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The Burdens of Body's Beauty: Pre-Raphaelite Representations of the Body in William Morris's the Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems (1858) and Algernon Swinburne's Poems

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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THE BURDENS OF BODY'S BEAUTY:
PRE-RAPHAELITE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY IN
WILLIAM MORRIS'S *THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE, AND OTHER POEMS* (1858)
AND ALGERNON SWINBURNE'S *POEMS AND BALLADS, FIRST SERIES* (1866)

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by

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Graduate Program
in
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies representations of the body in the first two published volumes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858) and Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866).

These two volumes (along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1870 *Poems*) were disparaged as the work of the "Fleshly School of Poetry" by the critic Robert Buchanan in 1871, and this dissertation seeks to understand through close reading how the depiction of the body in the poetry of Morris and Swinburne so perturbed their contemporaries and why it continues to elude modern readers. Particularly, this study considers how representations of the body and its demands in these two works constitute a Pre-Raphaelite challenge to social, scientific, and aesthetic theories that involve sexuality, gender, and identity in relation to the body. The first chapter of the dissertation explains the development of an aesthetic of the flesh for the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which directly affects the way in which Morris and Swinburne would approach the problem of the body and perception in their poetry. This chapter also explains how Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas on phenomenology inform the analysis of the Pre-Raphaelite body's direct and active engagement with the world in poems of Morris and Swinburne. The second chapter focuses on Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* and its depiction of the experiences of the body as they strike the perceiving subject, particularly in moments when the body comes under a sexual strain that complicates its standing with the soul. The third chapter focuses on Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, First Series* as a wide-ranging experiment in eroticism, and considers the volume's treatment of desire and sexuality in the performance of identity through gender and memory. The final chapter

summarizes and synthesizes the readings of Morris's and Swinburne's "fleshly" poems to place them within a continuum of changing attitudes towards the body and identity in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*, Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*, Pre-Raphaelite, Fleshly School, body, desire, sexuality, gender, identity, grotesque, taboo, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, Freud, memory, mourning, melancholia, poetry, painting.

To Julie,

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

Of all my moral being.

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who in turn respected him. The respect that he offered and received was neither simple nor gratuitous: it was a respect built on both the high expectations he had of students and the high expectations that his students were encouraged to have of him with every carefully crafted and polished lecture that he gave.

This dissertation has held a number of people hostage over the years, and I would like to take a moment to honour their sacrifice. The final submission of this thesis frees my beautiful and brilliant wife, Julie, whose many weekends and days apart have been used to pay the ransom. Without her love, perseverance, fortitude, and editing, I could not have finished this work. Although it is but small recompense for all that she has done and sacrificed, I dedicate this work to her as a token of my love and gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BODY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget that there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke ...
(Robert Browning, "Fra Lippo Lippi" 179-84)

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the body as it appears (and sometimes disappears) in what might be considered the first two volumes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858) by William Morris and *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866) by Algernon Charles Swinburne. Particularly, this is a study of how the representations of the body in these two works shoulder the burden of contemporaneous social and scientific discourses centred on the material body; furthermore, it studies the challenge to Victorian notions of the body and the aesthetics of the flesh made by the Pre-Raphaelite bodies in the poetry of Morris and Swinburne. After an introduction to the context and shaping influences of the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the discussion will examine the body in the so-called "Fleshly School of Poetry" through a consideration of the aesthetic and philosophic shift in Victorian art and culture represented in the volumes of Morris and Swinburne.¹

Contrary to the notion promulgated by Lytton Strachey and others that the Victorians hardly knew their own minds when it came to discussing their bodies, late-twentieth-century scholarship has revealed a culture that generated a highly articulate discourse on the flesh.² Reacting to eighteenth-century ideas that imagined the human

body as another material object of the world, writers and artists of the nineteenth century began to suspect and monitor physical sensations for signs sometimes animalistic and sometimes divine. Mortified and idealized, hidden and celebrated, transcended and objectified, the body was a hotly contested focal point in medical, social, spiritual, legal, and philosophical debates. Arguably, the more the Victorians tried to deny the flesh, by binding it in waistcoats, jackets, petticoats, crinolines, and corsets, the more aware they were of its demands. The ensuing battle for the body—for its pains and its pleasures, for its subjectivity and its objectivity—was waged among intellectuals and artists, claiming the body theirs to transcend, idealize, or expose in its material reality. One of the principal sites that they chose for the contest was John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

1.2 The Material Body

In an age that took up significant issues as “problems” or “questions,” the search for solutions to social, scientific, and religious controversies in the nineteenth century frequently encountered the body and its modes of being in the world as an obstacle. While concealed in layers of crinolines and taboo, the body was at the same time subject to an increasingly penetrating gaze: phrenology, physiognomy, and other pseudo-sciences joined forces with Social Darwinism to read the surfaces of material body as the moral and intellectual indicators of a person's character; cell biology put the flesh under the microscope to prove that the body's fundamental principle of organization worked mechanically according to the natural and material laws of chemistry and physics rather than the general and unifying “life-force” theories of vitalism;³ medicine and the law

joined forces to extend power over women's bodies in the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, and 1869), the passage of which made it lawful to arrest prostitutes in garrison and port towns, conduct medical examination for venereal disease, and, if found unsound, forcibly confine them in a locked hospital for the duration of their convalescence. In general, Victorian culture demonstrates a divided impulse towards the body in a desire to hide it and to see and know it intimately and in-depth. The ambivalent relation of fear and desire that characterizes the age's dealings with the body culminated in Wilhem Conrad Röntgen's discovery of X-rays in 1895 and a London firm's subsequent development of "X-ray proof" undergarments (qtd. in Weber 445). The body was both public and private, visible and invisible. Although the status of the body was uncertain, the divergent philosophical impulses of transcendentalism and materialism that drew it in opposite directions sometimes created a tension out of which issued a highly articulate debate that reconsidered the human body as an amalgam—organic or mechanical—of mind, body, and soul.

Emerging from an empirical philosophy in the tradition of Locke, materialism espouses the idea that nothing exists independently of matter. One of the consequences of this theory was to confirm the tangible and material reality of the flesh and to sow doubt as to the abstract and immaterial nature of existence for the Cartesian mind and the Christian soul. In the eighteenth century, few took materialism as a serious threat to Christian theology, which, of course, posits the reality of a spiritual life distinct from, and higher than, the physical reality of the body. Laurence Sterne, for example, in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), makes delicious sport with Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and other such endeavours to determine the material,

social, and spiritual nature of human relations, reaching heights of ironic hilarity in the study of physiognomy and (though he does not name it as such) the phenomenology of the soul provided by Tristram's father, Walter. With magnanimous equanimity, he allows that

... all souls were by nature equal,—and that the great difference between that most acute and the most obtuse understanding,—was from no original sharpness or bluntness of one thinking *substance* above or below another,—but arose merely from the lucky or unlucky organization of the body, in that part where the soul principally took up her residence.

(162; emphasis added)

Capacities of understanding, to Shandy's mind, depend on a *material* confluence of body and soul that produces a "thinking *substance*"; and since all souls are endowed with an equal potential in their original scope, the inequalities of mental capacity among individuals, evident at a very young age, must be a material circumstance related to differences of anatomy and physiognomy. Searching for the seat of the soul, Tristram's father is "satisfied that it could not be where Des Cartes had fixed it, upon the top of the *pineal* gland of the brain"; nor is he satisfied with Joseph Francis Borri's identification of the soul as a "very thin, subtle, and very fragrant juice ... in the cellulæ of the occipital parts of the cerebellum," feeling sure that the soul would not sit, "like a tadpole, all day long, both summer and winter, in a puddle, — or in a liquid of any kind, how thick or thin soever" (163). Observing the general pattern of hampered intelligence in firstborn children relative to their siblings, Walter Shandy deduces that the physical location of the soul must be in the *medulla oblongata*, near where the spinal column joins the cranium,

for in pioneering the difficult way of the birth canal, the eldest child martyrs his intelligence for the benefit of his brighter siblings. Arriving at, or rather, in the usual pattern of narrative progress in *Tristram Shandy*, meandering towards the resolution of this anatomical mystery, Walter Shandy proposes an obstetrical theory in defence of breach births, arguing that the pressure moving *up* a head exiting the birth canal would lift a soul sitting at the base of the skull into the loftier region of the brain where sits the faculty of understanding awaiting illumination. With “a blaze of light,” Shandy learns of the Caesarian-section birthing method, which spares the child coming into the world the “violent compression and crush” upon the head, but finds his wife unaccountably less susceptible to his enthusiasm (perhaps she is aware of post-surgical rates of infection in the eighteenth century).

Although ludic in its narrative digressions, *Tristram Shandy* measures the pulse of the eighteenth century and registers the initial impact of an empirical philosophy tending towards the materialism that would define so many of the coming century’s debates in science and sociology, medicine and religion, and politics and art, and that would engage some of its most thoughtful minds, including Charles Darwin, Thomas Henry Huxley, Henry Mayhew, George Combe, Alfred Tennyson, and Thomas Carlyle. In Sterne’s novel, the material nature of the body makes only comic claims (think of Tristram’s crushed nose and accidental circumcision) on the spirit that transcends it, but by the end of the eighteenth century, empirical philosophy had taken such hold on the popular imagination as to make the body, the organ through which all living creatures know the world, the central metaphor of understanding and the window through which “we see into the life of things.” For the authors and artists of the nineteenth century, a constellation of

factors conspire to rob the body of much of its comedic potential and to thrust its materiality—and therefore its metaphoric possibility—into the middle of numerous cultural debates being argued by politicians, ecclesiastics, scientists, and artists.

1.3 The Mind and Body of Art in the Early Nineteenth Century:

John Locke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and William Wordsworth

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain's foremost institution of fine arts, the Royal Academy, favoured the neo-classic sensibility of its first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1768-1792), whom the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood irreverently nicknamed "Sir Slosua" (qtd. in Marsh 32).⁴ By way of instruction, the Academy offered the collected *Discourses* of Reynolds, in the third of which he declares the aim of the artist to see just the "idea of beautiful forms ... [and] to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things, from their general figures.... This idea of the perfect state of nature, which the artist calls the Ideal Beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted" (44-5). The future of art would try to reclaim the individualized body and its experiences that Reynolds' neo-classic aesthetic sacrifices to general form and proportion.

Reynolds' notion of "Ideal Beauty" in nature fits within the continuum uniting ancient philosophy and contemporary science, uniting Platonic philosophy and an aesthetic of ideal forms⁵ with the taxonomic categorization of the natural world by Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778). As a member of the *Literary Club*, which included, among others, Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke, Reynolds contributed a prose piece in 1759 to the *Idler* that defends the artistic filtering out of minute detail, since "every species of

the animal as well as the vegetable creation may be said to have a fixed or determinate form, towards which Nature is continually inclining” (*Works* 2: 132). Reynolds’ Platonic vision of nature takes Linnaeus’s system of classification as though it were a divine blueprint showing nature’s fixed composition as it came into being, *ex nihilo*, on the day of Creation; whatever variation appears within a given species is a mere accident of manifestation belying the essence of the Idea of the thing itself, a changefulness betokening the corruption of the Fall. The eighteenth-century view that at the back of Nature lies a model archetype is tied to the Renaissance notion of perfectibility and would live on in the late-nineteenth century in theories of eugenics (and its twin-born opposite, degeneracy) that construe heredity as anchored in some ideal form towards which a species pushes or from which it recedes.⁶ The final word on the neo-classic aesthetic of the ideal form often goes to Reynolds’ friend, Samuel Johnson. In *Rasselas*, Johnson makes his declaration for the universal over the particular through his sage, Imlac, who asserts that the business of the artist is to examine

not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness. (527-28)

To the post-Darwinian mind, the neo-classic condemnation of variety in nature seems odd, given that the strength and vigour of a species is in part determined by genetic

variability; however, to such men as belonged to the *Literary Club*, God's presence resided in general ideas rather than in particular details, in the fixed *type* and form of human nature rather than in the unique traits of the individual.

