good deal further in ideological terms than the evangelical-cum-social “rescue work” which Christina was undertaking at Highgate, even as she developed the potentially sexual themes of exposure which ‘Goblin Market’ takes on. See Walkowitz, p. 76; p. 186; p. 196.

¹⁰⁵ The sisters did live in the penitentiary for short periods, but they slept in separate accommodation, away from the penitents’ dormitories. Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 276.

¹⁰⁶ This phrase was most notably used by Linton when arguing that women should not ‘work’ outside the home, which was the proper realm of men, but should be content within it, spending their energy on traditional pursuits such as decorating, child-rearing, and dressing themselves well. The piece bore the radical-sounding title ‘The Modern Revolt’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 23 (1870), 142–49 (p. 147).

¹⁰⁷ See Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 221; p. 245; p. 478; p. 307–8.

¹⁰⁸ The leading article was a treatise on the profession of teaching in relation to middle-class women in society. For a thorough overview of the magazine’s history and significance, see Jim Mussell’s comprehensive introduction to the digital archive maintained at the *Nineteenth Century Serials Edition* website. While its circulation was not very wide, the publication was an ambitious one, featuring ‘detailed analysis of issues of concern to women in a distinctly feminine discourse that combined liberal politics, non-denominational religious sentiment, affecting anecdote, and engagement with high culture.’, its ambition in engaging with its readership’s social concerns distinguishes it as mid-century reading material for women engaging in emancipated forms of reading and interpretation. ‘English Woman’s Journal (1858–1864)’, *Nineteenth Century Serials Edition*, 2015 <<http://www.ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html>> [accessed 13 December 2015].

her'.¹⁰⁹ It is a curious coincidence that the span of this journal was roughly contemporaneous with the development, from date of composition to second edition, of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Christina may have been a regular reader; she was invited to submit two poems to the publication within this time frame.¹¹⁰ Every aspect of the journal was addressed to an implied middle-class readership of which Christina might have been considered typical: a dutiful Christian woman in possession of income, education, patience and leisure.¹¹¹

For the most part the article is concerned with the day-to-day running of the 'penitentiary for the most unfortunate of women',¹¹² and Parkes describes the setting, inmates and staff, and interviewing the warden of the time, John Oliver. She dwells in detail on the institution's regime, and the authorial tone is a curious combination of social chronicler, moral guardian and art reviewer. Indeed, Parkes could be said to be as interested as the Rossettis in the frames and annotations which have been constructed to contain the spectre of the sexuality of women. The 'penitents'¹¹³ (*EWJ*, p. 13) were young women who had sexually transgressed, rather than habitual prostitutes, but Parkes finds the 'desecrated doves' (*EWJ*, p. 17) themselves feeble and unattractive, and they merit far less emphasis in her account than their physical environment. They seem surrounded – even annotated – by text; the warden's room contains 'mottoes [...] painted above the doors and mantel-piece' (*EWJ*, pp. 13-14), even the sleeping cubicles featured religious prints and prayers and 'holy words embroidered in box and ilex leaves over many of the beds' (*EWJ*, p. 16). As on *Goblin Market's* title page, women's bodies are hemmed in by text which provides contextualisation, and partake in a narrative over which they have little control.

The warden is quoted approvingly and at length on the institution's ethos, which appears to have emphasised self-denial and self-control rather than carrying out a punitive moral programme.¹¹⁴ Oliver's belief that the penitents are individuals who, while 'alike in their broad features, differ in the detail' (*EWJ*, p. 18), seems eerily prescient of the title page vignette, and the different choices of Laura and Lizzie. Many of the penitentiary's rules concerned themselves with the regulation of young women's expression and consumption, from matters physical and aesthetic to intellectual, such as silent hours and restricted

¹⁰⁹ Diane D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti and *The English Woman's Journal*', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n.s. 3, 1994, 20–24 (p. 23n4).

¹¹⁰ Christina's 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' appeared in the December 1861 issue, and 'Gone Before' in the October 1863 issue. *Goblin Market and Other Poems* received a favourable review shortly after it was published. Later in her career Christina refused to submit her work to the publication, since she felt that they had printed her work alongside material that she considered contrary to her Christian beliefs. D'Amico, 'Christina Rossetti and *The English Woman's Journal*', p. 23n6; p. 20.

¹¹¹ The abolition of the advertising tax in 1853, of newspaper duty in 1855, and the duty on paper in 1861, all encouraged the proliferation of journals and newspapers. See Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 71.

¹¹² 'A House of Mercy', 1 (1 March 1858), 13–27 (pp. 24–5). All quotations are taken from this edition. All subsequent references are to this issue, and are given in the text with the prefix *EWJ*.

¹¹³ This is the initial term Parkes uses for the body of women as a whole, although for the most part she calls them 'girls' (*EWJ*, p. 14). She uses the word 'transgressors' (*EWJ*, p. 24) when conjecturing as to the risk of inmates leaving the penitentiary and returning to their former lives, and only uses the label 'fallen' (*EWJ*, p. 25) for those women who take this step. The Penitentiary rules stated that an inmate who left before her stay was complete could never return (*EWJ*, p. 25).

¹¹⁴ Trudgill notes that some institutions of the day did not stop short of brutality in their methods, pp. 281–2.

reading material.¹¹⁵ When Oliver proclaims that, since rules encourage rebellious feelings: ‘let us therefore have *as few as possible to break*’ (*EWJ*, p. 17, emphasis original), he specifically refers to the apple tree in the courtyard. The fruit is forbidden to the penitents – although the basis for this rule is never specified – and he gives an account of penitents who have found temptation impossible to resist, an example of how even supposedly harmless pilfering and unregulated consumption causes trouble within such an institution.

The accounts are heavily freighted with the symbolism of the apple of discord in the Eden of Highgate, and while thus far the individual bodies of the penitents have been appropriately shielded from the textual field, in one account of illicit apple-eating the sexualised neck suddenly obtrudes upon the reader’s notice. The climax of the piece is ‘the story of the third apple, [...] the most distressing of all’ (*EWJ*, p. 19), Oliver’s account of a violent and angry woman who had initially made progress in the institution, but whose theft of an apple appeared to have provoked her ‘evil spirit’ (*EWJ*, p. 19), to the extent that the warden was impelled to offer her the opportunity of leaving.

I then directed that she should be dressed in her own clothes, and handed over to me. [...] This was done, and when she re-appeared I desired her to follow me. She dashed about her dress with her hands as though she would have forced it from her body, and followed to the outer gate in a most excited state of feeling. As I applied the key to the lock, and the gate gently opened, I reminded her of God’s mercy to her, of the doom awaiting her. I said ‘You go to your destruction, but may God still have mercy on you.’ The door stood wide open, and the street was before her. The most agonising cry burst from her, as if it would rend her frame; such a cry as that I had never heard before; a cry that was unearthly, it seemed stifled in her throat, yet as if it burst forth through every pore of her skin. She threw herself from before the door against the adjoining fence, clutched at her clothes, buried her face in them, and stood convulsed from head to foot. (*EWJ*, pp. 19-20)

Once again the neck proves disruptive to the structures of representation which contain it, but here the force of the neck threatens to violate the integrity of the structure of the *body* which contains it. The imagery of enclosed spaces enforced by mantel-pieces, doors, gates, locks and keys is not lost on the viewer who has the volume’s design in mind; when examined afresh, the cover parallels this moment of conceptual ‘rend[ing of] her frame’, with the gate at its centre, while the cry of stifled self-expression seeps through the triads of pores which stand at its edges. The ‘unearthly’ cry which seems to emanate from the woman’s throat recalls the quaking and disruptive necks of the maidens in *Goblin Market*. Mitchell’s idea of the ‘recursive play’ of imagery has even more traction when the eating of an apple is reworked into a frame which considers sexuality, society and the Biblical heritage of the Fall without ever specifically naming these concerns explicitly.

Portraits like this one can flesh out a critical consciousness of the dominant sexual ideologies of the day, which subjected women to categorisation, as well as limitations of thought and expression; Christina had

¹¹⁵ The regime considered even texts such as *Pilgrim’s Progress* as prone to contamination when owned by the penitents, since they constituted ‘dangerous reminders of the forbidden past’ (*EWJ*, p. 27).

already recognised such cultural norms and critiqued them in her poetry before she lived within the Penitentiary walls.¹¹⁶ But as a highly-cultured middle-class artist she possessed the cultural means by which to recognise and subvert them. In the correspondence between the siblings Christina's role at Highgate, and her possible understanding of sexual impropriety through her exposure to the inmates, is never acknowledged. But in a later letter she firmly corrects Gabriel for his fears that writing about sexuality will taint her reputation, as well as tacit support of the idea that female poets are unable to reach outside the sphere of their own experience in creating a narrative heroine. In contrast to the respectful tone she has used in their negotiations over her work in the past, she shows a measure of defiance in speaking of her fallen character: acknowledging that

whilst it may truly be urged that unless white could be black and Heaven Hell my experience (thank God) precludes me from hers, I yet don't see why 'the Poet mind' should be less able to construct her from its own inner consciousness than a hundred other unknown quantities.¹¹⁷

Whatever opinion Gabriel may have expressed as to the capacities of the female 'Poet mind', his sister made a subdued but emphatic reproach on behalf of her own freedom of expression and of the awareness and capability, poetic and social, of her female peers. In the fantastical universe which Christina constructs for her maidens there is both innocence and commercial awareness in the exchange of the body, of which Lizzie is the proof. She has 'had to do with goblin merchant men' (l. 474), to the point of being touched, and violated as an untouchable textual space, and yet remains unspoiled. Christina is asserting that she may deal with commercial as well as critical pressures (and, tacitly, live amongst fallen women), but that her creative mind should not be fettered in such crudely gendered terms.

Just as the inmates of Highgate did not have to be divided into pure and defiled, 'Goblin Market' does not have to be conceived of either as innocent fairy tale or knowing lesbian romp; it is an artwork which can form a retort both to the notion of the fixed axis of Victorian bourgeois sexual niceties, and to later critical readings which rely on this fixedness.¹¹⁸ Kathy Alexis Psomiades suggests a critical reading of

¹¹⁶ Marsh interprets an 1856 work as a struggle to 'reconcile the desire for achievement with the female ideal as promoted by Church and society.' Then called 'A Fight Over the Body of Homer', it was retitled 'The Lowest Room' and, while Gabriel vetoed its appearance in either of their collaborations, she included it in her volume of collected works, *Goblin Market, the Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, which was published in 1875. *Christina Rossetti*, p. 180; p. 428.

¹¹⁷ Letter, Christina to Gabriel, 13 March 1865. Quoted in Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 330–1. 'Under the Rose', the poem in question, was being reworked for *The Prince's Progress*, and Christina later gave this poem a title which more explicitly attributed responsibility for sexual lapses, when it appeared in the 1875 compendium: 'The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children'. Gabriel might have been cautioning her from the position of an artist already well-known for his sensual material striving to protect his sister's artistic and personal reputation, yet if this was his motive it is hard to see why he chose such a clumsy and derogatory means of couching his concern. Gabriel's behaviour in their publishing partnership would become increasingly belligerent over time, and while we cannot know the toll of the patrician interference she was subjected to by figures like Macmillan and her brothers, retorts like these are illuminating. Gabriel's strictures on the style, themes and appearance of Christina's work must have become harder for a published, popular, and well-reviewed poet to put up with. Jan Marsh analyses the social issues he deemed "suitable" for his sister's pen in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, pp. 297–8.

¹¹⁸ Marsh speaks on behalf of a critical tradition which insists on reading Christina's 'deployment of erotic feeling [as] largely unconscious, derived from childish memories of sensual desire', and further suggesting that 'Goblin Market' was a morality tale conceived for the penitents, since it was 'designed to delight and instruct and pitched

‘Goblin Market’ which detects a private poem at its heart, free of ‘figures of embodied femininity, that exists not for its own sake but as [...] a moral message that is the only part of this poem we can read’,¹¹⁹ even the perceptive subject who has bought and read the tangible text. This notion of para-poem, of a private poetic core, is a fascinating interpretative construction, but it elides the sequence of choices by artists and collaborators involved in *Goblin Market*. I read the emphasis which they placed on the female body throughout, and its stress on the neck in particular, as forming a porthole through which the private and moralised (as opposed to moral) poem may reach out to touch the buyer/reader. This notion of ‘embodied femininity’ becomes a straw woman for a secret core of moral meaning in the narrative, and has all the more powerful an application in that ultimate aesthetic experiment of form and feeling: Gabriel’s *Bocca Baciata*.

Bocca Baciata

On 13 November 1859, Gabriel wrote to his friend and fellow artist William Bell Scott:

I have painted a little half-figure in oil lately which I should like you to see, as I have made an effort to avoid what I know to be a besetting fault of mine – & indeed rather common to PR [*sic*] painting – that of stipple in the flesh. I have succeeded in quite keeping it at a distance this time, and am very desirous of painting [...] various figures of this kind, chiefly as a rapid study of flesh painting.¹²⁰

Bocca Baciata is a small work, not much bigger than a sheet of paper, and while its size should mean that it is non-confrontational, its subject matter and approach make it a startling one (see Fig. 6). A lush rendering of the Pre-Raphaelite model Fanny Cornforth, the composition is crammed with flowers, hair, fabric and flesh, and the figure is transfixed, her look evading the eyes of the viewer, despite being positioned very close to the picture plane, by this time a signature element of Gabriel’s practice.

The painting demonstrates the development of Gabriel’s technique, especially in balancing the handling of pigment and texture in a single work. A lightness of touch pervades the treatment of organic surfaces in the painting, where the man-made components such as the wall, the jewellery, and the jacket are conveyed with a more effortful mimesis, making everything that impedes the vision of ‘natural’¹²¹ beauty seem prosaic. The multiplicity of visual registers operating within the picture is clearly marked by the compositional dominance of the neck, and the shift between them is marked by the contrast of the necklace with the flesh. With this juxtaposition Gabriel moves from an observational to a sensory register, using layers of paint and brushstrokes in order to capture, and exaggerate, the variations of human skin.

midway between the nursery and the study’ *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 234–5. I find it hard to believe that Christina, with her experience of the era’s tendency to infantilise women, would be incapable of exploiting this idea in her writing.

¹¹⁹ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 53–4.

¹²⁰ Letter, Gabriel to William Bell Scott, 13 November 1859, quoted in Fredeman, II, p. 43.

¹²¹ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, pp. 174–5.

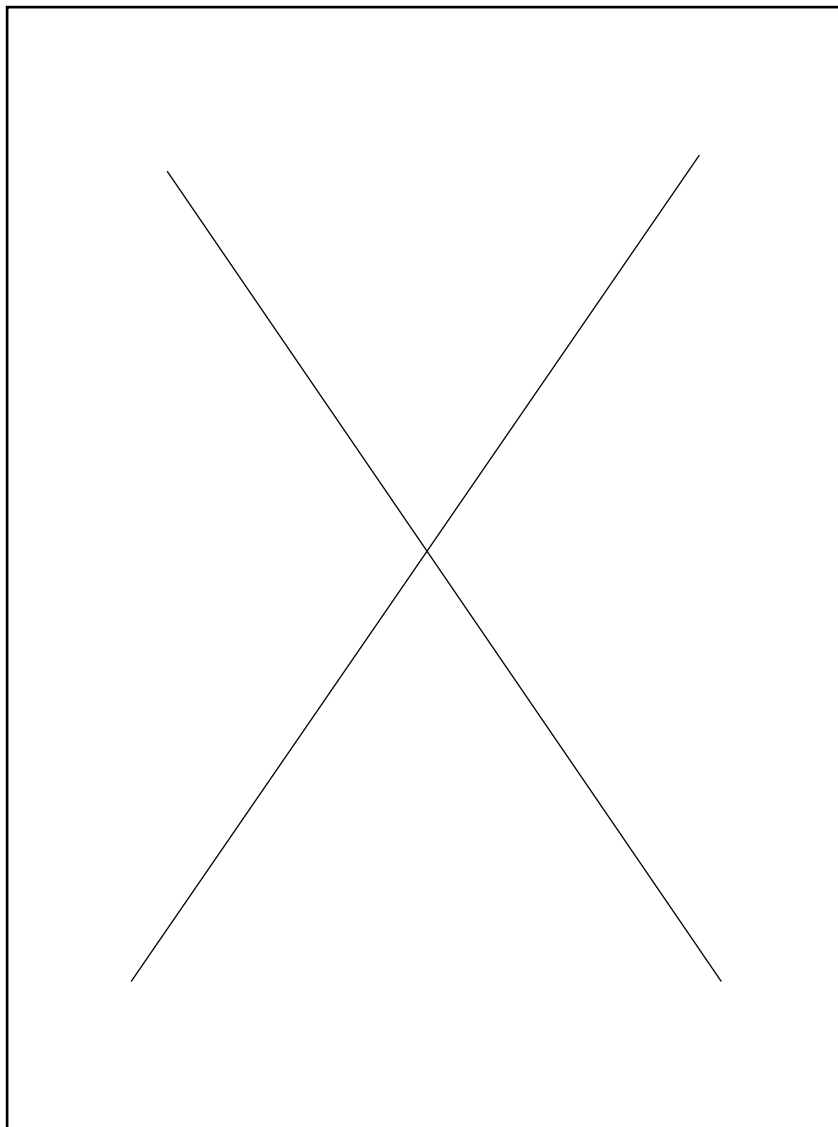


Fig. 6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, oil on panel, 321 x 270 mm, 1859, Museum of Fine Art, Boston.

Paradoxically, this makes the neck the point at which, in consuming the picture, the perceptive subject is made aware that the painting has more meanings than the idea of an 'exercise in flesh tones' may communicate. The expression of the subject is neutral-to-melancholy, which means that the chin being slightly thrown up (typically a human expression of defiance and dominance) is a means of foregrounding the throat. The bull-like neck of the figure is almost exaggeratedly lithe, but not in an ephemeral way, rather in being a mass of fibres and gristle, a tower of strength which gives the image structure. It draws

together sexually referents elsewhere in the picture, joining the white flesh of the *décolletage* and the face, and becomes transformed into a quasi-phallic threat.¹²²

Gabriel builds up the image with complex layers of colour on a red ground, meticulously – although not always successfully – blended. Gabriel labelled it a ‘study’, and indeed another version of this picture exists, which Gabriel marred through technical inexperience.¹²³ This picture can be seen as marking his definitive move away from early Pre-Raphaelitism’s empiricism, and his turn ‘instead to a wholly subjective proto-Symbolist style.’¹²⁴ But it retains some of the Brotherhood’s characteristic meticulous treatment of the visual field. Critics who pin their interpretation to the commoditisation of the female form hold that this attention to detail reinforces the materialist tendency of the work, and Prettejohn is right to observe that such detail, rather than attempting the mimetic, emphasises the ‘physicality of the paint’.¹²⁵ Such an emphasis on the intermediary presence of paint confronts the synthetic nature of the figure’s flesh, and with the synthetic nature of the encounter with the flesh. Bodily materiality multiplies in the face of such recursive art, and in the ‘play’ which its interpretation might enable. But the eye is composed of cutaneous matter too, and so skin cannot truly ever exist to us as a purely visual concept: it is one of the elements of the world, in Merleau-Ponty’s phrase, which we must not only be brought to through vision and interpretation, but which we always bring with us. Perhaps even the imagined eye is conceived of flesh.

Its status as a ‘radical’¹²⁶ portrayal of sexuality comes from its insistence on visual pleasure as its ultimate achievement, and its loving depiction of a sensual (if not definitively sexual) moment without narrative pretext. The picture certainly is replete with sexual symbols, all of which have contemporary coded significance: the woman’s (presumed) post-coital flush; the reddening of the freshly-kissed lips which

¹²² In phrenology, the skull is divided into ‘organs’, whose prominence and location determine character, and the organ of ‘amateness’ is at the nape of the neck. Perhaps it is not surprising that a base human drive should be positioned as far down the form of the head as possible, where the head and the body connect, a portion which is also considered erogenous due to the sensitivity of the skin. Intriguingly, the other faculties in immediate proximity are ‘destruction’ and ‘philoprogenitiveness’ (love of young creatures), which perhaps indicates gendered hierarchies in the placement of these zones, away from more cerebral, supposedly masculine, qualities such as ‘firmness’ and ‘veneration’ which occupy the crown. The organ of ‘amateness’ sits in the same place both on Franz Joseph Gall’s original phrenological chart and the expanded early nineteenth-century version by Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, which was the one printed in George Combe’s wildly successful 1835 *Constitution of Man*. Given phrenology’s enormous popularity in early Victorian England, this association between the neck and the erotic may have been a pervasive one, coinciding with the 1860s styles of women’s hairdressing which piled the (equally sensually inflected) hair high on the head, revealing more of this telling and sensual portion of the body. *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 29–30.

¹²³ The watercolourist George Boyce, whose own artistic sibling was the painter Joanna Boyce, received this first version of the picture. Due to Gabriel’s inexperience with oils the other was painted with too much copal, producing an ‘unpleasant glossiness of surface’; letter, Gabriel to George Boyce, 5 September 1859, quoted in Fredeman, II, p. 35.

¹²⁴ Marcia Werner, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 142.

¹²⁵ *Rossetti and His Circle*, p. 14.

¹²⁶ Bullen, p. 93.

recall labia (the ‘genital difference’¹²⁷ elided by Academy artists even in nudes); loosened hair; the post-lapsarian apple (a ‘traditional visual analogue for a woman’s breast’¹²⁸) on the parapet. Yet the picture confounds such easy categorisation. The title is an abbreviation of a line from Boccaccio’s allegorical poem *Decameron*, which is inscribed upon the back, ‘Bocca baciata non perda ventura, anzi rinnova come fa la luna’, which I translate as ‘A kissed mouth doesn’t lose its freshness, rather it renews itself as does the moon.’ The line relates to Alatiel, a character of one of the fables who is multiply abducted and married, and yet always assumes the guise of a virgin, whose final marriage she contracts freely. While Bullen notes there is no reason to suppose the character is Alatiel, both ‘Boccaccio’s text and Rossetti’s image both speak of the infinitely self-regenerative aspects of human desire.’¹²⁹ The portentousness of the iconography and composition of the work implies a specified subject, but its sheer beauty might outweigh those signs, and the title’s resonance. The figure forms the nexus for this potentially regenerative process, and when considered next to the epigraph and her visual containment behind a solid brick wall parapet, the perceptive subject is definitely being taunted by the proliferation of significances, and being invited to consider which textual narrative, and which textual space she occupies.

This sense of the painting’s existence on its own terms frustrates many theoretical approaches, because it refuses to submit to simply being an ‘exercise in flesh tones’, or to dress its sensual satisfactions in a mythological or narrative costume, in the manner of Academy stalwarts like Albert Moore or Frederic Leighton. The paradox of portraying sexuality in paint was that nineteenth-century artists were expected to provide both a ‘moral lesson’ and to simultaneously take the opportunity to portray a ‘beautiful, classless object to be contemplated and enjoyed.’¹³⁰ The ‘stunners’ for which Gabriel’s work is now best-known became his trademark in the 1860s, and they are powerful figures in comparison with Victorian norms of beauty, which favoured plump but dainty female figures. Their construction as beings without narrative, outside Victorian categories of picture, and never intended for wide public display, make their sexual expression, at least in their initial and original phase, something of an exception to the equations of sexuality in Victorian art.¹³¹ However, MacLeod notes that contemporary observers were conscious, even

¹²⁷ Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 34.

¹²⁸ Prettejohn, *Rossetti and His Circle*, p. 14.

¹²⁹ Bullen, p. 91.

¹³⁰ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, pp. 181–2. Nead’s formulation applies to depictions of prostitutes sets out the paradox of the nineteenth-century painting which trades in sexuality in terms of depicting prostitutes, but it is also relevant to *Bocca Baciata* because of the combination of context, subject, and treatment which encode female sexuality within the painting.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Prettejohn notes that *Bocca Baciata* was more of her time than is now credited, noting that ‘[a]t the Royal Academy exhibition of 1859, just before Gabriel began this ‘exercise in flesh tones’, were three paintings of a striking Italian model by Frederic Leighton [which] deprived the female figure of a decidable narrative and symbolic context, annotating her beauty instead with attributes whose symbolism is vague or confusing.’ Prettejohn, *Rossetti and His Circle*, p. 15. By 1861, the prevalence of portraits of courtesans on the walls of the RA, instead of the traditional debutantes, was causing “seven Belgravian Mothers” to write to *The Times* to express their disgust at such forms of ‘public acceptance of the *demi-monde*’, see Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, p. 61.

as they lived through the period, that 1859 was a ‘watershed’ moment when ‘a number of artists were questioning their most fundamental precepts.’¹³²

The feel of the images produced by Gabriel over the 1860s lends credence to the argument that his increasingly varied artistic experiences meant that he realised his images with the sensibilities (and perhaps priorities) of the designer, engraver and photographer. Critics like Raymond Watkinson make the case for his development as an artist having to do with his work designing for Christina’s works, as well as stained glass when he traces the transition into a more ‘weighty ... [and] voluptuous’¹³³ visual style. Certainly his formal training had been frustrating and sporadic, which led to mistakes, but also perhaps innovations; his determination to achieve his own effects and subjects was at the heart of his refusal to follow the template of his peers, and even his sympathisers.¹³⁴ Yet, while his career would be shaped by the anti-Academy nature of his persona, it is notable that around the time when the Royal Academy’s bias towards ‘oil painters, sculptors and architects’¹³⁵ was increasingly formalised, Gabriel ‘veered away from the evident triumphs of the [18]50s watercolours and their companion works’¹³⁶ in pursuit of mastery in oils.

As with the *Goblin Market* designs, Gabriel brings the privileged viewer up close, in the manner of one of his earlier watercolours, using what is considered a hallmark of Pre-Raphaelite art: positioning his subjects very close to the picture plane.¹³⁷ *Bocca Baciata* was an experimental private commission, and it must have been designed to hang, in Academy terms, ‘on the line,’¹³⁸ and the artist deliberately chose the most intimate (and all-male) setting possible for its first public appearance: the Pre-Raphaelite circle’s own Hogarth Club.¹³⁹

¹³² Macleod, p. 268. Nead notes that while the previous ‘years of crisis and moral panic’ of 1857 and 1858 may not have generated cultural uniformity or consensus, they did provoke a heightened awareness, and policing, of ideas of respectability in public culture, *Myths of Sexuality*, p. 80; p. 84.

¹³³ Watkinson, p. 158.

¹³⁴ Having left the Academy regime, Gabriel took lessons from the painter Ford Madox Brown, an older and more experienced artist, for some months, but he found the technical discipline irksome. One task which he was set involved making a study of pickle jars in oils; typically, Gabriel later inserted an image of a sleeping woman (whose composition was very similar to that of the title page illustration to *Goblin Market*) at its heart, a work now known as ‘Bottles’. Stephen Hackney, Joyce H. Townsend, and Jacqueline Ridge, ‘Background, Training and Influences’, in *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848-56*, ed. by Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney (London: Tate, 2004), pp. 21–27 (p. 27).

¹³⁵ In the 1850s and 1860s the Academy formalised rules on the exclusion of members of any of the major watercolour societies, which critics of the time noted was a tacit way of preserving artistic hierarchies and hegemonies. See Colin Fyfe, ‘Auditing the RA: Official Discourse and the Nineteenth-Century Royal Academy’, in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 117–30 (pp. 125–6). MacLeod notes that engravers were perceived as even lower in this hierarchy of media, p. 58.

¹³⁶ Jerome McGann, ‘[D.] G[.] Rossetti and the Art of the Inner Standing-Point’, in *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now*, ed. by David Clifford and Laurence Roussillon (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 171–87 (p. 171).

¹³⁷ For a more detailed analysis of this tendency in the wider Pre-Raphaelite movement, see Lindsay Smith, ‘The Elusive Depth of Field: Stereoscopy and the Pre-Raphaelites’, in *Pre-Raphaelites Re-Viewed*, ed. by Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 83–99.

¹³⁸ Watkinson, p. 52.

¹³⁹ The painting was probably first displayed at the Hogarth in 1860. Deborah Cherry examines the development and facilitation of the Pre-Raphaelite movement through this society in ‘The Hogarth Club, 1858-1861’, *Burlington Magazine*, 122 (1980), 237–44.

William Holman Hunt was only the first to be shocked by it: 'I will not scruple to say that it impresses me as very remarkable in power of execution – but still more remarkable for a gross sensuality of a revolting kind'.¹⁴⁰ Proximity – the sense of being 'impressed' by a protrusive force – seems key to Hunt's disgust.

Prettejohn notes of Rossetti's 'modern' half figures, of which *Bocca Baciata* is archetypical, that

there is little or no perspective recession to contain the abundant and malleable volumes of the figures. We encounter another human being but we seem to stand closer to her than propriety should allow. It is as if the picture contents were turned inside out, projecting into our space rather than receding safely into illusionistic depth; we are at the 'inner standing-point' and cannot recede to a safe physical distance. By extension we cannot preserve a safe moral distance from which we can judge the woman as either virgin or whore.¹⁴¹

To concentrate too closely on how we might 'see' sexuality within *Bocca Baciata* is to fall into a trap set for us by a school of interpretation which Gabriel had begun to eschew by this point in his artistic career: that which seeks out definitive messages and explanations. It can be read as a riposte to the didactic dominance of narrative painting of the 1850s, but it also relies on its mechanics for its teasing structure, recalling Julia Thomas' idea that the interplay between text and image ensures that interpreting such pictures 'depends not solely on perception or reading, but on an interaction between them that throws into question any idea that either process should be seen as self-contained'.¹⁴² To search the painting for answers in too literal a fashion risks sexually objectifying the figure depicted instead of seeing her as a challenge to our categories of art and women in the quest for visual pleasure.¹⁴³ In this conception of the painting, *Bocca Baciata* does invite the perceptive subject to scrutinise, it even calls to the extensively-educated to recall the wider themes of the Decameron, and perhaps even the story of Alatiel to which the title's axiom refers. But as a visual work it asks us to look, to savour scopical pleasure, and not to work to detect a construction of sexuality *per se*. Instead the work confronts us in various ways, in order to interrogate our need to categorise *Bocca Baciata*, and possibly even theorise it, instead of merely engaging with its sensual existence as well as our own.

Bocca Baciata and *Goblin Market* share methodological, as well as thematic, preoccupations. Gabriel crows at his development away from a cruder treatment of the grain of the flesh, and in this quotation we see a repeated conflation of flesh, technique and concepts of proximity. One of his means of involving the viewer is by keeping the viewing eye close. As with Laura and Lizzie the female figure is only separated from us by a thin layer of fictionality; Gabriel creates the illusion of her animate presence, but the figure

¹⁴⁰ As in the sexual reference in Gabriel and Macmillan's correspondence, Holman Hunt was unembarrassed in making the comparison between the painting and pornographic material in a letter to his patrons Thomas and Martha Combe, taking the opportunity to ask their opinion of it. Evidently he expected them to understand a reference to illicit materials which supposedly were smuggled into the country from France at the time, compounding the sense that Gabriel was a flesh-monger. Letter, Holman Hunt to Thomas Combe, 12 February 1860, quoted in Bullen, p. 93.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 213.

¹⁴² Thomas, p. 5.

¹⁴³ While the model of the 'gaze' and associated feminist theorisations are of importance here, I have chosen to emphasise the *texture of looking* rather than the politics of the gaze here, and scrutinise the politicization of sight and perspective in my chapter on the waist. Prettejohn performs a particularly astute analysis of the 'gaze' in relation to the Pre-Raphaelites: see *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate, 2000), p. 84.

also seems to have a dream-like quality. Whatever the context, the reader/viewer is positioned – perhaps even entrapped – as intruding on an intensely personal and subjective moment. It is this sense of privacy being exploited that gives rise to the feeling of voyeurism, not with an inherent sexualised or misogynist notion of the gaze. I see little of either exploitative looking or an objectified subject. If we are to take Mitchell's exhortation to an extreme we could alter the terms on which we engage with the work, rendering the female figure layers of pigments on a canvas, only to inspire play with the notion of representational woman, then why should 'she' be endowed with subjectivity for our imaginative delight, only to have it revoked?

Gabriel's habit of cultivating ambiguity through cross-textual work can be frustrating to scholars; Martin Danahay is only symptomatic of this chagrin (symbolised by the marigold, a prominent sign in *Bocca Baciata*) in observing that the artist 'encodes in his images of virtual women's bodies a desire that can never be fulfilled on this earth, only in an afterlife that transcends the physical.'¹⁴⁴ But just as the figures are modelled on the body rather than mimetic of the body in Gabriel's work, so is desire an evocation of sexuality, rather than its portrait. Scholarly narratives which critique the way Rossetti indulges in sensuality while evading the materiality of sexuality reveal their investment in well-worn mode of consuming female bodies in art which revolve around patriarchal power. In an 'unfulfilled' state the desire which he invokes through representing the human figure is all the more an embodiment of art. This is because its allure resides in the power of interpretation and play, rather than cruder mechanisms of representation such as knowing, and exposing, on which unequivocally sexual representations rely. Since desire is not compelled by any one of the constructs in the artistic transaction, it is not appropriated, and therefore it is all the more open to interpretation.

Instead Gabriel concerns himself, not with what the viewer sees, but with how the viewer sees it, leaving room not only for their (neutrally positioned) desire, but the potential of physical satisfaction of desire through other means than sexual. And as in the composition of the picture this version of the body's sexuality, as articulated through art, can be located in, and by, regions of the body that have no sexual function, which instead play a role in the expression and interpretation of desire, such as the eyes and the neck. This would form an artistic expression of Gabriel's personal early 1860s preoccupation with 'synaesthesia [...] and the tactile senses'.¹⁴⁵ Arguably, desire can only be fulfilled in the imagination, an interpretative realm which is anchored in the physical world through optical, textual, and sensual means, and which is yet unearthly.

As Christina does in her poetry, Gabriel sets off the chain of referents which lead the perceptive subject to the notion of the sexualised female, but refuses to pin a narrative label onto the process to validate these symbols. *Bocca Baciata* can be connected, through quotation, to the story of a woman whose

¹⁴⁴ 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Virtual Bodies', *Victorian Poetry*, 36 (1998), 379–98 (p. 385).

¹⁴⁵ Alastair Grieve, 'Rossetti and the Scandal of Art for Art's Sake in the Early 1860s', in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. by Elizabeth Prettejohn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 17–35 (p. 23).

sexuality is re-made for the purposes of her self-determination and survival, but we cannot say definitively that the figure *is* Alatiel, any more than we can say that ‘Goblin Market’ *is* about sexuality.¹⁴⁶ In another curious biographical parallel the eldest Rossetti sibling, Maria, experienced an attack of erysipelas in 1859 or 1860, which took the form of an inflammation of her facial skin. Marsh notes that, according to Victorian psychosomatic diagnoses of the day, such an outbreak was attributed to ‘strong repressed desires’,¹⁴⁷ making Maria’s ‘desire’ a question of reading the body for an internal source of imaginative desire, just as if she were one of the fictional heroines created by her siblings in the same year. The Rossettis’ works invite us, as Mitchell observes, to have ‘ideas’, and possibly even get carried away.

Conclusion: the Nearness of the Neck

Gabriel may have expounded to Macmillan that art ‘is the only subject on which I should make a principle of not writing’,¹⁴⁸ but the siblings expressed themselves in different media with aplomb throughout their lives, achieving an extraordinary diversity of output. Gabriel’s protests that each artistic medium should speak for itself are valid and well-known, even as he wrote poems to add an extra dimension of significance to his visual works, and provided retrospective illustrations even to some of his earliest poems. None of Gabriel’s poems is a gloss or label for a painting, even when placed below it, just as none of his pictures are mere visualisations of his words. Kooistra is one critic who positions Christina’s personal drawings as integral to her compositional process, and an unseen dimension of her immense poetic talent.¹⁴⁹ For the Rossettis, there was always a chance to say more under the same pretext.