Romanticism's strong sense of individualism and subjectivity constituted in part a rejection of the neo-classic aesthetic of the flesh and commenced a reinvestigation of the lived body that Pre-Raphaelites would continue to pursue at the mid-century. When William Wordsworth, one of the Pre-Raphaelite "Immortals," writes in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that he wishes to "keep [his] Reader in the company of flesh and blood" (131), he means more than simply wishing to write poetry grounded in everyday experience and the "language of men." The human body has a central *material* function in Wordsworth's poetic theory; that is, Wordsworth proposes poetry that re-imagines the experience of the body in the phenomenal world and of the reflective mind that finds meaning in sensations it receives from the body.

In his seminal and still very useful work, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams distinguishes the artistic impulse of Romanticism from an earlier eighteenth-century aesthetic in terms of a consciousness of the divide between subject and object. Prior to the stranglehold that empirical philosophy had taken on the culture, the objective of British art was mimetic—to hold up a mirror to nature. To describe the Romantic poets as first and foremost poets of nature does not necessarily render them distinct from the long line of topographical poets of the eighteenth and late-seventeenth centuries. The distinguishing feature in Romantic poetry, Abrams argues, is a matter of artistic perspective and the subjectivity of perception. In what since has been constructed as Romantic poetry's inaugural manifesto, Wordsworth's "Preface" rejects mimesis as the

primary purpose of art (if it ever was) in favour of a combination of mimesis and subjectivity—or rather, Wordsworth and the Romantic poets whom Abrams considers reject the reflection of the mirror for the illumination of the lamp. The Romantic poet himself becomes the subject of art, a lamp-like figure whose personal experiences illuminate the mysteries of nature and who in turn is illumined by them. Therefore, representations of nature are equally representations of the minds and bodies of artists. In its explorations of subjectivity, Romantic art seemed fixed to the now quite well-worn phrase of Wordsworth’s “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*: “All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (127). The tendency to take this phrase and make it the movement’s governing axiom assumes that the “expression”—quite literally *pressing out*—of emotion is the principal aim of Romantic poetic theory. Such a premise privileges a movement from inward to outward that overlooks the *a priori* movement of outward to inward in Romantic poetic theory in which the body sets the aesthetic conditions of art as a filter for all that the mind perceives.

The forces at work in the Romantic vision of art are both centrifugal (*a pressing out*) and centripetal (*a pressing in*). Take, for example, this passage from the First Book of *The Excursion*, in which Wordsworth offers the mini-*künstlerroman* of one in whom “the foundations of his mind were laid [by Nature]”:

In such communion, not from terror free,
 While yet a child, ...
 Had he perceived the presence and the power
 Of greatness; and deep feelings had *impressed*
 So vividly great objects that they lay

Upon his mind like *substances*, whose presence

Perplexed the bodily sense. (132-39; emphasis added)

The development of the Wordsworthian poet begins in a Lockean fashion in that the poet of nature possesses an exceptionally supple mind that passively receives the impressions of sensory data. Wordsworth's youthful poet wanders out into Nature where his mind registers the sensations made by the feelings and proto-thought of the body and becomes "Perplexed [in] the bodily sense." The mind of Wordsworth's poet shows the influence of Locke's alternate analogies of the soft-waxed tablet that receives the impression of the seal and the white paper that receives the imprint of the printing press forme.⁷ Working from Locke's analogies for the natural growth of the mind, Wordsworth suggests that the mind of a poet is more susceptible to impressions than its common counterpart in the average person, claiming that when softened by the heat of "deep feelings," it not only receives the impressions of the "great objects" of the external world pressing in on the senses, but also feels them lie upon the mind like "substances." At first glance, there seems no great disparity in meaning between terms such as "object" and "substance"; however, in the same way that he uses "impress" in its etymological sense, Wordsworth employs the term "substance" in its etymological sense meaning "that which stands beneath." In dealing with "substances," Wordsworth deals in transcendental ideas of essence inasmuch as essence is what stands beneath the outward appearance and surface of things. However, what tends to be overlooked in the transcendental process is the sheer *physicality* of the Romantic experience of Nature, how the body engages the objects of the world.

In Wordsworth's theory of poetry, the body is the central site of agency that conducts the transcendental transaction on the mind's behalf by acting as the contact that bridges the objective reality of the external world and the subjective reality of the Platonic Idea. For example, the prototypical Romantic narrator of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" declares his love of "Nature" as a love for "all the mighty world / Of eye and ear" (106-07; emphasis added). Locke's presence registers obliquely in the turn of the enjambed lines. Initially, "all the mighty world" appears as an object worthy of love, but the fullness of the line's meaning is suspended by the enjambment with the subsequent one that modifies the "world" in relation to the body and its organs of perception. Wordsworth's speaker responds to a Nature that is neither purely material (a world of things independent of the speaker) nor purely a Cartesian intellectual construct (a world in which the falling tree makes a sound only if someone is there to hear it). His love of Nature, neither purely objective nor completely subjective, follows something of a phenomenological spirit that combines both objectivity and subjectivity in which the body is key to perception—he is a lover of "all the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they *half-create*, / And what *perceive*" (106-08; emphasis added). Out of this love, comes a gospel of phenomenology, in which the speaker says he recognizes "the language of the sense"—sensory data— as "the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (109-12). The new strain of subjectivity in Romantic poetry therefore becomes an exploration of modes of perception and the body's being in the world, as it is for the poet in "Tintern Abbey," who reflects his development in relation to physical "sensations sweet / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" (28-29).

The poet's body in the Romantic poetry of expression becomes the meeting place of the artistic experience. Although the intellectual action of what the poet "half-create[s]" is often emphasized in studies of the subjective in Romantic poetic theory, Wordsworth equally makes a special claim for the body of the poet as the medium of "what [he] perceive[s]," because it is a body that possesses "more than usual organic sensibility" ("Preface" 127). Like any other body, the poet's is immersed in the phenomenal, but it is unusually aware of sensory experience. Flowing in like the "intellectual breeze" over Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "subject lute" ("The Eolian Harp" 47, 43), the phenomena of the world wash over the attuned bodily senses of Wordsworth's poet to be met halfway by an active mind: "For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" ("Preface" 127). So, before any poetic expression can "spontaneously overflow," the mind must organize the "influxes of feelings" that are literally the *flowings-in* of sensations. The emotions at the core of the poetic expression that will spontaneously overflow are first "recollected in tranquility" and distilled through a process of "contemplation" ("Preface" 149). In this process of contemplation lies another direct allusion to Locke's *Essay*.

Experience, Locke contends, writes upon the white paper of the mind through sensation and reflection. Sensation in Locke's model consists of data that the five senses impress upon the mind; "reflection" works in the etymological sense of the mind's act of "bending back" upon its own operations. The direct influence of Locke's *Essay* on the theory of poetic epistemology that Wordsworth outlines in the "Preface" becomes

apparent if “reflection” is substituted for “contemplation” and is more obvious still in *The Excursion*, the *künstlerroman* of a poet who

had received

A precious gift; for, as he grew in years,
 With these *impressions* would he still compare
 All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms;
 And, being still unsatisfied with aught
 Of dimmer character, he thence attained
 An *active power* to fasten images
 Upon his brain. (1.139-46; emphasis added)

While manifestly attempting an expressive mode of poetry that spontaneously overflows with powerful feelings, Wordsworth simultaneously writes poetry of “impression” that contemplates the sensations received by a thinking body. Ironically (and as will now be seen), many of the same Victorians who revered the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth were quick to condemn Locke’s philosophy because it envisages the mind as a soft mould capable of receiving the “impressions” that *press in* from the world outside through the physical senses of the body (1.2.1).

The irony in the general approval of Wordsworth’s poetry and strong opposition to Locke’s *Essay* is not without explanation. Wordsworth does not duplicate exactly the philosophical ideas of Locke, and the differences between the two men seemed to have been enough for the Victorians to distinguish their relative worth. For example, Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” preserves the Platonic notion of remembrance in the newly-born child, whose “Soul ... cometh from afar: / Not in entire

forgetfulness, / ... / But trailing clouds of glory ... / From God" (59-65). And while "our birth is ... a forgetting" and the knowledge of wonder that was present in youth "fade[s] into the light of common day" (58, 76), Wordsworth's "Ode" envisages the mind as retaining some of the original forms that could be filled once again with ideas through the careful observation and creative sensibility of one who maintains "the primal sympathy" with nature and listens for its echo in his own soul (181). Locke, however, rejects plainly "that there are in the Understanding certain *innate Principles* ... stamped upon the Mind" (1.2.1), and he further rejects that there are "constant Impressions which the Souls of Men receive in their first Beings, and which they bring into the World with them" (1.2.2). Herein lies the source of the Victorian reservations about Locke. The nineteenth century would project its major debates onto Locke and his *Essay*, especially as concerned the five following issues: the passivity of the mind, sensation, sensuality, materialism, and knowledge as a guide to conduct. Many chose to vilify the man whose theories had been popularly interpreted as suggesting that the mind is passive in perception, that it is unable to do anything about the sensations that the body gathers and imprints upon it.⁸

Lockean epistemology was reduced to the notion that all ideas come from the sensations of the flesh—or, at least, so feared some Victorians who either did not understand or chose to ignore entirely his discussion of complex ideas and ideas born of reflection.⁹ While disciples of Jeremy Bentham and utilitarianism would make this sensuality the basis of a social model in which pain and pleasure function as the guides of conduct for institutions of law and government and for relations in a marketplace economy, conservative Victorians shuddered to think that the mind was a thing formed by mere sensation. Specifically, they recoiled from the materialist implication of a

philosophy that rejects the notion of innate ideas, from the idea that the mind is a passive mirror reflecting the phenomena of the world, and from the assumptions that the nature of existence is material, that everything is matter, and that the mind and soul take direction from the body rather than the other way round.

In the epistemological model that the *Essay* sets up as the guide of human conduct, Locke envisions two categories for the relation of the mind to the ideas impressed upon it through the body: “Knowledge,” which he equates with “Certainty [and] Evidence” gained through observation and inductive logic; and “*Faith, or Opinion*” (4.2.14), which he equates with probability. Knowledge, as Locke defines it, casts a limited amount of light on reality and, thus, is an insufficient guide for conduct and requires the supplementary illumination of “Faith.” However, neither Locke’s discussion of reason and will nor his proofs for the existence of God in the *Essay* appear to have interested the Victorians; nor would they remember his Christian apology, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). In many ways, Locke in the nineteenth century had been set up only to be knocked down. He had, as Hans Aarsleff argues, become “a whipping post” for critics who “really meant but did not wish to attack too directly... the utilitarian philosophy” (135). Conservative Victorians had resurrected him as an atheist straw man, a philosopher of the flesh, responsible for opening the way to the worst aspects of Benthamite Utilitarianism and the modern tendency towards materialism and sensuality that were undermining the religion and morality of the age.

Somewhere between Locke and Wordsworth, the Victorians crossed the Cartesian divide that had existed between mind and body. Marking this troubled crossing are the writings of Thomas Carlyle, to whom contemporaries looked for steadfast wisdom in a

time of rapid change. In his social commentaries for a troubled age, he makes the body's uncertain status apparent by using it as a symbolic centre. His treatment of the body provides a context in which to read the Fleshly School controversy generated by Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

1.4 Carlyle and the Body Politic

“Locke, himself a clear, humble-minded, patient, reverent, nay, religious man,” says Carlyle, “had paved the way for banishing religion from the world” (“Goethe” 215). Carlyle was one of the most influential voices of Victorian social criticism, a patriarchal figure to whom the British looked for guidance in an age of philosophical, religious, and social crises. The importance of Carlyle to the Pre-Raphaelites is evident in the *P.R.B. Journal*, in which William Michael Rossetti records a fairly regular contact between members of the P.R.B. and Carlyle, who sat for a medallion by Thomas Woolner and also facilitated the sculptor's introduction to Ruskin in 1851 (89, 96).¹⁰ Carlyle's intellectual influence on the group is also apparent in the journal entries that recall evenings spent in “Carlyle-Emersonian and such like considerations” (76). The Pre-Raphaelites would have known Carlyle as one of the early Victorians who blamed the moral corruption, spiritual exhaustion, and introspective weariness of British society on Locke, making the English philosopher and his materialist ideas into a kind of scapegoat to be driven onto the Continent and left there to die among French Sensualists and their impoverished philosophy that starts and ends with the body.