The framed frames of art that the Rossettis (and their circle) manipulate in the 1860s both put us at a remove and bring us much closer to the text which is framed as self-conscious, yet whose subject lacks self-consciousness. All these works promise is their interpretability, not that they will try to agree with an interpretation. In the mouth of both works’ most obvious consumer – cultured, with an education in the Romance languages – an Italianate pronunciation of the title, *Bocca Baciata*, produces exactly that kind of pouting mouth which Gabriel and Christina invoke and provoke. Is it some form of self-referential joke that readers of these ‘bad-mouth engagements’¹⁵⁰ have to pucker up themselves, in a gesture considered inherently expressive of human sexuality? Or that ‘Goblin Market’, when voiced, makes a reader into one of the gobbling subjects, opening their mouth to greedily consume the poem, which its didactic mode supposedly warns us against? Especially given that a reader, giving voice to Christina’s words, is using the

¹⁴⁶ Kooistra observes that later illustrations of ‘Goblin Market’ don’t perpetuate this ambiguity, but instead position the consumer ‘outside a picture frame in which Lizzie and Laura become passive objects of the gaze.’ ‘Visualizing the Fantastic Subject: Goblin Market and the Gaze’, in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. by Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 136–69 (p. 142).

¹⁴⁷ Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, p. 253.

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Gabriel to Macmillan, which Packer dates to the summer of 1864, p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Valentine Cunningham examines the ‘mouth-dominated poems and paintings’ by Christina and Gabriel in *Victorian Poetry Now: Poets, Poems, Poetics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 289.

contents of the neck – the vocal cords, throat muscles, and windpipe – as well as the lips to give rein to the drive to consume.¹⁵¹

Lizzie utter'd not a word;
 Would not open lip from lip
 Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
 But laugh'd in heart to feel the drip
 Of juice that syrapp'd all her face,
 And lodg'd in dimples of her chin,
 And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd. (ll. 430-6)

In this key moment the conscious perceptive subject is confronted with their false dimensional estrangement from the work. It can bear so many readings, from Lizzie becoming the artwork, to the perceptive subject assimilating her experience through identification. I see this as a way for Christina to both validate and confound critics who would consider this moment as material for an interpretation inflected by sexuality, while commenting on a work of art that refuses to explain itself.

If, within this reading, it is the means by which works are created that opens up new spheres of agency to them, then the means of their consumption (if not the conclusions which are reached) can safeguard their interpretability while leaving space for the expression of certain motifs. The potential presence of sexual ideas in particular may be safeguarded by tropes such as tale-within-a-tale structures. *Bocca Baciata* therefore becomes not a subjectless exercise in flesh, but a knowing element in a world which can afford to acknowledge sexuality through controlled spheres of observers, and *Goblin Market*, through its very public nature, might gesture towards violations of social and moral codes, and yet appear above suspicion. As Laura and Lizzie learn, it is the way things are consumed that matters. Mitchell and Merleau-Ponty ask us how we interpret, as well as consume, which is never more important than when scrutinising artworks, which are capable of representing a form of sexuality not bound by the constraint of their own society or ours.

All three elements of the body under consideration in this project have an element of tapering about them – with the possible exception of some of the necks – providing a structural and visual concentration for the eye and the line. In this reading, Gabriel and Christina understand that this makes such pieces of the body aesthetically useful to their conceptions of production and consumption within a diverse and diversifying visual culture. The profusion of intersecting grids with which a brother surrounds his sister's seminal poems are full of pinch-points, where the reader can grasp an idea, much like the attention to a piece or portion of the body in representation, be it curl, neck or lip. The window-like lattices of *Goblin Market's* cover, with thematically rich little roundels making their sly thematic forays through these arbitrary boundaries, and equally arbitrary intersections, offers material for a bolder reading of the Rossettis' joint work as aesthetic *agents provocateurs*. These grids are frame-like, and overlap each other in a way which subtly skews the perception of depth by the handler. This may not immediately register with

¹⁵¹ I am indebted to Heather Tilley for this observation.

them, but it works to erode their position as a subject in control of a volume which they hold in their hands: it is a stealthy and comprehensive primer for the aesthetic priorities of their shared text.

Ultimately, the sexual significance of the poem comes less from the motiveless malice of the goblins, or Laura's malleability, but from our presence as delighting consumers who survey not from above, but in the midst, perhaps as thematic procurers. Likewise, in *Bocca Baciata* the prurience of the viewer, even when carefully elicited by the painter, situates a vision of sexuality at its heart which is both confrontational and tempting. We do not need to see the idea of sexuality when Christina and Gabriel bring us, goblin-like, to the spectacle of maids indulging in sensuous expression without risking, as did the Highgate penitents and the 1860s woman in the street, its contemporary repercussions.

Monna Vanna is another bull-necked 'stunner', begun in 1866 and very much in the mode of *Bocca Baciata*. It now hangs in the Tate Gallery, and when I went to examine it closely I could see what looked like fingertip-sized smudges in the brushwork on the throat. I found it hard to resist the temptation to imagine Gabriel paddling his fingers in the pigments, simultaneously validating and destroying what could be considered the sexual 'hallmark' of his work. It seems to speak of the cultural dynamic of the creator and his prone, desired subject which is still perpetuated in criticism a century and a half later. But while it is a prurient vision, it would be unwise to take this dynamic at neck value. To me, the lure of this imagined scenario is heightened by the way it seems to mirror Christina and Gabriel's efforts in *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. As in those works, Gabriel's act of 'touching-up' seems to break down the artificial separation of artworks from the body of the perceptive subject, shifting the emphasis from consumption to interpretative exchange. As a dynamic symbol of sensuous experience in the Rossetti's works, the neck reigns supreme in this permeable space.

Chapter Two: Waist

There are some rather eerie parallels between the visual components of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* and one of Lady Clementina Hawarden's hundreds of images of her daughters.¹ The volume's development is roughly contemporary with the span of Hawarden's oeuvre, and they share a preoccupation with representing sisters hemmed in by grids of interlocking lines and planes of representation. As in 'Golden Head by Golden Head', in D335 (Fig. 7) the Hawarden sisters face in different directions, with one sister poised on the threshold of moving into a different representational and symbolic space, while the other seems fixed, a visual anchor.² Isabella Grace, the eldest of Hawarden's daughters, poses with her hand on the latch of a window, as if caught in the act of emerging onto the balcony of the family's Kensington home, and into the hubbub of mid-century London. Kathleen kneels, a dark mass on the threshold, but just within the safety of the domestic sphere, and sheltered by the bulwark of her sister's skirts.



Fig. 7, Lady Clementina Hawarden, D335, albumen print, 93 x 81mm, c. 1861, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The mauled state of the print seems to mock the linearity of the image; its torn edges seem to have been intermittently clipped into more 'straightened' contours, leaving a deep incision in the area furthest to the

¹ While according to the conventions of the English peerage I should properly call her either 'Clementina, Lady Hawarden' or 'Clementina Maude', her work is almost universally known under this pseudonym. I am indebted to Virginia Dodier for this distinction.

² For the sake of clarity I use the Victoria and Albert Museum's catalogue numbers in discussing individual images, although those that were displayed in Hawarden's lifetime appeared under generic titles such as 'Studies from Life' or 'Photographic Studies'. Virginia Dodier's extensive work on the archive means that most of the sitters have been identified, the approximate date of most of the prints images is known. *Clementina, Lady Hawarden: Studies from Life, 1857-1864* (London: V&A, 1999), p. 11.

right of the image, while a tear runs through its heart.³ Admittedly, many Hawarden images set around mirrors and windows have the type of contextualising domestic drapery found in the *Goblin Market* title page vignette, and the loss of the outer reaches of this print emphasises the starkness of this portrait of Victorian femininity, but it is not uncharacteristic of her work. Hawarden's strategic choice of composition, costume and pose presents us with similar questions as the Rossettis' collaboration, and similar self-consciousness on the part of the consumer: it is not a simple image. But in Hawarden's work we are offered a new point on the female body around which to negotiate the cultural and representational forces shaping representations of female sexuality, and its own opportunity to take shape: the waist.

The waist – at least as a specific objective area of the body – does not exist. It is a component of the human form which fluctuates according to the fashionable silhouette, bringing a degree of uniformity to the idiosyncrasies of the individual's shape. The waist is not a part of the body, but an element which culture devises, moves, and shapes; the Victorian female body is socialised with whalebone and laces, as well as invisible structures which regulate the display of sexuality. The waist, with its status as a devised trope of the body, is a particularly useful element by which to look at mid-Victorian photographic culture. Its preoccupation with focus, and upholding historically inflected ideas of mimesis, means that the waist in the late 1850s and early 1860s can be read as another manifestation of a point of priority – and hierarchies of consumption – around which visual experiences are structured. I situate controversies over the alteration of the human body through dress alongside the debates over photographic, and examine how contemporary visual and textual culture to artificially compressed critical discourse on clothing and focal range in ways which articulate the aesthetic and sexual preoccupations of the day.

Within historical constructions of mid-century's visual climate photography acts as a force for rupture and discontinuity. But here I approach some of the complex mid-century conceptualisations of models of photographic focus as part of the continuity of representational culture, whose development of art historical norms is shown through the embrace of seemingly-divergent practices of representation. The same may be said of the journalism and criticism which I set alongside the photographs; the models of adherence to, or divergence from, set representational templates cannot fully account for the complexity of women's engagement with the representational culture to which they were subject, and to which they contributed.

Here I consider these questions in comparing the focal point of photography and the contrived waist of the contemporary fashionable female silhouette. I use these tropes of representation to investigate ways in

³ The Hawarden archive at the V&A is mounted and catalogued, and the majority of the photographs are available as high-resolution images as part of their digital collection, but many of the prints are damaged, which is attributable to their removal from their original albums by her descendants at an unknown date. Later in the chapter I examine their turbulent history, particularly the circumstances and consequences of this displacement from their original context.

which Victorian female authors and artists can be understood to exercise a measure of control over bodies in representation and cultural narratives of sexuality, through journalism and photography.

In this chapter I analyse the waist's importance in the work of three women: Lady Clementina Hawarden's photography, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake's writings on fashion and photography, and *Dress as a Fine Art* by Mary Merrifield.⁴ I read their work as articulating, albeit in coded terms, women's subjective experience from within what we consider exclusively patriarchal social, sexual, and sartorial structures. They enjoyed the advantages of leisure, education, and financial means, but they also took advantage of the scope offered them by the expansion of both periodical journalism and photography at mid-century. In exercising their talents their creative and critical legacy demonstrates the complexities inherent in fashioning the image of a Victorian woman. I examine how the tensions over the expression of female sexuality were codified into debates over representational priorities, particularly these models which photography offered in its concern for 'focus', and how this found expression in the development of the fashionable silhouette. I aim to re-situate such questions in looking at how the waist, as created by women, may be read as a form of agency, fashioning an alternative vision to that of the Victorian woman as the passive agent of aesthetics, fashion, and physical ideals.

Both Eastlake and Merrifield's work on dress include treatises on the type of social factors which determine women's physical appearance which have little to do with the trends, practicalities or economics of dressing the mid-Victorian lady, but more to do with the role of dress as a tool of communication. Whether politically, aesthetically, or sexually, as tool of self-representation dress is never approached as inconsequential, and its importance is reaffirmed at the point at which it intersects with other forms of representation. I conclude the chapter by briefly relating their treatment of the waist to the controversial series of letters featured in the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* which dealt extensively with the different mid-Victorian experiences of tight-lacing, as expressed by the women affected by, and effecting, the shaping of the body in public through their letters as well as their lacing.

While the corset is integral to analysis of the focused waist it should not be used as shorthand for a monolithic view of mid-Victorian suppression of female sexuality and selfhood. To categorise the bounded waist as a point of uniformity risks eliding forms of female individuation; it was certainly promoted as the contemporary ideal, and it can be read as an expression of behavioural and sexual priorities which fit the patriarchally inflected tastes of the time. But I argue that, as with a scale of photographic clarity which has become bound up in models of documentary focus, the concept of delimitation has become too simplistically conflated with confinement. In this respect, the corset, and the clothing which functions in relation to the corset, becomes part of the narrative of domestic suppression

⁴ Although Elizabeth Rigby was an established translator and journalist long before her marriage to Sir Charles Eastlake, little of her early work was published under her own name; I will refer to her throughout the chapter by her married name. This style of address is as incorrect as Hawarden's, since her husband was knighted the year after their marriage, but it is also the title under which she is generally known.

of women's individuality, at the expense of appreciating the narratives fashioned by women such as Eastlake, Merrifield and Hawarden while playing, self-consciously, on just such notions of restriction.

Instead I approach the shaped waist as a visual and narrative pivot with which the represented female character, as well as the originator of representation, might articulate the scope of the female body, and her own potential for sexual expression. The emphasis on the waist becomes less a determinant of the *function* of a woman, and more a play on the roles available to a female character in forms of representation. The waist can be seen as a fulcrum at which to re-situate some of the mid-nineteenth century demands on the female body as forms of licence. In this respect, the corset is a tool of perception as much as the camera, and it is this point of similarity that I will scrutinise, through analysis of discourses of focus, dress culture, and women's agency through their work.

Staging Perspective, Shaping the Female Form

The conception of the waist has an interesting textual quality in common with photography, in using a measure of length instead of breadth in practically differentiating its appearance: the waist is deemed "long" or "short" according to where it appears in relation relative to the rest of the torso. As with the body's proportions, the photograph is assessed by its depth of field, which in turn is a linguistic and philosophical framework for translating an idea of the seen world into representation within the cultural imagination. The 1850s and 1860s were decades in which photography's relationship to concepts such as mimesis and perspectival representation, as well as to the portrayal of the female body, was coming into question. In my analysis of Hawarden's works I look at how her work sensitises a viewer to the spectrum of focus along which her images travel, while engaging with the fraught contemporary climate surrounding the notion of visual clarity, as well as the politics of representing nubile young women. She fashioned photographs which I read as alluding, through technology's analogue of sight, to the individuating forces of the body's engagement with the world, and by extension, women's creative practice in the world.

While focus could dispassionately be designated the indicator of how strongly a camera lens converges light, even the most ardent of advocates for photography as a vehicle of optimal visual clarity were becoming attuned to the nuances embedded within such rhetoric, despite the mechanics of lines, rays, axes, or planes. Lindsay Smith's summary of the function of perspective in representation contains many of the political and philosophical implications of the transmutation of dimensional space into flattened representation:

Geometrical perspective, the dominant Western system for articulating three-dimensional space as two-dimensional, assumes an established linear relationship between a vantage-point (the eye of a subject looking) and a vanishing point (the culmination of the look upon an object according to the eventual convergence of lines of geometrical projection).⁵

⁵ Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 13.

Photographic focus is built around the recognition of the vanishing point as an integral structural element to vision in aping a construction of normative human stereopsis, as opposed to painting's use of the vanishing point to structure an accurate impression of depth. Yet as a form of representation it is always already in negotiation with the methods of consuming the *representations* of human sight which have been inculcated into the consumers of Western art. In her work on different formulations of perspective within Victorian culture, the critic Linda M. Shires observes that this model of the grid with the single central vanishing point constructs a hypothetical 'stable observer perceiving a world outside of the self',⁶ eliding other factors which participate in human vision and perception. Mid-century culture was struggling with the notion of the objective viewer not only in painting, as considered in the previous chapter, but especially in the emerging practices of photography.

In his seminal work *Techniques of the Observer* Jonathan Crary argues that photography must stand as an agent of discontinuity in the history of visual representation, because it must always commoditise and disembodify vision, co-opting the viewer within a scheme of spectatorship in which 'an observer becomes lodged'.⁷ Where Crary's argument is that the nineteenth-century observer was newly dispossessed from forms of optical and perceptual agency by photographic formats, scholars such as Linda Shires and Lindsay Smith have analysed the ways in which geometrical visual regimes throughout history have worked to dispossess human perceptual agency in pursuit of ideological aims, and examined ways in which the Victorians were particularly explicit in examining this representational legacy.⁸ Anxieties over the reliability of the human eye lead vision to be fragmented in the drive to perceive more *clearly*. I would argue that Hawarden's representational choices thwart this form of entrenchment, in part using the tools of older visual traditions, while using all the technical sophistication offered her by new technologies.

Unlike the pursuit of definitive representation through adhering to geometrical perspective, Hawarden's photography exploits the potential for instability in a textual framework whose construction relies on the relation of viewer to a work's ostensible subject. She manipulates the very pliability of what is perceived as finite, and destabilizes what is conceived of as a fixed space. The concepts of depth of field and photographic focus rely on the shared notion of geometrical perspective, whose predominance in Western art cultures has come to stand for the authoritative representation of human stereopsis. Yet Victorian culture found a source of both creativity and conflict in the systems of representation which used the central crux of the 'vanishing point'. Hawarden's extant works are exemplary of the ways in which photographers probed these questions which surrounded their practice of the art, as Linda Shires acknowledges in her work on perspective in the Victorian era:

nineteenth-century forms work not to paper over ideological contradictions but to call attention to them as papered over – as irresolvable and as raising questions about their very authority. In other words, the artwork [...] does the job of defamiliarization. The artwork, negotiating

⁶ Shires, p. 6.

⁷ Crary, p. 13.

⁸ See Shires, pp. 3–12; Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, pp. 13–18.

perspective, holds in solution contradictory perspectives and stages a dialogue which exposes the strengths and limits of perspective, while maintaining gaps for alternative points of view. And it compels a rethinking and reviewing on the part of the viewer and reader about [...] representation and experience, viewing and reading, affect and judgement.⁹

Hawarden not only 'negotiates' perspective through her play on focal points, she stages the shifts of the dimensional and active female subject through the camera's capacity to perceive them. The development of photography's technological possibilities mean that she is able to articulate how focus can be approached as a state within a spectrum of relative divergence, rather than a finite condition. Like the approach of other areas of contemporary culture studied here, from the dressed silhouette to writing about fashion, she creates different levels of focal space in which portions of the female body are better-delineated than others. But these portions are never enforced into isolation from the wholeness of the already culturally-constituted female body.

Hawarden explores ideas of photographic depth of field in many of the seven hundred and seventy-five prints which are held in the V&A's collection, but in D347 (Fig. 8) her critique is so overt as to seem almost a pastiche of the idea of representational perspective.¹⁰ The model, her eldest daughter Isabella Grace, is positioned as if at a nexus of different grids, out on the terrace wearing the same dress as in D335, its distinctive diagonal trim section crossing the lower portion of the skirt and terminating in a ribbon rosette. The image coheres around the vanishing point to which the composition of roof lines and crinoline-supported skirt leads the eye, culminating in the model's waist. The dress is trimmed with wide dark bands of ribbon which 'map out' her body like the points of a compass. Despite her artfully languid bearing she is kept centred: her crinoline ensures that the diagonal band on the skirt still sketches out her conformity to the rooflines of Princes Gardens, which together comprise the all-encompassing diagonal cross which forms the premise of the image.

⁹ Shires, p. 14.

¹⁰ This archive makes up approximately 90% of her extant work, the rest being held in the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (Bradford), the Getty Museum (Los Angeles) and Musée d'Orsay (Paris). On 19 March 2013 thirty-seven of Hawarden's previously-unseen photographs were sold at auction by Bonhams in Knightsbridge, where they fetched £115,250, possibly purchased from her descendants in the 1970s. This collection's dimensions are different to those in the V&A's holdings, and are less damaged, having been more carefully removed from their original album; some of its albumen prints were still mounted on the original album's leaves. They fetched rather less than their estimate, which is probably attributable to their being absolutely in keeping with her oeuvre, and in some cases variants on her work housed at the V&A. This would suggest that their smaller format is attributable to her use of multiple cameras in a single session, for more detail see 'Lot 107: HAWARDEN (CLEMENTINA MAUDE, Viscountess)', *Bonhams Catalogue, Auction 20751: Books, Maps, Manuscripts and Historical Photographs* <<http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/20751/lot/107>> [accessed 24 November 2015].



Fig. 8, Lady Clementina Hawarden D347, albumen print, 102 x 164 mm, c. 1861-2. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The carefully-staged nature of the image, whose regularity is only skewed by the pose of its subject, is conspicuous. The model is embedded in the metropolis, both static and mercurial in appearance. The sash-style trim on the skirt is a visual reply to the rooflines, which culminates in a rosette. This whorl of ribbon may seem arbitrarily placed, but it can articulate how different cultural facets must be drawn together in making an image like this one: the composition can use it thematically, and the camera is able to capture it.

Its appearance reaffirms her individuality, even amidst the receding skyline of identical houses which house her social peers. Unabashed femininity is sited at the heart of modern industrial and cultural London, a hub of activity from the mass-production of glass to the newly-emerging cultural powerhouses of Kensington. Later in the chapter I investigate how such industrial processes made their incursions *into* the female figure in revolutionising the manufacture of corsetry and the shape of the Victorian woman to come. The idiosyncratic dress exposes the juxtaposition of technology, clothing, and personal preference through which Hawarden can articulate the ways in which photography might foster independent aesthetic choices in several spheres, especially for certain groups of nineteenth-century women.¹¹

Throughout Hawarden's work a single image can sustain utterly divergent readings. D347 might show a trenchant attitude to the debates about focus and perspective, and the development of photography as a medium. Different levels of clarity have been carefully calibrated, and the image does not present a

¹¹ For those women who could afford to access photography, it offered the maximum creative scope within the social conventions which might, in other formats, have limited their efforts. Notable peers of Hawarden's in early photography include Viscountess Jocelyn (elected to the Photographic Society in 1859, received an honourable mention in the 1862 International Exhibition), Lady Rosse (awarded the medal for the best paper negative by the Photographic Society of Ireland in 1859), and her most famous contemporary Julia Margaret Cameron, all of whom primarily photographed their family, domestic settings, and estates. For more, see Isobel Crombie, 'Jocelyn, Lady Frances (1820-1880)', in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. by John Hannavy (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 775-77; Carolyn Bloore, 'Parsons, Mary, Countess of Rosse (1813-1885)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54028>> [accessed 28 November 2015]; Victoria Olsen, *Julia Margaret Cameron & Victorian Photography* (London: Aurum Press, 2003).

‘finalised’ vision in showing a level of focus which might make it vulnerable to appropriation by either viewer or photographer. Elements are allowed to recess in being less focused, and become secondary but piquant details: for example, the lone foot emerging from beneath the petticoat. The material of the opened fan means that it cannot be captured in the same precise detail as the covered buttons of the bodice fan, and its angle ensures that it passes out of the plane of focal depth. It is held to the model’s head at one of the few angles that does not follow the lines of composition which run through the image like the seams in a skirt. Yet the rosette can also be read as a play on the very visual eddy or whorl which the eye enacts in looking at any form of representation, questing about for an element on which to hang understanding of the image.¹² After all, the site of the rosette leads the attentive eye back towards the centre of the image, lined up with the roofline’s optical recession. The fact that the image should be viewed in a stereoscope serves to heighten this circular motion around the flattened but curiously convex image(s) even further.

In the stereoscopic format, which Hawarden used for her first attempts at photography, two images are taken at slight variants simultaneously, and to view the print the observer must place it in a viewing frame which sits on the bridge of the nose, like a pair of spectacles. The sensation which follows is unnervingly like an act of surrender; the eyes are forced to allow the two images to reconcile into one, giving the illusion of depth. The stereoscopic format compounds the self-consciousness of Hawarden’s representations of femininity still further, as the medium of photography develops a waist of its own in the form of the visual seam separating two near-identical images, yet which proves that divisions are just as much connections in a visual sense as in the socialised body of the mid-Victorian woman. It seems no accident that she elected to use stereoscopic photography to capture the contradictions of photography as a still-novel form mired in the most conventional questions of visual virtue and beauty.

Stereoscopic photography was one of the first formats to permeate Victorian visual culture, and Virginia Dodier attributes its enormous popularity not merely to the novelty of the viewing experience, but also to the fact that the cameras’ compact size only required ‘relatively brief exposure times because of the short focal length of the lenses.’¹³ Such equipment was among the first accessible to a wide range of practicing amateur photographers, who could practice their skills before moving on to single-image formats whose technical demands were more complex. Dodier’s deduction that Hawarden began her photography career in 1857, using a stereoscopic camera, is significant, because it means she is ‘a transitional figure between

¹² This model of reading a photograph for its emotive power as well as its artistry relates to Roland Barthes’ model of *studium* and *punctum*, in which a photograph has a most potent effect when its *mise-en-scène* of which the reader is conscious is speckled with sensitised spots. ‘*Le punctum d’une photo, c’est ce hasard qui, en elle, me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne)*’, Barthes explains. I translate this as: ‘The *punctum* of a photo is that quirk which *pricks me* (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).’ Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la Photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, Seuil, 1980), p. 49. Emphasis original.

¹³ In its earliest forms, achieving the clearest forms of representation in the single-format camera was the mark of the skilled photographer, in technical and human terms; early cameras had very limited focal capacity, and the long exposure times required were taxing for sitters. The development of technology meant that Hawarden had access to the wet-collodion process, which offered ‘nearly instantaneous exposure times, crisp detail, and a broad tonal range.’ Dodier, p. 24; p. 12.

the aristocratic and learned amateurs of the 1840s and the professional art photographers of the 1860s.¹⁴ She would have been perfectly placed to witness how photography as a medium, and focus as a visual component, would come to be contested between factions of visual culture, and to contribute to the burgeoning group of art photographers as she went on to use the more sophisticated photographic equipment and techniques through her use of several cameras.

Photography in 1863: Fine Art, or Machinery?

The 1860s were a complex time for photography, which was rapidly developing as an art form, a technological process, and a cultural entity. There were more opportunities for the public to see photographic prints than ever before, and criticism and commentary devoted to photography proliferated. The Photographic Society of London, whose members were made up of amateurs and professionals, and included some of the most prestigious figures in contemporary photography, saw itself as at the vanguard of this development. Its annual exhibition was a key event, but for various reasons the 1862 event had been cancelled, making 1863 something of a crucible for the tensions at its heart.¹⁵

Hawarden was a newly-elected member in 1863, and when she submitted her work for consideration it won the first medal ever awarded by the society for a contribution by an amateur. Given that journals such as the *British Journal of Photography* and *Photographic News* were prone to catalogue the annual photography exhibitions in minute detail, curiously little is known about the medal's inauguration. The category was not announced in the exhibition's rules, which had been published in November 1862, and Dodier suggests that Hawarden's efforts were outstanding enough for the judges to devise one to showcase them.¹⁶ The article 'Prizes at the Photographic Exhibition: Adjudicator's Report' indicates a more complex situation, avowing that in the case of several of the medals 'we have had no hesitation in fixing upon the names best entitled to the honour of that award',¹⁷ but praising the work of Hawarden's rival for the Amateur's Medal. The Earl of Caithness is commended first for his 'beautiful picture', but

¹⁴ Dodier notes that Hawarden's photography was probably facilitated by the accession of her husband, Cornwallis Maude, to the rank of Viscount Hawarden through the death of his father in 1856, and his inheritance of large estates in Ireland, which afforded Clementina the income, leisure and space which photography required. However, while Hawarden was an aristocrat, she was partaking in the same forms of culture which were squarely aimed at the middle classes. Although it is perfectly possible that her status and wealth facilitated her contact with the technological circle which embraced and espoused photography, unlike her contemporary Julia Margaret Cameron she photographed no-one in "high society" who did not also happen to be a family member or close friend. In fact, the exclusively familial and personal emphasis of her work means that it is possible to consider her alongside other amateurs regardless of social cachet. She did have an advantage in her election to the Photographic society; her connections by this point in the 1860s among the aristocracy and in the creative world would have meant that her nomination by two existing Society members (though we have no record of their identity), and the unanimous election required to become a member would presumably have been relatively straightforward. See Dodier, p. 21; p. 35; p. 86.

¹⁵ The 1862 exhibition had been cancelled, partly in response to the death of their patron, Prince Albert, but also because of the International Exhibition, whose pavilion (now the site of the National History Museum) can be seen in several of Hawarden's Kensington photographs. Rather than competing for the attention of members of the public who were interested in viewing photographs both as leisure pursuit and scientific enquiry, the society elected not to stage their own exhibition; the Society's journal notes that even attendance at the Royal Academy was diminished that year, which lends the decision practical and artistic legitimacy. *Photographic Journal*, 8 (1862), 118.

¹⁶ Dodier, p. 87.

¹⁷ 'Prizes at the Photographic Exhibition: Adjudicator's Report', *Photographic News*, 7 (1863), 73–84 (p. 81).

obliquely criticised for his ‘translation, though very faithful and artistic, of an accidental effect of nature’ where Hawarden shows ‘greater merit’.¹⁸ Possibly the report’s churlish tone indicates the wider rifts in the field over the necessity for originality and technical ability rather than simply attractive display qualities. It seems to indicate that, whatever the reason, during these months on display the work of amateurs had been considered noteworthy enough to require its own category.

The sense of tension in this text seems to gesture to the Society’s internal struggle between amateur and professional over the future of the medium, and its ‘claim to the status of art.’¹⁹ A perceived lack of ‘originality’²⁰ in the art market, alongside a sense of growing public interest, put exhibitions of photography under even greater scrutiny. The Commissioners of the 1862 International Exhibition insisted that both the product of photography as well as its apparatus should fall into the section labelled ‘Machinery’, and not even public pressure would induce them to include photographic prints with the ‘Fine Arts’.²¹ By 1864 the Society’s medal categories were transformed, and now classified pictures by genre, subject and technique, rather than the photographer’s practice.²² There was also a raft of new stipulations and exclusions; no photograph could be considered which had previously been exhibited in London, and no re-touched or coloured prints were to be submitted.²³ Combination printing was also excluded for the first time, which was notable given that the sensation of the 1863 event had been Henry Peach Robinson’s image – printed from multiple collaged negatives in order to achieve a uniform level of focus – ‘Bringing Home the May’.²⁴

The development of the medium both before and after the 1863 event would have provided the contemporary observer with plenty of evidence for the ways in which mid-century’s lack of a uniform approach to focus in representation was bound up in what Crary terms ‘questions about the body and the operation of social power.’²⁵ Contemporary photography discourse did recognise the drive to fragment the representation of human vision, and in turn to fragment the human form in pursuing its ends. They

¹⁸ ‘Prizes at the Photographic Exhibition: Adjudicator’s Report’, p. 81.

¹⁹ Dodier, p. 87.

²⁰ In 1863 a critic in the *Saturday Review* bewailed the lack of originality in the British art market, despairing of the ‘proliferation of engravings, lithographs, photogravures, and artists’ replicas’ quoted in Macleod, p. 249.

²¹ Nancy Armstrong notes that the Commissioners conceded that photographic prints could be exhibited separately, but still within ‘Machinery (section 2) rather than in ‘Fine Arts’ (section 4) as a concession to the public’s sense that photographic prints were a creative form of media, if not on the same level as the plastic arts. This problematic question of categories rather neatly encapsulates photography’s nascent legitimacy at this point in the century. *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, p. 79.

²² The 1864 report by the Society of ‘The Medals in the Exhibition’ lists the medal categories as follows: ‘1, for the best portrait or portraits; 2, for the best landscape or landscapes; 3, for the best group or groups, or composition or compositions, each from a single negative; 4, for the best architectural subject or subjects; 5, for the best printed impression from a photograph transferred to metal, stone, or other material, and absolutely untouched.’ It also argues for still more to be created to account for new technical developments and the growing body of press photography. Hawarden’s medal was attained in the ‘composition category’. ‘The Medals in the Exhibition’, *Photographic News*, 8 (1864), 337–48 (p. 337).

²³ For a contemporary reaction to such prohibitions, see ‘The Forthcoming Photographic Exhibition’, *Photographic News*, 8 (1864), 133–44 (p. 133).

²⁴ Such stipulations were probably due to the fact that many of the images at the society’s 1863 exhibit had already been seen elsewhere, due to the cancellation of the 1862 event, see Dodier, p. 88.

²⁵ Crary, p. 3.

adopted the language of coercion and of authority, and were situated within a public culture which, as we have already seen, was used to addressing the consuming observer through the use of wider frameworks of social control. And nowhere was focus more sensitive to questions of controlling representation than in the depiction of the female body; these questions were often addressed in ways which either tacitly or overtly navigated questions of gender and the social regulation of the female body.

Indeed, nineteenth-century photographers were sometimes explicit in their articulation of how the dislocation and distortion of the beautiful feminine form could best serve the development of the medium, particularly when it came to the attainment of an absolute and uncompromised arena of focus through combination printing. Henry Peach Robinson opined that such a method was akin to creating a ‘perfect whole’²⁶ specimen of female beauty, such as a Venus, out of the most beautiful features of several women. Indeed, O. G. Rejlander asserts that his frustration at being unable to keep a gentleman’s figure in focus, when posed behind a sofa upon which two women were seated, assisted him in ‘raising the science we practice to the dignity of a fine art.’²⁷ In the light of such politicisation of clarity as a component of the ‘ideal’ print, Hawarden’s more famous contemporary Julia Margaret Cameron was particularly acute in her demand, made on the last day of 1864, the same year that she was herself elected to the Society: ‘What is focus – and who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?’²⁸

A care for the totality of focus could be carried to rather self-defeating ends. The model of an ideal vision, capable of a thorough comprehension and capture of detail, is distinctly different from the subjectivity of human vision, and the individuality of even a single human eye, let alone the co-operation of two. The concept of focus as the site of authority and a means of legitimation for early photography is a vexed one, but for my purposes I examine how Hawarden approached her work within the definitions available to her in photographic discourse.²⁹ Within photography, unlike the world of the plastic arts, women’s creativity, and their interrogation of who has the ‘right’ to dictate art forms, could find expression. Perhaps because photography was a new format, it was less rigid in its observance of the ideology of separate spheres which tended to exclude women. Yet it was still part of the cultural landscape, and Janet Wolff notes that ‘forms of cultural representation reproduced that ideology, though often [...] in

²⁶ Robinson, p. 94.

²⁷ This irascible article is a collection of self-justifications, and contains many references to the contentious and embattled environment of contemporary photography world. Entertainingly, given the ‘fuss and abuse’ he says he incurred for making composites, it concludes with the mantra ‘NOW, USE PHOTOGRAPHY: DON’T ABUSE IT.’ It was published just days after the announcement of the medal winners at the Society exhibition, where composites had been the subject of much debate. ‘An Apology for Art-Photography’, *British Journal of Photography*, 10 (1863), 76–78 (p. 76).

²⁸ Lindsay Smith positions the refusal of prioritised focus in Cameron’s work as a refusal of the gendered role of the nineteenth-century woman at the ‘hearth’ (and at the heart) of the home, in line with the Latin etymological root of the word. Letter, Cameron to Sir John Herschel, 31 December 1864, quoted in Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, p. 24.