From Carlyle's point of view, Locke begins “banishing religion from the world” in Book One of the *Essay*, when he denies the pre-existence of innate ideas and principles

stamped in the human mind and soul that await discovery or activation by the faculty of reason. For Locke, even the idea of God (one he accepts) is not innate but arrived at through reflection (1.4.8-9). The sticking point for Carlyle and other conservatively-minded thinkers was Locke's premise that ideas originate in sensual experience: "The Senses at first let in particular *Ideas*, and furnish the yet empty Cabinet: And the Mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the Memory, and Names got to them" (1.2.15). Locke's critics argued for the innateness of ideas, the *a priori* moulds of the mind, that originate with God-given truths, for the Wordsworthian "Soul [that] ... cometh ... Not in entire forgetfulness / ... / From God" ("Ode" 59-65). For them, the body is merely the agent of expression for these inner truths, not an instrument that gives shape to and defines the mind in their absence.

Having inverted the traditional pre-eminence of mind over body, Locke's epistemology stood the Cartesian axiom "I think; therefore, I am" on its head and seemed to insist that its converse was true: "I feel [with my body]; therefore, I think." In an age when religious belief seemed precarious, Locke's ideas appeared to undermine the Christian tradition of treating the body as but the veil of the soul. Although he himself subtly challenges these traditional dualisms (something that will be addressed below), Carlyle believes Locke's error lies in the preponderance his philosophy gives to the senses of the body and its experiences of phenomena, which he blames for paving the way for a generation of sensualists and utilitarian "Motive-grinders."¹¹

Carlyle recognized the body as the site of an ideological battle. The tendency of radical political economists to discuss the "Machine of Society" metaphorically, he says, dangerously undermines the human spirit. "Considered merely as a metaphor," Carlyle

says, “all this is well enough; but here, as in so many other cases, the ‘foam hardens itself into a shell,’ and the shadow we have wantonly evoked stands terrible before us and will not depart at our bidding” (“Signs” 66). The growing perception of society as something mechanical—a machine—rather than an organic body was, for him, a sign that the material had superseded the spiritual, the phenomenal the Ideal, and the senses the intellect. Modern philosophy, thanks to Locke, was taking its direction neither from the reflections of the mind nor from the working of the soul, but from the demands of the body; and though utilitarianism’s motivation might be to seek the greatest (material) good for the greatest number (of material bodies), to Carlyle, such a way of thinking was simply an atheism that by any other name would smell as foul.

Taking stock of the ideological foundations of modern British society in his article “Signs of the Times” in 1829, Carlyle determines that the age in which he lives is “not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age” (59). He believes that the spiritual malaise of his age originated in the corrupting influence of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which had rendered “Metaphysics itself, from Locke's time downward, ... not a spiritual philosophy, but a material one” (64). In the four generations since Locke became the father of British empiricism,¹² the world, says Carlyle, has “grown [so] mechanical in head and in heart” that not only are “the external and physical ... managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also” (60). He applies the mechanical epithet not only to the obvious cultural changes wrought by the industrial revolution, but also to the philosophical revolution of Utilitarianism, whose leaders (the bemoaned “Motive-grinders” of *Sartor Resartus* [124]) think it possible to govern a society by regulating a balance of physical

pleasures and pains: “it is no longer the moral, religious, spiritual condition of the people that is our concern, but their physical, practical, economical condition, as regulated by public laws” (“Signs” 67). As a way of tending to people’s needs, Utilitarianism, to Carlyle’s way of thinking, fails to ameliorate the condition of England because it addresses only the material concerns of a spiritually needy nation: “Thus is the Body-politic more than ever worshipped and tendered; but the Soul-politic less than ever” (“Signs” 67).

As mechanical as England had become to him in 1829 when he published “Signs of the Times,” Carlyle feared that worse was to come from the infectious scientific discourse of the Continent. It was bad enough that in the previous century England’s own David Hartley (1705-57) had continued to perpetuate Lockean ideas with a study of the relation between psychology and physiology in *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations* (1749), arguing that sets of ideas (“vibratiuncles”) arise through the association of sensations (“vibrations”). Such theories “were material and mechanical enough,” but still worse thinking was brewing on the Continent, particularly in France and Germany, where, says Carlyle, “one of their philosophers has lately discovered, that ‘as the liver secretes bile, so does the brain secrete thought’” (65). The satirical target in this section of “Signs of the Times” is Dr. Pierre Jean George Cabanis, who “fairly lays open our moral structure with his dissecting-knives and real metal probes” in *Rapports du Physique et du Morale de l’Homme* (“Signs” 65). With vitriolic scorn, Carlyle denounces the materialist assumption behind Cabanis’ latest scientific analogy and heaps derision on this type of reductive thinking in which the wonders of “Poetry and Religion ... are ‘a product of the smaller intestines!’” (65).¹³

In 1833, four years after “Signs of the Times,” Carlyle’s only full-scale work of fiction, *Sartor Resartus*, appeared in serialized form in *Fraser’s Magazine*. Enigmatic and unconventional, *Sartor Resartus* follows in the tradition of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as a self-conscious and reflexive work of “Nonsense.”¹⁴ In the sartorial tradition of Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*, it is also a social critique in the guise of an editor’s introduction to a history of clothing by Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. For all its eccentricity and opacity, however, *Sartor Resartus* is the seminal expression of a prophet sitting Janus-like, with one face turned to the immediate Romantic past and the other to the imminent Victorian future. *Sartor Resartus* challenges Victorian culture to look about itself with fresh eyes, starting with how it sees and represents the human form.

In the chapter entitled “Natural Supernaturalism,” Teufelsdröckh declares, “Generation after generation takes to itself the Form of a Body” (201), and in this tight phrase lies the trope that functions as the core concern of his work: the body. Ostensibly, the German professor’s life’s work constitutes a history of clothing, but the real concern is less for a finery of cloth than for the condition of the flesh and spirit that lie beneath it. In the “Organic Filaments” chapter of Book Three, Carlyle takes the tenor of John Donne’s idea of the interconnectedness of humanity, the web of human relations in which “no man is an island, entire of itself” (557), and refashions the vehicle with the more immediate metaphor of the body. Contemplating the “wondrous ... bonds that unite us one and all” (185), Carlyle places a hypothetical figure, who, in a fit of egoism, would somehow disconnect himself from the world, in a bell jar:

Post Letters ... impinge against thy Glass walls, but must drop unread:
neither from within comes there question or response into any Post-bag;

thy Thoughts fall into no friendly ear or heart, thy Manufacture into no purchasing hand; thou art no longer a *circulating venous-arterial Heart* that, taking and giving, circulatest through all Space and all Time.

(186; emphasis added)

The model of Carlyle's modern economics is not the mechanical "patent engine" that provided Utilitarianism with its metaphor for society: a mechanism that could be figuratively dismantled into cogs and wheels so as to better evaluate the performance and driving force of each component of production. Carlyle however was no a Luddite. As Herbert L. Sussman has demonstrated in the first chapter of *Victorians and the Machine*, Carlyle embraced the machine as tool of work, and one must remember the adjuration in *Sartor Resartus* to "Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God's name" (149). Carlyle's concern is a matter of perception and how it is conditioned by metaphor.

The tendency towards a mechanical perception of the individuals constituting society, Carlyle laments, represents the modern failure "to comprehend the infinitudes of man's soul under formulas of Profit and Loss; and rule over this too, as over a patent engine, by checks, and valves, and balances" ("Signs" 71). Carlyle's economic model takes for its metaphor the organic human body in which the currency of a capitalist marketplace circulates in society like blood in a human body. John Ruskin, the champion of Pre-Raphaelitism, would renew the body metaphor in an attack on Utilitarianism in *Unto This Last* (1860). In the section called "Veins of Wealth," in which he uses "wealth" etymologically in the sense of "well-being," Ruskin argues for an economic model in which "the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in the

natural body. ... The analogy will hold down even to the minute particulars. For as diseased local determination of the blood involves depression of the general health of the system, all morbid local action of riches will be found ultimately to involve a weakening of resources of the body politic” (183-84). After rejecting the machine as a social metaphor because it is a soulless simulacrum of the bodies it replaces in the workplace, both Carlyle and Ruskin come back to the body but with an altered and even strained perceptual engagement of it that would mark so many other Victorian attempts to engage the flesh.

Carlyle’s criticism of his mechanical age is not a rejection of modernity and progress; in fact, his treatment of metaphor reveals a thoroughly modern and scientific mode of thinking. While rejecting the machine as a vehicle for a social metaphor, Carlyle still subjects society to a scientific and microscopic gaze in his metaphor: although society does not have the valves of a “patent engine,” it does bear an organic complexity of valves in a human vascular system. Perhaps the clearest example of this way of thinking comes in the chapter “Church Clothes.” Through his German mouthpiece, Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle claims that without “Church-Clothes, ... without such Vestures and sacred Tissues Society has not existed, and will not exist,” and proceeds to dissect the otherwise naked social body:

For if Government is, so to speak, the outward SKIN of the Body Politic, holding the whole together and protecting it; and all your Craft-Guilds, and Associations for Industry, of hand or of head, are the Fleshly Clothes, the muscular and osseous Tissues (lying *under* such SKIN), whereby Society stands and works;—then is Religion the inmost

Pericardial and Nervous Tissue, which ministers Life and warm Circulation to the whole. Without which Pericardial Tissue the Bones and Muscles (of Industry) were inert, or animated only by a Galvanic vitality; the SKIN would become a shrivelled pelt, or fast-rotting rawhide; and Society itself a dead carcass,—deserving to be buried. Men were no longer Social, but Gregarious; which latter state also could not continue, but must gradually issue in universal selfish discord, hatred, savage isolation, and dispersion;—whereby, as we might continue to say, the very dust and dead body of Society would have evaporated and become abolished. Such, and so all-important, all-sustaining, are the Church-Clothes to civilized or even to rational men. (163)

Entwined and interconnected, Carlyle's metaphorical bodies knit together the personal and the collective such that the organization of the social body mirrors the organic function of the individual body, and that the individual body mirrors the organic function of the body politic. In *Sartor Resartus*, the body repeats the pattern of the world—the model of the physical body reflects and refracts an image of the social body, replete with drives, modes of circulation, and cycles of vitality and morbidity.

For its mystical organization and beauty, the body has long attracted use as a metaphor for dynamic systems, but Carlyle sees the body of his metaphor with minute vision and particularity. It is there, in the close details, that Carlyle makes his bid for the body's transcendent ideal, the soul. His mode of perception is an ambivalent response both to neo-classic aesthetics and to Victorian science in that it rejects the neo-classic aesthetic of general representation but embraces its goal of pursuing the transcendent

through a near-scientific scrutiny of minute material detail. In many ways, Carlyle's body acts as a bridge between generations and their shifting attitudes—between neo-classical and Romantic, between the general and the particular, between Romantic and Victorian, between transcendentalism and materialism, between art and science. It is the very sort of body that connects the Pre-Raphaelites within a larger tradition as their dealings with the body would frequently attempt to encompass both poles of such antitheses.

Although their influences overlap in time and theme, Wordsworth and Carlyle demonstrate a generational gap in their thinking that marks one of the differences between Romantic and Victorian. While Romantic authors such as Wordsworth and Coleridge considered scientific reasoning the antithesis of the artistic imagination that imbues the everyday incidents of nature with spiritual significance,¹⁵ Carlyle enlists scientific observation in the service of a transcendental mysticism. Unlike Wordsworth, who defines the artistic enterprise according to the “philosophical ... contradistinction” that divides the poetic imagination and “Matter of Fact, or Science” (“Preface” 135n), Carlyle considers what the poetic imagination might gain from science's acuity of vision. Emerging from his rigorous study of the Bible at home and Locke at university in Edinburgh, and the pervasive nineteenth-century influence of William Paley's *Natural Theology*,¹⁶ Carlyle's approach to the body combines a scientific observation of minute detail and a religious instinct for the transcendent.

In the “Symbols” chapter of *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle's German professor explains the symbolic reality of existence in terms of “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” symbols, and places the human body at the centre of the symbolic order of reality.¹⁷ “The Universe,”

says Teufelsdröckh, “is but one vast Symbol of God” (166). The extrinsic symbols of the world are those signs, chiefly political in the examples given, to which the human imagination affixes arbitrary meaning, such as “military Banners ... and ... other sectarian Costumes and Customs” (168). This type is inferior to the “Symbol [that] has intrinsic meaning,” through which we witness the “God-like manifest itself to the Sense” (169). Central to Carlyle’s thinking on the intrinsic symbol is the notion of embodiment: “Man ... though based, to all seeming, on the small Visible, does nevertheless extend down into the infinite deeps of the Invisible, of which Invisible, indeed, his Life is properly the bodying forth” (165). It is, for Carlyle, “the small Visible” particulars of the phenomenal world that maintain the spiritual reality of the “Invisible.” What is important to note is how he collapses the disparate elements of the traditional Christian dualism of body and soul by having the embodied Man “*extend*” rather than *represent* the Invisible. Vehicle and tenor in the Carlylean symbol share a common reality. As Teufelsdröckh reasons, Man’s physical reality, “his Life,” embodies the Invisible, for

in the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some *embodiment* and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to bend itself to the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were attainable, there.... Not a Hut he [man] builds but is the visible *embodiment* of a Thought; but bears visible record of invisible things; but is, in the transcendental sense, symbolical as well as real.

(166-67; emphasis added)

The notion of embodiment that shapes Carlyle’s idea of the symbolic is rooted in the belief that God created humanity in his own image. If human form is a manifestation

of the God-like, then, Carlyle's *Teufelsdröckh* argues, "Jesus of Nazareth, and his Life, and his Biography" are the "divinest Symbol" (*Sartor* 169). In Jesus Christ, whose Incarnation (the embodiment of God) is an event both symbolical and real, the eternal glimmers in the historical, the infinite radiates in the finite, and the spiritual and the physical entwine in a coherent but transcendent reality. Carlyle does not privilege a spiritual reality over a physical one: the spirit needs the body to chafe against to make it real. The one constitutes the other. The divinest symbol for Carlyle is the historical Jesus because he is the physical reality of the infinite Word having taken the finite form of Flesh.

Carlyle's theory of the symbol is an aesthetic one because the symbol is the special province of the artist, who is "a Hierarch ... and Pontiff of the World ..., the Poet and inspired Maker, who, Prometheus-like, can shape new Symbols, and bring new Fire from Heaven to fix it there" (*Sartor* 170). In the spring or summer of 1853,¹⁸ Carlyle paid a visit to William Holman Hunt, one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and expressed his aesthetic vision as follows:

I'd thankfully give one third of all the little store of money saved for my wife and old age, for a veritable contemporary representation of Jesus Christ, showing Him as He walked about. ... And when I look, I say, "Thank you, Mr. Da Vinci," "Thank you, Mr. Michael Angelo," "Thank you, Mr. Raffaele, that may be your idea of Jesus Christ, but I've another of my own which I very much prefer." I see the Man toiling along in the hot sun, at times in the cold wind, going long stages, tired, hungry often and footsore, drinking at the spring, eating by the way, His rough and

patched clothes bedraggled and covered with dust, imparting blessings to others which no human power ... was strong enough to give to Him.

(1.356-58)

Although couched in a criticism of Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1853-54), Carlyle's image of Christ is connected to a larger philosophical shift in Victorian culture: the wish for an historically accurate picture of Christ stems less from the impulse of a historian to document facts than from the impulse of an intellectual believer to reconcile a fading conservative faith in the transcendent with a radical new way of looking at the world as a wholly material phenomenon. In his historiographic fusion of the factual and figural in works such as *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle considers the facts of history as manifestations in reality of a divine, teleological design, which is why, of all historical figures, he would like most to have an honest, *realistic* representation of Christ, who is, to Carlyle, the historical embodiment of the eternal, a symbolic integration of the factual and the spiritual, a coalescence of the phenomenal and the transcendent.

Hunt and Carlyle in fact stood closer in their aesthetic beliefs than the discord over *The Light of the World* suggests. Both Carlyle and the Pre-Raphaelites are bound together in their visions of Christ. The Pre-Raphaelite relation with Christ is variable and complicated within the group, but his importance to the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is signalled in his appearance at the head of the "List of Immortals" that Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the two leaders of the PRB, compiled just prior to the inaugural meeting of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in September 1848 (W.M. Rossetti, *P.R.B. Journal* 107).¹⁹ The list, says Hunt, was "to be pasted up in our study for the affixing of all decent fellows' signatures" and functioned as a creed of artistic allegiance, according to

its declaration: “We, the undersigned, declare that the following list of Immortals constitute the whole of our Creed, and that there exists no other Immortality than what is centred in their names and in the names of their contemporaries” (1.111). Hunt attributes the wording of the declaration to D.G. Rossetti, who wrote to his brother William on 30 August 1848 that it had “caused considerable horror among [his] acquaintances” (*Letters* 35). The “considerable horror,” of course, was caused by its apparent atheism, but Hunt insists that their “non-belief in the immortality of the soul ... was not long retained” (1.112). The substance of the declaration, according to Hunt, did not stem from an absence of faith (anyone familiar with Rossetti’s work or his own ought to recognize their Christian belief in an afterlife [1.112]), but from the determination to “respect no authority that stood in the way of fresh research into art” (1.111). Given decades after the formation and dissolution of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Hunt’s account, which in general tidies up premises and resolves controversies (or shifts blame for them), deserves some scrutiny on this point.

The discussion surrounding imagistic representations of Christ and a simple one-word revision in Hunt’s *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* signals the collision between the transcendental and the material in Pre-Raphaelite attempts to represent the flesh. In the 1905 version of Hunt’s memoir, “fresh research into art” meant the “denying all [of] that could not be *tangibly* proved” (1.158; emphasis added). The word “tangibly” was removed in Hunt’s revised 1913 edition.²⁰ Hunt’s decision to remove the word—one that bespeaks the phenomenal and tends towards a materialist aesthetic—reflects a doubt that would become a sticking point in the development of a Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic. While obviously relevant to the realism of the Pre-Raphaelite

aesthetic, the tangible might yet *prove* the intangible, just as Carlyle's natural world is evidence of a supernatural one. Carlyle would later voice his approval of "these Pre-Raffaelites ... [who] copy the thing as it is or invent it as they believe it must have been," which, he says is "the only way of doing anything fit to be seen" (qtd. in W.M.R. Rossetti, *P.R.B. Journal* 96). Hunt however appears less assured than Carlyle of the potentially symbolic power of realism. The pattern of his recollections of the declaration, subsequent disagreements, and disavowals, as well as the revisions to his memoir, express something of the age's uncertain and anxious relationship with the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, and the body and the soul. This uncertainty would dog the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the early days of its formation, during which various members demonstrated a shared interest with Carlyle in representing the Christ who was very much "man" rather than Ideal—the God incarnate, inhabiting the human body in all its frailty, senses, and appetites. In their paintings of biblical figures, whom time and tradition had rendered more symbolic than real, the early Pre-Raphaelites would precipitate an aesthetic controversy through representations of bodies that appear both sacramental and fleshly.

1.5 The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and "Early Christian" Art:

Catholic and Diseased Bodies

In the auspicious year of European revolutions, 1848, three rebellious students of the Royal Academy, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82), and John Everett Millais (1829-96) agreed that English art had grown stagnant and conspired against the institution that embodied it. Hunt recalls in his memoir, *Pre-*

Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the excitement with which Millais and he denounced the stale conventions of the Royal Academy. Together, Hunt and Millais would forge a friendship over ideas that Hunt found in his borrowed copy of the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846).²¹ The author of the work, calling himself only “an Oxford Graduate” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1.90), was none other than John Ruskin, a rising star in modern art criticism and a future defender of “Pre-Raphaelitism.” Hunt recalls enthusiastically endorsing *Modern Painters* because it “reverses the judgement of Sir Joshua” and held out to the young students the thrilling proposition of challenging England’s principal institution of fine arts (1.91). To many young artists of the early nineteenth century, the Academy and the doctrinal teachings set out in the *Discourses* of the institution’s first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, had become something of a tyrannical authority, a British aesthetic Bastille waiting to be stormed.

The rebellion Hunt and his friends would mount was Romantic in its appeal to freedom and genius. Looking back more than a half-century, Hunt explains that the term “Pre-Raphaelite” refers not to a given style of quattrocento art, but to rules established in the wake of Raphael:

And although certain rare geniuses since then have dared burst the fetters forged in Raphael’s decline, I now repeat, what we said in the days of our youth, that the traditions that went on through the Bolognese Academy (which we were introduced at the foundation of all later schools and enforced by Le Brun, Du Fresnoy, Raphael Mengs, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, to our own) time were lethal in their influence, tending to stifle the breath of design. The name Pre-Raphaelite excludes the influence of

such corrupters of perfection, even though Raphael, by reason of some of his works, be in the list. (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1.95)

Carlyle recognized a similar threat to the artistic imagination that an aesthetic authority posed. In a section of “Signs of the Times” lamenting the tyranny of the machine, he bemoans the institutionalizing of imaginative art that had come under the rule of mass-production so adverse to individual genius: “In defect of Raphaels, and Angelos, and Mozarts, we have Royal Academies of Painting, Sculpture, Music; whereby the languishing spirits of Art may be strengthened, as by the more generous diet of a Public Kitchen” (62). Elizabeth Prettejohn’s description of the Royal Academy of the 1840s suggests a public kitchen, of sorts, in that it had become “a market-place primarily for private, middle-class purchasers—to the extent that it was more modern, more commercialised and more exclusively capitalist than the art markets of France” (36). The three young rebels eschewed the conventions of Academy painting—pyramidal or S-shaped patterns of composition, the framing effects of dark backgrounds on the canvass, and the openly blatant brushwork—as expedient methods of rapid production adopted to supply the “Public Kitchen” that catered to an increasingly voracious Victorian art market.²² The strength of their shared disdain for “slosh” (Pre-Raphaelite slang for things weak and conventional) in the Academy’s prescribed style, which the *Discourses* of Sir “Sloshua” had enshrined,²³ and their shared belief that art needed rejuvenating supplied Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti with the germ of the idea behind the P.R.B. and consequently the spark of a controversy that would frequently centre on the aesthetics of the flesh.

Late in 1848, the three young artists, and probably at the instigation of Rossetti, decided to gather together like-minded fellows in a society of artists that would number

seven. The four new members whom they inducted were William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), Dante Gabriel's brother, whose greatest contribution would come in the form of criticism and record-keeping; Thomas Woolner (1825-92), a competent sculptor, who, though commissioned to design the Wordsworth monument at Grasmere (installed in 1851),²⁴ could not live by his art and was forced to quit the fellowship for the goldfields of Australia in 1852; Frederick George Stephens (1828-1907), who was also a student of the Royal Academy, but whose main contribution to the group would be as a model and an art critic and theoretician; and James Collinson (1825-81), the "other" Pre-Raphaelite²⁵ and, until he joined the Brotherhood, a painter of small-scale domestic scenes (he would resign from the P.R.B. in 1850 because he felt that his Catholicism somehow precluded membership in the group). There were two other important players in the early Pre-Raphaelite drama who were not asked to join as formal members: Ford Madox Brown (1821-93), a skilled artist who had been giving lessons to Dante Gabriel and would later give his daughter in marriage to William Michael Rossetti; and Christina Rossetti (1830-94), whose formal membership to the Brotherhood was precluded by her sex (and further perhaps by her increasingly reserved and pious character), but who would make significant contributions to Pre-Raphaelitism as a poet and a model (at least, for early sacred subjects). However, even with a complete cast of players and a stage set for secret meetings that would bind the seven rebels in a solemn league of dissent, the P.R.B. lacked a script articulating a unified philosophy of art upon which to ground the convictions of the group. Indeed, it is arguable that the group would never have a script or unified philosophy.