²⁹ Scholars have probed this notion of “authoritative” communication via focus in nineteenth-century photography, and their arguments deal succinctly with the ramifications of conceiving of documentary photography as ‘authoritative’, and the ways in which positioning the medium as a document of the real or a vessel for misrepresentation deprives the medium, its practitioners, and its subjects of agency. Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, pp. 13–4; p. 21; Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, pp. 75–7.

ambiguous (and sometimes subversive) ways',³⁰ as we see in Hawarden's work. 1863 was also the year in which women were barred from studying at the Royal Academy, having been excluded from life classes on the pretext of 'decency'.³¹ Nead links this to the Parliamentary Commission of that year into its management, and which she deems symptomatic of similar 'struggles over the control of cultural production'³² experienced by photography at this moment, albeit for different reasons.³³

While the concept of 'documentary' photography does not deviate far from conventional geometric perspective, 'artistic' photography of the era doesn't reveal its focal bias so clearly. Indeed, the differentiation between documentary photography and artistic may not ever have been a matter of easy deduction from the appearance of the prints. Hawarden's exhibiting vocabulary emphatically declares her practice as a component of her art; her works in exhibition were titled 'Photographic Studies' and 'Studies from Life', and take elements from many different genres, whether documentary, portrait, or life study. However, the category of 'studies' aligns her with an artist's preparation process, which used the 'study' to develop their ideas, while 'from life' differentiated 'photographs of people and places from photographs of art works'³⁴ and precluded the possibility of textual manipulation through retouching or enlargement.³⁵

Geometric perspective underpinned the two traditions: in 'documentary' terms it reaffirmed notions of a rational and objective viewer of the world, but it also bolstered photography's inclusion in the Western art canon through perpetuating its modes of representation via the new, and still occasionally controversial, medium.³⁶ As Linda Shires points out, the idea of art in photography could encompass everything from Henry Peach Robinson's combination prints to Julia Margaret Cameron's most ethereal specimens.³⁷ I feel that Hawarden is confronting the principles of male domination and use-value of photography in its documentary manifestations, as Smith suggests when she writes of the 'phallocentrism of geometrical

³⁰ Janet Wolff, 'The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in Nineteenth-Century Public and Private Life', in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, ed. by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 117–34 (p. 128).

³¹ This move meant that a dedicated physical establishment exclusively for women was all the more important, and I examine Hawarden's contributions to this cause later in the chapter. For more on the exclusion, see Susan P. Casteras, "'The Necessity of a Name': Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists', in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. by Anthony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp. 207–32 (p. 213).

³² Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, pp. 167–8.

³³ Colin Trodd and Rafael Cardoso Denis pinpoint the nineteenth century as a crucial moment for the idea of the 'academy' and its supremacy, since it was then that 'academicism was confronted with, and weakened by, different methods of calibrating aesthetic value as well as other ways of dealing with the status of nature or the nature of representation.' 'Introduction: Academic Narratives', in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1–11 (p. 2).

³⁴ Dodier, p. 44.

³⁵ Patrizia di Bello analyses the tensions between 'straight' and 'manipulated' photography in the era in detail in *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007), p. 17.

³⁶ Lindsay Smith attributes the entrenchment of this division of discourse to photo-historians, particularly Helmut Gernsheim, whose albums contain some of the best-known works by Dodgson and Hawarden. Gernsheim cites Cameron's questioning of models of 'legitimate focus' as evidence of her disregard for technique, rather than proof of her technical independence. Indeed, Cameron's forging of a "soft" focus aspect set her within the critical arc of art-historical aims and techniques which could legitimise the medium as belonging to the trajectory of the Western canon. *Politics of Focus*, pp. 25–6.

³⁷ Shires, p. 65.

perspective',³⁸ but not through outright refusal of focal sharpness. Instead she subtly blends superlative compositional skills with a sensitive distribution of focus *through* the image.

Feminising Perspective



Fig. 9, Lady Clementina Hawarden, D292, albumen print, 115 x 90 mm, c. 1859-64. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

An image such as D292 shows Hawarden's feel for the traditions of art history, and how a redistribution of meaning and feeling can come from using the focal range of photography just as deftly as paint and pigment on canvas. The image explicitly structures representational space through its use of composition. Demarcated squares run rhythmically, grid-like, throughout the image: panels of wainscoting and panes of glass provide the backdrop, as if providing a model of scale against which to measure the figures. And, as in D335 and D347, the central female figure's waist lies at an axis, this time composed of the central backbone of the wainscoting between two windows, and the struts which divide the lower panes. It is strongly marked here in the young woman's fashionable 'Swiss'³⁹ belt, with its central 'point', making a startling blot at the heart of the image. The belt forms the most saturated area of the print and the point of highest contrast, only echoed by the gradual move into shade where the curtains are looped back high against the walls. The whole effect is simultaneously softened and rendered more stark by this repetition of the counter-angled fabrics, whether the diaphanous curtains strung above or the reflection of the girls' skirts in the supposedly-transparent glass behind.

The triangular ideal of Western pictorial composition is here, but Hawarden adds another (dimensional) apex in her awareness of the outward thrust of the mid-century woman's dressed silhouette. The girls are

³⁸ Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, p. 30.

³⁹ In the early 1860s Swiss belts were at the height of fashion, both for day and evening. Lucy Johnston, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail* (London: V&A, 2005), p. 182.

both wearing a more distinctively 1850s style of dress, in which the fullness of the skirt is worn in all directions. The elder sister stands behind, her skirt and its underlying crinoline visibly compressed by her position between the wall and her younger sister. The seated girl is wearing a full and very crumpled skirt, apparently unsupported by petticoats or crinolines, and in their absence has her legs crossed to support the book on her lap. This pose appears to thrust her foot out towards the viewer, and while this portion of the image is blurred – and possibly distorted by the strong sunlight from the windows behind – it is in stark contrast to the way in which the print has captured every crease and detail of the girls' dresses.

Contemporary femininity's appeal forms the crux of the image. While the composition shows a set of grids and planes, the image makes its 'layers' apparent just as surely as it attends to the strata of fabrics which constitute the dressed woman. It makes the ways in which we stage looking at women's bodies in representation visible: in navigating films of information through which the look must pass, it makes the image into a compressed peep-box. Curiously, the lopsided subsequent trimming now emphasises this effect, since later consumers must frame our look through the consciousness that this is an altered object, an artefact of previous curatorial decisions. These only serve to underscore how artistic representation is an imperfect window onto past moments. Yet, as in many of her photographs, Hawarden finds a way to collapse these layers, dismantling the various frames through creating an out-of-focus layer, object, or area of the print: here that function is served by the book, and the foot.

Hawarden does not seek to diminish the female body in striving for focus. Her work acknowledges the individuality of women who are dressed and presented in conventional ways, as well as fancy dress. While, like focus, it has a prescribed axis, it can encompass a spectrum of individuality and expression without the need to adopt a form of collage which nineteenth-century culture allotted not only to women who practiced photography and the wider arts, but who also were the subjects of such media. Her manipulation of levels of focus calls to the culture which is now perceived as one of performativity and conformity, yet in which women could be, in Patrizia Di Bello's words, 'subjects in a feminine culture pervaded by a number of potentially productive tensions'.⁴⁰ From the evidence of her archive, Hawarden's daughters were very skilled models, but for all their experience the foot and the book may be out of focus due to the irrepressible energy of her young daughter, deliberately preserved by Hawarden in the print. The disregard for the totality of focus in representing human beauty is its strength; how unlike Henry Peach Robinson's composited Venus, or Rejlander's decision to obscure the very women he selected to act as the beautiful bookends to the male subject of his photograph.

One of the reviews of her work in the 1863 exhibition registers the way in which, while her photographs were acknowledged to showcase the beauty of her models, contemporaries did not mistake this for a lack of technical or aesthetic rigour. Her 'studies' were subtle enough to both please and stimulate her contemporaries, while seeding her ideas about representation. Having noted the small field of life-studies

⁴⁰ di Bello, p. 127.

submitted, and their similarity to portraiture, *Photographic News* proceeded to devote a greater portion of their review to Hawarden than to any other photographer:

There is a wonderful charm of freshness about these pictures which is much less common in photographs than we like to confess [...] there is much grace and beauty both in the fair models themselves, and in the posing and general arrangement, but the chief charm consists in the daring lighting and the artistic effects of light and shade secured. [...] [T]he portions tipped with the bright light are full of detail and free from chalkiness, and the masses in deep shadow are perfectly transparent and free from blackness. In some cases the effect of light reminds of Rembrandt's pictures, in which one bright light is sufficiently carried to secure both transparency and breadth. We regard these pictures as most instructive and well worthy of study as illustrations of lighting of the effects possible in photography. They are produced we understand with a highly bromized collodion: a very strong developer, sometimes containing as much as fifty grains of iron to the ounce, and with Dallmeyer's No. 1 Triple lens, which secures this wondrous depth of definition. Should these studies be published [...] we should recommend every portrait photographer to possess and study them.⁴¹

Hawarden's work was clearly esteemed by her peers, but the stress on her process establishes that she was becoming a touchstone of technical and artistic quality within her field. While the comparison with Rembrandt is also an acute one, given his skill in depicting textures, light, and nuanced states of emotion, it is also a demonstration of the Western art canon being required to legitimate the search for visual beauty, or 'charm', in photography.

Reviews like these are one of the main sources of information about Hawarden's practice and how her work was approached by her peers. Critics often express understandable frustration at the lack of biographical texts such as letters or diaries which might expand on her approach; we have no extant text from her on any aspect of her inspiration, her methods, her peers, or even her views on the medium.⁴² She must have had a technical forte to suit her aesthetic priorities, and have been an able and patient developer, and the review mentions her combination of lens and developing strength as particularly noteworthy. It seems reasonable to suppose that such an educated and practically creative woman would instruct her daughters in her methods, and that she might have enlisted their help in developing as well as creating her works. Dodier observes that in some of her photographs Hawarden's daughters have blackened fingers typical of those handling darkroom chemicals – a feature of photography which contemporary photographic magazines supposed made it unappealing to women.⁴³ But we don't know the degree of her collaboration, what she considered a successful effort, and what – if anything – she threw away. As a result, it is difficult to know in what format her works were created and stored during her lifetime, but even after death their history is somewhat mysterious.

⁴¹ 'Photographic Exhibition: Fifth Notice', *Photographic News*, 7 (1863), 98–99 (p. 99).

⁴² It is possible that such texts might have existed, but Dodier notes that in their own profuse correspondence Hawarden's family expressed their disappointment that 'Clemmy' was not more communicative; the letters we have from her are dutiful social missives rather than anything more revealing. Dodier, p. 11.

⁴³ Dodier, p. 35.

The Artist and the Archive

Hawarden's descendants were familiar with her work, and knew of her success, so when the Victoria and Albert Museum held 'An Exhibition of Early Photographers to Commemorate the Centenary of Photography, 1839-1939', her granddaughter Lady Clementina Tottenham was understandably surprised that Hawarden's photography was not included.⁴⁴ On learning from the curator Charles Gibbs-Smith that the museum had none of her grandmother's work, she promptly donated the majority of the family's collection to the museum, only to find on a visit in 1952 that none of the prints could be found.⁴⁵ About a year later Gibbs-Smith 'moved a pile of boxes in the corner of his office', only to discover 'in a mass of tight rolls [...] all the Hawarden works',⁴⁶ at which point the prints were mounted on card. The prints had not fared well on being donated, the chaos of wartime having delayed their accession, and the conditions of their storage (or neglect) had made already fragile and damaged works even more vulnerable. Patrizia di Bello recalls a 1999 seminar in which Haworth-Booth, then curator of photography at the V&A, attributed the torn corners to Tottenham's overzealous efforts, prompting a 'wistful chuckle'⁴⁷ from the audience, but there seems to be no proof of this. Indeed, Dodier contends that the condition of the photographs on reaching the museum 'suggested they had been cut or torn from their pages some time before', citing personal correspondence as evidence that the family circumstances probably required their removal from cumbersome albums at the beginning of the century.⁴⁸

While some of the prints which comprise the V&A's collection are relatively pristine – notably the larger format works, which may have been too large to keep pasted into albums – the damaged images are palimpsests of their changing fortunes. The differences in treatment of the prints constitute an textual archive itself: some ragged edges are left extant, while others are trimmed, which means sacrificing large parts of the prints to create straight planes (as in D574 and D292), or clipping neatly around the tears, transmuting the damage into a suitably linear, but erratic, form (as in D335). This raises the possibility that several different sets of hands were involved in the removal of the prints from their original albums, creating curious discontinuities within the archive, and a further meta-textual fragmentation of Hawarden's body of work.⁴⁹ Their visible damage has proved an inspiration as well as a problem for

⁴⁴ The V&A had been one of the first museums to collect photographs as an art form, and Tottenham would also go on to correct misattributions of Hawarden's work in later exhibitions there. See Mark Haworth-Booth, 'The Return of Lady Hawarden', in *Clementina, Lady Hawarden: Studies from Life, 1857-1864*, by Virginia Dodier (London: V&A, 1999), pp. 110–15 (pp. 110–11).

⁴⁵ The museum website partly acknowledges the delay in properly attending to Hawarden's photographs, stating that they were accessioned in two batches, in 1947 and 1968, before Dodier's work unified the collection in 1984. 'Lady Clementina Hawarden and the V&A', *Victoria & Albert Museum* <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/1/lady-clementina-hawarden-and-the-v-and-a/>> [accessed 28 November 2015].

⁴⁶ Haworth-Booth, p. 111.

⁴⁷ di Bello, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Dodier notes that the sale of the family estates in 1903 left the Hawarden daughters without a permanent home, making the matter of how to keep their mother's photographs in a more portable form a pressing one, p. 10.

⁴⁹ While their provenance is somewhat uncertain, the unique size and pristine condition of the prints auctioned by Bonhams show a markedly different approach to removing photographs from albums to that shown by the prints in the V&A archive, and raise interesting questions as to how Hawarden's albums were distributed among friends and family.

subsequent scholars, but the style of her work is so self-contained that the descendants who transformed them could be forgiven for thinking that their handling could hardly impinge upon the innate power of the works themselves.

Paradoxically, the removal of her works from the albums which they originally filled has only ensured her reputation as a notable photographer through exhibition; di Bello observes that the speculation around their history lends the prints a charismatic 'aura [...], marking them as authentically vintage and scarred by a history that nearly confined them to obscurity.'⁵⁰ In 1974 Hawarden's work came to a wider audience with the publication of *Clementina Lady Hawarden*, a collection of her images with a short introductory essay by the painter Graham Ovenden; the damage to the prints was cropped still further in its reproductions.⁵¹ It was only in 1977 that the museum's reorganisation meant that they were transferred to the Department of Prints, Drawings and Paintings. This move, as Haworth-Booth observes, finally 'reclassified photographs as works of art, rather than illustrative adjuncts to printed works',⁵² or indeed, as the 1862 International Exhibition considered them, adjuncts to machinery.

In some cases, the transformation of the prints through changes to their material condition can reflect on their contents, for example in the case of D547 (Fig. 10). Here I read Hawarden's work as explicitly addressing female capacity, capitalising on the ways in which what Smith calls the 'fetishism of an absolute focus'⁵³ enforce wider cultural requirements in portraying nineteenth century women. This is not accomplished through a denial or evasion of focus, but through thematic use of the idea of the focal point. The beautiful woman's image is produced not only through the mechanical and optical convergence of light rays, but of her own agency in representing herself. The female figure leans forward, off-centre, seeming to cling to a curtain. Her position by the source of light means that the shadow of her body on the wall behind joins those of the window struts, just out of view. This creates an intersection at the point of the shadow waistband, but where in other Hawarden photographs this would engender a sense of ambiguous fixity and stillness, here the extreme angles generate a sense of energy and dynamism. In representing a representation of the waist Hawarden can parody the will to clearly define the female form, while also representing how the accoutrements of the age enable such delineation.

⁵⁰ di Bello, p. 10.

⁵¹ In generously responding to my enquiries, Dodier explained that this book's treatment of reproductions 'concerned Mark [Haworth-Booth] to the extent that he was motivated, as I was, to produce a publication that would reproduce the Hawarden photographs as faithfully as possible. The cropping of the reproductions in the Ovenden book destroys Hawarden's eye for full-frame composition and the muddy color destroys the finesse of her handling of the subtle tones of the albumen print process.' Email, Virginia Dodier to Beatrice Bazell, 'Re: Trimming of Hawarden Photographs', 14 March 2014. In our correspondence, Dodier expressed her confidence that no V&A curator – or any other, for that matter – would sanction cropping the original prints.

⁵² Haworth-Booth, p. 112.

⁵³ Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, p. 21.



Fig. 10, Lady Clementina Hawarden, D574, albumen print, 150 x 120 mm, c. 1862-3. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The image is filled with fabric, and in selecting materials for the model's dress which have the same visual 'weight' as the curtains, seeming visually to elide them, Hawarden registers how the representation of women can become bound up in upholding the domestic ideal. The image is divided into vertical bands of texture – wainscoting, textile, wall – and the architecture provides a single plane of focus which the volume of fabric does not disrupt, since intriguingly the section of the skirt which thrusts outward becomes darker and more obscure, as if to underscore the element of subjugation in the pose which seem to press the female figure flat.

Hawarden underscores the difficulty and discomfort of composing such an appealing image, due to the exigencies of mid-Victorian women's clothing. She distorts the pleasing proportional rhythm of the fashionable silhouette; the bust is flattened, the shape of the bishop sleeves is lost, the skirt made more ungainly through the lack of a crinoline. The composition emphasises the way in which, when the waist is dislocated from its counterbalancing elements, it becomes a structural nonentity; the woman ceases to look womanly once the supremacy of the waist over other characteristics of the female body is displaced. Here the focal point (another supposedly invisible underpinning of the female body) is a much more unequivocal representation of female capacity and subversion, upholding women's energy and individuality in the face of Victorian social norms, and Hawarden finds such interest in this scenario, and particularly this pose, that she revisits it frequently in her work.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ According to my own research there are at least five images in the archive which are variations on this composition: D571, D572 and D573 could be considered 'versions' of D574. By contrast, D569 and D575 share

The positioning of the figure in relation to the shadow 'bars' sets up the centre of the female body as the vanishing point, the point where the coherence of the image rests as geometric perspective converges at the nexus of the waist. The pleating of such an enormous volume of fabric into the waistband becomes an analogy for the ways in which photography might condense and intensify age-old dilemmas of representation and ideas about the expression of femininity into art. But what really 'shapes' the waist here is Hawarden's use of light. The highest intensity of light is found at the point where the 'hourglass' of the female figure should register, but the swell of pale silk tapering into the shadowed torso heightens the wasp-waist until it becomes a visual nonsense. In making explicit the ways in which the camera, the agent of light, can uphold and trouble norms of femininity, she asserts her right to take the fashions of the day, which through composition she has all but rendered absurd, as the fit subject for women's artistic practice and creative interpretation.

Images like this show Hawarden depicting Victorian women, seemingly anchored by composition or by conventional dress or setting, as having the capacity for freedom of expression, movement, and emotion. Hawarden must have observed the desire in her contemporaries to pin the model like a lepidopterist pins a specimen, using various techniques among which an aesthetic of 'capturing' a model with focus, within one plane of focal depth, reigns supreme. Lindsay Smith analyses the implications of the mid-century photographer's quest for 'perceptual mastery'⁵⁵ at length, examining Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's tendency to incapacitate his young female models through *mise-en-scène*. A reifying composition makes the subject vulnerable where the conjured viewer's look is 'stopped upon the [...] body'⁵⁶ of the girl, who within Victorian culture should be most protected and sheltered. But in D574 the hypothetical viewer is not distanced from the female subject; indeed, the viewer is noticeably nearer than in many of Hawarden's works, while still accommodating the full length of the woman's body. The foreshortening, which denies us the model's facial expression but makes clearer the attitude of subjugation and the risk of objectifying the nubile body, also uncomfortably implicates the viewer's construction of female vulnerability for the benefit of aesthetic pleasure. The image is not just a comment on the photographic gaze too-often 'stopped' onto the exposed body, it works to question the constructions which underlie that crystallizing gaze, the geometrical axes with which contemporaries valorise the pursuit of photography, and which Victorian visual culture encouraged photography's observers to seek. Hawarden's visual and conceptual sophistication in maintaining that her daughters could be represented

many of its preoccupations and *mise-en-scène*, but alter the severity of its effect. Shires notes the similarity of the model's pose to the woman in George Elgar Hicks' famous 1863 genre painting *Woman's Mission: Companion to Manhood*, in which she leans appealingly on her stricken husband while acting as his moral support. Shires, p. 82.

⁵⁵ Smith observes that in one particularly telling picture of Xie Kitchin, a favourite model of Dodgson's, she is posed as if playing the violin, and yet has become so closely pressed to the wall which serves as backdrop that she is incapable of moving the bow. That Hawarden should share his taste for emptied-out interiors only makes the difference between their treatment of figures the more evident. Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Lindsay Smith, *Politics of Focus*, p. 27.

as more dimensional than archetypal, should take up as much space, attention and focal range as she could allow them, is a form of proof of her communicative as well as technical talents.⁵⁷

In 1864 Hawarden made an unusually public contribution to the cause of women's creative capacity, in taking photographs in public to raise funds for women's art education. She set up a booth at the Grand Fête and Bazaar in Aid of the Building Fund of the Female School of Art, and manned it herself, alongside members of her family. The event was able to bring attention to the cause of women's creativity, especially in the light of their exclusion from the Royal Academy Schools the previous year. In what, to modern ears, seems a bizarre and eclectic event, London's cultural cognoscenti were offered the opportunity to have their portrait taken by the Viscountess, assisted by her colleague Thurston Thompson.⁵⁸ A specially-printed bill is tantalising, showing only a fashionable length of skirt trailing into the frame, and a hand removing the lens cap as she photographs a contented but obscured family under the auspices of a smiling sun and a fairy with a wand.⁵⁹

Hawarden's patrons on these few days were especially fortunate: we have no record that she sold her work on any other occasion. That year, only months before her death, *Photographic News* regretfully admitted in a response to a reader's letter that, contrary to their speculation, Hawarden's work was not generally available through exhibition or purchase.⁶⁰ At the Bazaar her peers and admirers were not only able to buy otherwise unobtainable prints but also, effectively, to commission work from her in posing themselves.⁶¹ She may never have worked as a professional, but her exercise of her talents in public, for hire, in the cause of women's education, is a powerful statement from a woman careful never to disturb the domesticity of her image in any other way.

⁵⁷ In her work on Hawarden, which contrasts her work with that of modern photographers and autobiographical analysis, Carol Mavor reads the images for much less equivocal sexual significance than I posit here. Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ The Bazaar was held in the Horticultural Gardens in South Kensington, June 23-25 1864. According to a newspaper report the event took the form of stalls manned by aristocratic ladies selling articles such as leather goods, a ceremony at which the School's pupils presented purses of money for the school to the Prince and Princesses of Wales, a minstrel performance, and a 'peep-show'. The article reports that the Royal couple purchased some of the 'very artistic photographs executed by her ladyship', but we have no further evidence of this. 'Fete at the Horticultural Gardens', *The Times*, 24 June 1864, p. 14 (p. 14).

⁵⁹ The bill is a form which clients fill in with their address and the required number of prints, but the sprightly illustration takes up almost half the space. We don't know who created the image, but it contains some rather knowing references to Hawarden's photographic hallmarks, as well as her social reticence, suggesting that the artist may have been familiar with her photographic work and temperament. It is held in the collection of the National Art Library, and is kept as part of the exhibition materials, with the *Programme of the Grand Fête and Bazaar in Aid of the Building Fund of the Female School of Art (Queen Square, Bloomsbury, W.C.), ... Held ... at South Kensington* (London, 1864).

⁶⁰ 'The Medals in the Exhibition', p. 348.

⁶¹ Dodgson, whose assiduous attempts to cultivate Lady Hawarden as a social acquaintance were thwarted on several occasions, was able to buy a print of Isabella Grace in a peignoir at the Bazaar which he pasted in an album alongside those of the most notable Victorian photographers of the day, now held in the Gernsheim collection. He subsequently brought Mary and Irene MacDonald, among his favourite child models, to her stand to be photographed, although the images she took for him cannot now be identified. For a full account see Dodier, p. 50; p. 90-2.

The excitements of the fête eclipsed the Photographic Society's exhibition, which was fittingly being held across town in 'the Gallery of Female Artists, in Pall Mall'.⁶² Hawarden won yet another silver medal, this time for her 'composition',⁶³ but the judging was delayed again, owing to a 'serious difference of opinion on some photographs of merit'⁶⁴ among the judges. Hawarden's tragically early death in January 1865, at the height of her creative powers, prevented her from receiving either award in person, and the medals were cast and presented after her death.

The Society held a ceremony to present the medals of previous exhibitions in December 1866, at which her colleagues 'expressed sorrow that she was not present to receive this tangible proof of their high esteem for her'.⁶⁵ Such 'differences of opinion' at the heart of the society must have leant extra poignancy to Rejlander's statement, in the obituary he wrote for the *British Journal of Photography* just days after her death, that the photographic community has 'just now lost a member as useful as a clasp and bright as a diamond'.⁶⁶ The piece reflects much of the concerns which had occupied the photographic world throughout her brief career:

The Lady Hawarden is gone to the source of all light. She was an earnest believer in the progress of photography, and that it could be used as an art and abused like a daub. She worked honestly, in a good, comprehensible style. She aimed at elegant and, if possible, idealised truth. There was nothing of mysticism nor Flemish Pre-Raffaelistic conceit about her work. So also was her manner and conversation – fair, straightforward, nay manly, with a feminine grace. She is a loss to many, many friends. She is an enormous loss to a loving family. Peace everlasting and good will be with her!

Rejlander's is a contingent reading of her career and her persona, aestheticized and gendered according to mid-Victorian norms. Yet it is an apt approach to Hawarden's photographic practice, which often articulates how aspects of constructed femininity can be manipulated by female hands. In that sense, Rejlander takes his cue from her aesthetic, in synthesising care for the exercise, as well as the appeal, of 'feminine grace', much like the jewelled clasp to which she is compared.

Constructing Femininity: The Corseted Waist

The rather contradictory Victorian physical ideal of 'feminine grace' relied on the corset: while women should ideally cultivate 'plump arms and a round bosom, the focal point of erotic beauty [...] was the small "wasp" waist'.⁶⁷ This central point communicated virginity in the midst of fecundity, and gave coherence to the mid-century profusion of fabric, and Hawarden exploited it in scrutinising the spectacle of femininity as it impinged on the bodies of her daughters. As with geometrical perspective, the fashionable silhouette relied on a sensitised point from which representation coheres. The visual

⁶² 'The Forthcoming Photographic Exhibition', p. 133.

⁶³ Hawarden's medal was attained in the 'composition category'. 'The Medals in the Exhibition', p. 337.

⁶⁴ 'The Photographic Exhibition: Studies and Genre Subjects', *Photographic News*, 8 (1864), 302–3 (p. 302).

⁶⁵ Dodier, p. 107.

⁶⁶ 'In Memoriam', *British Journal of Photography*, 12 (1865), 38 (p. 38). By contrast, the obituary which appeared in the *London Illustrated News* consisted solely of her family connections and her age.

⁶⁷ Michie, p. 19.

bifurcation of the female form was at its height during the 1860s, reaping the benefit of technological advances which made the incursion *into* the female form possible. The clothing as well as the photography of women during the era relied on technological innovations and underpinnings: the extremity of the contemporary silhouette was an achievement of an industrialised era. But, as with Hawarden's play on models of perspective, in depicting the silhouette of the day she interrogates the idea of the focal point and its role in making femininity a spectacle.

Fashion and focal range developed at similar rates: the acculturated female body became deeper in tandem with the camera's ability to represent that change. While an image of a fashionable woman of the 1850s had only had a very limited focal plane on which to situate her, the 1860s photograph had more scope to accurately represent her new social-spatial depth in the shape of the skirt and the newly-fashionable train, and register the effect of an extraordinary degree of technical alterations in the dressed body during the shift. In the era of the *carte de visite*, as well as the popularity of viewing photography as contemporary document and art form, it had never been so easy to come across representations of what fashionable women were wearing, and to assess how well such fashions 'read' in photographic prints. In England, over the period spanning 1861 to 1867 '[b]etween 300 and 400 million'⁶⁸ *cartes de visite* were sold, which must have made the photogenic quality of any style a key criterion, shaping the development of fashion.

The 1840s and 1850s had been dominated by the bell-shaped skirt, and enormous quantities of fabric had been incorporated into the waistband by means of intricate pleating of various styles. This effectively structured the material so that it stood away from the body (as can be seen in D335), meaning that less boning was required in the bodice to make the waist seem slender.⁶⁹ However, this style of skirt added bulk where the ideal required daintiness, and the importance of the waist is indicated by the way in which its supremacy was secured as fashion changed.

One of the most efficient ways of making a narrow waistband from a voluminous skirt was through the use of a structural element of dress which particularly mimics the perspectival grid's structural bias in shaping the represented form. The gore is a triangular panel of fabric, used in clothing and corsetry alike, without which the elegant extremes of the 1860s silhouette would have been impossible to achieve. The fullness of the skirt was now thrown behind, flattening its shape in front, which meant that to achieve the effect of a slim waist would require more technological innovation, and more pressure. The waist was worn high through the 1860s – particularly in 1863 – as part of the drive to make the waist appear as small as possible.⁷⁰ The top of the crinoline narrowed, the gores became more extreme and were placed lower in the skirt and were added to the petticoat as well; all these elements made the projecting line of

⁶⁸ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 17.

⁶⁹ Penelope Byrde notes that the 'easing round the waist' was particularly noticeable between 1850 and 1855. *Nineteenth Century Fashion* (London: Batsford, 1992), p. 55.

⁷⁰ Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Women's Clothes 1600-1930* (London: Faber, 1973), p. 141.

the skirt register more strongly. As part of the quest to reduce the absolute size of the waistline the top of the crinoline narrowed, linings were removed from bodices, and even the cutting techniques altered to minimise the amount of fabric which might enlarge the appearance of the waist.⁷¹

The pursuit of definition at the waist went hand-in-hand with Britain's sense of its own aesthetic identity; British women were exercising physical discipline, and sacrificing their comfort 'in order to express social rank.'⁷² Critics such as Cunningham pinpoint 1862 as a moment in which British prosperity and confidence prompted its fashionable citizens to 'develop styles of dress of her own, instead of meekly accepting the current French modes'.⁷³ The British 'mode' demanded an extreme degree of curve in the bodice, prompting a more heavy style of corsetry than was worn by European counterparts.⁷⁴ This would have been impossible without British trade, manufacturing, and innovation, since while 'whalebone'⁷⁵ can be shaped and hold its form, it was prone to snap at the waist under pressure from the extremes of 1860s fashion. Without innovations like the crinoline, the metal eyelet, and the gore, the ideally minimised waist, and the strain it placed on fabric and wearer alike, would have been unachievable.

As the decade went on innovations in corsetry – such as steel reinforcement, the 'split-busk'⁷⁶ and 'steam-moulding'⁷⁷ – meant that the corset became 'heavier, [and] more inflexible',⁷⁸ ensuring rigidity and uniformity in what was almost certainly the most personal of garments, and which until relatively recently had been tailor-made for its wearer.⁷⁹ As in the composition of D347, industrial Britain is just as much at the core of the Victorian woman as she is at its heart and hearth, and must negotiate with her capabilities

⁷¹ While it might seem a contradiction in terms, this change often required a further layer, a 'corset cover', to 'soften the edges of the corset underneath the dress' and prevent it from being exposed under a low neckline. The lighter 1850s styles had only required a flap of fabric attached to the chemise worn underneath, which could be pulled over the top to conceal it. Eleri Lynn, *Underwear: Fashion in Detail* (London: V&A, 2010), p. 24; p. 12.

⁷² Cecil and Phillis Cunningham emphasise that, in the history of English dress, the 1860s were 'perhaps more important than any other' since the fashions of the decade expressed this independent identity so clearly. *The History of Underclothes*, rev. edn (London: Faber, 1981), p. 97.

⁷³ Cecil Cunningham, *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, facsimile rpt. (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 212.

⁷⁴ Norah Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines* (London: Batsford, 1954), p. 79.

⁷⁵ Overfishing of suitable species of whale from around 1860 onwards led to a scarcity of baleen, which ensured its use was confined to the highest-grade corsets. Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines*, pp. 167–9.

⁷⁶ The 'split-busk' refers to a corset that opens at the front, which avoids the wearer having to step into already-loosened stays, as in the past. The English inventor Joseph Cooper patented the slot-and-stud fastening in 1848 as an improvement on an earlier French design, in which the front of the corset is specially stiffened to maintain its shape. Putting this fastening into commercial production at mid-century made further innovations in corset design possible, but it also meant that the corset could be drawn even tighter than before easier, due to the durability of the metal fixtures to withstand extremes of pressure. Johnston, p. 170.

⁷⁷ Baleen, as whalebone is properly known, is a keratin in which the properties of hair and horn meet; it was considered desirable as a material because it was flexibility while still supportive to the shape. The steam-moulding process, in which the corset is soaked in starch solution and shaped on a mannequin with steam, was invented by Edward Izod, a Portsmouth corset maker, in 1868. See Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 42.

⁷⁸ Byrde, p. 66.

⁷⁹ The predominance of the sewing machine meant that the most modern shapes were affordable to the majority of British women, and as a result by the 1860s the modern corset was all-pervasive, worn 'by women of every age and every class, rich and poor alike', Vincent, p. 38. While patterns for making them up at home still appeared in ladies' magazines as late as the 1860s, by the end of the decade the mass-production of corsets was well under way. See Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines*, p. 79.

even as it aspires to circumscribe her. The (admittedly exaggerated) appearance of the female figure in England provoked derision for frivolity and excess, but it was an enormously profitable British industry, and was the product of a great international and industrial nation, whose progress could be measured by its drive for self-control.

In her writing on the fashionable silhouette Susan J. Vincent observes the irony of the development of a template to which women were expected to fit themselves, just at the moment when technology was making it easier for a woman to determine her own preferred silhouette:

It was in the Victorian period, when waists became the focus of fashion – and fetish – that the moulding of flesh became most dramatic. Industrialisation and technology mass-produced shaped corsetry into which the malleable body fitted, filling out the predetermined form. The materials used were stronger and more resilient than before, more resistant to the strain of wear and [...] it was the body that adapted most.⁸⁰

However, the 1860s corset was not as unrelenting as we now perceive. It could be worn significantly ‘laced out’⁸¹ and still perform its function – although once too loose the corset becomes obsolete – and it would be varied throughout the day. Paradoxically, the technological advances which brought about the new ‘extremity of curve’⁸² meant that, for the wearer, the corset had never been easier to put on and adjust, through innovations such as split busks and ‘lazy lacing’.⁸³ The trend for more heavily-boned forms of corset and for tighter styles of lacing naturally suggests restriction, but Hawarden’s observation of her daughters engages much more widely with concepts of contemporary women shaping their representations as part of a larger social picture. Joanne Entwistle observes that, particularly when it came to the question of the corset, through ‘investing importance in the body, dress opens up the potential for women to use it for their own purposes.’⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Vincent, p. 41.

⁸¹ Lynn, p. 73.

⁸² Vincent cites contemporary accounts which stipulate that an ‘ordinary’ Victorian woman would vary her lacing throughout the day, and expected to adjust the ‘extremity of [her] lacing according to occasion, time of day, stage of life, and mood’, p. 42; p. 47.

⁸³ In this system the laces are secured at the top and bottom with the length hanging in a loop at the centre back, and once the wearer fastens the corset via the slots, they tighten the corset laces inwards towards the waist. The lengths are then tied around the waist and then secured under a hook at the front lower edge of the corset. Eleri Lynn notes that lacing *à la paresseuse* developed in the 1840s and ‘was only made possible by developments in other areas of corset fastening’ such as the split steel busk and Cooper’s slot-and-stud innovation, p. 119.

⁸⁴ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), p. 24.



Fig. 11, Lady Clementina Hawarden, D562, albumen print, 154 x 129 mm, c. 1862-3. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

D562 is a particularly striking image; daringly, it shows Clementina as a contemporary subject, wearing her own fashionable coloured underwear in full daylight, in the window of her home.⁸⁵ Standing between

⁸⁵ Underwear was another component of dress which had recently become a vehicle for the wearer's own tastes, developing its own fashions. The V&A catalogue dates the image between 1862 and 1863, when paler colours were replacing scarlet as the most fashionable colour for corsets, crinolines and petticoats. In another version of this composition, D561 (not shown), Clementina is shown wearing a dark corset and petticoat with decorative piping, which were possibly examples of the now-superseded trend. Cunningham and Cunningham, p. 103; p. 106.

an unshaded window and a turned mirror, in this image Clementina is shaped as much by light as by the supposed constraint of her corset, with her waist at its core.⁸⁶ The female figure is a spine of structure between two planes of brightness, borne out by the central strut of the window which aligns with her waist in both iterations of her figure, in the picture plane and in the mirror. The waist is not only explicitly shaped by the corset, but by exploiting natural light, which distorts the figure further to create the ultimate desirable daintiness of waist. Even the format of images of young women could be manipulated: while Hawarden appears never to have used retouching or combination printing to shape her photographed subjects, we do have an image which shows her use of ‘vignetting’,⁸⁷ a technique which involves fading the outer edge of the image to form a framing shape.

While it is a comparatively dark image, its nuances are extraordinary; the composition showcases Hawarden’s signature skill in balancing levels of saturation and bleaching in the print. In three-quarter profile, the force of daylight trims the appearance of Clementina’s waist more effectively than any early 1860s stay-lace, and where the front edge is harshly delineated by the front of the corset, the arm thrown out from the shoulder allows the back of the torso to fade in the manner of the vignettied edge of a print. The effect is only heightened by the lace edge of a garment which is wedged into the candle holders of the cheval glass, which a catalogue note speculates is a ‘[n]egligeé, blouse or peignoir [*sic*]’.⁸⁸ This motif obtrudes itself onto the arc of the waist in a visible reminder of how clothing negotiates with the body, and Hawarden exposes the mid-century fear over how powerful visual distortion and misdirection have become in representing the world to human eyes, even within the parameters of a more documentary style of photograph. The represented body is divided between two planes of representation, which recalls the frisson of the dimensions of a voluptuous female figure in the now-superseded stereographic format.

The image articulates the demands made on the bodies of contemporary women, as well as on their representations of themselves, balancing the real woman with her reflection. The subject is not looking at the image which she creates for herself, unlike in other photographs by Hawarden which use this prop for contemplation, instead she is engaging with an external view of herself. It is possible to interpret such splitting as Hawarden performs here as an observation not only of her role as a model in front of her mother’s camera, but as a meditation on the adolescent daughter’s prospective role in Victorian society as a social and aesthetic commodity.⁸⁹ Clementina is exercising her personal taste to a certain degree, and

⁸⁶ Dodier notes the popularity of the mirror in 1850s and 1860s portrait photography not only through its symbolism, but in a technical sense as well, ‘illuminating areas that would otherwise have remained in shadow’, p. 50.

⁸⁷ Dodier, p. 96.

⁸⁸ ‘Online Catalogue Entry: Departmental Notes on D562’, *Victoria & Albert Museum* <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1048046/photograph-clementina-lady-hawarden>> [accessed 28 November 2015].

⁸⁹ Whether or not D562 was ever displayed, we can be fairly certain that Hawarden did exhibit photographs of her daughters in states of undress in public, and Dodier suggests that the ‘issue of “decency” would have been mitigated by the presentation of [the] photograph as an art object in a serious exhibition’, p. 50. We know that Dodgson was able to buy a very similar photograph to this one in which one of the Hawarden girls wears a peignoir, which Dodier suggests from similarities in description was one of those which featured in her 1863 contribution to the photographic exhibition.

unlike elsewhere in Hawarden's photographs of her daughters in contemporary dress, she is seemingly wearing a current style. In the early 1860s women were offered even more aesthetic scope by fashions for coloured undergarments, including petticoats, crinolines, corsets and shoes. The coloured corset worn by an unmarried young woman can be read as purely for own visual pleasure, and sense of trend-setting. Yet colour implicates display, and the visibility of underpinnings increased in the 1860s, but where tacked-on undersleeves and brightly-coloured shoes might be considered relatively innocuous, the 1862 fashion for scarlet underwear seems very much at odds with the edicts of public morality.⁹⁰

In this image I see Hawarden playing on the idea of how culture breaks up the body into artificially differentiated components, and not only through the use of clothes. Clementina wears the fashionable shape of corset, which pushes out the breasts as it compresses the lower torso, where her face is in darkness, almost an abstract shape. She is not posed coyly, the viewer does not 'catch' a vulnerable unclothed girl, the composition and costume seems an acknowledgement of how often women of her status moved through different states of dress during the day.⁹¹

The drive to distort the female figure into some of the most exaggerated shapes possible was concurrent with the most intense debates over objectivity in forms of recorded perception. It is tempting to speculate on whether mid-century fashion's aesthetic was driven to the verge of the fantastical by advances in optic science and technology, and the reassertion of how fallible the human matter on which it relied could be. Indeed, one contemporary photographer bewails the ease with which the retoucher can 'slice off, or curve the lady's waist after his own idea',⁹² leaving the eye doubly duped, and the lady doubly shaped by the machinations of photography and corsetry combined.

Throughout the century more rigidity of corset lacing and the extremes of what were labelled 'tight-lacing' were conflated, but the latter does seem to have been the exception for mid-Victorian women rather than the rule.⁹³ Critics note that the supposed increase in tight-lacing is a matter as much of perception, preference and the vagaries of the archive as it is a question of extant exhibits to confirm this

⁹⁰ Manufacturing and the growing taste for strong colours due to the development of aniline dyes permeated even the clothes of young women, with the exception of gloves. While I wouldn't go so far as to say they are an 'erotic device', they may well have lent a frisson to the already-taboo sight of petticoats and feet of respectable women. Cunningham and Cunningham, pp. 102–6.

⁹¹ By mid-century social rituals had developed to the point where women were expected to change their clothing several times a day to affirm their social status; Philippe Perrot cites a French work of 1866 which stipulated seven to eight changes of costume in one day. *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 91–2. For Hawarden, unconcerned with washing or pressing such volumes of material, clothes could represent visual pleasure and agency, in defiance of the conduct books which urged their readers to keep their clothing in pristine order.

⁹² Quoted in Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 100.

⁹³ While it is problematic at best to try and deduce the circumstances under which clothing of past eras was worn in day-to-day circumstances, given how closely much of 1860s costume was designed to fit, archivists might examine some of the proportions to which the body was habituated, which such clothing can show. As a result critics such as Eleri Lynn can reasonably deduce that 'objects at the V&A and other museums suggest that very tight lacing was uncommon' during the period, p. 73.

development.⁹⁴ Clever tailoring could do much to give the impression of narrow waist, reducing the need for excessive pressure in the corset. However, the differentiation between ‘tight’ lacing and the practice of lacing tightly would prove problematic, and the difficulty of representing such an intimate differentiation in culture would prove controversial throughout the rest of the century, and I examine one manifestation of this tension in the periodical press towards the end of this chapter.

Consequently, we know that we have only a circumscribed knowledge of how women exercised power over their own silhouette, and in some ways this is a less interesting question than how culture, through representations of women, negotiated the drive to shape them. Hawarden’s photographs all date from a time when the stylish silhouette was moving into a period of perceived greater constriction. Yet they negotiate the contrast between the increasing supremacy of ‘line’ which marked out both the most extreme silhouettes – as well as the most extreme states of focus – and the individual variation of this line available to mid-Victorian women.

Dressing as an Art: Authorship and Aesthetic Subjectivity

Both Merrifield and Eastlake take the consideration of dress as an opportunity to consciously explore the nuances of the social and intellectual position of mid-century women. Both were to make contributions to public intellectual life which, in their own time, would be circumscribed and tempered by considerations of gender, but Hilary Fraser, in considering their art historical careers, proposes that the liminal status of women gave them ‘creative freedom to imagine other ways of writing about art and its histories’⁹⁵ than the conventions of the day would allow their male peers.⁹⁶ Dress, considered in its own right, became a pretext for communicating the ways in which women’s individualism could flourish, and how they might exercise their talents and tastes in the face of such obstacles. In treating dress as a mode of communication they examine how the imperative to encode individual preference and proportion intersects with contemporary anxieties over correct perception, aesthetics, the individual, gender roles, and the mass-communication of the era. And in speaking of clothing, it was necessary to speak of the body, and its presence as a form in its own right, as well as a vehicle for contemporary and subjective taste.

⁹⁴ Undergarments are even more problematic than other categories of clothing, since their intimate and regular use makes those items that are preserved even more exceptional, and thus even more vulnerable to misinterpretation when treated as historical record. Scholars of this era of dress are beset by the problem of assessing how tightly women laced themselves, and Susan Vincent is driven to ask, of extant corsets, ‘[d]o things survive because they were typical and numerous, or because, on the contrary, they were atypical and their unusual qualities prized?’, p. 44.

⁹⁵ *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking like a Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 33. The work of critics such as Eastlake, Merrifield, and Anna Jameson was crucial to the development of art history as an academic discipline; its stress on research and professionalism was at odds with what Fraser diplomatically calls ‘the more literary and generalist mode’ prevalent in Britain’s male-dominated art establishment at the time, p. 20.

⁹⁶ John Paul Kanwit stresses Eastlake’s work as instrumental in establishing some of art history’s formal tenets in the 1840s, some twenty years before the discipline is critically recognised to have been formed. *Victorian Art Criticism and the Woman Writer* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp. 7; pp. 60–63, pp. 70–5.

The circumstances of Eastlake's first contribution to the prestigious *Quarterly Review* in 1847 reaffirmed that women's voices were too-easily subsumed to cultural narratives. Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon note the light quality of much of the correspondence between the author, her editor John Gibson Lockhart, and the publisher John Murray, in which the two men 'alternately teased and indulged her'.⁹⁷ In the letter in which Lockhart first commends her to write on the topic of dress he quotes the Murray's approval of her personal style: 'if you write on dress as well as you dress yourself, you must produce a *chef d'oeuvre*'.⁹⁸ This endorsement ignored not only her growing expertise on art history and aesthetics, but also the strong authorial persona which had lent itself well to the reviews she had previously written for the publication.⁹⁹ She left no record that she objected to such a paternalistic (not to say patronising) basis for assigning her this work, rather than her practice as an artist or her informal but extensive education in the arts. It would prove to be the beginning not only of her significant contribution to public culture as an art critic, but the first of many instances of her professional and scholarly expertise being overlooked.

According to the convention of the time the essay was published anonymously, with an explicitly male authorial voice, and Eastlake takes this opportunity to critique the contemporary idea of a woman's role, and its limiting effect on her forms of expression. In the essay, later collected into a volume with another review and printed under the title *Music and the Art of Dress* in 1852, Eastlake's forthright style is brought to bear on many aspects of mid-century fashions, alongside extensive reference to the precedents provided by art history for her conclusions about the aesthetics of dress and physical beauty.¹⁰⁰ But the moments at which her criticism reaches a pitch are those which consider how contemporary fashion reinforces, or enforces, the social roles and expectations of gender. Indeed, she opens the piece by condemning the 'fallacies'¹⁰¹ about a woman's intellectual and moral abilities and judgement, which have meant that '[f]or centuries we agreed that education was a dangerous thing for her' (*MAD*, p. 63). She takes individual fashions to task, but in general recommends modern dress for women on the basis that it is a costume in which they can

dress quickly, walk nimbly, eat plentifully, stoop easily, loll gracefully, and, in short, perform all the duties of life without let or hindrance. The head is left to its natural size – the skin to its

⁹⁷ At the time Eastlake was one of only two female writers contributing to the journal, and the only one writing on the humanities. The other was Mary Somerville, a scientist and mathematician. Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World* (London: National Gallery, 2011), p. 70.

⁹⁸ *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Julie Sheldon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 110.

⁹⁹ Avery-Quash and Sheldon, pp. 72–3.

¹⁰⁰ The essay I consider originally appeared as an anonymous review of three historical surveys of British costume, called 'The Art of Dress', which was printed in the *Quarterly Review*, LXXIX, 158 (March 1847): 372–399. The essay on music had previously appeared in the *London Magazine*. Both Merrifield and Eastlake's articles on dress were subsequently reprinted in book form. While it may seem counter-intuitive to study their subsequent appearance in print, I see it as evidence of the continued relevance of Eastlake and Merrifield's work and insights (even after some of the specific fashions which they consider become obsolete) as evidenced by their translation into independent volumes during a period of rapid sartorial change.

¹⁰¹ *Music and the Art of Dress: Two Essays Reprinted from the 'Quarterly Review'* (London: John Murray, 1852), p. 63. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix *MAD*.

native purity – the waist at its proper region – the heels at their real level. The dress is one calculated to bring out the natural beauties of the person, and each of them has, as far as we see, fair play. (*MAD*, p. 77)

Critics of fashion know that dress is rarely a question of the ‘natural’, ‘native’, or ‘real’, and the mid-century silhouette was as deserving of critique as any other. A woman who dresses herself with an awareness of fashion does so in a similar spirit as an artist in relation to genre: essentially within certain parameters, but with the creative flair and courage to disregard them if her taste directs. Yet the characteristics of contemporary dress which Eastlake emphasises show how a prioritisation of female freedom of movement, and the disdain for artifice demonstrates an ideal with which women are subjects in negotiation with fashion. Eastlake’s vision of women as active participants ‘in the duties of life without let or hindrance’ (*MAD*, p. 77) even allows for the erotic experience of contemporary dress:

There is something especially beautiful too in the expanse of chest and shoulder, as seen in a tight plain-coloured high dress – merinos or silk – like a fair sloping sunny bank – with the long taper arms, and the slender waist so tempting and convenient between them, that it is a wonder they are not perpetually embracing it themselves. (*MAD*, p. 79)

Eastlake acknowledges that sensual pleasure in their own appearance, and their own aesthetic choices, is something in which women can consciously partake is an assertion that culture should attend to. Neither undergarments or tight-lacing are named in the article, though it does refer to the ‘subtextures’ (*MAD*, p. 70) of costume; indeed, at times the deliberate omission of a discussion of corsetry seems ludicrous. But in her disdain for uniformity of dress and silhouette, and the aesthetic ignorance of many individuals who nevertheless have the power to make aesthetic choices, Eastlake juxtaposes all of the concerns which relate to the practice of corseting the ‘tempting and convenient’ waist.

Published as it is in one of the most serious and authoritative cultural sources of the day, her sensitivity to detail can also be read as an admission of her own aesthetic priorities and preoccupations. Her art historical qualifications are shown in her attention to the interpretation of dress as a conscious set of aesthetic choices which can be analysed in the manner of a review of a contemporary artwork. The source of authority in Eastlake’s authorial voice is allowed to range between the profoundly subjective, the academic, and the lyrical. But, crucially, she concedes that even her own pronouncements are reliant on the individual: ‘it is a lady’s own sense on which their proper application depends’ (*MAD*, p. 84).¹⁰² This is borne out by her declaration that a woman’s fine sensibilities mean that

[her] dress becomes a sort of symbolical language – a kind of personal glossary – a species of body phrenology, the study of which it would be madness to neglect. [...] We maintain that, to a proficient in the science, every woman walks about with a placard on which her leading qualities are advertised.’ (*MAD*, pp. 68-9)

¹⁰² Eastlake’s opinions on women’s art education may have been skewed by her struggle to be recognised for her achievements. The exceptionalism of her ‘own sense’ of aesthetics and ability to apply them seems to weigh on a rather short-sighted critique of women’s training and skill in her review of an exhibition at the Society of Female Artists for the *Art Journal* in 1871, perhaps owing to the fact that by then, as Avery-Quash and Sheldon note, she had been a self-taught artist and critic herself ‘for at least 30 years’, p. 103.

The etiquette books of the era urge women to exercise limited verbal self-expression, but argue that dress can ‘speak’ in the absence of the voice. They warningly pronounce on the ways in which the arrangement of a woman’s dress ‘gives you a good insight into their character: be careful, therefore, to dress with becoming taste and consistency’.¹⁰³ Even in her own preternaturally authoritative voice, Eastlake is showing her consciousness of a material and moral culture which regards woman as the safe space in which to exercise visual pleasure, but also a component of the social world which must be kept in check.¹⁰⁴

Unlike Eastlake, by the time Merrifield’s essays appeared under the collective title ‘Dress – As a Fine Art’,¹⁰⁵ she was not only an agent in the field of aesthetics, but an authority. This had been established by her record of critical and art historical scholarship and publications, several of which sprang from her contribution to the Royal Commission on the Fine Arts.¹⁰⁶ While Eastlake’s contribution is complicated not only by her anonymous status, but in her authorial transvestism, she and Merrifield have an opening sentiment in common, decrying women’s limited education and participation in culture. As with Eastlake, her work has a very firm art historical bias, and uses examples of costumes from historic and modern works of art to substantiate her arguments, which as Fraser observes ‘unsettles established dominant critical discourses’¹⁰⁷ in making domestic culture a field to be enriched by understanding the Old Masters.

Much of *Dress as a Fine Art* is taken up by an excoriation of the fashionable wasp-waisted silhouette. The means by which Merrifield makes her argument invites readers to think of such a totem of contemporary fashion as a symbol of the dispossession of the individual’s taste and judgement, and her ignorance in applying such a fashion to her body regardless of her own proportions. She is unequivocal in protesting at the pervasiveness of the contemporary mania for artificially disproportionate female figures, whether achieved by a ‘pad’¹⁰⁸ in the dress or the over-tightened lace.¹⁰⁹ Her arguments appear primarily based on

¹⁰³ *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen, Or, The Principles of True Politeness: To Which Is Added, Hints on the Flower Garden* (Halifax, Yorks: Milner & Sowerby, 1853), p. 78.

¹⁰⁴ Critics such as Rosy Aindow have noted the inherent bind which women found themselves in bourgeois discourse, since in contrast to men, they were expected both to ‘uphold moral values, but [...] simultaneously required to illustrate patriarchal wealth through attention to dress’. *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture, 1870-1914* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 55. In turn, Eastlake spends much of the early portion of the article observing that past eras of dress have shown “fellow” men equally capable of frivolous fashions, but allows that the current fashions for men, while drab, make a man’s wife ‘the only safe investment for his vanities’ (*MAD*, p. 68).

¹⁰⁵ The first of the instalments appeared as ‘Dress - As A Fine Art’, *Art Journal*, 5 (1853), 1–3.

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Mitchell, ‘Merrifield, Mary Philadelphia (1804-1889)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54028>> [accessed 28 November 2015].

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Merrifield, *Dress as a Fine Art*, p. 3. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix *DAF*.

¹⁰⁹ While Merrifield refers to the ‘pernicious practice of tight-lacing’ (*DAF*, p. 15) throughout the piece, her general discussion of the work makes it clear that she views the fashionable silhouette, if only loosely interpreted, as participating in it. She argues that any form of corsetry works against what she calls ‘the gently undulating line of nature’ through the ‘compression of the ribs’ and the ‘sudden diminution in the size of the waist’ (*DAF*, p. 28). She devotes an entire section of her essay to the topic of ‘Slender Waists and Small Feet’, rightly observing that it is only ever possible to judge any portion of the body in relation to the rest: arguing that where waists and feet are ‘recognised as *small*, they have ceased to be beautiful, because they are disproportionate’ (*DAF*, p. 25, emphasis original).

aesthetics – with significant asides addressing its medical dangers – on the grounds of its ugliness according to classical principles of proportion and beauty, and the first edition even goes so far as to feature an illustration comparing the skeletons of a torso of the Classical ideal with its tight-laced counterpart (*DFA*, p. 38, plate 4). But she is also acutely aware of the role fashion plays for young women in society as aesthetic outlet, and does not scruple to deal with the restrictions they face in terms of education as well as in dress, and the elision of the individual's preference, taste, and the properties of her figure inherent in such a pattern of ideal beauty. She freely asserts that the 'remedy' to this fashion is easily found:

give to every young lady a general knowledge [...] of the principles of beauty as applied to the human frame, and when these are acted on, tight-lacing will die a natural death. (*DFA*, p. 22)

She attributes blame for the vice-like grip of this fashion to novelists, painters, poets, and sculptors, arguing that particularly in visual media 'the ideal production of the uneducated, whether expressed by the pencil, chisel, or the pen, are always ill-proportioned and defective' (*DFA*, p. 20).¹¹⁰ She seems to imply, in her subsequent arguments for better art education for women and their inclusion in the creative professions, that not only would the standard of dress be raised among the general population, but the standard of art. Merrifield is prepared to go even further in confronting mid-Victorian conceptions of proper knowledge for women, while using the contemporary concern for beauty as the most suitable spur. She asserts

a young woman will not make the worse wife, or mother, for understanding the economy of the human frame, and for having acquired the power of appreciating its beauties. We fear that there are some persons whose minds are so contracted as to think that, not only studies of this nature, but even the contemplation of undraped statuary, are contrary to the delicacy and purity of the female mind; but we are satisfied that the thinking part of the community will approve the course we recommend. (*DFA*, p. 23)

She is unafraid to flatter the reader that they are one of the 'thinking part of the community', which only makes her subsequent statement, citing medical authorities, that women should be less ignorant of the 'structure and functions' of the body all the more extraordinary.¹¹¹

While elements of her argument acknowledge that fashion is a question of the (mis)representation of the body, she is conscious of the aesthetic inconsistency of the age. An individual can exercise choice with regard to colour, fabric and trim, but is 'bound to adopt the form and style of dress which the fashion of the day has rendered popular' (*DFA*, p. 4). Merrifield despises the 'sudden transitions and curves' (*DFA*,

¹¹⁰ Merrifield also considers the ramifications of the narrative of a disproportionate waist becoming self-perpetuating, even in culture beyond artistic representations. She recounts the experience of an acquaintance, 'professor of anatomy in a provincial academy' who experienced some difficulty in 'procuring a model whose waist had not been compressed by stays' (*DFA*, p. 19).

¹¹¹ Merrifield takes the idea of women's art education further; the article concludes with the idea that the mind which has been educated in colour 'from the study of dress, may rise to the study of natural philosophy' (*DFA*, p. 173). She does, however, concede that separate art schools should be established for men and women, in a concession to a rather vexed question of the day. Merrifield was to become a botanical artist and 'an accepted authority on seaweeds' in the 1860s and 1870s, Rosemary Mitchell, 'Merrifield'.

p. 36) of the tightly-drawn silhouette, freely implicating physical incapacitation with political inflections in her rhetoric, acknowledging that this ‘despotism of fashion is limited to *form*’ (DFA, p. 4, emphasis original), and calling it a ‘tyrant’ (DFA, p. 6). While the essay has nothing of the calculated scientific study about it, and the author cites sources such as paintings and anecdotes for her evidence, she is acutely aware of how the visibility of distorting physical ideals can influence how people dress, and think of, themselves.

She takes this consciousness even further in considering the pressure that a woman might experience after a confrontation with such unattainable ideals at her dressmaker, recognising that women were being affected by this preference in all its cultural manifestations. Women were being encouraged to take control of their figure with both hands, and to shape the representation of their bodies, but this did not always serve their aesthetic satisfaction, their health, or their own personal taste:

What young lady, unacquainted with the proportions of the figure, could look on these prints of costumes and go away without the belief that a small waist and foot were essential elements of beauty? So she goes home from her dressmaker’s, looks in the glass, and not finding her own waist and foot as small as those in the books of fashion, gives her stay-lace an extra-tightening pull (DFA, p. 105)

By 1857, when Eastlake wrote her survey of photography for the *Quarterly Review*, concerns over the appropriate format of feminine beauty had become even more topical in the fraught representational climate of the time.¹¹² The article opens by cataloguing the astonishing saturation of the medium as a representative form and artistic practice, noting that it had even penetrated to ‘the fair woman whom nothing but her own choice obliges to be more than the fine lady’ (P, p. 444).¹¹³ While much of it is taken up with a historical survey of the medium, her supposed intention to ‘investigate the connexion of photography with art’ (P, p. 444) is often articulated in relation to its social ramifications. In doing so the argument incorporates contemporary anxieties over the dispossessed human faculties and the troubled aesthetic climate of this point in mid-century.¹¹⁴ Eastlake openly addresses the body, a key text in such a debate about Victorian representational culture, using much of the same critical rhetoric here as she does in her strictures on dress.

¹¹² ‘Photography’, *Quarterly Review*, 101 (1857), 442–68 (p. 444). All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix P.

¹¹³ The extent of women amateurs’ participation in photographic culture was notable, but here Eastlake might be making an observation to those in the know about her own status: Kanwit notes that ‘most insiders in the Victorian art world knew that Eastlake wrote art criticism for *The Quarterly Review* in these years’, p. 69. While not a practitioner herself her interest in the topic and experience of being a sitter for the photographers Hill and Adamson was known, and was greater than that of her husband Charles Eastlake, despite the fact that he had been President of the Photographic society since 1853.

¹¹⁴ 1857 was the year in which the Society of Female Artists (later the Society of Lady Artists, now the Society of Women Artists) was able to hold the first of their annual exhibitions. Eastlake was one of the founders of the Society in 1855, which was set up to ensure its members’ work could be exhibited in the same way as their male peers, and which first exhibited in a gallery on Oxford Street that same year: Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 175; Kanwit, p. 67.

In the light of the burgeoning photographic careers of artists like Lady Hawarden – who acquired her first camera that same year – Eastlake's disparagement of photography's creative potential seems obtuse, to say the least. However, she shows critical acumen in being attuned to the contemporary debates over the importance of how the world is represented by human and artificial faculties.

For the more perfect you render an imperfect machine the more must its imperfections come to light: it is superfluous therefore to ask whether Art has been benefited, where Nature, its only source and model, has been but more accurately falsified. If the photograph in its early and imperfect scientific state was more consonant to our feelings for art, it is because, as far as it went, it was more true to our experience of Nature. Mere broad light and shade, with the correctness of general forms and absence of all convention, which are the beautiful conditions of photography, will, when nothing further is attempted, give artistic pleasure of a very high kind; it is only when greater precision and detail are superadded that the eye misses the further truths which should accompany the further finish. (*P*, p. 460)

She cites the work of an earlier critic who 'created no little scandal' in suggesting that 'pictures taken slightly out of focus' would be more "[...] *artistically* beautiful" (*P*, p. 460).¹¹⁵ And Eastlake's ultimate proof of this idea, considering the interplay of scientific advancement with the artistic ends of photography, is the representation of beautiful young women, since they are cultural representation's ultimate ornament.¹¹⁶ She alludes to the social stakes which attend Victorian women's presentation of their bodies in acknowledging that, especially through the tendency of photography of the time to distort the natural tints of the skin 'the male and the older head, having less to lose, has less to fear' (*P*, p. 462).

Eastlake avoids considering focus as a component which might inflect the artistic capacity of photography, which seems an odd omission given the article's lament that technological advances have come at the expense of photography's aesthetic development. Her inability, or unwillingness, to consider how photography may advance aesthetics may be interpreted as bound up in a form of art historical conservatism. However, especially in her consideration of the female subject and the female photographer, the essay nevertheless gestures towards the innovations that Hawarden is able to depict, playing on these forms in her pursuit of innovations in a still-developing form of art.

In their critical work both Merrifield and Eastlake weave together an understanding of the topic in hand with the sense of the visual complexities which the era was experiencing. Even before the photographic community began to grapple with such ideas in earnest the authors were negotiating ideas of proportion, aesthetics and the representation of the body. They took dress as one of the ways in which the general

¹¹⁵ Here Eastlake is referring to a paper given to the Photographic Society (at the invitation of her husband) by Sir William Newton, 'Upon Photography in an Artistic View, and in its Relations to the Arts'. She attributes the resistance of the Society to the personal stake of its membership in standards of technical and professional excellence, but ably demonstrates that, even a decade before the divisions of the Society to which Hawarden was witness, the photographic community experienced great difficulty in dealing with questions of appropriate photographic blur. For a more detailed account of Newton's paper see Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 43.

¹¹⁶ Her exact phrasing is curiously euphemistic: 'of all the surfaces a few inches square the sun looks upon, none offers more difficulty, artistically speaking, than a smooth, blooming, clean washed, and carefully combed human head' (*P*, p.461).

public could achieve a sense of the female figure as something which must be naturally active as well as beautiful. They were conscious that the styles of the era were prone to fragment not only the vision but the presentation of femininity, in which the female figure, as Eastlake puts it, ‘breaks upon [the viewer] in such a plenitude of charms that we hardly know where to begin the catalogue’ (*MAD*, p. 77). Hawarden’s photography was to take these questions of the ‘breaking’ female body, and the depiction of its agency, out of the realm of documentary and heteronormative-focused photography, and use the creative power of the new art to communicate, just as effectively as dress could, the individual within.

Conclusion: Corset Controversies and the *Conversazione*

Eastlake’s final thought on the relationship between the photographer and the artist links artistic capability, aesthetic independence, and the different paths through the ‘field of delineation’, envisioning the practitioners themselves as female:

Photography *is* intended to supersede much that art has hitherto done, but only that which it was both a misappropriation and a deterioration of Art to do. The field of delineation, having two distinct spheres, requires two distinct labourers; but though hitherto the freewoman has done the work of the bondwoman, there is no fear that the position should be in future reversed. (p. 466)

However, as the work of all the creators in this chapter have shown, women of the era found ways to negotiate between ‘freedom’ and ‘bondage’ in their creative expression, especially in relation to Victorian ideals and ideologies. However, in the false dichotomy which Eastlake draws up between replication and representation, art and photography, her own political aims and values, her own hopes for women’s self-determination, become visible in her choice of metaphor.

Dress was supposedly an apolitical, if emotive, topic of the day, but Eastlake and Merrifield are not alone in perceiving its relevance to the daily experience of women. A letter to the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* would provoke a controversial discussion of corsetry’s merits which lasted for almost a decade, and addresses how women’s confinement in cultural and social terms would become the means by which they could author their own experiences of pleasure, sexuality and power in much the same way that they could tug at their own corset lace.¹¹⁷ In 1867 an Edinburgh woman wrote to the letters column ‘The Englishwoman’s *Conversazione*’¹¹⁸ to entreat the editor to ‘invite correspondence on the important subject’¹¹⁹ of tight-lacing. She fulminates at length at the deployment of the ‘cruel laces’ that have been ‘instrumental in metamorphosing my merry romping girl to a pale fashionable belle’:

¹¹⁷ For the fullest account of the series of letters on this topic – which later devolved into a discussion of corporal punishment – see Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 81–8.

¹¹⁸ Letters to this column were mediated through the editor’s authorial persona, and direct quotation is strongly implied by a change in tone, if not marked out by punctuation. The column as a whole is presented as a vehicle for its readers’ concerns and talents, such as health advice, recipes, and correcting errors in previous numbers. For more in-depth scrutiny of the ‘*Conversazione*’ format and the tensions of editorship and readership which it exposed, see Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 73–5.

¹¹⁹ ‘Englishwoman’s *Conversazione*’, *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, n.s. 2, 3 (1867), 163–67 (p. 163). All subsequent references are to this issue, and are given in the text with the prefix *EDM*.

the most merciless system of tight-lacing was the rule of the establishment, and [...] she and her forty or fifty fellow-pupils had been daily imprisoned in vices of whalebone drawn tight by the muscular arms of sturdy waiting-maids, till the fashionable standard of tenuity was attained. (EDM p. 164)

Her daughter had written home in protest against this treatment, but her letters had been confiscated, and she was punished for her rebellion. When the author confronted about the severity of the regime, the headmistress protested that ‘no young lady could now go into good society with a coarse, clumsy waist like a rustic’ (EDM p. 164), but admits that she has to employ force with her pupils, ‘owing to the obstinacy of young girls, and the difficulty of making them understand the importance of a good figure’ (EDM p. 164). The ‘good figure’ has weakened the daughter’s muscles, the mother protests, so that she cannot do without her corset:

her muscles have been, so to speak, murdered, and she must submit for life to be encased in a stiff panoply of whalebone and steel; and all this torture and misery for what? merely to attract admiration for her small waist. (EDM p. 164)

The mother’s letter demonstrates how, even in fulminating against the shaping of the body, cultural interaction with the waist allows women space to articulate their relationship to socially prescribed roles, in terms which carve out a space for their own aesthetic and sensual capacities. In protesting a school’s pursuit of fashionable figures on behalf of their pupils, and their repression of personal preferences and narratives of protest, the author may not only protest the physical impact of the visual effect, but also the elision of her daughter’s individual physique and personality. The letter-writer is using the cultural outpost available to her as a community of female correspondents, articulating an alternative narrative to that of the female body’s confinement, which her daughter has been denied by the confiscation of her letters protesting her discomfort. Her condemnation of the pursuit of admiration for the fashionably visible ‘absurdly small dimensions’ (EDM p. 164) at the expense of the pupils’ ‘romping’ vitality reiterates how young women might experience the shaping, by society, of their bodies and their voices for its own ends.¹²⁰

The silhouette’s development through the 1860s and 1870s adheres to the idea of what seems most fitting to the camera, with its increasing ability to represent perspective, which does seem to entrench the idea of women’s bodies being shaped to fit a template. As seen in the *Punch* cartoon, the visual weight of the figure is redistributed as the silhouette develops – the skirt tightens even further, the chignon grows at the back of the head while hats tip forward onto the brow – so that the woman seems to be receding elegantly. The pursuit of a perspectivized female body during the era, as Eastlake and Merrifield

¹²⁰ Ana Krugovoy Silver stresses that to Victorian culture, the ‘slender body became a sign not simply of the pure body, but of the *regulated* body’, and in an era which conflated women’s hunger with sexual desire it was of the utmost importance that schoolgirls be taught to regulate every facet of physical intake and expression, from speech and dress to eating. *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 10; p. 56.

recognise, might come at the expense of the individuality of young women, who must learn to submit their 'obstinacy' and individuality to the 'stiff panoply' of contemporary visual mores.¹²¹

But the concept of shaping the expression of the self might also offer them a scope for self-determination in their participation in culture, whether in domestic albums, photography exhibitions, or journalism. Di Bello comes to consider women's magazines, like their albums, as providing their contemporary reader with a tool 'to produce herself as a genteel woman',¹²² yet allowing her to maintain a degree of individual choice.¹²³ Within such a context the magazine publishing women's correspondence about dress alongside the periodical criticism of Eastlake, Merrifield and their peers, and Hawarden's photographs, are part of a wider participation in culture within prescribed bounds, but which nonetheless allow for a measure of self-determination in cultural narratives.

The Edinburgh mother preferred to remain anonymous but enclosed her card as her authority to the magazine. Just over a week after that letter's publication an illustration of Elizabeth, Lady Eastlake, graced the cover of *The Lady's Own Newspaper* at the age of fifty-seven, as part of a profile which named her as the author of many of her anonymous pieces, including the *Quarterly Review* articles on dress and photography.¹²⁴ Prior to this Eastlake could be said to have been working to tacitly feminise the periodical press, as befitted an author who, despite her capabilities and the male persona of her articles for the *Quarterly Review*, was manipulating it to serve her own ends, just as women were used to do in the daily business of dressing. While elements of her practice appear to be shoring up the ideology of separate spheres, her voice – and her scholarship – jostled for space amongst her critical peers.¹²⁵ Eastlake herself, through her writing, had contributed to the tensions which had been situated between the interpretative eye and the observing eye, and which had been applied to the sensitised spots of the clothed mid-Victorian female body. Nevertheless, she was prepared to risk being subject to them in claiming her life's work.