The principles of Pre-Raphaelitism did not emerge Athena-like, a fully formed brainchild of the group meetings, but were developed gradually and retrospectively—gradually in a very public debate on the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic in the popular press, and retrospectively in twentieth (and now twenty-first) century scholarship. In the “Notes” to the 1911 edition of his brother’s *Works*, William Michael Rossetti points to the “Old and New Art” sonnets (Sonnets 74-76 in “The House of Life” sequence as printed in the 1881 *Ballads and Sonnets*) as foundational texts, saying that the “trio of sonnets forms a manifesto—perhaps the best manifesto that it ever received in writing— of the Præraphaelite movement, begun in the autumn of 1848. Nos. 2 and 3, were written in 1848; No.1, in 1849” (656). The first sonnet, “St. Luke the Painter,” is the most significant in this respect, advocating a rejection of the introverted and sterile virtuosity of art (the “soulless self-reflections of man’s skill” [11] inspired by the humanistic revolution of the Renaissance) in favour of a return to symbolic origins—a natural symbolism in which Art “looked through ... to God and was God’s priest” (8). The more thoroughgoing attempt to impose a cohesiveness on the movement, however, would come from Hunt.

Hunt published a series of articles under the title “The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art,” between April and June 1886, in the *Contemporary Review*. These articles are the basis of his larger 1905 account, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, which Hunt would edit and revise for a second edition in 1913. The retrospective account, including extended quoted (at least purportedly) conversations that highlight Hunt’s worldly wisdom, is marred by the obviously over-determined effort to set straight the historical record—that he (Hunt) was Pre-Raphaelitism’s lead player, rather than its fifth business, a supporting role to the lead

character, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He clearly resents Dante Gabriel Rossetti's assumed leadership of the P.R.B. and the consequent alignment of Pre-Raphaelitism with quattrocento art and with the Nazarenes (which will be discussed below). Prettejohn, for example, calls Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelitism* "a legendary prehistory, concocted from oral tradition, distant memories, and wishful thinking" (23). Although frequently bitter and wounded in tone, and clearly biased, Hunt's memoir nonetheless provides posterity with one of the only, and certainly the most comprehensive, insider accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism. Even the other Brothers, as Prettejohn indicates, tended to rely on Hunt's "memory" for their own retrospective accounts of the P.R.B., providing but mild correctives to Hunt's bias (23). So, like myth, Hunt's account must be considered at least grounded in truth.

Hunt's telling of the story of the initial meeting of the artists in Millais's studio in 1848 has become a crucial element in the foundational myth of Pre-Raphaelitism. In this gathering, according to Hunt, the minds of the brothers met in their mutual admiration of two books: one containing the illustrations of Joseph von Führich, the other the engravings after the early Italian frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa by Carlo Lasinio. The illustrations of the former descend, Hunt indicates, from another rebellious school at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nazarenes, under whom Brown had studied. Thus, Hunt reaffirms the connection and long-standing comparison between the Pre-Raphaelites and the *Lukasbrüder*, or the Brotherhood of St. Luke, which formed in Vienna in 1809 at the instigation of J. F. Overbeck and Franz Pforr. The *Lukasbrüder*, joined by Philipp Veit, Peter von Cornelius, Schnorr von Carolsfeld, and Schadow-Godenhaus, moved to San Isidoro, a disused sixteenth-century Franciscan monastery in

Rome, where they established an all-male artist community and lived a strict monastic life. The term “Nazarene,” applied to the group and its followers later (around 1817), was originally used mockingly in reference to the religious subject matter and aim of their art, and in particular to the perceived affectation in the artists’ habit of wearing long robes and shoulder-length hair parted down the middle, “like the Nazarenes,” or even Christ, himself. Hunt accommodates the long-noted influence of the Nazarenes on Pre-Raphaelitism in his recollection of the group’s admiration for Führich’s illustrations at the formation of the P. R.B., but he insists on a difference of aesthetic principles that radically distinguishes the two brotherhoods in their methods and aims.

In the discussions concerning their “ideal intention,” Hunt recalls the unsettling habit Rossetti had of referring to their artistic principles as “Early Christian,” a “habit that he had contracted [in conversation] with Ford Madox Brown,” who had studied in Rome with the German Nazarenes (who also called themselves “Early Christians”). Hunt objected to the term “Early Christian” as it applied to their purpose, insisting that they retain the “designation ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ as more radically exact and as expressing what [they] had already agreed should be [their] principle” (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1.98).

Annoyingly, Hunt lets go the opportunity at this point in his memoir to give full and direct utterance to what exactly was the agreed-upon principle, except to say that it was to “do battle against the frivolous art of the day” (1. 98). However, Hunt’s recollection of the group’s enthusiasm for the Campo Santo volume, which almost every account of the P.R.B. formation includes, obliquely comes round to something like a Pre-Raphaelite principle:

The innocent spirit which had directed the invention of the painter [of the Campo Santo frescoes] was traced point after point with emulation by each of us who were the workers, with the determination that a kindred simplicity should regulate our own ambition, and we insisted that the naïve traits of frank expression and unaffected grace were what had made Italian art so essentially vigorous and progressive, until the show followers of Michael Angelo had grafted their Dead Sea fruit on to the vital tree just when it was bearing its choicest autumnal ripeness for the reawakened world. (1.91)

The Campo Santo anecdote seems a contradiction in the context of Hunt's narrative, which takes pains to dissociate Pre-Raphaelitism from the influence of late medieval and early Renaissance art under which Nazarenes worked. However, Hunt's anecdote emphasizes the desire to emulate neither the technique nor the method of early artists, but the "vigorous and progressive" spirit with which they worked and the frankness of their expression. The name "Pre-Raphaelite," according to Hunt, was never meant as a dismissal of Raphael—indeed, he ranks among the P.R.B. "Immortals"—and Hunt acknowledges Raphael's "power to prove that the human figure was of nobler proportion, that it had grander capabilities of action than seen by the casual eye, and that for large work, expression must mainly depend upon movement of the body" (1.94). Rather, the chosen designation of "Pre-Raphaelite," says Hunt, indicates the desire to lift the shade of formalized aesthetic rules that followed in the wake of Raphael, through which the Royal Academy asked its students to see; to be "Pre-Raphaelite" meant to look again with more than a "casual eye" at the world and the forms that inhabit it.

Hunt, of course, won the argument in favour of using the name “Pre-Raphaelite,” but with the concession that the group also accept Rossetti’s addition of “Brotherhood,” despite “the objection that it savoured of clericalism” (1. 98). So, the seven formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and agreed to adopt “P.R.B.” as the insignia of their fellowship with solemn vows of secrecy that were to be soon broken. In 1849, the only year in which the initials “P.R.B.” appear on painted works submitted for exhibition, there were three Pre-Raphaelite paintings on public display: Hunt’s *Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of his Young Brother Slain in a Skirmish between the Colonna and the Orsini Factions* (1848-49, retouched in 1886) and Millais’s *Isabella* (1848-49) were both selected for the Royal Academy exhibit, and Rossetti, perhaps to circumvent the Academy jury, sent his *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) to the Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner.²⁶ The three works drew considerable attention in contemporary reviews.²⁷ Although the attention was not an unconditional endorsement, it was nonetheless balanced: for example, the critic for the *Morning Chronicle* considered Rossetti’s *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* “remarkable ... for the feeling with which it adopts the ‘early religious’ style, and reprehensible for the blind idolatry of the imitation” (“Exhibition” 5), and the critic for *Observer Supplement* thought Rossetti’s painting “admirable for its expression and for its composition rather than for its design” (“Free Exhibition” 1). However, to be noticed at all among the 1900 works that the Royal Academy and the Free Exhibition displayed in the summer of 1849 was a remarkable feat in itself for relatively or, as in Rossetti’s case, entirely unknown artists.²⁸

The three paintings by Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti found buyers,²⁹ but it was the strong critical response to their work that appears to have helped bind the Brotherhood

with a sense of unified purpose, indicated in part by their decision to keep a record of their collective efforts and activities in what survives as the *P.R.B. Journal* (began 15 May 1849, just as the first exhibition reviews were beginning to appear) and by the increasingly evident exercise of mutual influence in one another's work. Galvanized by the previous year's success, the Brothers began preparations for the 1850 exhibition season, encouraging one another in works of daring innovations in technique and media, such as painting on primed white canvasses (both dry and wet) and using fine watercolour brushes to apply oil paints, which made their work startlingly luminous and minutely detailed.³⁰ They also established early in 1850 an organ for their aesthetic ideas and creative writing in the form of a literary journal entitled *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*.³¹ Through the collaborative efforts and mutual influence that participation in the group afforded its members, the P.R.B. advanced on the 1850 exhibition season with not only a growing sense of the faults of modern art, but also a clearer set of Pre-Raphaelite ideas concerning what art should attempt to do and the manner in which it should do it. However, the success of their campaign was compromised from within—a “traitor” (as Hunt labels the loose-lipped Rossetti) broke their “pledge of secrecy” and divulged the meaning of the initials of their secret order to the public (1.140).

The discovery of a “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” did much to prejudice critics against the group ahead of the 1850 exhibition season. One day in May, while working with both Rossetti and Millais to get their paintings ready for exhibition, Hunt recalls the moment he discovered that a “gossiping column” of the *Illustrated London News* had published the meaning of the P.R.B. insignia. Rossetti had played Judas and betrayed the

secret of the P.R.B. to the sculptor Alexander Munro, who then revealed it to the writer Angus Reach (Hunt 1.140). While the narrative of betrayal as Hunt tells it (although none of the P.R.B.s denies the details) suffers under the pomposity of an “I-told-you-so” strain of hindsight that doubles Rossetti’s culpability as both the advocate of a “Brotherhood” and its traitor, Hunt’s recollection fairly pinpoints much of the antipathy that would stem from the discovery of their order. The public response to the revelation was swift and sharp. “Nearly to the last man, declared themselves hostile to us,” Hunt recalls of the critics who came out against the “‘wicked’ designs” of the Pre-Raphaelites (1.139). The “P.R.B.” insignia that had appeared on the previous year’s works was a parody of the practice among Royal Academy members, who would attach to their signatures “A.R.A.” for Associate of the Royal Academy or “R.A.” for Royal Academician. The art critics who had been willing to recognize certain merits in the works of Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti the previous year, now felt their pride wounded by the mocking impudence of a group of young upstarts, whose very formation suggested that they neither sought nor valued critical approval in what amounted to an aesthetic challenge to the authority of critics as guardians of English taste. To compound the crime against Englishness, the critical attack would embroil the P.R.B. in the larger religio-political crisis of the 1840s. For here was a group of rebellious young men forming a “brotherhood” within the walls of the Royal Academy with obvious similarities to the Nazarenes (whose explicit purpose for art was to promulgate Catholic faith) on the continent and being led (at least ostensibly) by a probationary student of Italian descent with a predilection for painting the Virgin. As a result, the P.R.B. was easily suspected of being the latest in a wave of Anglo-Catholicism.

Although the “P.R.B.” insignia that had escaped notice in 1849 disappeared entirely from the 1850 canvasses (no doubt suppressed following the public furor raised by the *Illustrated London News* column), some of the reviewers received them collectively as works by members of a school with Anglo-Catholic tendencies. Hostile critics used the combination of the group’s chosen name, the sacred subjects of their painting, and certain obvious similarities with the expressly Catholic school of the Nazarenes to levy popular anti-Papist sentiments against the P.R.B.. In the past decade, England had witnessed the formation of several medieval societies and movements that, perhaps inadvertently, had opened avenues to the return of Catholicism, from the Ecclesiological Society, with its penchant for Gothic church restorations, to the Tractarian or Oxford Movement, with its collapse in the conversion of John Henry Newman in 1845. Plans to re-institute an English Catholic hierarchy with formal ties to Rome had been in the works since the 1840s but had stalled in 1848, when Pope Pius IX had to flee Rome during the popular uprisings. Following Pius IX’s return to Rome in 1850, England and Wales finally re-established their first Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy since the Reformation under Cardinal Wiseman. At the same time, during the 1840s, the popular press had become increasingly anti-Catholic. The Papal Aggression became a constant theme among British periodicals, condemning the Catholic Church for its proselytizing campaigns, its Mariolatry, and its history of corruption within monastic institutions, all of which the *Times* recorded under the heading “Catholic Perversions.”³² The Catholic emphasis on celibacy was frequently critiqued as an unhealthy and degenerate form of discipline in which lurked an emasculating threat to a culture that prized manliness. For example, Charles Kingsley, in his article “Why Should We Fear

the Romish Priests?” attributes the “foppery and profligacy” of the priest and monk, and their “vulpine and Machiavellian” social attitudes, to Catholicism’s distorted and unhealthy attitudes towards sexuality (468). As Hunt had feared, the name “Brotherhood” for the all-male order of artists “savoured of clericalism” (1.98) to critics who would soon discover all that was distorted, unhealthy, and unmanly in Pre-Raphaelite art.³³

In 1850, Rossetti exhibited *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-50) at the National Institution, while Hunt’s *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* (1849-50), and Millais’s *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50) and *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1849-50) hung on the walls of the Royal Academy.³⁴ These works demonstrate a clearer and more cohesive commitment to Pre-Raphaelite principles in their treatment of colour, perspective, and detail, yet the aspects of their work that had met with critical approval in the 1849 were now, in 1850, signs of degeneracy in art. For example, Rossetti’s *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* had been praised in 1849 by the anonymous critic of the *Art Journal*, the leading voice in art criticism at the time, in terms that are inherently Pre-Raphaelite: *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* is a “successful ... pure imitation of early Florentine art.... The artist has worked in austere cultivation of all the virtues of the ancient fathers. ... With all the severities of the Giotteschi, we find necessarily the advances made by Pierro della Francesca and Paolo Uccello” (“Hyde” 147). However, in 1850, the same *Art Journal* would lead the attack against the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, joined enthusiastically by Charles Dickens, for subverting the “progress of Art,” for turning its back on “modern civilisation

[which] is but the aggregate of a series of progressions infinitely small in their individual steps” (Wornum 269).

Both Dickens, in his own *Household Words*, and Ralph Wornum, for the *Art Journal*, came out loudly against the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in opposition not so much to the aesthetic challenge posed by the group but to the ideological dangers that implicitly lurked in such a fraternity. Both men refer to the Pre-Raphaelites as “Young England,” with (probable) reference to the conservative group of political influence who advocated social reform based on return to an idealized form of Christian feudalism. Although not dealing with the politics of Benjamin Disraeli’s Young England, Dickens and Wornum use the tag to associate the P.R.B. with the specific brand of revivalism that lay behind Tractarianism and its religio-political dangers.³⁵

In his article “Old Lamps for New Ones,” Dickens ironically invites his reader, as suggested by the inversion of Aladdin’s cry, to give up their ideas of progress and learn to walk backwards with the Pre-Raphaelites. With his gift for humour and hyperbole, Dickens expands the irony of his title with the hypothetical founding of other “Pre-” societies: a “Pre-Perspective Brotherhood” (which would naturally incorporate the Pre-Raphaelites) to subvert progress in painting; a “Pre-Agincourt Brotherhood” to undo the effect that Mozart, Beethoven, and Handel have had on music; a “Pre-Gower and Pre-Chaucer Brotherhood” to rid the English of Shakespeare’s influence and render the English language unintelligible in its old spellings; and a “Pre-Harvey” Brotherhood to shroud the human body in mystery again by returning medical science to a period pre-dating the discovery of the circulatory system, when, presumably, the body was understood principally in terms of its humours; and lastly, “Pre-Newtonian” and “Pre-

Galileo” Brotherhoods to release humanity from laws of gravitation and the obligation to revolve about the sun. Such backward-looking brotherhoods, says Dickens, with a derisive sneer at the Tractarians, are already forming “in the neighbourhood of Oxford” (12-14). Despite the rhetoric of the absurd, Dickens’s allusions raise the two long-feared and related spectres of France and Catholicism. The “Pre-Raphael Brotherhood,” says Dickens, have come as a corrective in the age of progress as the new “dread Tribunal which is to set this matter right, ... this new Holy Brotherhood, this terrible Police that is to disperse all Post-Raphael offenders” (265). The doubly ominous allusion suggests not only the Tribunals that administered the justice of the Terror in Revolutionary France, but also the Jesuit-led Inquisition, whose “terrible Police” acted as agents of the Vatican in the counter-Reformation against Protestantism.

For Wornum of the *Art Journal*, the primary fault of the Pre-Raphaelite was their backwardness, which he tied to a current religious controversy. In his article ironically entitled “Modern Moves in Art,” he declares that “Progress be our motto” as he attacks the apparent “retrograde character” of Pre-Raphaelitism: in art, he says, “all honour to enthusiasm, be its tendency progressive” (Wornum 269). In 1850, Wornum’s readers would recognize in the use of “enthusiasm” its etymological and religious sense (*en-theos*, “in God”). He objects not to “enthusiastic” or devotional art but to a style of representation that suggests a regressive religious impulse towards Catholicism. Wornum complains that the “retrograde” Pre-Raphaelite artist mistakenly searches a “superstitious priest-ridden age ... [for] special objects of veneration” and laments the popular infatuation with all things Gothic,³⁶ whose “moral associations are much more closely allied with ecclesiastical [i.e. Catholic] abuses than Christian principles” (269-

70). Ironically, Collinson had left the P.R.B. because he could not reconcile membership with his Catholicism, yet many saw the group and their work as the latest evidence of the Papal Aggression. Even Ruskin, in his famous defence of the group in the 13 May 1851 edition of *The Times*, would regret their “*nom de guerre*” and their “Romanist and Tractarian tendencies” (8).³⁷ The violence with which Dickens and Wornum assail the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood appears to stem from a crisis of English identity, which had long been defined, at least in part, in opposition to Catholicism. The moment Pre-Raphaelite art was identified with Anglo-Catholicism it entered a highly charged political debate concerning the character of the nation. The scope of the criticism levelled at the individual works of Pre-Raphaelite artists, however, widens beyond immediate denominational debates and takes in the fears and anxieties of a much more rudimentary nature involving the uncertain status of the body in art.

The detractors of Pre-Raphaelite art found their evidence of religious failings in what they saw as the group’s distortions of the human form. Even before the P.R.B. made its debut in 1849 or came under attack in 1850, Kingsley had recognized Catholic distortion of the flesh in the work of early Italian painter-monks, who, he says, “were prone to despise all by which man is brought into contact with this earth—the beauties of sex, of strength, of activity, of grandeur of form; all that is, in which Greek art excels: their ideal of beauty was altogether effeminate ... ascetic and emasculate in tone” (“Sacred” 294). The term “Pre-Raphaelite” was interpreted as an affront to progress and the Academy’s authority, but the monastic associations of a “Brotherhood,” as a fraternal order formed under some sort of the celibate impulse to cut itself off from the flesh, struck critics as sign of sexual immaturity and a wilful blindness to the “beauties of sex.”

Once aware of the existence of the P.R.B, hostile critics scrutinized the group's paintings for signs of distorted sexual perception that they could connect to the mutual influence of the all-male society and a supposed Catholic impulse to deny the flesh.³⁸ Drawn with great fidelity to their live models, the human subjects of Pre-Raphaelite painting appeared to Wornum's prejudiced eye as morbid examples of medieval Catholic asceticism and the "intolerable idea that sanctification consists in the mortification of the body" (270).

Wornum's rejection of the Pre-Raphaelite body indirectly rejects Catholicism in general, but the specific and direct criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite figure, in which Wornum was joined by others, is of a body that seems to reject life. Ironically, "mortification of the flesh" is precisely what the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers objected to in the Nazarene-style illustrations over which the group bonded in their formative gathering. Hunt recalls how they discovered "quite remarkable merit" in the German illustrations but thought they were too obviously bound by rules and systems that resulted in "art sublimely intellectual in intention, but devoid of personal instinct and often *bloodless and dead*" (*Pre-Raphaelitism* 1.130; emphasis added). Although many such remarks are bound to strike the reader today as highly self-conscious and even revisionist in their disingenuous attempt to repudiate the influence of the Nazarenes, Hunt's words here indicate a special mode of looking in Pre-Raphaelite art and, in particular, an attitude towards the representations of the body and its vitality, out of which would emerge the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic of the flesh. For all its dead and dying figures, Pre-Raphaelite art, from its use of live models to its subject matter, takes pains to represent an intensely living body. Yet, in the Pre-Raphaelite commitment to paint what was before the eyes, others read acts of distortion, and in the attempt to capture the spark of intense vitality in

the minute details of particular and individual bodies, many critics saw the flesh and spirit denied in deformity, suffering, and disease.

The charges of popery against the Pre-Raphaelites stemmed from the nature of the group's formation, which pushed critics to discover evidence of it in the actual works, particularly in paintings of sacred subjects. In those depictions, critics pointed to a very Catholic denial of the flesh in a perceived diseased aspect of the Pre-Raphaelite body. Of the Pre-Raphaelite works exhibited in 1850, Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50) encountered the most vitriolic criticism, but more remarkable than the hostility of the reviews was the discursive shift in critical language.³⁹ *Punch*, then only in its ninth year, satirized not only the Pre-Raphaelite works but also the change in critical discourse by assigning coverage of the 1850 Exhibition of the Royal Academy to "Our Surgical Adviser," who offered the following review and medical analysis of Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents*:

The interest of this work is distinctly pathological; the figures in it being simply illustrations of the scrofulous or strumous diathesis. Their emaciated bodies, their shrunken legs, and their tumid ankles, are well-known characteristics of this morbid state of system. The incipient oedema of the lower extremities is faithfully portrayed; though, in conjunction with this symptom, which indicates far-gone disease, the abdominal tension might have been more strongly marked.

("Pathological" 198)

The title of this "awful cut," as Millais calls the article in a letter to F.G. Stephens (qtd. in Bullen 38), is "Pathological Exhibition at the Royal Academy." While primarily

targeting Pre-Raphaelite style, the *Punch* piece inflates to comic proportions the manner in which reviewers of the exhibition had set aside the usual stock of vocabulary for art criticism in favour of a pseudo-medical discourse: rather than attack the Pre-Raphaelite school on grounds of technical demerit for the private pleasure of the few in an elite group of art connoisseurs, they made a public spectacle of dissecting the Pre-Raphaelite representation of the human body.

While critics complained that the concept of a Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was retrograde, they railed against depictions of the human form that were too medically modern. Wornum claimed that Pre-Raphaelite realism had become a mere “administer to science, ... the mere handmaid to morbid anatomy” (271). Frederick Hardman, writing for *Blackwood’s*, described the “emaciation and deformity” of “rickety children” of Millais’s *Holy Family* (82). Frank Stone, the reviewer for the *Athenaeum*, noted in Millais’s painting numerous “accidents of putridity” (590).⁴⁰ In his general condemnation of “Modern Moves in Art,” Wornum chastised the Pre-Raphaelites for seeking out leprous models for historic and sacred characters (271), and in his review of the 1850 Royal Academy Exhibition, he regrets Millais’s choice in model for Joseph, a figure “realised from a subject after having served a course in the dissecting room” (175)—a particularly nasty cut for Millais, whose father had modelled for Joseph’s head (naturally, a real carpenter sat for the muscular detail of a tradesman’s forearm). Not to be outdone by Wornum’s hyperbole, Dickens characterized the figures of Millais’s *Holy Family* as “mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting,” noting in particular the “hideous, wry-necked” Christ child [and] the “dislocated throat” of the Virgin Mary. For the carpenters, Dickens says, Millais chose models that “might be undressed in any hospital

where dirty drunkards in a high state of varicose veins are received” (266). “Their very toes,” says Dickens, “have walked out of Saint Giles” (265), which was one of London’s poorest parishes in the east end of the city. Millais actually did paint the setting of the work from a real carpenter’s shop that he visited on Oxford Street, but it is in the carpenters’ “very toes”—the toes that clearly belong to *someone*—that Dickens catches at what appears to have been the bugbear of many contemporary critics: the alarming individuality in Millais’s figures.