The fraught attitude to the Victorian visual would prove a spur particularly to the project of realist fiction in the late 1860s and early 1870s, in which the literary eye might be construed as similarly vulnerable to

¹²¹ The lines of the 1870s silhouette lengthened and straightened, which required even tighter control through corsetry, and over a larger surface area. The 'cuirasse', or spoon busk extended over the length of the torso and abdomen, forming the longest and most restrictive form of corset thus far. It is possible to speculate that such a shift was influenced by photography's development, with technological advances in capturing the fashionable visual 'froth', while still capturing the lean silhouette and small waist beneath. Vincent, p. 41.

¹²² di Bello, p. 124.

¹²³ Sharon Marcus notes that letters to the *Conversazione* column on the topic of whipping, which were a direct result of the tight-lacing correspondence, were printed verbatim as part of a pornographic compendium called 'The Birchen Bouquet'. This might be considered the ultimate example of textual malleability, where women's narratives of taking pleasure in pain intended for a genteel general audience of their peers can be re-purposed for erotic ends. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 147.

¹²⁴ 'Lady Eastlake', *Lady's Own Paper*, 1 (1867), 1.

¹²⁵ Her writing is often symptomatic of an author who championed her own career, while being tacitly aware of the gender norms which had hampered her work. Even a decade after her husband's death, Eastlake wrote to a friend 'I feel that I shd have been his best successor in the direction of the Nat: Gallery [...] tho' the world wd be astonished at such an idea.' Letter to Hannah Brightwen, 14 October 1875, quoted in Sheldon, p. 407. Emphasis original.

the human organism, in the substitution of an image and the camera's 'way of seeing'¹²⁶ for individual and subjective sight is sought-after. Eastlake's acute consciousness of how the struggle between ideals as they played out in the mind's eye, in culture, and on the body of mid-Victorian woman must particularly have informed her when she wrote, wryly:

Of course, to the inward eye of the imagination the mere name of woman presents a vision clothed in perpetual youth and loveliness, or floating in a region too far above us to know precisely how she is clothed at all. But to the outward eye of the senses, which acts as a man of business to the inward eye of the mind, bothering it with particulars it never wants to know, it is not to be denied that there are some of these visions which appear not beautiful, and many by no means young. (*MAD*, pp. 85-6)

Her own work had warned of the dangers of exposing the female body to what the conduct books called 'the vulgar stare of the public eye',¹²⁷ warning women not to make themselves conspicuous, while acknowledging that dress was one of the most powerful means at their disposal for communicating. But her work also bore its consciousness of how evading the 'particulars' of women's bodies could constitute sensitised areas in which culture's ideas and ideals about women could about find expression. It also could be said to participate in some of the rhetoric which fed into the Contagious Diseases acts implemented throughout the 1860s, when anxieties over women's public visibility and the interpretation of their bodies could be said to have had their utmost social impact across Britain.

Representations of the female body, and measured interpretation of its outer appearance, had never been so imbued with significance, and even the most solemn forms of culture which followed this period would negotiate the sexualised frisson of display wherever a female body, and its sensuous capacity, was under prolonged scrutiny. If we can reconsider the means by which the female body was atomised, it's possible to see within women's efforts a reflection on the forces within culture which created such sensitised spots. In turn, we can then read their contributions to culture as a re-positioning of the representation of the female body, while still operating in relation to patriarchal norms and narratives, as a construct which cannot be voided of its own sexual significances in relation to itself.

¹²⁶ Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, p. 77.

¹²⁷ *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen, Or, The Principles of True Politeness: To Which Is Added, Hints on the Flower Garden*, p. 75.

Chapter Three: Wrist

From the Treppenhaus we entered the Griechischer Saal, devoted to the divine sculptures of the Parthenon and the Eginetan sculptures. [...] This was our favourite room. Here we came again and again to feed our eyes and minds with the unspeakable beauty of those works which, all mutilated as they are, exercise a spell over one that no other sculpture commands. The Ilissus, the Theseus, the two female figures, which deprived of heads and arms completely express – the one, eager attention, the other contemplative repose. The backs of a male and female figure, the latter with her lovely arm around the neck of her companion – these were our favourites, and made everything else seem mean or lifeless in comparison.

Recollections of Berlin 1854-1855

Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm? The unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow, and all the varied gently lessening curves, down to the delicate wrist, with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness. A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the timeworn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life.

The Mill on the Floss (1860)

There is now no clue as to which of the sculptures in the carefully choreographed surroundings of the Neues Museum in Berlin so enthralled George Eliot, but the 'lovely arm'¹ she describes cannot have belonged to any found on the Parthenon.² Indeed, scholars are at a loss to discover which pair of figures – specifically, which woman embracing a male companion – can have drawn Eliot's special attention to this portion of the female body, and prompted such admiration.³ The 'New' Museum had been built on a palatial scale, and its layout was designed around specific exhibits in the expansive collection of 'plaster-cast copies of the most representative Greek and Roman sculpture.'⁴ However when it opened to the public in early 1855, elements of the project were still unfinished, which meant that Eliot and her lover

¹ George Eliot, 'Recollections of Berlin', in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. by Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 243–58 (pp. 252–3). The trip inspired brief and lengthy journal entries, articles, letters, and essays from both Eliot and Lewes, many of which deal with questions of art and aesthetics. This essay is one of several 'Recollections' of travels and experiences which she recorded for her own benefit in her journals.

² We know from contemporary illustration that the famous incompleteness of the Parthenon figures was left untouched, although James J. Sheehan notes that the culture of the Berlin institutions tended to prefer their statuary to be 'heavily restored'. Nonetheless, the beautiful arm might be doubly fictitious, since it was present by way of a modern artisan rather than an Ancient Greek sculptor. See *Museums in the German Art World from the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 80.

³ George Witemeyer is unable to identify a likely candidate for the male and female figures referred to in Eliot's reminiscences; he suggests that casts of the figures of mother and daughter Demeter and Persephone seated together on the Parthenon's East Pediment provided the germ for this motif in the novel, albeit with the incorrect detail removed. Neither of the Parthenon's pediments – nor those of the temple of Aphaia at Aegina – feature the figures of a man and woman embracing, and since most of the figures in question already showed significant damage and are curtailed above the wrist, a conflation of two different pairs of figures in Eliot's memory seems likely. Since this trip provided her first encounter with many historic pieces of sculpture, including the Parthenon marbles, perhaps this is not surprising. *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 210–11n62.

⁴ Since only originals were allowed in the Altes ('Old') Museum, the design of the Neues presented a valuable opportunity to unite the comprehensive collection of casts in a single home, linked by bridge to its predecessor. Can Bilsel, *Antiquity on Display: Regimes of the Authentic in Berlin's Pergamon Museum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 85; p. 83.

George Henry Lewes would have been confronted by a phalanx of casts of renowned sculptures 'labelled with a single word'.⁵ The availability of scholarly or authoritative guidebooks, which assisted them elsewhere during their travels, is disputed, and since 'Recollections of Berlin' was not destined for publication in mind, so perhaps it is not surprising that the attribution of the figure which so enthralled her has never been determined.⁶ Such factors might explain how Eliot, normally punctilious in her scholarship, might have misattributed a favourite exhibit to which she would later return; the Neues, and perhaps this sculpture in particular, made such an impression that she returned, alone, on her last day in Berlin.⁷ Five years later the striking 'woman's arm'⁸ would reappear in her fiction as part of Maggie Tulliver's fictive form.

The description is a *tour de force*, and it's possible to see Eliot putting her delightful experience in Berlin into a textual form which, in something of an irony, makes all else seem 'mean and lifeless'. The flexing of the sentence itself, in describing the undulating form of the arm, suggests the constriction and relaxation of muscles. Its structure of meticulously shortening clauses mimics 'all' the arm's 'varied gently lessening curves', pivoting at the limb's 'tiniest' point, before broadening out again into an unseen hand. This charting of Maggie's arm is seen through the eyes of her lover, Stephen Guest, in the moments before his first sexual approach: 'he darted toward the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist' (MF, p. 460). The erotic tension of the moment is emphasised in the sensually inflected description of the 'nicks in the firm softness', articulating the tension between exercising moral restraint and indulging the nineteenth-century taste for feminine plumpness, considered synonymous with the frisson of departing girlhood and the promise of sexual maturity.⁹ The description is conducted on the knife-edge of the contradictions, tensions and pleasures of Victorian writing about the beautiful female body.¹⁰

⁵ Sheehan, p. 118.

⁶ Gerlinde Röder-Bolton seems confident that Eliot and Lewes were travelling without a suitable guidebook, which when combined with the Museum's unfinished state 'inevitably led [them] to misunderstandings and misinterpretations'. However, Leonée Ormond's careful comparison of misattribution as well as prominence given to Eliot's assessment of art works leads her to argue that Eliot had a copy of Murray's *Handbook for German Travellers in South Germany*, as well as Kugler's *Handbook of Painting* in the original German, since the English translator Head offered corrective notes. See *George Eliot in Germany, 1854-55: 'Cherished Memories'* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006), p. 10; 'Mines of Misinformation: George Eliot and Old Master Paintings: Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Dresden, 1854-5 and 1858', *George Eliot Review: Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship*, 33 (2002), 33-50 (p. 33; p. 42).

⁷ Her diary for 10th March 1855 stipulates that she finished her packing first. *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. by Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 47.

⁸ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 460. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix MF.

⁹ The word 'nick', here indicating the dents produced by the joint between the major bones of the forearm and those of the hand, suits the metaphor of the woman's body as material to be shaped (in this case by the sculptor), which means that this portrait of the arm accrues another layer of objectification. The *OED* also records incidences where 'nick' is used as slang for female genitalia, and as a term for marking the ownership of cattle, further aligning the sexual implications of the wrist's appearance with concepts of the ownership of bodies and sexuality. "'Nick", n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/126760>> [accessed 5 January 2016].

¹⁰ Margaret Homans points out that in descriptive passages throughout the novel Maggie's arms 'serve as genteel metonymies for her breasts', as well as substantiating her class position as beneath his, since the hand-me-down evening gown she wears has had to be altered to accommodate them, which connects her to an older tradition of

In contrast to Eliot's earlier account of the figure in Berlin, the wrist is the most prominent feature of the 'lovely arm' here. Its status is heightened in being distinguished from a feature of the beautiful arm to an erogenous zone, and from an enduring symbol of beauty to a specified measure of human achievements in art. But, while the fragment of sculpture is invoked as a component of the Parthenon – often used in the nineteenth century as the high watermark of human achievements in culture – the narrative is unafraid to risk bathos by acknowledging the dependence of art on human sensory delight in the beautiful. The description is tacitly navigating the tensions of the contemporary art world discussed in the previous chapter, in dealing in subjectivity, vision and interpretation. The reader constructs an imagined arm according to the text, evoking an arm carefully 'wrought' in marble to seem voluptuous, which in turn finds its point of origin in the 'vision' of a 'great sculptor'. The narrative proclaims the ultimate beauty of the fragment, but is not afraid to trump this ideal, as well as its own exquisite sinuousness, in appealing to the reader's personal, physical archive of experiences of beauty: 'Maggie's was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life' (*MF*, p. 460).

The passage demonstrates Eliot's belief in the power of art to move, as well as the intensely sensuous excitement that representations of the body, and writing about the body, can provoke. It accords with her passionate avowal, in an earlier article informed by her German travels, that art 'is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.'¹¹ But it omits Maggie's own considerable sensuous energies and impulses, which are exercised elsewhere in the text. While it is a fascinating and complex exposition of the feeling that can attach itself to a portion of the body, in the context of the novel the passage demonstrates precisely how female sexuality is framed to serve patriarchal norms. When the heroine's body is transformed into a component of plastic art, an exhibit prone to exploitation and misinterpretation, it is exposed. In making the wrist the pretext on which to invite the reader to enter this aesthetic experience, the narrative voice 'stages' Maggie's arm as a dissociated element of beauty.

The wrist composed of stone is a point of great vulnerability in sculpting human figures; it makes manifest the contradictions of strength and vulnerability inherent in the depiction of the wrist. Where the mutilation of the artwork does nothing to blunt its power, the passage's omission of Maggie's hand reaffirms the tensions inherent in mid-Victorian representations of the women who inspire and exercise this sensuality, and their preferences or choices. When depicted as subject to interpretation through wider cultural and social imperatives, she is denuded of her agency, a process that will ultimately lead to her sexual degradation and death.¹² The wrist, whether it belongs to a Parthenon figure or a fallen woman,

middle class woman unafraid of forms of 'manual work' in the running of their homes. 'Dinah's Blush, Maggie's Arm: Class, Gender, and Sexuality in George Eliot's Early Novels', *Victorian Studies*, 36.2 (1993), 155–78 (p. 175).

¹¹ George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Westminster Review*, 66 (1856), 51–79 (p. 54).

¹² Maggie is outraged by Stephen's kiss, despite their mutual attraction, and throughout the novel her 'firm' feelings are contrasted with the 'softness' of her body, even in the manner of her death, which is a result of her sexual disgrace in associating with him (*MF*, pp. 460–1).

becomes the point at which she is rendered an archetypical object of male sexual desire, rather than articulating her own desires.

Since the wrist is a variable and sinuous portion of the body it is an apt trope to use in communicating how a heroine's sensual consciousness negotiates with nineteenth-century sexual and social mores. The description of Maggie's wrist can be read as a form of negotiation between traditional hierarchies of consumption and interpretation, and the role of the female form within them. Eliot repeatedly brings the heroine's wrist into the narrative as a space for the negotiation between power structures and the desires of the individual, and its textual appearance often coincides with the narrative's consideration for how cultures of art have shaped perceptions of female sexuality. In Eliot's fiction the beautiful female arm and wrist are endowed with the power to disrupt and energise the art form by which they are represented. *Daniel Deronda*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Mill on the Floss* can all be approached as novels about the search for intensity of feeling in daily life. For the heroines this often entails comparison, consciously or unconsciously on their behalf, to artistic prototypes whose qualities substantiate an aspect of their appearance, or convey the intensity of response which their appearance excites.

Eliot acknowledges, even in her portrait of the beautiful arm and wrist, that the work of interpreting both the desiring body itself, and works of representation which deal in desire, can present an immense challenge to a reader or viewer. Through the wrist the novels offer the reader a space in which to acknowledge the conundrum of how to deal with desire, and conjured and coded expressions of sexuality, in representation, and to probe Victorian constructions of represented sexuality. I examine whether, unlike Maggie's 'lovely arm', it might be possible to read the rendering of the beautiful wrist as a space for the individuation of desire through representation. Maggie's arm may 'touch the soul' of the reader, but in this chapter I examine textual moments in Eliot's later novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, where the wrist can be interpreted as representative of female characters' individuality of desire, and their sensual agency.

'Unspeakable suggestions of tenderness': the Wrist and its Symbolism

While the Victorian era attached its own forms of coded significance to the wrist, its symbolic legacy was already a long one. As a point on the body which is sensitive to touch and temperature, where emotion and excitement may be deduced from the strength of the pulse or the heat of visibly-flowing blood, where skin's whiteness and delicacy can be assessed, and where the body may be easily encompassed by another person's hand or by jewellery, women's wrists in art and culture have become bound up in the sexual significances of Western culture. Renaissance iconography was particularly interested in the '*laccio*

d'amore, or love knot',¹³ ribbons or thin chains knotted or wound around the wrist to symbolise love and fidelity, a play on ancient wedding rituals in which the couple were fastened together at the wrists.¹⁴

The very characteristics which made the wrist an intriguing and sensual space could easily be co-opted into nineteenth-century culture's appetite for physical and physiological quantification of the body and the self. In February 1859 Étienne-Jules Marey demonstrated his version of the 'sphygmograph'¹⁵ in Paris, a device which strapped to the wrist and took the pulse using a sensor placed on the radial artery, which used a connected stylus to transcribe it in linear form onto a smoked glass plate (see Fig. 12).¹⁶ Megan Kennedy traces the relationship between the rapid development of new forms of serial and sensation fiction and the proliferation of graphing instruments prompted by Marey's innovation, and suggests that 1860s culture experienced a 'shared cultural moment' in which these new 'narratives of bodily experience'¹⁷ could thrive. Conversely, Gregory Brophy attributes this turn toward graphical articulations as an expression of mid-century discontent with the medium of language, preferring its new narratives stripped of 'the artificial and arbitrary nature of human language' in brokering a linear form of 'direct commerce [...] with the world it described.'¹⁸

Both scientist and novelist collude in making bodily experience legible; the wrist is the site on the body where the heart may be *read*. Sensation novels of the 1860s are notably preoccupied with 'pulses [...] beating wildly'¹⁹ in distress, as in *East Lynne* (1861), 'slackening'²⁰ from fear of disgrace in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), or as a measure of the intensity of feeling distilled in time in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1867): 'years of anguish condensed into those few pulse-beats!'²¹ The contradictions of mid-century culture, which are exemplified in phenomena such as the sphygmograph and the sensation novel, are not neglected in Eliot's writing; she uses the metaphor of the heart's rhythm in both *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), albeit to very different ends, demonstrating how thoroughly medical

¹³ *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Andrea Bayer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 323. A similar Renaissance custom was the fine decorative chain, a '*vinculum amoris*, or chain of love' which indicated the couple's fidelity was bound by love as well as duty (see p. 241; p. 245n32).

¹⁴ Marcia Pointon notes that jewellery's various pictorial connotations of female fidelity and treachery are exemplified by Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalen*. The painting depicts a woman who 'retains the slenderest of silver chains round her wrists' despite the renunciation of other finery which lie discarded around her, particularly a string of pearls, which 'signify purity', although since the necklace is broken it also 'suggests [...] her ruptured chastity'. *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 86–9.

¹⁵ Robert G. Frank, Jr., 'The Telltale Heart: Physiological Instruments, Graphic Methods, and Clinical Hopes, 1854–1914', in *The Investigative Enterprise: Experimental Physiology in Nineteenth-Century Medicine*, ed. by William Coleman and Frederic Lawrence Holmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 211–90 (p. 216).

¹⁶ The impact and development of the sphygmograph in Britain is discussed in Terrie M. Romano, *Making Medicine Scientific: John Burdon Sanderson and the Culture of Victorian Science* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 79–81.

¹⁷ Meegan Kennedy suggests that the sphygmograph signals the re-instatement of individual life as central to concepts of a continuum of human development within Victorian culture, this chapter will consider Eliot's portrayal of the wrist as the signifier of personal development through aesthetic and sensory experience as part of sexual subjectivity 'Some Body's Story: The Novel as Instrument', *Novel*, 42.3 (2009), 451–59 (pp. 456–8; p. 457; p. 453).

¹⁸ 'The Sphygmograph: Pros-Theses on the Body', *Victorian Review*, 35 (2009), 13–17 (p. 15).

¹⁹ Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 305.

²⁰ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 264.

²¹ Rhoda Broughton, *Not Wisely But Too Well* (Brighton, East Sussex: Victorian Secrets, 2013), p. 158.

ideas had permeated conceptions of human experience. In *Middlemarch* Dr Tertius Lydgate expounds on the necessity of ‘systole and diastole’²² to scientific enquiry, positing an individual of wide ambitions but in pursuit of a specific objective; meanwhile, the narrative makes clear that this analogy applies to the extent of his personal unhappiness in marriage as much as to his scientific career. By contrast, in *Daniel Deronda* Eliot’s choice of metaphor exemplifies the heiress Catherine Arrowpoint’s relationship to her tutor, the pianist Herr Klesmer, when the narrative states that ‘the systole and diastole of perfect companionship’²³ is theirs. It is curious that a portion of the body which interested Eliot should be key to the development of technologies which supposedly capture the individual bodily experience, and yet which render it in its most disembodied form.

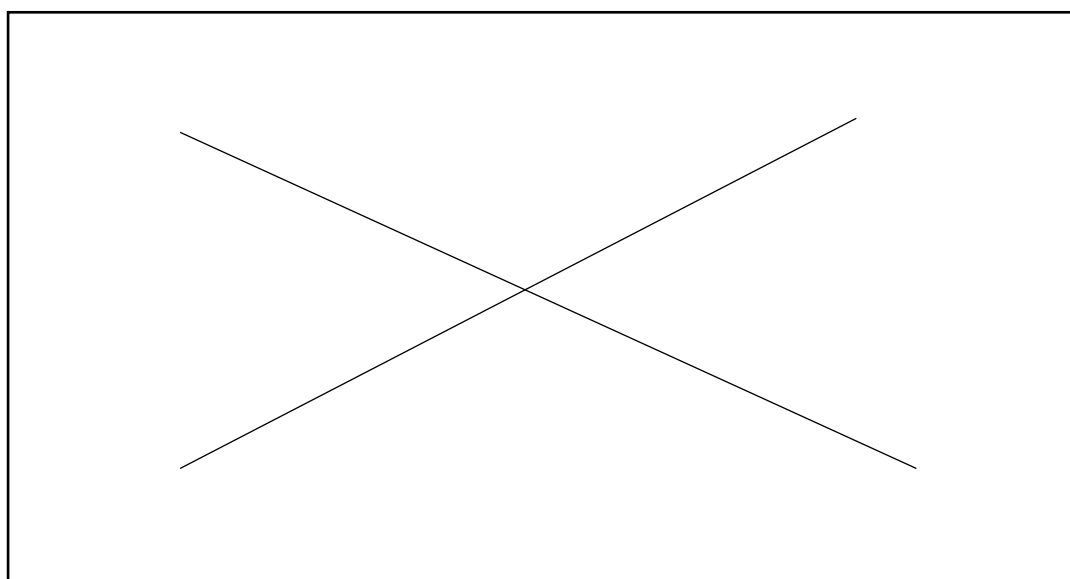


Fig. 12 Illustration of a transmission sphygmograph from Étienne-Jules Marey’s *La Circulation du Sang* (Paris: Masson, 1861). Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library.

Modern Western culture has often rendered the wrist the space where ideas of the public body meet the private. The hand has figured both as the portion of a person which may respectably interact with other bodies in the course of social and commercial intercourse, as well as a space which can particularly express passion and attachment through a touch imbued with special intimacy. Constance Classen considers regimes of touch in the light of the ‘segmented nature of life in the modern state and the consequent heightened awareness of bodily boundaries’.²⁴ However, in the depiction of women’s bodies

²² In this scene his friend Mr Farebrother wonders whether Lydgate’s voluble behaviour is due to an opiate, a type of drug which notably slows the heart rate. *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 640. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix *MM*.

²³ *Daniel Deronda*, ed. by Terence Cave, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 240. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in the text with the prefix *DD*.

²⁴ Classen’s essay examines the shift away from the (no less regimented) table manners of the Middle Ages which constructed individuals as members of ‘social bodies’, towards modern conceptions of politeness. Interestingly, she traces a connection between this segmentation and the cultural experience of the nineteenth-century gallery-goer, one who has resigned themselves to the sensory restrictions now in place because, as we have seen in the previous

this idea accrues further meaning, and older ideas about sexuality and the wrist encounter new ideas about class status and the necessity of being able to ‘read’ respectable sexual conduct from the appearance of the body. When added to the hand’s role as the agent of desire, and Victorian culture’s increasingly codified regulation of where on the female body skin might be glimpsed or touched, the wrist becomes an ever-more potent marker of sensuality in fiction and art.²⁵

As has already been discussed in previous chapters, messages of moral probity as well as socio-economic privilege were coded into the appearance and exposure of the Victorian woman, whether on the canvas, on the page, or in the gallery, and the significance of the wrist was heightened as part of a new set of strictures which applied to the exposure of women’s hands.²⁶ In Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) sexuality and the democratising influence of the industrial revolution on social norms encounter one another through the space of the heroine’s arm. Mill owner John Thornton is ‘fascinated’ and excited by a bracelet which Margaret Hale repeatedly pushes up ‘until it tighten[s] her soft flesh’ having ‘fall[en] down over her round wrist’ while she is serving tea, yet considers her no less of a lady in expecting her to shake his hand. Margaret’s struggle to reconcile her ideas of what a ‘gentleman’ should be with her attraction to his forthright manners – as represented by the handshake – runs throughout the novel, alongside his fascination with her ‘round white arms, and taper hands’.²⁷ In this instance the Victorian novel’s attention to handshakes and hands clasped articulates anxiety at the dwindling of class differentiation via social customs, as well as an acknowledgement of the reader’s interest in the refinement of sexual and social mores that differentiated women’s bodies. Well into the twentieth century the anxiety over sanctioned female touch and the wrist was perpetuated by such conventions. Ford Madox Ford would exploit the sense of the wrist’s ultimate intimacy in his 1915 novel *The Good Soldier*, even as he inverts the convention making the touch of the wrist by a desiring woman the key erotic marker. The infidelity of the narrator’s spouse Florence is revealed through her act of touch, made stark through its syntactic isolation: ‘And she laid one finger upon Captain Ashburnham’s wrist.’²⁸

Gloves were an especially conspicuous means of showing adherence to social codes, since a woman was ‘considered improperly dressed if she left the house ungloved.’²⁹ Anne Jemima Clough, the first principal

chapter, contemporary culture considered sight the sense endowed with the most ‘perceived intellectual and aesthetic value’, rather than touch. ‘Control’, in *The Book of Touch*, ed. by Constance Classen (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 259–63 (p. 259; p. 260).

²⁵ Philippe Perrot argues that the nineteenth-century sexual significance of hands was only emphasised by covering them, since as the ‘organs of touch and prehension, gloves [...] emphasized sexual insinuations by simultaneously reigning in and stimulating desire’, p. 106.

²⁶ Helena Michie notes the parallels drawn by Victorian etiquette guides between the ‘lapse in table manners’ and the ‘fall from grace’, pp. 18–9. Since ladies were expected to dine without gloves, such works were anxious to warn their readers not to accept food (particularly fruit) that had been touched by a man’s bare hands, making even mediated skin contact an illicit act in polite society.

²⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 80; p. 163; p. 160.

²⁸ The narrator registers the distress of this revelation through ‘the pain in my left wrist’ as it is clutched by Leonora, Ashburnham’s wife, and he notes that her own erotic appeal is indicated by her ability ‘to conduct your gaze always to her wrist.’ Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 42; p. 33.

²⁹ The frisson which this lent to the glimpse of skin at the wrist where cuff did not quite meet glove was heightened as sleeve shapes changed throughout the second half of the century, and the modest undersleeves of the 1860s were

of Newnham College Cambridge, was distressed to hear her students accused of impropriety on the grounds that they were still buttoning their gloves as they emerged from college onto the streets, and urged them to provide themselves with pairs ‘that don’t want buttoning.’³⁰ Her presidency at Newnham coincided with the emergence of the ‘Mousquetaire’ gloves in the mid-1870s, whose design enabled the wearer to slip her hand out of long gloves, while ensuring that her wrist was still modestly covered, which perhaps marks the wrist as the starting point of the socially taboo body.³¹ While we cannot know if a casual reference to a ‘language of gloves’³² in an 1880 newspaper indicates that they had a social legibility akin to a language of flowers or fans, it does demonstrate that the communicative power (romantic and sexual) of hands was already an established trope in nineteenth-century culture.

The anxiety over the potency of the exposure of the female mind as well as the female body was perpetuated through cultures of art appreciation. The art critic Samuel Carter Hall, in discussing the contradictions of mid-century art in relation to the ‘loftier and nobler sentiments’³³ which he felt sculpture could express, drew an analogy between the nude in the gallery and the denuded hand of a woman:

The difference between French and Greek art seems to me simply this – the Frenchman pictures a woman as if she had taken off her clothes to be looked at; the Greek represents one who has never known clothes at all, who is naked but not ashamed and who thinks it no more wrong to let her whole form be seen than she does to show ungloved hands. [...] In the days to which I go back it was not unusual, at stately mansions, to cover up statues on reception nights; I can call to mind one case in which each statue of marble was gifted with an apron. Ladies were then rarely seen in the sculpture-room of the British Museum.

Such a juxtaposition of degrees (and consciousness) of nudity, ‘nobler sentiments’, and the etiquette of exposing ‘ladies’ to sculpture speaks particularly powerfully of the social structures which may have impacted upon Eliot’s personal and professional experience of art.³⁴ Such factors may partly explain why her first exposure to the glories of the Parthenon should have been as a cultured (and accompanied) traveller in Berlin rather than in Bloomsbury. Susan David Bernstein notes that Eliot never attended the British Museum Reading Room alone, bringing Lewes with her as a ‘broker to facilitate her own

dispensed with. Johnston, p. 154. Intended to fit the individual hand absolutely, the most prized pairs were made of materials such as kid leather which were expensive and difficult to keep clean, necessitating careful behaviour and laundering from the wearer, which added to the sense that they were markers of probity.

³⁰ Blanche Athena Clough, *A Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough* (London: Arnold, 1897), p. 240.

³¹ Valerie Cumming, *Gloves* (London: Batsford, 1982), p. 68.

³² ‘Feminine Fashions and Fancies’, *Newcastle Courant*, 26 November 1880, p. 3 (p. 3).

³³ S. C. Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life: From 1815 to 1883*, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1883), I, p. 342. In 1839 Hall founded Britain’s first periodical devoted to art history, the *Art Union* (later renamed the *Art Journal*). In his early attempts to elevate the general opinion of sculpture at mid-century he published plates featuring ‘semi nudes’, which led to their return by post ‘torn through, [...] with protests against such attempts to introduce “indecenties” into families’, p. 341.

³⁴ Interestingly, in 1878 the critic Mary Eliza Haweis made a similar comparison between the relative moral spectacle of the form, whether dressed or sculpted: ‘Some women though covered up to the eyes always contrive to look indelicate, some others, *décolletée* as the dressmaker and a corrupt custom have made them, are in their natural innocence without reproach. [...] It is the mind that makes or mars. Many nude figures in sculpture and painting are inoffensive, because the face which is the index of the mind is free from shame or blame’, p. 27.

research³⁵ on her first visit there in 1861, reinforcing the sense that Eliot's artistic education was to a large extent mediated through patriarchal structures and priorities. Her own record of her early cultural life in London is incomplete, since her second husband John Cross took it upon himself to excise the journal entries between 1849 and 1854.³⁶ In that light, it might hardly be surprising that Eliot's representation of her heroines' respectable bodies confronts ideas of modesty and covering, even when depicting its most innocent-seeming component, the wrist.

***Middlemarch* and the Aesthetics of Pleasure**

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible, — or from one of our elder poets, — in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper. She was usually spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common-sense. Nevertheless, Celia wore scarcely more trimmings; and it was only to close observers that her dress differed from her sister's, and had a shade more coquetry in its arrangements[.] [...] She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery. Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there [...] Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection. With all this, she, the elder of the sisters, was not yet twenty, and they had both been educated, since they were about twelve years old and had lost their parents, on plans at once narrow and promiscuous, first in an English family and afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne, their bachelor uncle and guardian trying in this way to remedy the disadvantages of their orphaned condition. (*MM*, pp. 7-8)

While *Middlemarch* features a striking 'Prelude' considering the role of passionate women in a world which denies them opportunities for martyrdom and sainthood, the quotation above is where the novel's examination of Dorothea's character development begins. The reader is brought to ask: why begin a novel with a wrist? And in the textual characterisation of Eliot's heroine Dorothea, the critic is forced to ask: why begin a woman with a wrist? The passage establishes Dorothea as a spectacle under close observation, for her neighbours as well as for the reader, with the wrist as its keystone. Within the passage itself the wrist forms the tangible point of Dorothea's body, anchoring this profusion of insights, and making her presence in the text more than an abstract bundle of yearnings and 'plain garments'. Yet the wrist itself is not described – the narrative does not offer the kind of paean to beauty which Maggie's arm elicited – but is evoked only in abstract and referential terms. The textual tribute 'so finely formed' must serve, in its own formal simplicity, to convey the clarity of the beautiful hand and wrist qualified to wear

³⁵ Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 115.

³⁶ These years apparently took up 'forty-six pages', and their loss constitutes a substantial loss for those curious about this portion of her life. Witemeyer, p. 9.

sleeves as ‘bare of style’ (*MM*, p. 7) as those of Renaissance visions of the Madonna. Yet the moments in the novel which feature her body as an active entity capable of ‘turning’, particularly her wrist, foreshadow the development of her faculties so that she can ‘turn’ her own perspective to reconcile high ideals with her own passionate nature.

Dorothea’s ascetic tendencies can provoke exasperation among critics: Michael Irwin expresses it most directly in protesting that her presence has a ‘numbing effect on the narrative: she tends to create a circumstantial vacuum.’³⁷ While I cannot agree with his analysis, he makes a striking point in substantiating his argument:

Dorothea has relinquished the enjoyments of a Gwendolen Harleth or a Maggie Tulliver for the sake of marital and spiritual aspirations that George Eliot is reluctant to scrutinise or to pursue. The inner life remains insubstantial; the outer life, in terms of physical activity or sensual awareness, almost ceases to exist. [...] In narrowing Dorothea’s ideals Eliot narrows the descriptive range of the major story in *Middlemarch*. Where Dorothea goes the story thins – there is nothing to see or to touch.³⁸

Pamela Gilbert locates the germ of this idea of realism within the nineteenth century itself, in the critical approach which held that the mid-Victorian novel’s ‘minute description of everyday detail’ was assumed to be ‘the particular strength of the woman, grounded in the body and in the concern with the ordering and reproduction of the physical world’,³⁹ where the abstract and conceptual was the provenance of the male imagination. But instead of addressing Dorothea’s perception in relation to questions of narrowness, or of reproduction, I perceive the supposed ‘thinning’ of the story not as a descriptive failure on Eliot’s part, but as a technique which enables the reader to trace the development of Dorothea’s aesthetic faculties, tracking the progress of her ‘sensual awareness’ and awakening through the progress of the novel. In this reading the treatment of the wrist shows, as with its coverings, how representation plays on the tension between what is expressed and the ‘style’ in which that expression is made. I read the novel’s attention to Dorothea’s wrist and its coverings as articulating her struggle to relate to her self as well as her society; style, sexuality and society come together in examining the significance of the sleeve, and of the bracelet, within the novel’s repertoire of symbolism.

Dorothea’s lack of skill in consuming is made clear in the first of the novel’s set-pieces, in which the sisters divide their dead mother’s jewellery collection. Her conflicted pleasure in the beauty of an emerald *parure* sets up many of the key conflicts for her character:

‘They are lovely,’ said Dorothea, slipping the ring and bracelet on her finely-turned finger and wrist, and holding them towards the window on a level with her eyes. All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy. (*MM*, p. 13)

³⁷ Michael Irwin, *Picturing: Description and Illusion in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 124.

³⁸ Irwin, p. 127.

³⁹ Gilbert, p. 25.

The jewel-casket scene provides the novel with the opportunity to offer Dorothea's vague and somewhat inconsistent principles a test, according to how she positions her wrist. She is given things to see, and to touch, and the gems illuminate her internally as well as refracting external light. Her approach to the pieces of jewellery can encapsulate her difficulties with aesthetics, sensual pleasure, social restrictions, the impact of sexuality in her life, and personal taste. She has never been taught to absorb and analyse the details of outward show which would give her judgment authority, and she lacks the equipment with which to collect these details. Dorothea's 'narrow and promiscuous' (*MM*, p. 8) early experiences are demonstrated here, and we are offered clues as to how her short-sightedness may have impacted on her relationship with beauty and pleasure, creating her need to 'justify her delight' (*MM*, p. 13) through the religious principles she has so keenly absorbed. The selective detail which Eliot does provide, I suggest, works to keep the reader and the text connected.