The Pre-Raphaelite body—irregular and individualized—evidently struck the nineteenth-century critic as fragile, its emphatic physicality too ready to betray the “thousand natural shocks / That the flesh is heir to.” In approaching the body with an aesthetic that privileges the individual over the general characteristic, says Wornum, the Pre-Raphaelites mistake the aim of art:

A general treatment [of age or expression] will be universally understood, while a special treatment to those unacquainted with the special *symptoms* adopted, is sure to be misunderstood; and by those who might understand them there is danger of the work being mistaken for a ‘*pathological*’ illustration. (“Modern” 271; emphasis added)

Similarly, in his denunciation of the specificity of the carpenters’ toes, Dickens objects to the failure of the painter to idealize members of the Holy Family—to show that they were touched by divinity and not just poor folks with grubby feet and tattered clothes. For many critics, Millais’s emphasis on the accidents of individuality obscured the God-like image of human creation, which could only be seen in the general form—an aesthetic fault compounded in representations of sacred characters. As a corrective to the wayward

“Young England School,” Wornum reminds the Pre-Raphaelites (sounding very much like Browning’s Prior would speaking to Fra Lippo five years later) that the office of art, especially religious art, is to idealize: “The physical ideal alone can harmonise with the spiritual ideal: in *Art*, whatever it may be in Nature in its present condition, *the most beautiful soul must have the most beautiful body*” (“Modern Moves” 270).

In Wornum’s and other hostile reviews that accuse the P.R.B. of “revel[ling] in diseased aspects” (Hardman 82), the discourses of art criticism, medical science, and materialist culture intersect in responses to the Pre-Raphaelite body in such a way as to reveal the controversial nature of depicting actual bodies. With an allusion to the 1831 cholera epidemic, more befitting an epidemiologist than an art critic, Wornum hopes that the current “pathological” taste in art, having crossed the channel, will “pass onward to the ungenial north, and there for ever lose itself in the arctic regions” (“Modern” 270).⁴¹ Wornum’s hopes were dashed on both accounts: cholera would return to Britain again in epidemic proportions in 1854 and Pre-Raphaelitism, although mutating form and style periodically, would prove to be a highly infectious, long-lived, and very mobile influence, continuously crossing and re-crossing both the channel and the Atlantic for years to come.

1.6 Pre-Raphaelite Modes of Perception and the Human Form

While critics such as Frederick Hardman for *Blackwood’s* saw Pre-Raphaelitism as “renouncing ... the progress” that art had made since the time of Raphael (82), Hunt insists that the Brotherhood was thoroughly progressive: “We drew from this fountain source [‘the mastership of the great of earlier ages’], and strove to add strength to its

further meanderings by the inflow of new streams from nature and scientific knowledge. Our work was condemned for its daring innovation” (1.137). The Pre-Raphaelites, insists Hunt, never intended to imitate the style of medieval or primitive art; “Pre-Raphaelite” meant liberating art and perception from the rules of style and composition that followed in the wake of the High Renaissance master artists. Hunt and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites wished to paint what the eye sees rather than what theory teaches. The innovations of Pre-Raphaelitism and the challenges it posed to Victorian aesthetics would have less to do with subject matter and any potential Anglo-Catholicism lurking in it than the acts of looking and the specialized gaze recorded on the canvass.

The emphasis that the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers placed on the realism of their art has been read, by their contemporaries and by later critics, as an expedient response to avoid the more tangled issues of primitivism and Anglo-Catholicism. For the account he gives of Pre-Raphaelitism and its challenge to vision, Hunt has been accused of revising the history of a movement inchoate in its inception and development in an attempt to shore up its uncertain theoretical foundations and to create a commitment to principles where formerly there were none.⁴² Prettejohn reads the rise of Pre-Raphaelite realism as an evasive manoeuvre and an opportunistic “triumph in public relations” that W.M. Rossetti orchestrated with Ruskin,⁴³ who through their influence in the popular press managed both to shift the debate away from “primitivism” (and all of its attendant religious controversies) to the less politically loaded concern of aesthetic “realism” and to rehabilitate the Pre-Raphaelites in public opinion as naturalists (59). However, there was less retrospective tinkering and abortive back-peddalling than either Hunt’s critics or Prettejohn’s argument permits. The members of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were

already working on a special visual engagement with the natural world before the controversy erupted in the wake of the 1850 exhibitions.

F.G. Stephens, the other important critic in P.R.B. (the first being William Michael Rossetti), presents a Pre-Raphaelite mode of looking in “The Tendency and Purpose of Early Italian Art,” an article that he contributed to the second number (February 1850) of *The Germ*. Stephens praises the “pure” style of early Italian artists (59), but he does not propose a backward-looking imitation of medieval art; what he admires in the purity of style of medieval art is the method of observation upon which it rests. If anything, Stephens’ vision of Pre-Raphaelite realism looks forward and aligns itself with the modern-day scientist:

The sciences have become almost exact with the present century. ... And how has this been done but by bringing greater knowledge to bear upon a wider range of experiment; by being precise in the search after truth? If this adherence to fact, to experiment and not theory, —to begin at the beginning and not to fly to the end, —has added so much to the knowledge of man in science; why may it not greatly assist the moral purposes of the Arts? (61)

Stephens promotes a Pre-Raphaelite mode of observation in art that takes for its model the inductive philosophy of experimental science. Following this mode, art might sharpen its visual and moral acuity by using the ever-increasing knowledge of the physical world to modify its gaze, penetrating ever more deeply into the natural world. Current tastes, he argues, have stagnated in their reliance on a circular, deductive model of art based on the general principles set out in Reynolds’ *Discourses*, producing works

that are remarkable only as executions of “conventionalities and feeble reminiscences from the Old Masters” (58). However, the “unprejudiced spectator of recent progress ... of Art in England,” says Stephens, is bound to note “a marked attempt to lead the taste of the public by producing pure transcripts and faithful studies from nature” (58). The driving force in such aesthetic progress, he asserts, has come primarily from the landscape artist, whose “simple attention to nature in detail as well as in generalities ... requires a somewhat longer and more devoted course of observation” (58). The idea of truth in nature and landscape painting partakes in the impulse of natural theology that seeks out the divine in details of natural law, but Stephens’ Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is not necessarily driven by a predetermined theological vision. Stephens’ interest has more to do with the intensity of the artist’s gaze. The keen, scientific eye that has invested landscape painting with so much “truth,” he argues, should be employed by artists of different genres that take up human subjects.

In 1851, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood used Ruskin’s defence of Pre-Raphaelite methods (though not their “Romanist and Tractarian tendencies” [“The Pre-Raffaelites” 8]) in his letters to the *Times* and William Michael Rossetti’s position of influence as art critic for the *Spectator* to publicly challenge the limits of artistic vision and representation. Seizing upon Ruskin’s praise for Pre-Raphaelite realism, William Michael Rossetti lobbied public support for the brethren’s attempts to bring to art new eyes with which to seek out truth. In his “Pre-Raphaelitism” article of the 4 October 1851 issue of the *Spectator*, he declared that “Art—except such as consists in the mere collection of materials through the medium of strict copyism—represents individual mind and views working from absolute data of fact” (955). The Pre-Raphaelite image, he

argues, is not photographic, not “mere ... copyism” (955), but a record of the world’s “absolute data of fact” pressing in along the nerves and into the mind that receives and works them into artistic expression.

William Michael Rossetti presents a form of Pre-Raphaelitism that is highly Romantic. His article echoes Wordsworth, the central aim of whose work is to show how God and Nature are linked, or married, in harmony. In “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth asks his readers to recognize “in nature and the language of sense”—that is, sensory awareness of nature—“the anchor of [their] purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of [their] heart, and soul / Of all [their] moral being” (108-11). In the closing lines of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth imagines himself and Coleridge taking on the responsibility of art as “Prophets of Nature” who will attune their followers’ ears to hear God’s voice in Nature (14.446), a pledge that he renews in the Prospectus to *The Recluse*, writing that he is going to use his strains to “proclaim[] / How exquisitely the individual Mind ... to the external World / Is fitted” (62-66). William Michael Rossetti in fact makes the same claim for Pre-Raphaelite art that Wordsworth makes for poetry. In the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth says that the “object [of poetry] is truth” and that “poetry is the image of man and nature” (139); in “Pre-Raphaelitism,” Rossetti claims that the aim of Pre-Raphaelite art is to express a truth of which “nature and man are the two halves” (955), echoing the dictum that Ruskin also tirelessly repeats in his *Times* letters and in *Modern Painters*.⁴⁴ Thus, the proposition that Pre-Raphaelite artists would seek to represent the truth as it is mutually reflected in man and nature seems to risk little that had not already been won elsewhere in the arts. However, by mid-century, despite Wordsworth’s popular appeal,

the Romantic bond between art and nature was showing signs of strain. The idea of what was natural in the world and humanity was in fact coming under new scrutiny.

In 1850, the year of Wordsworth's death and the posthumous publication of *The Prelude*, the once harmonious relation between the perceiving "individual Mind" and nature had grown so discordant that the successor to the Poet Laureateship, Alfred Tennyson, would ask, "Are God and Nature then at strife?" (*In Memoriam* 55.5). Seven years later, showing how far from harmonious had become the relation between Mind and Nature (as the phenomenal manifestation of the Divine) in light of geological discoveries that disturbed belief in the Christian record of time and Creation,⁴⁵ Philip Henry Gosse would ask readers of his *Omphalos* (1857) to doubt their senses and their minds when considering the evidence nature yields in strata of rock and to believe that God had placed the fossils of dinosaurs (that had never walked the earth) in the ground on the day of creation to test humanity's faith.⁴⁶ Thus, the idea that "nature and man are the two halves of every true work of art" was a tenuous and tangled principle upon which to ground an aesthetic philosophy at the mid-century. In this respect, the Pre-Raphaelite aim, as formulated by William Michael Rossetti, would challenge art to test the powers of perception, to see and represent truths that seemed to elude the grasp of philosophy, science, religion, and art.

In both Stephens' and William Michael Rossetti's early writings on Pre-Raphaelitism, the principle of fidelity to nature begins to widen its scope, extending not only to tangled banks of wildflowers and trees in such paintings as Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-52), but also to tangled aspects of human nature. Pre-Raphaelitism, therefore, has to do less with the medieval style adopted by the Nazarenes than with a more

contemporary, even scientific emphasis on psychological and visual realism. Stephens' discussion of early Italian art helps develop a modern understanding of the term "Pre-Raphaelite" as signalling an appreciation not so much for the naïve forms of fifteenth-century art as for its empirical methods of observation, hypothesis, and experiment. Art had become, according to Stephens (quoting both Hamlet and Emerson), "Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (59)—that is, contemporary artists had become such slavish administrators of aesthetic theories of execution that they no longer looked, directly and intensely, upon the world: "Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry?" (qtd. in Stephens 59). The challenge faced by the Pre-Raphaelites and the spectators of their art in the particular cultural contexts of the mid-nineteenth century then became how to observe, determine, and represent human nature, while respecting the strict aesthetic conditions of fidelity to nature.

The scientific eye that Stephens proposes art open on the material world posed certain spiritual and philosophical dangers when it took up the individual human subject as another material object for representation. The aesthetic philosophy espoused by Reynolds and taught by the Academy as the "great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted" was to perceive and transcend "the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things" that shrouded general form (Reynolds, *Discourses* [44-5]); however, to Stephens' mind, the works executed mechanically according to this injunction are but shallow tributes to their own artistic conventions: in them the spectator cannot hear the "crying out of the man," but sees only "the strut[ting] of the actor" (60). One of the consequences of the Romantic revolution was an emphasis

on individuality as a trait that ennobles the species—deviation (rather than deformity) in the wake of Romanticism and in anticipation of Darwin was not necessarily a sign of degradation. The extreme individuality of the Romantic Byronic hero elevates common humanity for readers who sympathized with both the hero's admirable virtue and regrettable vice. The Pre-Raphaelite dedication to verisimilitude and an emphasis on individuality, and their corresponding rejection of conventions of form and attitude, meant that they required for their aesthetic a new visual code to signify human characteristics and qualities.