That the novel should begin with the fineness of a woman's wrist and end with a hope of humanity's greater interconnection and empathy does not seem incongruous when seen in this light, since Dorothea's exceptional mind and aspirations are kept in balance by her flawed physical and social perception. These factors render a critical protest of an inability to 'make the reader *see* what is taking place' seem a missed opportunity to achieve a level of empathy with Dorothea, in which we share her imperfect view on the world. Eliot connects the reader to the characters, events and components of the novel not only through the narrative's plentiful insights into the prosaic daily life which every 'great soul' (*MM*, p. 20) must experience – which a gently mocking Celia asserts on the reader's behalf – but through dwelling on a bust in a gallery, or a bonnet in a boudoir.

As Dorothea is overtaken by her pleasure in the emeralds 'on her finely-turned finger and wrist' (*MM*, p. 36) the text 'merges' the joy of looking at the emeralds through Dorothea's eyes with the joy of looking at the fineness of Dorothea's form.⁴⁰ Eliot consulted C. W. King's lapidary as part of careful research into contemporary and traditional gem-lore, and her selection of emeralds as the stone to capture Dorothea seems deliberate since they are praised in the Bible, and reportedly had uniquely therapeutic properties for both eyesight and insight.⁴¹ Here the text makes plain that her 'religious feeling' and consciousness of the human cost – 'miserable men find such things' (*MM*, p. 14) – of purchasing such beautiful adornments, as well as her pleasure in them, are aspects of her own sense of self. She marvels aloud at the power of the gems to "[...] penetrate one, like scent [...]" (*MM*, p. 13), and finds a Biblical allegory with which to justify this indulgence aloud. The reader understands that her subsequent effusions of pleasure in the

⁴⁰ The reader is offered a gently satirical reading of Dorothea's 'Puritanic toleration' (*MM*, p. 13) of the gems as well as those who wish to wear them through the perspective of the rather more discerning, if worldly, sister. The narrative implies that Celia has a sense of her sister's "weakness" in the face of beauty, and she suggests that her elder sister would prefer a necklace which would 'lie down and hang' (*MM*, p. 13) where she herself could see it, rather than one which would fit as 'closely as a bracelet' (*MM*, p. 12).

⁴¹ In his edition of Eliot's research diaries, Joseph Wiesenfarth notes that she was indebted to King's comprehensive lapidary for much of her information about gems. *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879; and Uncollected Writings* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), p. xxxv; Rev. C. W. King, *Antique Gems: their Origin, Uses, and Value as interpreters of Ancient History; and as Illustrative of Ancient Art* (London: John Murray, 1860), pp. 34–5.

emeralds supersede her justifying Christian pretext, as the source of more instinctive joy, but Dorothea's earnestness obscures this distinction. She may appear to distinguish worldly and spiritual pleasure, yet they are shown to be utterly enmeshed in her statement of objection to the other gems, on the basis of what will suit the 'complexion' (*MM*, p. 12) of her soul. In the end, she compromises: returning to her designs for workers' cottages – an activity which the narrative scrupulously reports gives her 'delight' (*MM*, p. 11) – she 'took up her pencil without removing the jewels, and still looking at them' (*MM*, p. 14). Rather than disengaging from the jewels, she incorporates them, alongside her designs and her plain sleeves. Through the simple disposition of her wrist, she can take up her activity while doing nothing to remove the suite of gems from her body, and by extension, from her sight.

The experience of savouring beauty for an unsullied moment is shared, before the social spectacle of upper-class femininity intrudes upon the scene in the form of Celia's prosaic inquiry as to whether she will 'wear [the jewels] in company' (*MM*, p. 14). Within the privacy of her home, Dorothea believes, she can briefly escape the visual connotations of wealth and sexual promise to which women wearing jewellery are subject. But Celia's enquiry intrudes upon this illusion, and her withering response, 'I cannot tell to what level I may sink' (*MM*, p. 14), reasserts her distaste at entering into the marriage market as a commodity, bedecked in what her younger, worldlier sister calls 'ornaments' (*MM*, p. 12). This exchange tacitly calls back to the passage which introduced the sisters' characters, in which the narrative takes up the gossipy tone of observers speculating on their lives: 'And how should Dorothea not marry?' (*MM*, p. 9). Eliot paints a portrait of two mature sisters negotiating the display of coded sexuality and women's moral restraint, while ostensibly deciding how to apportion the jewels.⁴² The 'practice of dressing with jewels'⁴³ was part of the refinement of gender roles in the nineteenth-century: to dismiss the importance of the jewels is to ignore the fundamental difference between each sister's vision of her future.⁴⁴

Dorothea's 'explosion' (*MM*, p. 14), it is implied, is part of an expression of self-disgust at having admired her hand as it turned, bedecked in emeralds.⁴⁵ The episode of the jewel casket reveals that despite her autodidactic tendencies, her intelligence, and strong feeling for beauty, she has allowed her sense of the role of sensual pleasure to be cramped by external considerations. It shows her inability to relate her

⁴² Marcia Pointon points out that an older visual tradition showcases the jewel casket 'in association with other motifs suggestive of female sexual initiation or desire', p. 89.

⁴³ Arnold, p. 10. The narrative is careful not to condemn Celia for her pleasure in the gems, and in the novel it is often her role to tease Dorothea for her incessant efforts to be 'uncomfortable' (*MM*, p. 32; p. 776; 820) in avoiding conventional choices and their accoutrements. She understands how to communicate her social intentions through her dress and accessories as Dorothea does not, although her comparison to a 'yoked creature' (*MM*, p. 15) recalls the collar-like nature of the amethyst necklace she favours, and the fact that signalling her wealth will make her more desirable on the marriage market. Eliot is perhaps also exploiting contemporary awareness of how much more entrenched the symbolism of young women's sexuality as codified in jewellery would become in the second half of the century, a factor which I discuss later in this chapter.

⁴⁴ This episode prefigures a conversation between them later in the novel, in which it becomes apparent that Dorothea is especially socially and sexually imperceptive, since she has misattributed the attentions of her suitor James Chettam to Celia, who gently but firmly reproves her for 'never looking just where you are' (*MM*, p. 36).

⁴⁵ In this repetition of allusion to dissenting religious traditions which valued plainness, Eliot may be playing on the European philosophical legacy of the seventeenth century's 'fiercely philosophical battle in which academic authorities condemned colour for seducing the ignorant.' Pointon, p. 134.

passionate feeling to the world she inhabits and to the people around her, but also her difficulties with conforming to a wider framework of behaviour, however vague and inconsistent it makes her seem. Having reproved Celia, she is left 'questioning the purity of her own feeling and speech in the scene' (*MM*, p. 14), especially given the strength of her desire to 'feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour' (*MM*, p. 14) and using her own visibly beautiful body as a tool to achieve it. The narrative sustains this tension of ideal and real throughout her courtship and marriage, and from which she will only break in the course of her love for the (apparently unsuitable) Will Ladislaw.

In accordance with Dorothea's physical and aesthetic inexperience, Eliot is much less interested in trying to make her reader 'see' (at least in the descriptive sense which Irwin delineates) than the contemporaries to whom he compares her; Eliot's writing strives to make the reader *feel*. Dorothea's aspirations are necessarily 'vague' throughout the novel because she lacks the education, the awareness, and the trust in her instincts to give what Irwin calls her 'spiritual aspirations' a definite form. Objects which are under her weakened eye, whether an emerald ring, a letter of proposal, or architectural plans, are those things that she feels capable of comprehending, yet she is also suspicious of them. This does not, to me, speak of Eliot's reluctance to scrutinise Dorothea's impulses, but of a wish to convey the sensual and spiritual hunger of the female character with a limited scope of action and an imperfect education, and the contrast between her open-heartedness and the narrowness of her society.⁴⁶ The combination of Dorothea's ascetic tendencies with her education mean that she suspects that 'emotionality that is not directed to the universal good is unlicensed and ought to be denied', as Jill Matus astutely notes, and that Eliot uses this idea to forge 'subtle links between responses to painting, pleasurable emotions, sexual feelings, and the feminine'⁴⁷ whose significance will only deepen with the progress of the novel.

The wrist is a point where Dorothea's individuality can be explored, just as the novel first engaged the reader with her character via her 'fine' wrist, but it also becomes a point where wider social concepts can be explored. Dorothea's approach to marriage and her political feeling, as well as aesthetics, can be decoded from the emotions provoked in her by a 'beautiful', but otherwise non-specific, suite of emeralds. Barbara Hardy asserts that Eliot eschews straightforward mimesis in her concern for 'visible and tangible surfaces, even though her surfaces are rendered with sensuous precision.'⁴⁸ This idea is particularly interesting when considering how Dorothea's dress is often represented to the reader as permeated by the passion and sexuality which proves so confusing to her.

Middlemarch is acutely aware of the ways in which the eyes are agents of perception, and profoundly affected by the education and aptitudes of the mind which lies behind them, as well as the cultural

⁴⁶ In the first edition of *Middlemarch*, the description of Dorothea's life after the novel's conclusion acknowledges the determining role of 'modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance' (*MM* p. 852n282). Ashton notes that she revised these final paragraphs 'in response to criticism that she seemed to blame society for Dorothea's mistaken match to Casaubon', see 'A Note on the Text', in *MM*, p. xxv.

⁴⁷ *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 234.

⁴⁸ *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* (London: Owen, 1982), pp. 147–8.

discourses of vision which surround them (as considered in the previous chapter). Eliot's fiction bears a consciousness that the sensory reception of experience is bound up inextricably in older codes of representation and belief, which is especially visible in the sketch of Dorothea's character in the Prelude and Chapter 1. Thus the comparison of Dorothea to the Madonna in the opening lines, and the invocation of the slender, bared wrists of the Renaissance, communicates a sense of the reverence with which such a body is represented, and the seriousness of the emotional appeal to the reader. Rather than feeling that the narrative is drawing a division between Dorothea's body and sensory being and the rest of the novel, I feel that it draws up a gradient of textual effects which differentiate, but do not isolate, that body from the emotional experiences that populate the novel. Dorothea's pleasure in looking at the gems is tempered by her recognition of what they will represent when worn on her body to the outside world, which she feels is a constraint.⁴⁹ The narrative is accruing layers of observation of Dorothea's character whose goodness nevertheless lacks the 'perfect meekness' (*MM*, p. 14) which would mean she could submit to the 'close' restraint of sexualised jewels or fashionably tight sleeves.

Sleeves, Sexuality, and Style

The sense of artless pleasure derived from Dorothea's dress is a carefully maintained textual construction which must keep concepts of sexuality, commerce, and aesthetics in balance. In this respect, a lack of mimetic description is key to the textual effects involved, particularly in the treatment of her sleeves. As the setting of *Middlemarch* in the Reform Bill era gradually becomes evident, an informed reader comes to understand that the emphasis on Dorothea's simple sleeve in the opening description is a pointed rebuke to the enormously elaborate silhouette, with its leg-of-mutton and *imbecile* sleeve styles, worn by her fashionable peers.⁵⁰ The narrative might disclaim any interest in fashion on Dorothea's behalf, yet her divergence from the fashionable norms demonstrates an understanding, as well as a consciousness, of the ways in which the dressed silhouette is always interpretable according to social narratives.⁵¹ The phrase 'bare of style' (*MM*, p. 7) is itself a phrase stiffened with internal contradictions, much as guimp is

⁴⁹ In this respect, Dorothea's body stands for the problem of realist fiction's relationship to commodities; Ellen Bayuk Rosenman notes that a hallmark of the realist novel is its dependence on objects, while its 'second defining feature is its ambivalence about these objects.' 'More Stories about Clothing and Furniture: Realism and Bad Commodities', in *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time*, ed. by Christine L. Krueger (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), pp. 47–62 (p. 47).

⁵⁰ Clair Hughes argues that, while the symbolism of Dorothea's sleeves is a question of omission in the opening section of the novel, it lays the foundations for an even stronger contrast between her unfashionable appearance and that of the puffed-out provincial beauties of *Middlemarch* later in the text, noting that 'the sleeve of the 1830s ballooned to the elbow, then narrowed tightly to the wrist: for sheer volume and elaboration the sleeve of the 1830s has never been surpassed.' *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 93. Its inordinate volume eventually required cumbersome sleeve supports filled with feathers or straw which further restricted the wearer's movement; an extant pair of 'sleeve puffs' is held in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, exhibit t.189c <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O316199/pair-of-shoulder/>> [accessed 1st March 2015].

⁵¹ Eliot might be gently mocking a naïve dismissal of 'guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery', since 'Gimp' is a historic name for part of a nun's habit which covered the chest and neck, and even women who are devoted to spiritual work must conform to patterns of dress. But it has further significance for Eliot's readership, since by the later part of the nineteenth-century 'guimp' came to refer to this fabric which was 'sometimes covered with beads or spangles' perhaps entrenching an 1870s reader's sense that Dorothea's 'plain garments' are meant to dignify her principles as well as her figure. "Gimp | Gymp", n.1; n.2, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/78349>> [accessed 27 December 2015].

stiffened with cord or wire to give it shape. It could be hard for a single garment to meet the demands made on contemporary dress: to demonstrate moral probity as well as prosperity. The emphasis found in *Middlemarch* on dress is just as representative of its own era as an earlier one; Victorian culture's interest in how aesthetics and art education could be brought to bear on daily life found an ideal subject in the topic of 'imbecilic' sleeve shapes, as expressed in criticism of women's dress in the 1870s. Indeed, in its review of the novel the *Saturday Review* felt that admiration of Dorothea's nobility should not be allowed to belittle the interest in dress fostered in the 'ordinary domestic type of woman'⁵² by society.

As the silhouette narrowed, sleeves followed suit; the outsized luxurious 'pagoda' and 'bishop' sleeves of the 1860s would have distracted attention from the elaborately-decorated bodices that came into fashion. But by the late 1870s the style had veered towards a tightness which provoked a scathing response from contemporary critics. In 1878 Mary Eliza Haweis forcibly condemned the tight sleeve's most egregious fault, 'the sudden stoppage – just at the wrist-joint',⁵³ which gave the effect of a visual estrangement of the hand from the rest of the arm, affording the skin of the wrist and hand no further protection from the elements. The art critic and author Percy Fitzgerald had voiced the same condemnation a year earlier, taking the opportunity to expound on the pleasure of a viewer in the beautiful feminine arm, which had been articulated by Eliot nearly twenty years before.

[N]o-one, from the 'tubes' we have been speaking of that do duty as sleeves could conceive that there was within so elegant a thing as the human arm, thick where it joins the trunk, thinner at the elbow, swelling out below and tapering off to the wrist, where it glows close and knitted, so as to give support to the broader hand. Our sleeve, therefore, to exhibit these beauties, should certainly be covered with a loose and flowing material that will fall into draperies and reveal the shape and motion of what is within.⁵⁴

Eliot's text might disavow Dorothea's interest in dress, and protest her ignorance of her visual appeal to observers, but it makes plain that her sartorial choices showcase her body. Likewise, the text follows her form only as the draping sleeve which can 'exhibit [the] beauties' of her arm and wrist, without becoming crude through too close an attention to the undulations of her body. The sleeve she selects, while bare of style, is not undesigning, or artless.

It might serve to reinforce that Dorothea is timeless material for a heroine – who must be respectably clothed – since the simplicity of her silhouette as well as her virtue makes her available to different historical visions of how a heroine might appear, whether Christian, Shakespearean, Classical, or even Cromwellian. In this respect, the phrase 'bare of style' (*MM*, p. 7) might be re-read as 'of bare style'. In such a reading the narrative is inaugurating a flexibility of interpretation which, as the reader is to discover, Dorothea lacks. The text explicitly connects a narrow mental scope with clothing and the shared human experience of the body: '[o]ur passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to the common table' (*MM*, p. 166). This sentiment

⁵² 'Middlemarch', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 7 December 1872, 733–34 (p. 733).

⁵³ Haweis, pp. 73–4.

⁵⁴ Percy Fitzgerald, 'The Art of Dressing and of Being Dressed', *Art Journal*, 3 (1877), 325–27 (p. 326).

ostensibly concerns Rosamond's courtship by Lydgate, but it is equally relevant to Dorothea in its association of self-perception, self-presentation and clothing. Dorothea's limited range of passions, no matter how 'ardent' (*MM*, p. 86), have a similarly circumscribed wardrobe for their expression.

As her sleeve 'thins'⁵⁵ to fit her myopic consciousness, it represents the fine form of the arm beneath, but disregards the development of contemporary design and the fellow-feeling of indulging contemporary fashion. Dorothea's clothes are intended to be pleasing to the senses rather than admired as fashionable, and to indicate that her choice is motivated by sensory pleasure, as in the case of the emeralds. Her clothing may make her an extraordinarily singular and appealing vision – Ellen Moers deems it 'the most stunning wardrobe in Victorian fiction'⁵⁶ – but it works to estrange her from the shared tactile world of her peers. Her sleeves are particularly visible elements which show what Irwin protests as her lack of 'sensual awareness',⁵⁷ but not her lack of sensuality.

The description of her appearance on the first occasion when she interrupts Will and Rosamond Vincy in an intimate moment is symptomatic of how the narrative treats her dressed form:

Let those who know, tell us exactly what stuff it was that Dorothea wore in those days of mild autumn - that thin white woollen stuff soft to the touch and soft to the eye. It always seemed to have been lately washed, and to smell of the sweet hedges - was always in the shape of a pelisse with sleeves hanging all out of the fashion. Yet if she had entered before a still audience as Imogene or Cato's daughter, the dress might have seemed right enough: the grace and dignity were in her limbs and neck (*MM*, p. 432)

Here the text imbues her plain dress with the sensory richness and energy of skin itself; an Ancient Greek tradition held that 'perfumes were sweetest when the scent came from the wrist'.⁵⁸ Once more her sleeves are of such simplicity that they facilitate a vision of Dorothea as timeless, and the quaint phrasing of their description – 'hanging all out of the fashion' – compounds the bucolic associations of the hedgerow scent that clings to the fabric. The narrative underscores a 'bare' style whose simple lines can best showcase her 'graceful' proportions and her 'dignified' demeanour, completing the portrait of Dorothea as a Classical paragon in pristine drapery. Her connection with these ideals is unconsciously underscored by her old-fashioned low-profile sleeve; its simplicity recalls the Regency styles of the previous generation, whose bucolic simplicity also heightened their erotic effect in following (and revealing) the lines of the body, achieving what Cunningham calls the "classical statue" effect'.⁵⁹

Dorothea's costume follows the prescriptions of Fitzgerald very closely, in being denuded of fashionable contemporary attributes such as giump, and being 'ruled by the shawl and not the glove principle'.⁶⁰ Yet despite the vocabulary of composure, even down to the evocation of the 'still audience' of the reader, the

⁵⁵ Irwin, p. 127.

⁵⁶ *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 194.

⁵⁷ Irwin, p. 127.

⁵⁸ Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 16. No doubt this tradition was facilitated by the heat generated from the blood flowing very near to the skin of the wrist, meaning that anything aromatic applied there would make the most sensory impact.

⁵⁹ Cunningham, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, p. 326.

description's syntax is itself charmingly disordered in speech-like patterns of hesitation and elaboration. The text expresses the stimulating sensory confusion of being unexpectedly confronted with beautiful textures and fragrances, since her appearance in the room is of intense interest to this audience of two, although the text notes that Will's feelings for Dorothea mean that he cannot be a 'calm observer' (*MM*, p. 433).

The narrative suggests, through its repetition of 'always' in its description of her ensemble, that her figure is often dwelt upon by observers, reaffirming the sense of its timeless appeal. The narrative insists that Will can see no contrast between the two women, but the scene unequivocally demonstrates Rosamond's artifice when it articulates her delight in the opportunity to display her ensemble 'of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion' (*MM*, p. 432-3). Rosy Aindow suggests, in line with Irwin's perception, that the minute level of description of Rosamond's outfits 'encourage[s] the reader to note and savour these elements'⁶¹ even as they are condemned, interpreting them as light relief from the heroine's sartorial austerity. I suggest that this would be to stress the textual significance of Rosamond's elaborate surface over Dorothea's sweet-smelling and texturally tempting substance disproportionately. Rosamond's pleasure in dress derives precisely from its legible effect on her audience, and the text satisfies her materialism and social ambition in meticulously describing the effort she has made to seem 'exquisite' (*MM*, p. 433), according to the precise fashionable template of the time, for the benefit of the reader. Her lack of interpretative aesthetic skill is underscored by the fact that she supposes Dorothea to be one of the 'best judges' (*MM*, p. 433) of her exquisite appearance, despite the sartorial evidence of the latter's ignorance or indifference before her eyes.

Dorothea's vague and sometimes inconsistent attitudes toward aesthetics stem from a lack of understanding and education, not from a lack of taste or strong preference. Eliot may have famously derided the contemporary 'mind-and-millinery species'⁶² of novel, yet Tamara S. Wagner astutely notes that, in her own fiction, she 'extensively used clothes and trinkets to set up moral juxtapositions between characters, [...] in a complex symbolism'⁶³ of her own. Dorothea's ensemble may communicate her moral purity, but it also broadcasts her freedom, by virtue of her rank and wealth, from the demands of conformity and social approval which affect the appearance of a provincial doctor's wife.⁶⁴ In that respect, the descriptions of Rosamond's façade do not serve to enliven the experience of reading Dorothea's plain stuffs. In demonstrating the aesthetic forces which act on both women, but take different material forms, Eliot is both protesting at, and capitalising on, textual attention to dress.

⁶¹ Aindow, pp. 55–6.

⁶² George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, 66 (1856), 442–61 (p. 447).

⁶³ Tamara S. Wagner, 'Respectably Dressed, or Dressed for Respect: Moral Economies in the Novels of Victorian Women Writers', in *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature*, ed. by Cynthia Kuhn and Cindy Carlson (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007), pp. 209–29 (p. 215).

⁶⁴ This is even more true when one considers that Rosamond must regulate her looks in order to assure her future; her reliance on making a good marriage is contingent upon her ability to mould her body to the 'accepted erotic standard', Silver, p. 38.

Where Rosamond's clothed appearance is an integral part of her portrayal by the text, Dorothea's dress becomes most visible to both readers and observers at moments of sexual confusion. Dorothea may dress for herself, but the narrative of *Middlemarch* is careful to link her sartorial choices, which reflect its moral and material economy, to her ignorance of sensory effect. The visual starkness of her clothing thus emphasises its sensory properties, as does her unconsciousness that her figure provokes such passionate feeling. The encounter inspires scrutiny of her feelings for Will, to such an extent that she is 'hardly conscious of what was immediately around her' (*MM*, p. 433), down to the touch of clothed bodies as she takes 'the arm' (*MM*, p. 433) offered by Will as he escorts her out of the house. The text has made clear that Dorothea's clothed body expresses an erotic tactility which must be recognised in her consciousness before she can understand the nature of her relationship with, and feelings for, Will. The plainness of her dress and its powerful hold on the text is bound up in these considerations. Her understanding of her own tastes and choices will develop as she grows to recognise the importance of understanding and fulfilling her own sensual desires. This process will be facilitated by her growing sensory and aesthetic education in which Will plays a part, and which is made most visible on her wedding tour in Rome.

The Turning Wrist and the Turning Body

Eliot's own first tour of the continent may have taken the form of a honeymoon, but it also gave her the opportunity to consider in depth the relationship between art, aesthetics and life. While ostensibly intended as part of research for Lewes' biography of Goethe, the nine-month tour that they took through Germany marked not only the public beginning of their relationship, but the inception of her career as a novelist.⁶⁵ While Eliot's ideas about art would develop throughout her life, Röder-Bolton argues that the German tour in particular offered her 'the opportunity to see and examine critically contemporary art and to develop her own aesthetic of the real',⁶⁶ particularly in Berlin. It also exposed her to different cultures of art appreciation; museums and galleries took up a large proportion of the couple's time on this visit, and Eliot would prove an indefatigable gallery goer on this and future travels, discovering the difficulties as well as the delights of trying to access high culture.⁶⁷

Dorothea's first encounter with Will establishes how badly she is in need of this kind of programme of aesthetic education; the Brookes visit Lowick Manor, Casaubon's home, and encounter his cousin sketching, and when prompted to admire his work by the affable Mr Brooke, she instead despairs of her ignorance:

⁶⁵ In her 1857 essay about her first attempts at fiction, Eliot notes that an "introductory chapter" was [...] among the papers I had with me in Germany and one evening in Berlin, something led me to read it to George'. 'How I Came to Write Fiction', in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. by Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 289–91 (p. 289). The flouting of Victorian sexual mores which they had undertaken together would, however, have a marked effect on her career.

⁶⁶ Röder-Bolton, p. 3. Her reading included the works of heavyweight German art historians and critics, such as G. E. Lessing, Adolf Stahr, and Franz Kugler.

⁶⁷ The pair became adept at navigating the complexities of visiting the museums of Berlin, which rarely kept regular opening times, and were 'frequently dependent on an introduction or similar formality', Harris and Johnston, p. 32.

‘[...] I never see the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. They are a language I do not understand. I suppose there is some relation between pictures and nature which I am too ignorant to feel – just as you see what a Greek sentence stands for which means nothing to me.’ (*MM*, p. 79)

This reflects Dorothea’s sense that her marital home will be something of a refuge from her uncle’s idea of culture; Tipton Grange is replete with the souvenir ‘casts and pictures’ (*MM*, p. 74) of his Grand Tour. The text displays its bias towards Dorothea’s simple tastes, if not her understanding, in conveying this eclectic profusion of ‘severe classical nudities and smirking Renaissance-Correggiosities’ (*MM*, p. 74). The tortuous phrasing conveys its sympathies when it admits that ‘to poor Dorothea [...] these severe classical nudities and smirking Renaissance-Correggiosities were painfully inexplicable’ (*MM*, p. 74).

On honeymoon in Rome the concerns so deftly foreshadowed at Lowick are resurrected; just as she does not understand the ‘language’ of art when faced with Western culture’s treasures, she fails to understand the language of art criticism which her husband adopts. She is baffled by the Old Masters, and the older master she has married: the motivations of both are obscure to her, until she finds in Will a translator, who will teach her how to bring pictures and sculpture ‘into any sort of relevance with her life’ (*MM*, p. 74). The portrait of ‘Mrs Casaubon’ in the Vatican therefore becomes a marker of the novel’s development of Dorothea’s aesthetic education as well as her sensual faculties.⁶⁸ It revisits elements of the Renaissance Madonna comparison, while making the erotic charge of the ‘fineness’ of her body more explicit through the eyes of Will and his companion, the painter Naumann:

the two figures passed lightly along by the Meleager, towards the hall where the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness. They were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. She was not looking at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor. But she became conscious of the two strangers who suddenly paused as if to contemplate the Cleopatra, and, without looking at them, immediately turned away (*MM*, pp. 188-9)

The artists’ vision brings out the sensory delights of her appearance, and figures her energy as if she were the subject of a painting. She is implied to be the source of diffuse light, describing her as ‘blooming’, and ‘petal-like’, her bonnet casting a ‘halo’, and leaving the ‘streak of sunlight’ which actually illuminates her

⁶⁸ Dorothea’s bewilderment in the face of the volume and complexity of art available to her might have elicited sympathy from an audience enjoying a proliferation of art writing designed for the widest possible audience. Dehn Gilmore notes the shared common concerns of the mid-century novel with museum culture, bound not only by ‘common features of artistic praxis, but also by common experience [...] increases in how many people were encountering art, and in how much art there was to encounter.’ *The Victorian Novel and the Space of Art: Fictional Form on Display* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 3.

until last.⁶⁹ The purity of line which the clothing of Dorothea's wrist and arm makes conspicuous is reasserted by the text, but as with Maggie's arm, the description endows her with bloom, tints of life, and a radiant visual warmth. While the 'tender' and 'easy' folds of the Vatican Ariadne's drapery are beautifully disordered, Dorothea's nonconformity, as well as an erotic frisson, is communicated through her forcefully displaced clothes. Her cloak is 'thrown backward from her arms', and her bonnet 'push[ed] [...] backward' by the ultimate erotic marker of Dorothea's body throughout the novel, her 'beautiful ungloved hand'.⁷⁰

Eliot explicitly invokes the 'marble voluptuousness' of the conjured sculpture, but in the treatment of Dorothea's form, 'not shamed' by her counterpart, Dorothea's 'figure' can speak of the ways in which her own sensual nature finds expression. Rather than risk objectification, even in the cause of 'making life beautiful' (*MM*, p. 219) – an ambition which she communicates to Will on better acquaintance – she turns away: as Alison Byerly puts it, she 'breaks the frames that others attempt to impose on her'.⁷¹ Naumann plans to paint her 'dress[ed] as a nun' (*MM*, p. 189), articulating the artistic tradition of appropriating female beauty (not least in categorising it according to sexuality).⁷² Especially in the light of the novel's opening, this comment of his reveals how the iconographic function of the female form is merely reinforced by the novel's subsequent contrast of the aesthetic confusions of Dorothea's honeymoon, and her increased understanding of art and of her own desires through her relationship with Will.

While the 'tender' sculptural vignette is supposedly a reference to the reclining Ariadne in Rome, Röder-Bolton analyses the links between this scene and Eliot's 'first acquaintance with a *Reclining Ariadne* on her own honeymoon with Lewes'.⁷³ At the sight of Johann Heinrich von Dannecker's world-famous sculpture of Ariadne in Frankfurt in 1854 Eliot enthused: 'I never saw any sculpture equal to this – the feeling it excites is the essence of true worship – a bowing of the soul before power creating beauty.'⁷⁴ This statue excited as much reverence in its day as some of its historic counterparts, but it was a resolutely modern exhibit. The sculptor had stipulated that its plinth contained a turning mechanism, and it could be 'lit through red curtains to give the statue a flesh-coloured hue'.⁷⁵ Eliot's trip to Germany gave her the opportunity to distil her feelings about art; she found her experiences of Old Masters discomfiting,

⁶⁹ Clair Hughes does note that, while it lends a "spiritual" aspect to her appearance, 'her bonnet of costly beaver is clearly of fashionable dimensions'. 'Dress', in *George Eliot in Context*, ed. by Margaret Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 104–12 (p. 108).

⁷⁰ For more on the erotic significance of the hand in novels of the period, see Michie, pp. 98–9.

⁷¹ *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 113.

⁷² Eliot is particularly attuned to how pathos is heightened when it coincides with beauty. Naumann is shown to be susceptible to the 'softening influence of the fine arts which makes other people's hardships picturesque' (*MM*, p. 429), which later in the text works as a commentary on Mr Brooke's neglect of his tenants' homesteads, in the face of which Dorothea's empathy and practical plans have been shown to be futile.

⁷³ Röder-Bolton tracks the appearance of the Ariadne sculpture and its attendant myth as it appears in *Middlemarch*, from the tender to the comic, p. 34; p. 38.

⁷⁴ Harris and Johnston, pp. 18–9.

⁷⁵ The Ariadne was the centrepiece of Moritz von Bethmann's private collection, and was shown in a dedicated room, much like the Neues *Laokoonkabinett*. See Röder-Bolton, p. 32; p. 38n61.

though some made an enormous impression, she objected to the ‘heavy symbolism’⁷⁶ of contemporary German painting, and the development of her preference for sculpture seems to have been entrenched by her experiences there.⁷⁷ The coincidence of a ‘turning’ Ariadne offers yet another incidence of the effect that her German tour had on Eliot’s ideas about perception and representation, making the idea of considering the female form from a new angle particularly arresting.

The image of the Ariadne’s form being moved beneath a coloured light recalls Dorothea’s wrist clad in emeralds ‘turning’ so that she may access the beauty of their form. As with the ‘Parthenon’ figure’s arm, the idea of beauty proves transient between pieces of plastic art and the human form, but the treatment of Dorothea’s figure is specific to her tastes, her inclinations, and her sexuality, and speaks of her refusal to be appropriated. Her progress as a character will be to integrate her pleasure in her ‘finely-turned’ body as part of her own aesthetic experience, and into a larger conception of sensory pleasure as a component of life. The description of Maggie’s arm dissociates it from the very sensory pleasure – the scent of roses – which she seeks, making her a pattern of beauty on which any represented woman could be modelled. In *Middlemarch* Eliot articulates Dorothea’s ‘fine’ (*MM*, p. 7) form, not as a component of ‘fine art’, but in a way which expresses her individual sensual capacity.

Dorothea’s means of appreciating art stems from whether one can ‘care’ (*MM*, p. 197) about a work or piece, by which her new husband is baffled.⁷⁸ Rome may seem a barren place when viewed through Casaubon’s search for attributions, consensus and definitiveness in representation, but Will’s open-ended, even flippant, perspective on matters of art demonstrates the multiplicity of approaches available to her.⁷⁹ Through their discussions she becomes increasingly sensually attuned to him, and by extension the world around him. The impotence of Casaubon’s treatment of the aesthetic, and by extension his failure of erotic imagination, is contrasted with Will’s role as an active agent of her aesthetic and education, and her eventual engagement with her love and desire for him which forms the novel’s conclusion. Will’s definitive rebuke to Naumann, discussing Dorothea as a potential model for one of his great works is, in the context of both sculptural iterations of Ariadne and of Eliot’s own efforts at representation, as well as

⁷⁶ Röder-Bolton, p. 3.

⁷⁷ John Rignall notes that she and Lewes ‘spen[t] many hours in galleries of sculpture, and, from the tone of George Eliot’s comments, they caused her less critical anxieties than old master paintings.’ In his analyses of her written reflections on art throughout her career he observes that she was ‘more at ease with Classical reference’, although in *Middlemarch* there is plenty of evidence that she put her capacity for scholarship, if not personal preference, to good use in researching art history for her comparisons of the physical ideal in art. ‘Visual Arts’, in *Oxford Reader’s Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 449–55 (p. 454).

⁷⁸ The work in question is the Farnese Palace frescoes, which depict the myth of Cupid and Psyche, whose erotic significance Joseph Wiesenfarth examines in relation to Dorothea’s relationships. He analyses the further influence of German art historical narratives in Eliot’s selection of this work, which he suggests was prompted by her reading of Goethe’s *Italiänische Reise*. See ‘The Greeks, the Germans, and George Eliot’, *Browning Studies*, 10 (1982), 91–104 (pp. 99–101). Perhaps the myth of miscommunicating spouses is also indicative of how Casaubon fails to comprehend that his new wife is trying to illuminate their relationship for the love of him (while also acting on the impulses towards self-realisation) which he can see only as humiliation.

⁷⁹ On their first private meeting in Rome Will combines the two oppositions of sense and knowledge, in explaining that “‘Art is an old language with a great many artificial affected styles, and sometimes the chief pleasure one gets out of knowing them is the mere sense of knowing [...]’” (*MM*, p. 206).

the novel's recurring theme of self-presentation, significant: 'As if a woman were a mere coloured superficialities! You must wait for movement and tone' (*MM*, p. 191)

The comparison of Dorothea and Ariadne thematically exploits the piquancy of unhappy love and the beauty of sadness in representation, but it also acknowledges its popularity.⁸⁰ All the art historical speculations about the identity of the figure have erotic significances: the pioneering eighteenth-century German scholar Johann Winckelmann discounted that the statue could be Cleopatra, but considered it a nymph or Venus, while Ennio Quirino Visconti later proposed the Ariadne identification.⁸¹ In making a show of the figure's misattribution, which persisted even at the time of the novel's publication, *Middlemarch* asks her contemporary readers to engage subjectively with the figure, or with the *idea* of the figure, which already has a legacy of erotic power not tied to its context. Kanwit notes that Eliot is not above flattering her audience to achieve her ends; she draws their notice to 'how much more they know about art than do her characters'⁸² in order to make the textual comparison between Dorothea – who has been shown to be all 'movement and tone' (*MM*, p. 191) before marriage – and her stone counterpart more effective.⁸³ Even such an oblique reference demonstrates Eliot's consciousness that the power of beauty in art is not a static condition: it can be expressive of a character's individuality and their relationship to culture and their own desire. Dorothea's Vatican portrait hints at unhappiness in her marriage, and the subsequent chapter reveals that a painful domestic scene is the cause. Her sensual discontent only serves to underline that aesthetics and sexuality are not to be dissociated by the developments of the plot, and that Dorothea has not found in her marriage an outlet for her passions or an increase in her knowledge. Hilary Fraser observes that the Roman honeymoon provides a synthesis of textual elements in portraying her sexual awakening, which is 'realized symbolically through her awakening to art.'⁸⁴ Naumann, an artist with a determinist (and thus flawed) vision sees only the 'antithesis' of the comparison of antique beauty 'arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection' (*MM*, p. 189) with Dorothea's Puritan trappings. Dorothea's wardrobe might be sober, but it virtually throbs with her sensory energy.

⁸⁰ Mr Brooke's collection might even have featured an Ariadne, and the myth appears to have had special resonance for the Victorians: for a discussion of the popularity of Ariadne figurines in Victorian parlours, see Arnold, pp. 114–5.

⁸¹ See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 186.

⁸² Kanwit, p. 119.

⁸³ Rignall sees this as part of a hope on Eliot's part that contemporary British tourists would seek out better sources of information about art on their travels than their 1820s and 1830s counterparts had tolerated, p. 453. However, as but as this chapter has already established, this was by no means easy, and perhaps Eliot had forgotten her frustrating experiences in Germany nearly twenty years later, when she opened her account of the Casaubon's honeymoon thus: 'In those days the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years than it is at present. Travellers did not often carry full information on Christian art either in their heads or their pockets; and even the most brilliant English critic of the day mistook the flower-flushed tomb of the ascended Virgin for an ornamental vase due to the painter's fancy' (*MM*, p. 182).

⁸⁴ Hilary Fraser argues that to critically stress Dorothea's asceticism without attending to the sensually expressive attributes of the St Theresa motif of her story is to distort Eliot's nuanced portrait of her heroine. 'St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in *Middlemarch*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40 (1986), 400–411 (p. 410).

Dorothea's long-delayed recognition that she loves and desires Will allows her to integrate aesthetics, passion, and her spiritual ambitions in a way that she can comprehend. She becomes incorporated into the world when she recognises that her sexuality must be a part of her longing for intense experience, and that the simplicity of her dress has its role to play in her life through the messages it sends. The idea that her sleeves are 'bare of style' (*MM*, p. 7) now appears in a new light, since they are appropriate to the new life she faces which will be much less materially rich, but sensually enriched instead. In giving her hand in marriage she transforms her 'fine' wrist from an apotheosis of visual purity to a site where passion may be expressed. Not a 'thinning' of the body, then, but a concentration of feeling and significance, a space in which to exhort the reader's sympathetic feeling rather than to isolate them from the lovely, but untouchable woman. Perhaps there is space to interpret the text 'thinning' texturally in attuning itself to Dorothea's wardrobe of draping and diaphanous stuffs, and becoming more embodied, because it is more attuned to how Dorothea experiences the world.

Dorothea's choice to 'turn' her body, and 'turn' her wrist, may be emblematic of her developing sensual and aesthetic awareness, but also of her progress towards the realisation of their importance in her life. In her marriage to Will her body truly becomes an instrument of her own decisions and desires, whether that is a refusal to be looked at as equivalent to a piece of canvas or of marble, or to try and reconcile beauty and goodness in the world through endowing it with an emerald ring as well as an architect's pencil. In telling her sister Celia of her coming marriage, she disdains to make a 'story' (*MM*, p. 821) of her realisation of love and desire, telling her, in the final reported sentence of their interview "[...] you would have to feel with me, else you would never know." (*MM*, p. 822) She has finally understood that in using her finely turned wrist she can re-situate her pleasure as part of the world before her, and part of her role in it.

***Daniel Deronda*: 'Telegraphing' sexuality through turquoises**

Ostensibly, Gwendolen Harleth is as much a product of her society as Dorothea is at odds with hers; yet neither of them is as exceptional, or as extreme in their views, as they believe, and *Daniel Deronda* attributes no lesser degree of meaning to how the female body is presented and contextualised than *Middlemarch*. In Gwendolen's case, however, the representation or invocation of the wrist and its trappings shows the extent of her participation in the rhetoric of patriarchal dominance, especially in relation to her own sexuality; they are the tangible means through which she comes to understand her subjugation to nineteenth-century patriarchal and imperial concepts of power, and become the site of her struggle for self-determination. Unlike Dorothea, Gwendolen is gorgeously clothed and furnished, giving the reader a thrill of sympathy in finding pleasure in their descriptions. However, the narrative stresses her longing for forms of connection less tangible than these tactile, sensuous elements which eventually come to articulate her conflict with her culture's values. Her relationship with Deronda may not culminate in her exercise of subjective desire *with him*, but helps her to understand what subjectivity in the realm of desire

entails, and opens her eyes to the subjective desires of others. Through the novel's use of the wrist to tease out these ideas, the wrist can be transformed from a site of constraint to a site of agency.

As in *Middlemarch*, the text first introduces us to the priorities of the female protagonist in her interaction with inherited jewels. Unlike Dorothea, Gwendolen Harleth's precarious social status and straitened financial circumstances mean that she must curate the display of her body as a valuable commodity, part of the highly stratified regime of femininity at mid-century. In the context of contemporary values and tastes, Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador notes that the choice of a wealthy or married woman to eschew jewellery would indicate that, for some reason of her own, she 'does not participate in conventional social life'.⁸⁵ Gwendolen, endowed with the attributes and accomplishments considered desirable in her 1860s upper-class setting, must use jewels as a tool in order to secure the most conventional social goal – a wealthy husband – but she also imbues them with symbolic and emotional importance. Within this framework, Eliot makes it part of the logic of Gwendolen's situation that her growing consciousness of her unease with contemporary values should be manifested on her body, via her dress and accessories, and in particular her jewellery.

Gwendolen is observed by a crowd of admirers, of whom Deronda is one, while losing money in a Leubronn casino, and her response to the news of her family's financial ruin proves a catalyst for her relationship with him: needing funds for her journey home she sets out to pawn her ornaments, chief among them an 'Etruscan necklace' (*DD*, p. 17) whose disappearance she thinks will go unobserved by her companions. The reader finds out the history and qualities of the necklace in her encounter with the pawnshop's owner:

She looked neither to the right hand or the left, and transacted her business in the shop with a coolness which gave little Mr Wiener nothing to remark except her proud grace of manner, and the superior size and quality of the three central turquoises in the necklace she offered him. They had belonged to a chain once her father's; but she had never known her father; and the necklace was in all respects the ornament she could most conveniently part with. (*DD*, p. 19)

These few sentences not only provide information to Gwendolen's own origins and the symbolism of her connection with the necklace, but illuminate her own temperament in her mixed feelings towards it, being 'superstitious and rationalising at the same time' (*DD*, p. 19). The text suddenly reverts from the standpoint of an outsider to Gwendolen's internal perspective, from one which values the customer as well as the goods to her dismissal of a supposed pang at sacrificing the tribute of a dead parent. The sentence which describes the stones' provenance shows her capacity to thread contradictory ideas together in pursuit of a goal, with the clauses of the sentence studded with semi-colons in the manner of gems on a chain. In synthesising such different motivations and ideas in describing the necklace, the narrative forges further links between Gwendolen's will and the commoditisation she is happy to risk in achieving her ends. Yet Eliot is also making calculations about what Rosador calls the 'freight of

⁸⁵ Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador, 'Gems and Jewellery in Victorian Fiction', in *REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, Volume 2, ed. by Herbert Grabes, Hans-Jürgen Diller, and Hans Bungert (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), pp. 275–317 (p. 295).

meaning⁸⁶ which such an object can be brought to carry, and which critics have parsed according to its extra-textual significance, so that its next appearance in the text, wrapped around her wrist, will have the necessary resonance, and prompt her husband to accuse her of trying to ‘telegraph’ (*DD*, p. 447) a secret significance in plain sight.

Turquoises are a strategic choice of stone on Eliot’s part; beautiful but mutable, their ancient symbolism was perpetuated as they were absorbed into the refinements of mid-century jewel etiquette.⁸⁷ They had peculiarly emotive properties, acting as a talisman against illness and accident (especially for riders), and monitoring internal states of wellbeing and emotion. However, King’s lapidary reports the historical tradition that these properties would be lost if they were purchased rather than given.⁸⁸ Hardy notes that Eliot made revisions to language which deals with this transaction in the second Cabinet Edition of the novel, changing ‘pawn’ and ‘redeemed’ to ‘part with’ and ‘repurchased’ in certain instances in the text.⁸⁹ Such revisions mitigate rather than quash the symbolism of the sexual implications of the transaction for Gwendolen. Since her appearance is bound up with the calibre of the stones, as seen through the eyes of the pawnbroker Mr Weiner, the text only confirms that she is a commodity upon whose desirability, and constancy, men and women will speculate.⁹⁰ Gwendolen is ultimately confirmed as a monitored and sexualised commodity when the necklace is promptly returned. Furious at being observed and at having to conceal her strong suspicion of her benefactor’s identity, she rages at Deronda’s action: ‘[h]e had taken an unpardonable liberty, and had dared to place her in a thoroughly hateful position’ (*DD*, p. 20). His presumption, as well as the intimacy of receiving the necklace ‘wrapt in a cambric handkerchief’ (*DD*, p. 20), has frustrated her attempts at independence, contiguous with packing unaided and preparing to embark on a journey across the Continent unprotected.

Deronda has redeemed for her what contemporary culture considered both the symbol of girlhood and ‘a declaration of love’⁹¹ when given as a gift, and the implication of Gwendolen’s outrage is that he has put a

⁸⁶ Rosador’s comprehensive analysis of the turquoises’ significance considers the depth of critical interpretation to which they can reasonably be subject, p. 317.

⁸⁷ During the 1860s and 1870s shortened sleeves and the addition of small V-necks meant that jewellery became highly visible, and semi-precious stones such as corals and turquoises were deemed the solution for daywear, ‘an extraordinarily tricky area of jewel etiquette.’ The fashionable “Etruscan” setting of the necklace, when combined with the fact that she has not worn them on her journey – meaning that their absence will not provoke comment from her companions – means that they are probably the most suitable of Gwendolen’s jewels to pawn. Charlotte Gere and Judy Rudoe, *Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria: A Mirror to the World* (London: British Museum, 2010), p. 187; p. 432.

⁸⁸ King refers to a German tradition attached to the turquoise that ‘when presented as a love-gift, its colour will remain unaltered as long as the giver is faithful, but will grow pale as his affection fades’. He also reports the traditional association between rider and the turquoise, quoting a historical source which who is assured the horseman that that ‘[a]s long as one wears it his horse will not tire, nor throw him’, p. 59; p. 427. Gwendolen’s riding habit is one that gives her most pleasure, and shows her attraction to physical as well as social risk in Chapter 7: she is prepared to risk looking ‘unseemly’ (*DD*, p. 70) in deciding to follow the Wessex hunt on the spur of the moment.

⁸⁹ Barbara Hardy, p. 160.

⁹⁰ Despite its supposedly negative connotations, the mid-century author Mme de Barrera writes effusively about the convenience and safety of pawning jewels to recoup gambling losses, the pleasant nature of the personnel, and the ‘elegant and expressive’ slang of the patrons. *Gems and Jewels: their History, Geography, Chemistry, and Ana.: From the Earliest Ages down to the Present Time* (London: Bentley, 1860), pp. 353–55.

⁹¹ Gere and Rudoe, p. 156.

price on her reputation. Cultural manifestations of historical and mythical associations between gems and female sexual behaviour, as Marcia Pointon observes, are often preoccupied with the circumstances under which a female character interacts with gems; if jewels ‘stand in metonymic relationship to her virginity or chastity, then her disposal of them is tantamount to the sale of herself.’⁹² Yet in this scenario the turquoises hold the promise of their future relationship, since their instability of colour meant they were imbued with the ability to communicate romantic loyalty, or inconstancy of affection.⁹³ Deronda has not yet been revealed to the reader as a character who seeks to evade such narratives, and while the opening chapter strongly implies that he is an exceptional figure, he is nonetheless depicted as one of the many observers in the casino who are struck by Gwendolen’s beauty, and their eventual connection is facilitated by their speculation and gossip about her breeding, status, and wealth. Gwendolen even feels that ‘Deronda’s gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye’ (*DD*, p. 10), ending her winning streak at the roulette table, which creates the necessity of pawning her turquoises for travel expenses. The protagonists never formally meet at Leubronn, but this episode provides the novel’s introduction to both characters, and sets up what Nancy Henry terms the ‘chain of miscommunications between them’⁹⁴ just as tangible as the necklace itself. The association – a thematic chain of its own – between Deronda’s unspoken desire and Gwendolen’s material status, as represented by the turquoises, continues through the course of the novel.

Charles Blanc, writing in the same year that *Daniel Deronda* was published, is emphatic in his statement that young women should ‘scarcely [be] permitted to wear pearls and turquoises, the emblems of poetry and purity.’⁹⁵ It seems probable that the fashionable Gwendolen would be aware of their symbolism, making the choice of stone a way of piquing a contemporary reader’s interest in beginning the novel with Deronda’s redemption of stones which come to ‘express and emblematised the lurking element of love, passionate and spiritual, in the[ir] relationship’.⁹⁶ The text later reveals that the reason for Gwendolen’s presence in Leubronn is a flight from her suitor Grandcourt, having encountered his mistress, Lydia Glasher. After her family’s financial collapse, Gwendolen cannot afford to risk being compromised by Deronda if she is to retain the only value remaining to her, that of the girl ready to relinquish her turquoises for the ‘brilliants [...] not worn until after marriage.’⁹⁷ Thus her choice becomes even more starkly reductive: turquoises or diamonds? Grandcourt or Deronda?

⁹² Pointon, p. 65. The association between gifts of jewellery and the illicit exercise of sexuality was not exclusive to the nineteenth-century, but it became especially prominent in narratives of seduction, due to factors such as the increased availability of jewels on the market and the increasing refinement of dress codes.

⁹³ There is a curious coincidence of the idea of the mutable and pawned turquoise in a later work by King, who explains that in Germany ‘it is still the gem appropriated to the ring, the “gage d’amour,” [sic] presented by the lover on the acceptance of his suit, the permanence of its colour being believed to depend upon the constancy of his affection.’ The French word for pledge or security is ‘gage’, so writing of the turquoises in these terms associates them strongly with the idea of a promise of exchange without a guarantee of stability. See *The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones and Gems, and of the Precious Metals* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), p. 424.

⁹⁴ *George Eliot and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 112.

⁹⁵ Alexandre Auguste Philippe Charles Blanc, *Art in Ornament and Dress* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1877), p. 259.

⁹⁶ Rosador, pp. 313–4.

⁹⁷ Blanc, pp. 258–9.

The episode sets a precedent in the novel, in which interactions around jewellery obliquely deal with themes of sexual conduct and a desire for independence and control, as in the *Middlemarch* jewel casket scene. Arnold observes that within nineteenth-century novels men give gems to women as part of ‘a show of privilege and prerogative [...] for jewelry [*sic*] had become ubiquitous as an object of desire.’⁹⁸ Deronda is able to return the turquoises without Gwendolen’s knowledge, or consent, because he supposes that the personal, social, or sexual implications will not affect him.⁹⁹ Gwendolen may have regained her turquoises, but she is forced by her family’s financial ruin to accept Grandcourt’s hand on returning to England. Her preparedness to trade precious commodities for wealth will stand her in good stead when she agrees to marry, since her body is the only form of security in dealing with men who have the power to decide whether to facilitate such an exchange, or thwart it.

Nonetheless, this action not only forms a link between Gwendolen and Deronda, but secures a thematic legacy attached to the turquoises when they appear later in the novel, tellingly wrapped around her wrist. Gems instigate both open conflict and unspoken resentment in the Grandcourts’ married life, and they are a way for the text to demonstrate her awareness of the nexus of power and sexuality which abound in the symbolism of gems, and which will add an illicit emphasis to her necessary pretence to her husband about the significance of this act in their later relationship.¹⁰⁰ As Grandcourt’s bride she attends the Mallinger New Year Ball, which publicly integrates her into the dynasty of which Deronda is an adopted member, and the turquoises’ reappearance in the text exposes her ignorance of the degree of control assumed by her husband and the social regime to which he belongs.

When Gwendolen was dressing, she longed, in remembrance of Leubronn, to put on the old turquoise necklace for her sole ornament; but she dared not offend her husband by appearing in that shabby way on an occasion when he would demand her utmost splendour. Determined to wear the memorial necklace somehow, she wound it thrice round her wrist and made a bracelet of it – having gone to her room to put it on just before the time of entering the ball-room. (*DD*, p. 440)

Gwendolen makes the turquoises a vehicle for her ‘longing’, but she incorporates them into a display which confirms the ‘splendour’ of her social achievement, since the ball is an occasion on which she is expected to wear his diamonds, the most potent contemporary symbol of high-status marriages.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁸ Arnold, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁹ Many of Deronda’s supposedly magnanimous gestures which occur around jewellery demonstrate his exercise of the wealthy upper-class man’s prerogative, even when he supposes himself to be acting chivalrously; for further analysis, see Rosador, p. 317.

¹⁰⁰ Gwendolen repeatedly receives jewels by messenger, making them remote but insidious: her necklace, her engagement ring, and the Grandcourt family diamonds. These arrive on her wedding night directly from Grandcourt’s mistress Lydia Glasher, of whose existence she feels she must appear ignorant, and which are the means of transmitting the ‘curse’ of a spurned fallen woman on her marriage (*DD*, p. 359). Gwendolen subsequently declines to wear them, whereupon Grandcourt puts the diamonds on with his own hands as an act of dominance, which provokes her realisation that ‘[h]e delights in making the dogs and horses quail: that is half his pleasure in calling them his [...] and I shall quail’ (*DD*, p. 427).

¹⁰¹ At the time the jewellery occasioned by such marriages were even noted in reports in the *Times*; they were key elements of the trousseau, and provided by the wealthier spouse. A woman of this rank ‘was expected to dazzle with precious jewels on any grand social occasion’: Gere and Rudoe cite an episode in Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*

bracelet, if read as Gwendolen's way of communicating her desire, show how utterly she is still implicated within the established social codes, since by this point the exchange of gems for sexual access is a well-established element of the novel's economy of symbolism, but the turquoises add an extra representative element of instability.¹⁰² Gwendolen's action is expressive not only of her wish to remember the connection of the turquoises to Deronda, but of her wish to defy the tainted diamonds which Grandcourt's wealth and status has provided by visually jostling their supremacy.

She vacillates between keeping it a secret from her husband, in putting it on just before the ball to circumvent his objections, risking his anger in trying to create 'an opportunity for the sake of which she had put the old necklace on her wrist' (pp. 443), yet deliberately revealing it before his eyes.

Gwendolen was wrapped in the lightest, softest of white woollen burnouses, under which her hands were hidden. While [Deronda] was gone she had drawn off her glove, which was finished with a lace ruffle, and when she put up her hand to take the glass and lifted it to her mouth, the necklace-bracelet, which in its triple winding adapted itself clumsily to her wrist, was necessarily conspicuous. Grandcourt saw it, and saw that it was attracting Deronda's notice.

'What is that hideous thing you have got on your wrist?' said the husband.

'That?' said Gwendolen, composedly, pointing to the turquoises, while she still held the glass; 'it is an old necklace I like to wear. I lost it once, and someone found it for me.' (DD, p. 443)

Gwendolen has not lost the power of effect which made her so compelling a vision at Leubronn; the text carefully records how calculatedly she stages a form of striptease, making the strategic part of her body 'conspicuous'. In signalling to Deronda this way she is not only communicating their connection, but reminding him of its potentially illicit nature: she and the turquoises are 'wrapped' in the gorgeous burnous, recalling the turquoises' secret return 'wrap' (DD, p. 20) in Deronda's torn handkerchief. In requesting a glass of water she is displaying herself, giving Deronda's 'notice' licence to move between her *risqué* bared wrist and the intimacy of her opened mouth.¹⁰³

She lets outer coverings fall away: having displaced her burnous in his absence her glove (decorated with a 'lace ruffle' redolent of the most intimate forms of clothing) is 'drawn off' (DD, p. 443) to reveal her bare skin and the ornament. Yet the sentence which includes this gesture is itself forcibly extended to maintain Gwendolen's pose – 'while she still held the glass' – in the manner of a stage direction to an actress, and

(eventually published posthumously in 1866), in which a conspicuous lack of diamonds on a duchess occasions disappointment and disgust in fellow, more humble, party-goers, pp. 102–3.

¹⁰² Gwendolen's appearance of marital fidelity is here established as bound up in the turquoises; Rosador argues that the erotic attraction between Gwendolen and Deronda is 'emblematised – and also textually sublimated in the necessary fashion – by the turquoise', pp. 315–6. The winding bracelet recalls the sensual serpentine mythological imagery associated with Gwendolen's appearance at Leubronn, and the bracelet in the shape of a snake worn by the Vatican Ariadne. Despite negative contemporary associations attached to the idea of Eve and female sexuality, serpent jewellery representing fidelity was fashionable at mid-century: Queen Victoria's engagement ring was an emerald-studded snake swallowing its own tail. Rosador, p. 290.

¹⁰³ A contemporary etiquette guide warns that 'both ladies and gentlemen should draw on their gloves in the dressing-room, and never be, for one moment, without them in the ball-room. At the time of taking refreshment, of course, they must be taken off. No well-educated person would eat in gloves.' Gwendolen's action only seems the more scandalous for treading the line between sanctioned and unsanctioned nudity. *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen, Or, The Principles of True Politeness, to Which Is Added the Ball-Room Manual*, rev. edn (Halifax: Milner & Sowerby, 1862), p. 117.

clumsily adapted itself. The hyphenation of the words ‘necklace-bracelet’ gives an effect of beauty caught up in external symbolisms which are crudely hinged together, in contrast to the beautifully sinuous body. The contrast between this sentence and its ‘soft’ predecessor with its languid clauses is marked, but both have a ‘winding’ quality, the word recalling her striking serpentine acting in Leubronn, in the words of a fellow observer of Deronda’s “[...] wind[ing] her neck about [...]” (*DD*, p. 12) at the roulette table.

Since Gwendolen has rarely been figured as anything but an exterior, even in her moment of trying to make herself understood to Deronda, perhaps it is not surprising that she can only conceive of the expression of desire through a play on surface, and not even the surface of her body.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the wrist’s appearance in comparable scenes in *Middlemarch* or *The Mill on the Floss*, its sensual potential is expressed in the displacement of the erotic power to the burnous, the glove, and the necklace. Despite his sense of attraction to her, which is well established by this point in the novel, Deronda follows this textual cue, and decorporealises her gesture: ‘He thought [...] she wished him to infer that she had submitted her mind to rebuke’ (*DD*, p. 444). But in eradicating an awareness of her desiring agency, he reveals that he is just as implicated as Grandcourt in the social structures which invest men alone with the power of desiring.

Arnold argues that turquoises and diamonds ‘represent opposed cultural values within the text, ultimately confronting one another on Gwendolen’s body’,¹⁰⁵ and yet both tell of her commodified sense of her selfhood as contingent on her relationships to men and to society, and her conception of her desires as something to be externalised rather than inwardly felt. Gwendolen believes in the general opacity of her communication via the turquoises, where in fact through their context (and their contrast) they are effectively as transparent and reflective of her feeling as the prism of the brilliant-cut diamonds. She has also uncharacteristically neglected the implications of dress, forgetting that conduct literature as well as fiction of the time regarded transgressions against the codes of jewel-wearing as ‘outright moral blemishes’.¹⁰⁶

On the one hand, the turquoises are symptomatic of her wish to communicate aspects of her feelings to Deronda, but on the other they show her utter egocentricity in thinking to secure his interest without bringing sexual suspicion upon him and his role in her life, in much the same way as his conduct in returning the turquoises showed scant regard for the implications of the act. Within the text, the turquoise necklace works to indicate how thoroughly she has internalised the concept that her selfhood is inextricably bound up with her experiences as a desirable sexual commodity. Unable to actualise her desires – or to realise how potent they might prove in symbolic terms – she waits to be made the subject

¹⁰⁴ Gwendolen’s movements are often minutely detailed in the novel, but she does not invest forms of expression, such as blushing or speaking gestures, with equal communicative power as dress.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold provides an excellent analysis of the different economies of feeling represented by Deronda’s turquoises and Grandcourt’s diamonds, pp. 21–7.

¹⁰⁶ Rosador, p. 239.

of another person's, and Grandcourt takes this prerogative further than she can conceive of in their marriage, as demonstrated by their confrontation after the ball is over.

While Gwendolen believes in Deronda's 'power' to understand her appeal, her husband can read the narrative of her desire rather better than either of them in the visibly incongruous turquoises: 'He is not going to take my place.'

When the door had closed on them in the boudoir, Grandcourt threw himself into a chair and said, with undertoned peremptoriness, 'Sit down.' She, already in the expectation of something unpleasant, had thrown off her burnous with nervous unconsciousness, and immediately obeyed. Turning his eyes toward her, he began –

"Oblige me in future by not showing whims like a mad woman in a play."

"What do you mean?" said Gwendolen.

"I suppose there is some understanding between you and Deronda about that thing you have on your wrist. If you have anything to say to him, say it. But don't carry on a telegraphing which other people are supposed not to see. It's damnably vulgar."

"You can know all about the necklace," said Gwendolen, her angry pride resisting the nightmare of fear.

"I don't want to know. Keep to yourself whatever you like." Grandcourt paused between each sentence, and in each his speech seemed to become more preternaturally distinct in its inward tones. "What I care to know I shall know without your telling me. Only you will please to behave as becomes my wife. And not make a spectacle of yourself."

"Do you object to my talking to Mr Deronda?"

"I don't care two straws about Deronda, or any other conceited hanger-on. You may talk to him as much as you like. He is not going to take my place. You are my wife. And you will either fill your place properly – to the world and to me – or you will go to the devil."

"I never intended anything but to fill my place properly," said Gwendolen, with bitterest mortification in her soul.

"You put that thing on your wrist, and hid it from me till you wanted him to see it. Only fools go into that deaf and dumb talk, and think they're secret. You will understand that you are not to compromise yourself. Behave with dignity. That's all I have to say." (DD, pp. 446-7)

In this scene Gwendolen unwittingly raises the stakes of their conversation by feigning ignorance and innocence, and laying a trail to her knowledge that there is an 'understanding' to be had about her expression to Deronda through the necklace. This is in accordance with the Grandcourts' avoidance of discussing the other spectre of sexuality, Lydia Glasher, until it is necessary to acknowledge their lack of heirs for the dynastic diamonds. Grandcourt is not a sophisticated thinker, and while he cannot understand what the necklace itself means, he does recognise its power to convey an illicit message in being *out of place*, both physically and socially.¹⁰⁷ A key component of his distaste is that Gwendolen uses the social currency of sexuality – jewellery – to communicate her feelings to another man in a way which is 'vulgar', and below the 'dignity' which should pertain to his wife. This constitutes not only a lapse of taste, but it makes Gwendolen the subject of the implication which she so wished to avoid at Leubronn, that anyone with financial means may take an interest in her conduct. Through that conduct, she has made her body into the equivalent of the turquoise necklace in the pawnshop window.

¹⁰⁷ The conspicuousness of mixing diamonds, the sole province of the wealthy married woman in evening dress, with a piece more suitable for daywear would have been remarked upon as a deviation not only from the etiquette, which Gwendolen's concealment conversely emphasises, but a betrayal of the 'sensitivity to use personal adornment discreetly and with propriety [which] was seen as a mark of gentility', Gere and Rudoe, p. 101.

Comprehending the degree of emotional and desiring significance of the turquoises between his wife and Deronda, Grandcourt can re-appropriate their meaning most effectively. He selects the most crude and artificial analogies for her behaviour from contemporary life, such as accusing her of ‘telegraphing’ meaning like a ‘madwoman in a play’. These are calculated to make Gwendolen feel that her sense of secret significance has been invalidated, and secure him a more complete form of domination as he commands her to ‘fill your place properly – to the world and to me’. Grandcourt manages to de-animate Gwendolen utterly, not merely in depriving her of the power of concealing anything from him, but in reifying the wrist which bears the ‘hideous’ turquoise ornament. The recurrence of his earlier phrase ‘that thing you have got on your wrist’ becomes more ominous as it is repeated, and his relentless precision of expression gives weight to the phrase. In its final iteration, ‘You put that thing on your wrist, and hid it from me till you wanted him to see it’ the wrist becomes a space estranged from Gwendolen’s self and, by extension, her capacity to act, using the ‘preternatural’ distinction of which his own speech is capable. As in the ballroom, this sentence encapsulates his precise observation, and distaste for, any action of hers which is undertaken against his wishes. It elides the wrist and the necklace, as efficiently as he encompasses her action and its motive under his sense of control. Grandcourt objects to the idea that there should be any visible signs which contradict her visual status ‘as becomes [his] wife’, while utterly disclaiming interest in her actual desires: ‘Keep to yourself whatever you like’. The very difficulty of Gwendolen’s situation is that Grandcourt does not care for her actual feeling, secure from fears of sexual betrayal in his sense of control. But the very obliqueness of the way this husband and wife negotiate the coded language of sexual impropriety is co-opted by the text, turning the display of desire, rather than the exercise of sexuality, into a more potent and terrible thing through its social inflections.

Gwendolen is appalled, but her strongest reaction is to wonder why Grandcourt has, in a horrifyingly animalistic metaphor that conveys her terror of his capabilities, ‘put [his] fangs into’ (*DD*, p. 448) her and not Deronda. This interaction is only the logical extension of her own disempowered modes of thought and desiring, and Grandcourt’s implied sexual and emotional predation. When she wonders why she should not ‘defy him’ (*DD*, p. 447), she concludes that ‘she might as well have tried to defy the texture of her nerves and the palpitation of her heart’ (*DD*, p. 447). Gwendolen has internalised Grandcourt’s confidence that he knows her intentions if not her motivations, and that he is ultimately in control of her physical actions. It is possible to read this interaction in her boudoir as making visible Grandcourt’s ability to violate Gwendolen’s physical authority; he is capable of splitting and refashioning her material self, down to her skin and nerves. His capacity to dissociate her from her own ‘palpitation of [...] heart’ can be seen in his denigration of the ‘hideous’ stones which absorb the heat from the fluttering pulse in her wrist. The language recalls the attitudes and *tableaux vivants* of Gwendolen’s girlhood, reflecting that she cannot even make a show of protest in ‘throw[ing] up her arms, as she would have done in her maiden days’ (*DD*, p. 448). In forcing her to become the ‘still’ image of a wife, Grandcourt invalidates the question of jealousy and ideas of sexual misconduct because he has almost totally ‘compromised’ her capacity for action.

Within this reading the bracelet-necklace mutely reaffirms to society that Gwendolen is still struggling with the degree to which she has internalised the values of their society; the wrist is the space for Gwendolen's subordinate and displaced preference.¹⁰⁸ Her marriage has made her breast the realm of her husband's command, but her wrist is the space for her (albeit coded) recognition of own desire for connection and communication, and her own attraction to Deronda, are not so easily commanded. When combined with the obvious attraction between Gwendolen and Deronda, the turquoises communicate a narrative of the relationship as the source of some form of extra-marital satisfaction, as unequivocally as a sphrygmograph's stylus or a sensation novel plot.¹⁰⁹ Yet her readiness to substitute one sort of 'monitor' (*DD*, p. 447) for another, just as she substitutes a piece of jewellery, makes visible how little understanding she has of what it means to become an actively desiring subject in her own life. She will not confront her assimilation of contemporary patriarchal sexual and political mores until she comes to this realisation, through her wrist.

Bracelets and Hand-cuffs: Sexuality and the Subjugation of the Wrist

Gwendolen's appearance is shown to be a crucial component of her assumption that she is entitled to control her own destiny; the text's interest in the response of other characters often brings social dynamics to the fore, demonstrating how she gains a false sense of power. While her appearance was gently mocked by her equals, and even superiors, at Leubronn, the family and servants with whom she has contact reaffirm that her charm and beauty merit supremacy. The Offendene housekeeper recognises her fitness to 'command [...] all' by virtue of her 'looks and figure' (*DD*, p. 28), and on her wedding-day the villagers agree that 'as to figure and carriage she was worthy to be a 'lady o' title' (*DD*, p. 353). But the narrative strenuously warns against accepting such 'surface' (*DD*, p. 41) narratives with which Gwendolen contents herself, informing the reader that it is her innate egotism and determination of 'will' (*DD*, p. 41) which secure a domestic dominance comparable to the contemporary 'unscrupulous male' (*DD*, p. 41), of exactly the type she is about to marry. When combined with her limited scope of imagination and her defiance of her own 'fits of spiritual dread' (*DD*, p. 63), Gwendolen's consciousness is made supremely vulnerable, since she lacks any real consciousness of the 'fetters' (*DD*, p. 63) which accompany her wedding band. If the conflict over the turquoises is a refashioning of the Brooke sisters' disagreement over the jewel-box, it makes the 'yoked creature' (*MM*, p. 15) more vulnerable in being unconscious of her 'yoke'. Thus Gwendolen is surprised by the way in which her supremacy during courtship recedes

¹⁰⁸ Barrera notes that bracelets were particular social markers in Roman society, as a mark of social rank, a military badge of victory, yet also a 'token of slavery', p. 316.

¹⁰⁹ Eliot makes clear that the sensation-style narrative of adulterous love is legible to other members of the house party. The chapter concludes with Sir Hugo's expressed hope to Deronda that he is not 'playing with fire' in his interactions with Gwendolen, while Deronda's rebuttal deliberately (and somewhat self-consciously) refutes any imagery of hot-bloodedness: "[...] there is nothing answering to your metaphor—no fire, and therefore no chance of scorching." (*DD*, pp. 453-4). Sally Mitchell draws a connection between the 'intense awareness of detail' found in both Eliot's realist project and the contemporary sensation novel, noting that they both 'reflect immediately on the changes they perceived in social standards and models of behavior [*sic*]', p. 74. Reynolds and Humble analyse how Gwendolen's behaviour mimics that of a sensation heroine, which ties in with the theme of adulterous or illicit love (a particular trope of sensation novels), which runs through *Daniel Deronda*, from Lydia Glasher's relationship with Grandcourt to Sir Hugo's own love for Deronda's mother, pp. 130-1.

after marriage; on her wedding day she reflects on her consciousness, fermented by the short engagement, that ‘the cord which united her with this lover and which she had heretofore held by the hand, was now being flung over her neck’ (*DD*, p. 354).¹¹⁰ Only after she contracts the marriage does she realise that the Roman *laccio* has been subverted into a manacle.

Sections of the novel devoted to her character teem with the vocabulary of subjection, dominance, control and will. Used to the command of her own ‘domestic empire’ (*DD*, p. 41), Gwendolen has no fear that her life might consign her to ‘any position which could lack the tribute of respect’ (*DD*, p. 63). Notably, the novel uses her marital situation to approach wider themes of oppression, particularly political and colonial events relevant to its contemporary setting.¹¹¹ It employs the rhetoric of colonialism and slavery in relation to her extreme sense of sexual subjugation, and makes the image of the restrained wrist central to the representation of her dispossession from bodily autonomy or desiring agency. In depicting Gwendolen’s experience of marriage as part of a spectrum of human struggle and suffering, despite her ignorance of such connections and her innate self-interest, the novel articulates that she is no less worthy of sympathy, and as entitled to political, personal, and sexual agency as any other human being.

The Harleth turquoises are a legacy from her father – and also a ‘possible symbol of British plunder’¹¹² – which demonstrate that she is part of a stratum of society best placed to derive material and social benefits from the Empire project. Gere and Rudoe point out that while gems for men were *de rigueur* in the early part of the century, they were most likely to be worn as part of a watch-chain, which was regarded as ‘a mark of the entrepreneurial merchant or wage-slave’¹¹³ by the subsequent generation of wealthy gentlemen. The turquoises are thus more the product of enterprise rather than of heredity, and become an emblem of her family’s fluctuating fortunes – the decisive factor in Gwendolen’s story is the loss of Mrs Davilow’s legacy from her father’s estate in the West Indies – and of her need to “marry up” to elevate their lineage and secure wealth.¹¹⁴ Their ‘Etruscan’ style also marks Gwendolen out as a

¹¹⁰ A strong component of Eliot’s portrait of their courtship and marriage is the hand-play between them, which expresses the ‘conflict’ at the centre of their relationship, as observed by Irwin, p. 63. The start of their honeymoon journey provides a particularly good example of this, as Gwendolen turns Grandcourt’s ‘gentle seizure of her hand into a grasp of his hand by both hers’ (*DD*, p. 357). The ungainliness of Eliot’s syntax communicates a desperation, as well as the intention of the text to be clearly understood in conveying the significance of this gesture to the reader.

¹¹¹ Katherine Bailey Linehan is careful to note that the novel incorporates ‘watershed issues of imperialist politics and civil rights occurring in Europe (the unification of Italy, the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, and the Austro-Prussian war), America (the American Civil War), and British colonial territories (the Jamaican Uprising). The topicality represented in the novel’s breadth of historical allusion is related to the political urgency reflected in its – for Eliot – unprecedented modernity of setting.’ ‘Mixed Politics: The Critique of Imperialism in *Daniel Deronda*’, *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 34 (1992), 323–46 (p. 327).

¹¹² Henry, p. 112.

¹¹³ Gere and Rudoe, pp. 137–8. As in the case of women, the selection of stones and styles, the time of day at which they were worn by men, and what they articulated about the moral and social nature of the men who wore them, interested nineteenth-century culture deeply.

¹¹⁴ Gwendolen is ready to pawn her jewels in preparation to become governess (an alternative future path to marrying Grandcourt), but Mrs Davilow encourages her to keep the turquoises and other ornaments, acknowledging that her own legacy of gems was ‘disposed of’ (*DD*, p. 275) by her second husband to mitigate his financial losses.

fashionable young woman who knows how to use the dignifying patina of history and culture to mitigate the less desirable aspects of herself as a potential bride, as in the setting of her jewels.¹¹⁵ They are something of an unstable commodity, in their meaning as well as their commercial worth, and by extension represent Gwendolen as an aesthetically desirable but potentially risky venture in the marriage market.

Chapter 29 (in the ominously-named Book IV, 'Gwendolen Gets Her Choice') consistently synthesises sexuality, dominance, and risk in the Grandcourt marriage.¹¹⁶ At the heart of the chapter is a report of the conversation topics of a party at Diplow, at which the Jamaican Uprising, now known as the Morant Bay Rebellion, is discussed in the same breath as diseased cattle and roulette.¹¹⁷ This party provides the opportunity for the first formal meeting of Gwendolen and Deronda since he 'redeemed her necklace' (*DD*, p. 330), and in turning away from the frisson of their unspoken link Gwendolen hears the discussion of the uprising of disenfranchised peoples – which Gwendolen thinks of as 'polite pea-shooting' (*DD*, p. 331) – which is concluded by an oblique reference to coerced interracial sexual relationships. A fellow guest crassly remarks that 'the whites had to thank themselves for the half-breeds' (*DD*, p. 331). Gwendolen's failure to connect ideas of enfranchisement and patriarchal sexual power with herself directly recalls the fullest early sketch of her character, which makes clear that her ignorance of her 'fetters' is facilitated by the 'conditions of colonial property and banking, on which, as she had had many opportunities of knowing, the family fortune was dependent' (*DD*, p. 63).¹¹⁸

Gwendolen's disregard for such 'opportunities' to learn about the fragility of her freedom proves disastrous; she frivolously invokes the concept of Grandcourt as her 'slave' (*DD*, p. 95) before her marriage, but the narrative also makes tacit comparison of her state of bondage with a more politicised one, since she is only dimly aware of her captivity.¹¹⁹ Her ignorance facilitates her choices, and frees her

The turquoises' reappearance in the text, having been secured by Deronda at Leubronn, can be read as a deliberate reference to Gwendolen's sense of debasement, having accepting Grandcourt's proposal at last out of financial necessity.

¹¹⁵ While archaeological styles of jewellery – 'Etruscan' being a deliberately loose term – were fashionable in the mid-1860s, they were still perceived as belonging to the more discerning woman, since like cameos the historical examples were considered to uphold the best principles of design, Gere and Rudoe, pp. 432-3. By the end of the decade they had become so prevalent that fashion writers would declare that 'the triumph of the classic jewelry [*sic*] is now complete.' 'About Some Rare Jewels', *The Ladies' Treasury*, n.s., 7 (1869), 14–22 (p. 15).

¹¹⁶ Eliot acutely begins and ends the chapter with the engaged couple navigating the shifting currents of sexual power between them, as well as the mutual knowledge of Lydia Glasher's existence, in their conversation.

¹¹⁷ For an analysis of the impact of the Morant Bay Rebellion on mid-Victorian culture see Laura Callanan, *Deciphering Race: White Anxiety, Racial Conflict, and the Turn to Fiction in Mid-Victorian English Prose* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

¹¹⁸ Gwendolen and Mrs Davilow's ignorance of the consequences of British involvement in Jamaica, both profits and political tensions, is marked. Nancy Henry argues that in this scene Eliot makes them representative of the class of 'absentee planters' but also depicts their own vulnerability to a social fiscal system which seems to necessitate 'the ignorance in which women are kept by the men who control their money', p. 111.

¹¹⁹ At the archery event the narrative makes plain that Gwendolen's ignorance is a necessary condition of enjoying her '[p]re-eminence [...], even under mediocre circumstances', going furthest in speculating that '[p]erhaps it was not quite mythical that a slave has been proud to be bought first' (*DD*, p. 100). As a novel about individuals within culture, *Daniel Deronda* as a whole does not confine itself to the portrait of Gwendolen in treating society's disregard

from her sense of obligation to acknowledge the suffering she may have profited from, whether of enslaved peoples, or that of social peers such as Lydia Glasher.¹²⁰ Consequently the turquoises' role in the text has a note of dramatic irony. In fastening them around her wrist, where they sit as clumsily as any other restraint to which she submits, and she aims to communicate her increased understanding of how she has benefited from harm done to others, but only to a new figure of authority and approval: Deronda.

Her unconsciousness of the extent of subjugation which an empire expects from its subjects leads her to marry Grandcourt, and the text repeatedly juxtaposes visions of political and social 'mastery' (p. 425) in the wider world with Grandcourt's exercise of control over Gwendolen, his personal dominion. His ruthlessness is made explicit: 'If this white-handed man [...] had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries' from his readiness rather to 'exterminate than to cajole' (*DD*, p. 594). Grandcourt's 'empire of fear' (*DD*, p. 425), as we have seen, expects to extend even into the mind of his wife.

He would have denied that he was jealous; because jealousy would have implied some doubt of his own power to hinder what he had determined against. [...] what he required was that she should be as fully aware as she would have been of a locked hand-cuff, that her inclination was helpless to decide anything in contradiction with his resolve. However much of vacillating whim there might have been in his entrance on matrimony, there was no vacillating in his interpretation of the bond. (*DD*, p. 584)

Eliot locates this idea at a moment when Grandcourt is reflecting on his wife's relationship with Deronda, demonstrating how he re-shapes the image of the enclosed wrist to reflect his own social standing and his expectation of 'mastery' (p. 425). The very qualities which Gwendolen feels make her exceptional actually conform to Grandcourt's template of a wife; in assuming that she will have the whip hand she fails to consider whether she will be subject to a violent regime which will dispossess her of all control.¹²¹ Eliot is unafraid to draw parallels between Grandcourt and a slave-trader: both acquire the human subject, and Gwendolen has been purchased according to a set of criteria, akin to those applied to her turquoises by the pawnbroker.¹²² He is not content to settle for a bride whose physical characteristics do not suit his 'taste' (*DD*, p. 585) as to particulars such as nails and earlobes, nor one who 'even if her nails and ears were right, was at the same time a ninny, unable to make spirited answers' (*DD*, p. 585). Eliot has already

for women's individuality of expression, and their economic and sexual subjection to their husbands, but she is its show-piece.

¹²⁰ Princess Halm-Eberstein makes the analogy explicit in railing against the 'slavery of being a girl' (*DD*, p. 631) late in the novel, but it is a trope hinted at in many of the female characters' lives. Anna Gascoigne yearns for personal freedom, and mentally dispenses with the social and material trappings of Victorian womanhood in envisioning colonialist life with her brother Rex: 'I should have done with going out, and gloves, and crinoline, and having to talk when I am taken to dinner – and all that!' (*DD*, p. 88).

¹²¹ The whip is a particularly dominant trope in Grandcourt's courtship of her, much of which revolves around riding; whip-play between them is especially notable in an episode of their courtship (*DD*, pp. 134-6), and whipping as a representation of supremacy in marriage is discussed by observers on their wedding-day (*DD*, pp. 353-4).

¹²² Grandcourt, calculatedly overcoming her reluctance to courtship by offering her 'a sense of freedom which made her almost ready to be mischievous' (*DD*, p. 303), completes his purchase of a wife by sending a messenger with cheque, a horse and a 'splendid diamond ring' (*DD*, pp. 312-3). This bartering transaction comforts Gwendolen in disclosing what she thinks of as mutually-held pride: 'I should hate a man who went down on his knees' (*DD*, p. 313).

demonstrated through Gwendolen's attempted evasion of marriage to Grandcourt that she has thoroughly internalised this concern for representing a physical standard of beauty in order to embody a feminine ideal.¹²³ But the narrative reinforces the sense that their marriage was entered into on unequal grounds by strategically withholding this mutual consciousness; this moment of musing on their 'bond' (*DD*, p. 584), which addressed Gwendolen's connection to Deronda, invokes the image of her 'locked' (*DD*, p. 584), restrained wrist.

In Grandcourt's conception of the marriage tie, Gwendolen is disempowered as a direct result of her fitness to be his wife, down to the shape of her nails. Her wilfulness is the component which ultimately heightens her desirability, and their engagement represents a scope of potential domination which he relishes:

she would have to submit; and he enjoyed thinking of her as his future wife, whose pride and spirit were suited to command every one but himself. [...] He meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man. (*DD*, p. 320)

Grandcourt's capacity for distinctness is brought to bear even onto Gwendolen's body, which he assumes the right to atomise and judge. In immobilising a portion of her body which is capable of determining and expressive action, his dominance is all the more complete. He can be 'contemptuously certain of all the subjection he care[s] for' (*DD*, p. 447) in their confrontation over the turquoises on Gwendolen's wrist because he knows full well that in marrying him she must always negotiate with the unseen, but perennially-locked, hand cuff. Clad in turquoises, Gwendolen is as unstable a commodity as a slave in revolt, and Grandcourt reasserts her 'subjection' in the manner of an authoritarian colonial governor. The text emphasises that he harbours no jealousy 'of anything unless it threatened his mastery – which he did not think himself likely to lose' (*DD*, p. 325), and yet his means of losing control, and bringing Deronda and Gwendolen together again, is through this very mastery. Having effected an utter mental and physical paralysis in his wife, which Gwendolen openly compares to the condition of a 'galley slave' (*DD*, p. 695), it proves the death of Grandcourt, since a chained human has no reach to rescue a drowning man.

Conclusion: Individuating the Wrist

The final appearance of the wrist occurs at the point where Gwendolen is brought to realise that her struggle for individuation and for sensual expression will not find its fulfilment in the repetition of the marriage plot. Over the course of the novel Gwendolen comes to a consciousness of the damage she has both inflicted and suffered through unquestioningly enacting – or playing her part in – contemporary models of human relationships, domestic or political, which take power as their central tenet.¹²⁴ The

¹²³ Just before Gwendolen's interview with Herr Klesmer about her prospects as a professional singer, she muses on her beauty: 'If anyone had objected to the turn of her nose or the form of her neck and chin, she had not the sense that she could presently show her power of attainment in these branches of feminine perfection' (*DD*, p. 251).

¹²⁴ *Daniel Deronda* has historically been accused of being inchoate due to the difference of its protagonists and their narratives, and Terence Cave traces contemporary and later reactions to the novel which seek to divide it into its constituent 'halves', from contemporary reviewers wishing to excise the sections of the novel to do with Judaism, to a late-nineteenth century Jewish critic preferring the novel without its episodes dealing with the Gentiles. See

novel's return to the wrist is a way of examining how the extent to which she has internalised these models, and how confronting the experiences which they have provoked might offer her a sense of self and sensuality not contingent upon anyone other than herself.

Deronda comes to visit the widowed Gwendolen at Offendene to tell her of his Jewish identity and to announce his engagement to Mirah Lapidoth. The text anticipates her pain at these revelations with a delicate sketch of her dependence on their future together, and her inability to 'imagine him otherwise than always with her' (*DD*, p. 795). The revelation of Deronda's wider Zionist mission intimates to her 'the separateness of his life' (*DD*, p. 796) to which her need for him had blinded her, and the impossibility of their marriage to her within the changed course of his life becomes apparent.

Gwendolen had sat like a statue with her wrists lying over each other and her eyes fixed – the intensity of her mental action arresting all other excitation. At length something occurred to her that made her turn her face to Deronda (*DD*, p. 804)

It is at this moment that she prompts him to talk of his future marriage, and I see it as a careful synthesis of ideas that Gwendolen's prone posing, and her sense of being 'dislodged from her supremacy in her own world' (*DD*, p. 804) should coincide with her ability to envisage his future independently from her own: 'she could not spontaneously think of him as rightfully belonging to others more than to her' (*DD*, p. 804). His political destiny provides the opportunity for her to realise that she has rendered even Deronda, whom she knows to be exceptional, as a perpetuator of the 'belonging' economy: ownership, domination and rescue. In one conversation between them, the day after the Mallinger ball when the necklace makes its appearance, she protests that he should have revealed to her a way of life which does not revolve around exploitation, without guiding her further. But she fails to understand the contradiction inherent in her plea to him: "'You must tell me then what to think and what to do [...]"' (*DD*, p. 445). She has envisaged their future life together as one where she 'would be continually assimilating to some type that he would hold before her' (*DD*, p. 796) with relief, as Dorothea envisaged life as Casaubon's partner in study, a means of being near enlightenment, if not enlightened herself. This template is a limitation Gwendolen prepares to impose on herself, as a desiring subject who has already experienced the enslavement of living according to a husband's direction.

Her readiness to substitute a chain of turquoises for a hand-cuff on her prone crossed wrists – redolent of the 'sexual fantasy'¹²⁵ embodied by contemporary Orientalist paintings of the beautiful slave or of the Classical or Arthurian heroine exposed as a sacrifice – is a visual representation of the painful limitations

'Introduction', in *Daniel Deronda*, by George Eliot, ed. by Terence Cave, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. ix – xxxv (pp. xv–xvii). These nineteenth-century critical approaches seem to overlook the manner of the novel's conclusion, which establishes that by their final meeting Daniel and Gwendolen are both conscious of belonging to categories of human being that the culture in which they have been raised considers inferior, whether through misogyny or anti-Semitism.

¹²⁵ Alison Smith suggest that such pictures were ideal opportunities for the display of feminine subjugation as well as bare female flesh, particularly by 1870, when '[t]he reposeful ideal was temporarily forsaken as artists chose to represent the female as a victim'. She also notes that Edwin Long's 1875 painting *The Babylonian Marriage Market* 'anticipates the slave scenes that came into vogue in the 1880s', p. 157; p. 168; pp. 172–3.

that still impinge upon her scope of ideas. Neither Grandcourt, seeing either a beautiful animal to be made to 'quail' (*DD*, p. 427), nor Deronda, interpreting her as a promising but shapeless soul, can offer her the self-definition she craves. As with her displacement of the expression of her desire in wrapping the turquoise necklace around her wrist, the displacement of her desiring subjectivity onto Deronda is still shaped by a brutalising set of values which demand a contingent sense of self, rather than one rooted in self-knowledge.

The novel subverts the theme of the marital cord, using her readiness to be guided by others to return her to ownership of herself through a denial of marriage and her pantomime of fettered humanity. Her wrist must take its place as the point not of submission, but a portion of an active agent who only submits herself to her own conscience and care. The recognition of the crucial role of subjectivity, in her own life as well as that of everyone else, results from her attempts to perpetuate a way of relating to sexuality through conformity and submission.

The final tender and conciliatory gestures between Gwendolen and Deronda revolve around bared hands and wrists.¹²⁶ They lead her to realise her need to move into the realm of empathy and subjectivity: 'Do not think of me sorrowfully [...] it shall be better with me because I have known you' (*DD*, p. 810). The force of her desires can come to be redirected through her body, making it a means to better engagement with her fellow creatures. Deronda eventually does finally communicate his message, and Gwendolen does not have to estrange herself from her own desires in order to understand others, but to recognise the integrity of the desires of others. When her embodied self is a component of the material world, instead of at its centre, she is freed from the rhetoric of dominance. Notably, her 'turn' towards him marks the disruption of her habit of posing as if she is a breathing work of art (whether a Lamia in Leubronn, a Saint Cecilia at Offendene, or a Hermione at Quetcham) and marks her acceptance that reifying herself may attract admiration, but will only ever procure isolation and estrangement. When Deronda turns the moment of surrender to him into a space for her to reclaim her desiring power, it marks a moment of freedom – admittedly, one which she is poorly equipped thus far to understand – which releases her from the economy of composite beautiful parts, and frees her to become a whole, desiring woman. Gwendolen's flexuous body and strong force of will can be put to use in this aspect of her development, as glimpsed after his departure in her mantra-like repetition: 'I shall live [...] I mean to live' (*DD*, p. 807). In her determination to come to life from the stilled condition of a statue – reviving her mirroring her *tableau* of the vindication of Hermione – her wrist can be re-positioned as a former space of constraint and domination, now transformed into the space of individuation.

It is unsurprising that Gwendolen, thwarted in her own creative efforts, models for an invisible artist. Witemeyer discusses Eliot's love of 'form' in art, and frames her connection to certain pieces of art as analogous to passionate relationships in her life:

¹²⁶ This is the moment when their relationship, paradoxically, becomes most physical and most intimate: having exchanged kisses on the cheek 'they looked at one another with clasped hands, and he turned away' (*DD*, p. 800).

When she fell in love with a picture, a statue, or a building, she studied it with the aim of registering its details in her mind's eye, so that after leaving it she might still contemplate and cherish it.¹²⁷

In this context, the marble arm of a statue is just as endowed with individuality as that of her own creation in Maggie Tulliver's warm and pulsing wrist. One of the thematic strains of *Middlemarch* protests against the stratification of culture and the human soul alike; separating the passions into 'locked chambers' (MM, p. 166) might prove as futile and damaging as trying to divide intellectual history into 'box-like partitions without vital connection' (MM, p. 157). Linda Shires has a potent interpretation of this quotation as part of the debates on perspective, as examined in the previous chapter, but she also notes that it recalls the novel's opening, which 'immediately yok[es] together visual and literary coordinates'¹²⁸ in striving to make the reader's mind 'flexible with constant comparison' (MM, p. 157). To contemplate, and to 'cherish' the details of the artwork, as of her own creations, is not to rob them of individuality, rather it imbues them with a sense of their special qualities in a sensory archive of Eliot's own, which she then bequeaths to her reader through her own writing. It may be an archive distorted by the quirks of her consciousness in turn, but it is that which makes her characters, and the novels which contain them, specially attuned to the details which can put flesh on a created body, and make sensate an invented world.

For Eliot, art and humanity must feel themselves strongly connected, and nowhere does this become more apparent than in her treatment of her heroines. Maggie, Dorothea, and Gwendolen are all relatively poorly educated, and their integration into a world of beauty and sensuality to which they are entitled is hard-won. In her treatment of the site of the pulse, an indication of whether a person does 'live' (DD, p. 807), their bodies are the means by which they win both sensual and intellectual agency, as part of organisms which garner pleasure for themselves. Maggie's beautiful arm is the means of facilitating her 'wicked' degree of joy in the scent of roses, and Dorothea's finely-turned wrist can turn to delight in the gleam of coloured stones which refute the philosophical anxieties to which she is normally prey. As Gwendolen repeatedly discovers, the episodes which revolve around the moving wrist often touch on the struggle for women to individuate themselves and their sensual responses, in the face of being observed or categorised. The beautiful wrist, when read in this way, becomes yet another fulcrum of interpretation, and can simultaneously engage and disrupt the efforts at representation which contain it. As for Eliot in the Neues museum, the beauty of women's arms and wrists across forms and centuries can animate efforts at representation capable of expressing ideas about representation which have the power to touch their viewer, to make them feel beauty. Eliot's pen, directed by her own wrist, held the power to facilitate writing about women's bodies which could engage such feelings in sophisticated ways, making us consider the bounds of representation and the power of female desire.

¹²⁷ Witemeyer, p. 31.

¹²⁸ Shires, p. 115.

Conclusion: Refashioning, Reframing, and Reconsidering Sexuality

No-one who visited the V&A's 2015 blockbuster exhibition 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty' could fail to notice that the designer, and by extension contemporary culture, is still utterly fascinated by the shaping, the fragmenting, and the distorting of the body according to an idea of what 'Victorian' culture demanded. McQueen's fascination was such that '[n]early every collection contained a reference to nineteenth-century dress',¹ and he took inspiration from the nineteenth century's balance of aesthetics and technology, such as the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron, and the designs of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement.

For the 1997 'Eclect Dissect' catwalk show, McQueen's set designer Simon Costin layered nineteenth-century fashion illustrations over anatomical drawings, so that in one image a woman wearing an 1880s bustle 'peels off her flesh to reveal the musculature; flesh is constructed as one more layer of clothing.'² As the designer's career developed he became more interested in exaggerating the female form into something closer to a carapace, aggressive and yet seductive, a thing of power metamorphosed out of an idea of primal vulnerability and softness. This thesis takes up that dynamic, albeit within a historical moment which did not have to go to such aesthetic extremes for the female body to be a shocking or transgressive spectacle. McQueen's work experimented with what we think of as nineteenth-century tensions between sexuality and fetishism, repression and freedom of expression, artifice and creativity: as a culture, we are still preoccupied by all these questions, and, in that sense, we are still Victorians.

Arguably, modern culture's own affinity with the era has meant that a caricature of Victorian approaches to sexuality has seemed necessary to distance it from the legacy of actual human repression which nineteenth-century ideologies appeared to demand. In some respects, the regulation of women and their bodies, in legal, financial, aesthetic, and sexual terms, seemed intrinsic to the concept of Britain as a modern industrialised and imperial nation.³ With the shift in the cultural climate from the ebullience of mid-century to the complexities of the *fin-de-siècle*, the exercise of sexuality was addressed more directly, and the rhetoric of art as it related to sexualities bifurcated. Whether in the campaigning fervour of the New Woman novel, or in the Yellow Book depictions of women as agents of creative and sexual licence,

¹ McQueen also liked to use nineteenth-century motifs such as mourning photography, and even used the 'Pepper's Ghost' technology as the opening of one catwalk show. Claire Wilcox, 'Edward Scissorhands', in *Alexander McQueen*, ed. by Claire Wilcox (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), pp. 25–35 (p. 32).

² 'A Gothic Mind', in *Alexander McQueen*, ed. by Claire Wilcox (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), pp. 141–54 (pp. 147–48).

³ Catherine Hall traces the history of the idea that a woman was a 'relative creature' from eighteenth-century origins to its refinement as part of Victorian bourgeois ideology. *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 75–93; p. 75.

a new generation took up the struggle of the previous generation to reconcile respectability with desire in art and turned it inside out, while simultaneously movements for ‘social purity’⁴ experienced a resurgence.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s vision of the beautiful woman as something of a *femme fatale* became a key text; his images and poems, and their increasingly fetishistic emphasis on elements of the female form, visibly bridged the old and new. Critics of the time recognised the potency of a vision which had its roots in a much more conventional and encoded grammar of art. Indeed, Rossetti was blamed for the cultural shift, as over time the stress that his works placed on certain components of physicality seemed, not fertile and encoded markers of sexuality, but rather the hallmarks of an explicit, and toxic, art. Buchanan’s coruscating article on ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’⁵ critiqued his influence on later generations of poets as early as 1871, but the 1879 review of an exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in the *Illustrated London News* most succinctly synthesises these concerns into a cry of disgust and bewilderment:

in these pictures there are latent meanings as to the rise, growth, and fruition of ‘passion’ [...] which forms the ‘super-sensations,’ or rather, we should say, the ultra-sensual school – a school which in its worst development is the morbid outcome of weakly over-wrought physique – which every man who respects his manhood and every woman who values her honour must regard with disgust, and would destroy everything of value in the national character. [...] [This] ‘supersensuousness’ was derived from Mr Dante Rossetti’s queer ideal of womankind – with hollow cheeks and square jawbones, necks like swans with the goitre, [...] lips [...] ‘stung,’ therefore swollen, ‘with kisses.’ The young are apt to sicken to this sort of thing [...] let us hope they will soon look back with amazement at their illusions.⁶

Gabriel had not exhibited publicly in over two decades, but such was the power of the type attributed to him; its ‘over-wrought physique’ was considered an articulation of the sickness of the artist himself, as well as the art, and a risk to impressionable minds. The majority of the era had been spent making the human form, whether through clothing and accoutrements or through innate physical characteristics, legible, and its over-determination in representation seems, with hindsight, a natural consequence. With the onset of Aestheticism as a movement, Kathy Alexis Psomiades acknowledges the line it negotiated between the ‘separation of art from the praxis of everyday life in bourgeois culture’⁷ which it made its hallmark, and the necessity of having a visual identity, inextricably linked with seductive femininity, which would make its products viable commercial entities. Rossetti’s reticence only heightened the power of the visual brand which his morbid stunners typified; they were the ultimate marker of commoditization.

⁴ Jeffrey Weeks notes that movements for social ‘purity’ were invigorated in the 1870s and 1880s, in part by their framing of the 1850s and 1860s as a time of a ‘decline in [moral] standards’ across the nation. *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1989), p. 86.

⁵ The review was published under the pseudonym ‘Thomas Maitland’; ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’, *Contemporary Review*, 18 (1871), 335.

⁶ ‘Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition’, *Illustrated London News*, 3 May 1879, p. 415 (p. 415).

⁷ Psomiades, p. 9.

Ironically, just as the cultural regulations around the expression of sexuality were beginning to loosen, the conventional ‘ideal of womankind’ of the reviewer’s imagination experienced more physical constraint; the new ‘spoon busk’⁸ style of corset would distort her body into an even more extreme shape and level of compression. Much of my work has involved discovering how much women were able to participate in, and shape their representation.

The guide to the 2015 exhibition at the Foundling Museum, *The Fallen Woman*, stresses the self-conscious nature of Victorian narratives of sexual behaviour, and how women used these narratives for their own ends. By the nineteenth century, the Foundling Hospital had put in place a strict selection process – to avoid encouraging immorality – in which mothers had to apply to the hospital for the adoption of babies, and submit themselves to scrutiny from the moment they first obtained an application form from the Porter’s Lodge.⁹ As part of this form they had to write, or to dictate, a narrative of the child’s conception which would fit strict admission criteria, but Nead is careful to stress that, while the archive is full of stories of distress and coercion,

we cannot be certain [...] that these necessarily tell the truth of the women’s lives. It is clear that the mothers who applied to the Hospital knew about its admissions criteria; they knew that they had to tell their stories according to prevailing assumptions about guilt, desire, love, respectability and repentance[.]¹⁰

Within acceptable nineteenth-century narratives of sexuality, the woman who had entered into consensual or satisfying sexual relationships outside marriage could not be acknowledged outright. Within this archive there can be little trace of contemporary women’s desire, but that women shaped their own narratives, even in the most difficult personal circumstances, is an important insight, amidst the preserved rhetoric of coercion and shame.

There are many more narratives around women’s cultural participation in narratives of sexuality to be explored, especially about women’s roles in emerging disciplines of art and culture at mid-century. Recent scholarship has started to reveal the extent to which modern narratives have tended to elide the creative and professional roles which were available to women, even in a society which tended to disbar them from education and training.¹¹ The under-representation of female artisans as well as artists and authors in our accounts of the mid-Victorian period has been touched on in this project, as well as the ways in

⁸ This new style of corset became popular in the 1870s, which extended far further down the torso than previous models, and so exacted even more control over the female form it contained. It took its name from the shape it gave, since it ‘curved into the waist then widened out over the lower abdomen.’ Vincent, p. 41.

⁹ Petitioners were monitored from the very start: the porter would take “notes on callers” in a log book, noting the appearance of the petitioners, observing their dress and judging whether they appeared respectable’, and this information would later be included with their application for the benefit of the panel of Governors who made the decision to accept their child or not. Victoria Mills, ‘The Fallen Woman and the Foundling Hospital’, in *The Fallen Woman: Exhibition Guide* (London: The Foundling Museum, 2015).

¹⁰ Lynda Nead, ‘Foreword’, in *The Fallen Woman: Exhibition Guide* (London: The Foundling Museum, 2015).

¹¹ For examples of such critical reconsiderations, see Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century*; Kanwit; Zakreski; Avery-Quash and Sheldon; Ferry; Shannon Hunter Hurtado, ‘Going Public: Self-Promotion Strategies Employed by “First Wave” Victorian Women Sculptors’, *Sculpture Journal*, 13 (2005), 18–31.

which their access to culture may, and may not, have been impeded. Women's access to art education has been briefly considered in this thesis, but their role in developing practices of display and curatorship are important to future understanding of their use of archival and medical spaces, and crucial to studies of the campaigns for access to professional and academic knowledge which characterised the final years of the century.

Several times in this project I've discovered scholarly errors or archival misattributions or elisions in relation to nineteenth-century women's work. I find two examples particularly telling, because they relate to an artist and a critic who enjoyed successful professional careers of their own, which were fairly well-documented in their own time. The birth date of sculptor Mary Thornycroft was incorrectly entered in the online catalogue of the Royal Collections; then-curator of Decorative Arts Kathryn Jones admitted she was unsure how such an error had 'crept in',¹² a metaphor curiously suited to an artist whose most famous pieces of work are portraits of royal children.¹³ In another instance, on visiting the Clore Study Area of the V&A I searched for what information they presented on Elizabeth Eastlake, only to find that, unlike other nineteenth-century female artists and scholars represented in the catalogue, information about her career and work had been incorporated into her husband's entry. Both women were married to fellow professionals: Thomas Thornycroft was also a sculptor, who experienced 'periodic jealousy'¹⁴ of his wife's greater talents and success, and Elizabeth Rigby's marriage to Charles Eastlake occurred six months before he was made President of the Royal Academy.¹⁵ While small in themselves, such inaccuracies and elisions in accounts of the work of female pioneers in art history erode our understanding of women's abilities and achievements in mid-Victorian Britain. These distortions are uncomfortably reminiscent of Victorian prejudices that a woman could not be professionally successful in her own right, and without her husband's intervention; in Eastlake's case, a few contemporary critics implied that her husband had written her work.¹⁶

Communities of female artists, and particularly sibling artists, are especially interesting sources of future study. The artistic careers of the Faulkner sisters, whose identities are still conflated in modern scholarship, and their work as engravers could offer fascinating insights into women's professional work in male firms at a time when the art establishment sought to segregate them. Likewise, the work of

¹² Email, Kathryn Jones to Beatrice Bazell, 'Re: Biographical Error in Online Catalogue', 31 May 2013.

¹³ Thornycroft was also a scion of a dynasty of architects, sculptors, and painters, of whom several were women, and she also 'instruct[ed] the royal princesses in modelling'. Nancy Proctor, 'Thornycroft, Mary (1809-1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27368>> [accessed 3 January 2016].

¹⁴ Mark Stocker, 'Thornycroft, Thomas (1815-1885)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/article/27369>> [accessed 3 January 2016].

¹⁵ Six years later, Sir Charles Eastlake would become the first Director of the National Gallery. David Robertson, 'Eastlake, Sir Charles Lock (1793-1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27368>> [accessed 3 January 2016].

¹⁶ In their recent study of the Eastlakes Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon note that Elizabeth was certainly 'influenced' by her husband's views, but that there is no evidence for accusations that he was the true source of scholarship and journalism which appeared under her name, p. 129.

generations of women belonging to the Colin family has been somewhat overlooked, despite the fact that they were talented watercolourists who illustrated the most popular fashion publications of the day.¹⁷

Bodies in books are made up of language, and bodies in art are made up of pigment or materials.¹⁸ The segments of a represented body cannot be constituent parts of a unified body, because they only exist within the text to illuminate the text itself. Yet neither can they be made into a clutter of objects, dissociated from human consumers, because of the consuming body's instinct for recognition. A later reader or interpreter of components of the body is not always privy to the matrix of meanings in which they played their part at the time; we encounter them differently. We are dealing here with a referential body; a body which changes with time, without moving, a body that is constituted and re-constituted with reading and interpretation.

The clothed Victorian woman's body was, above all, designed to be legible, and this thesis has exploited the opportunity to "carve up" the represented female body into component parts, but not in search of vulnerability. One might be able to encompass the neck, waist, and wrist with the span of a hand, but they are points at which the woman's body can be grasped or caressed. Its regulation and classification can be reframed as adaptability, as an openness to being read, and these spaces can re-constituted into a referential body that is a source of interpretative potential, and, ultimately, power. The dialogue between control and communication that I read as expressed by these spaces is what intrigues me; to use the rhetoric of Barthes, 'Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes?*'¹⁹

In this thesis I chose to approach elements of the body in representation – some of which are Rossetian tropes par excellence – not as ends in themselves, as in a fetishistically exploitative mode, but as interstices, spaces where different ideas, and different forces acting on those ideas, might be enacted. The volume of material generated by mid-Victorian cultural producers on the subject of such regions, or such displaced fascination with gaps and in-between spaces on the body, is astonishing. And in peering into the nooks and crannies of the represented body, my aim has been to scrutinise how the mechanics of subjugation could be reworked by its potential victims into something more subversive: into something sexy.

¹⁷ Sharon Marcus notes that identifying them as a dynasty of artists is all the more difficult because their work is known under their married names. 'Reflections on Victorian Fashion Plates', p. 11.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Emma Curry for this observation.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 9.

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