The visual code of Pre-Raphaelite art can make difficult demands on its viewers, particularly as it takes up the human subject. Millais's *Mariana* (1850-51) provides a suitable example of the complications involved in reading the Pre-Raphaelite body. In this small painting (59.7 x 49.5cm), Millais depicts the subject of Tennyson's poem "Mariana" (derived from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*) waiting for her lover, who she knows from a letter will not come.⁴⁷ The intertextual filaments from Tennyson and Shakespeare partially weave the scene's context, but the painting itself presents a visual challenge to viewers who would read meaning in the central image of the body.

The figure of Mariana fills the central portion of the canvass. Wearing a blue velvet dress with a belt that emphasizes the fullness of her hips, she stands with her hands pressed into the small of her back and stares distantly out the window with her head turned back and to the left. She appears to have just risen from sitting at a table where she had been working on an embroidery and to be giving a stretch to both back and neck. It is an unusual pose that is difficult to read. While not indicating a particularly graceful movement, her pose possesses an intense physicality that manages to be both sad and

erotic— sad in the weariness that her tilted head and distant expression convey, but erotic in the sensuous curves of the rich blue velvet pulled tight across her breasts and hips. Demarcated by the carefully placed belt, her voluminous hips draw viewers' attention with the ambiguity of the seemingly simple physical gesture which could suggest the moment on either side of the stretch, either the moment of muscular tension or the subsequent sensation of relief in the lower back and hips. And although the motion is ostensibly connected to her long work at her low table, the painting's literary contexts provide the hips with a different sort of tension from the hands in the small of her back that strain her pelvis towards the window through which she looks for her lover, the absent agent of her sexual release. The duration of the action, as Prettejohn indicates, is uncertain: the needle stuck upright in her work suggests that she has just paused in her work long enough to stretch her back, but the autumn leaves, which have blown in to settle on her embroidery and the floor, suggest an extended, almost frozen pose (12).

In the room with Mariana is a constellation of signs that crowd her body with meaning that viewers must find equally difficult to reconcile: in the stained glass before her is the scene of the Annunciation, out of which Gabriel seems to point directly at Mariana. It is unclear whether he confers a future blessing of fulfillment or points to her status as virgin. In the window to her right is the image of a snowdrop,⁴⁸ whose arrival in early spring after the long winter has symbolic associations with hope. Its white colour connects it to purity, but its early rise in conditions still cold also connects it to the land of the dead (the whole plant also happens to be poisonous). In Millais's painting, the flower is part of a larger sign in a crest surmounted by a knight's helmet and raised armoured fist, about which flows the banner containing the Latin phrase "in coelo quies"

(or “there is peace in heaven”), perhaps indicating the suicidal impulse that pervades Tennyson’s poem. The scene behind Mariana manifests signs of neglect and abandonment in the mouse (an allusion to Tennyson’s poem [“Mariana” 63-4]) that scuttles across the floor upon which leaves are scattered. Deeper in the shadows of the room, the viewer can dimly discern a covered table on top of which sits a triptych and some small pewter or silver containers. One of these containers catches the glow of the hanging candle that illuminates the little shrine, a phallic caster that Millais uses again in *The Bridesmaid* (1851), yet another complicated depiction of female sexuality. Taken altogether, her posture and surroundings construct a body that is both sexually charged and physically drained. To enter into the psychologically and sexually strained scene of *Mariana* demands from viewers an almost microscopic attention to the painting’s details. It is this act of looking hard that would characterize the Pre-Raphaelite visual engagement with the body.

Aspects of Pre-Raphaelitism represented a near-scientific challenge to prevailing conventional aesthetics of physical beauty. David Masson, for the *British Quarterly Review* in 1852, recognized that “instead of giving us figures with those fine conventional heads and regular oval faces and gracefully formed hands and feet . . . , they [the Pre-Raphaelites] delight in figures with heads phrenologically clumsy, faces strongly marked and irregular, and very pronounced knuckles and ankles” (76-77). As many modern critics have since noted, the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic partakes in the contemporary shift in thinking about the body that made it a readable text for students of craniology, physiognomy, phrenology, and other emerging sciences.⁴⁹ The rise of empirical philosophy through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gradually pushed the

materiality of the body upon the popular imagination to the point that it began to destabilize the dualism of Christian theology that posits the spiritual reality of the soul distinct from, and higher than, the physical reality of the body. Just as the natural world could be studied according to the physical laws that govern its motions, so too was it thought that laws of human behaviour might be discovered by studying them as material phenomena. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood brought to art the scientific challenge to see the body not as something distinct from, or the mere shell of the soul, but as being integral to and woven into the very essence of humanity.

Pre-Raphaelite art does not attempt to follow Wornum's tenet of good art by harmonizing a physical ideal with a spiritual ideal ("Modern Moves" 270), because Pre-Raphaelitism tends not to see them as separate entities: the physical is the spiritual and the spiritual is the physical. For example, consider how very *physical* is the nature of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*. The arrangement of the two figures and gestures they exchange give the painting an erotic undertone. The young Virgin, for whom a young Christina Rossetti modelled, appears newly awoken in bed, an original depiction as Ruskin points out ("Three Colours" 476). Gabriel stands before her wielding a lily, whose three buds joined on a straight stem suggest both the Trinity and the stem of Jesse mentioned in Isaiah 11.1, the prophecy that Christians use to place Jesus's birth within the royal Davidic genealogical line. Huddled in the corner of her bed with a look vaguely expressive of some mixture of fear, wonder, and even sleepiness, Mary has drawn up her legs about her in a physically defensive posture against the lily, which, for all its symbolic virtue, is a phallus that Gabriel aims almost at her womb. Rossetti's depiction of the Annunciation has little of the spiritual *ecstasy* (in its precise etymological

meaning of “out of body or senses”) that usually characterises artistic renderings of this scene,⁵⁰ and all of the physical presence of an Impregnation. Prettejohn, for example, has noted the “Virgin’s unease” in a scene that “convincingly represents the moment of a paradoxical deflowering that excludes the sexual” (51). Prettejohn’s comes close to the mark in her observation, but sexual elements are not entirely in abeyance in this painting. It might be more accurate to say that the paradox of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* is that the spiritual and the sexual mutually intensify the moment. Sexuality that sharpens the spiritual experience is in fact part of a larger pattern that can be traced in Rossetti’s painting and poetry,⁵¹ a pattern that would provide direction for future phases of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The P.R.B. was falling apart by 1853, as Christina Rossetti’s commemorative sonnet from November of that year records:

The P.R.B. is in its decadence:
 For Woolner in Australia cooks his chops,
 And Hunt in yearning for the land of Cheops;
 D.G. Rossetti shuns the vulgar optic;
 While William M. Rossetti merely lops
 His B’s in English disesteemed as Coptic;
 Calm Stephens in the twilight smokes his pipe,
 But long the dawning of his public day;
 And he at last the champion great Millais,
 Attaining academic opulence,
 Winds up his signature with A.R.A.

So rivers merge in the perpetual sea;

So luscious fruit must fall when over-ripe;

And so consummated the P.R.B. (“The P.R.B.” 1-14)

In “luscious fruit” left by the P.R.B. were seeds for a second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, which would spring up at Oxford in 1856, centering on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones. Soon after, Algernon Charles Swinburne would enter into the circle over which Dante Gabriel Rossetti once again exerted enormous influence. Morris and Swinburne would produce the first complete volumes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.⁵² The poets and their works were quickly labelled as Pre-Raphaelite because of their associations with Rossetti, but they also have something in common with the early phase of Pre-Raphaelite painting: a determination to look hard with fresh eyes at the human body and its lived experience.

In the following chapters, the volumes of Morris and Swinburne will be placed in a theoretical framework derived in large part from Merleau-Ponty’s seminal work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), in an attempt to account for and partially resolve some of the more confused readings of their “fleshly” work. Merleau-Ponty rejects Cartesian dualism as existentially unsatisfying because the subject of experience, “the mind by which I am what I am,” as Descartes puts it (*Discourse 75*), is denied firm material being in the world; alternatively, Merleau-Ponty rejects the materialist monism because it denies the subject of experience an existence beyond the world of matter, and as a result, the materialist body has no more *being* in the world than any other type of object in a world of objects that operate *passively* according to the physical laws of the

universe. Phenomenological philosophy, says Merleau-Ponty, “consists in relearning to look at the world” in such a way as to “re-achiev[e] a direct and primitive contact” with it (xxiii, vii). To achieve this type of “direct and primitive contact,” which Cartesian dualism and materialist monism preclude or interfere with, Merleau-Ponty posits a “lived body” (as *le corps propre* is usually translated) that actively inhabits and “rises towards the world” (87). The power of Morris’s and Swinburne’s poetry does not descend from the transcendental sublime to the mind but rises from the lived bodies of their dramatic poetry towards the world with primitive powers of perception.

Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* and Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* offer a new poetry of erotic perception, depicting what Merleau-Ponty calls the “body in its sexual being” (*Phenomenology* 178-201). It is a type of perception that does not speak to the mind or the understanding; rather, it is a kind of perception that works “through one body, ... [as it] aims at another body, and takes place in the world, not in a consciousness” (*Phenomenology* 181). It involves “an erotic ‘comprehension’ that is not of the order of understanding, since understanding subsumes an experience, once perceived, under some idea, while desire comprehends blindly by linking body to body” (*Phenomenology* 181). As will be argued, Morris’s poetry shows an interest in the conditions that make it so difficult for one body to take aim at another and often leave one wide of the intended mark; Swinburne’s poetry assumes the obscurity of the target and sometimes delights in it with a sort of vicious self-effacement but, more often than not, speaks in tones of frustration.

At the core of the sometimes obscure and sometimes objectionable (at least so it appeared to contemporary readers) early poetry of Morris and Swinburne lies the key

concern with perception, with seeing and knowing, the complications of which their poetry roots in the body. The dramatic mode of their poetry amplifies the problem of perception, at once fusing the subjective and objective and structuring the irreducible gap between them; however, the recurring disjunction (or dysjunction), gap, or *écart* in perception in their poetry develops from a complicated relation to the body. The complications of seeing and knowing for the poems' perceiving subjects implicate the body in the phenomenological terms of Merleau-Ponty, who asserts that a theory of the body is a theory of perception, and conversely, that a theory of perception is a theory of the body. In the following two chapters, the discussion considers the extent to which desire, sexuality, and memory shape, define, obscure, and obliterate the perception of bodies (which is sometimes sacred, sometimes grotesque, often violent, and almost always sexual), and *vice versa*, in the interplay of dramatic voices in Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858) and Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866).

**THE RIDDLE OF THE FLESH IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S
*THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE, AND OTHER POEMS (1858)***

I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?
And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

(Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric" 1-8)

2.1 The Pre-Raphaelite Poet

In his lecture "The Society of the Future," first given on 13 November 1887, William Morris insists that a utopian world must promote the freedom to exercise the impulses and appetites of the body: "I demand a free and unfettered animal life for man first of all: I demand the utter extinction of all asceticism. If we feel the least degradation in being amorous, or merry, or hungry, or sleepy, we are so far bad animals and therefore miserable men" (202). The "Society of the Future," he said, in which "men (and women too, of course) would do their work and take their pleasure in their own persons, and not vicariously," would be a society "founded on the free exercises of the senses and passions of a healthy human animal" (202). Over the course of his long and varied career, Morris made the experiences of the body a central concern of his writings, constantly re-evaluating its states of health and disease, its relation to the mind and spirit, and its relation to political power.

Later in life, Morris could see the body as a foundation of beauty in the world. In his 1884 lecture “How We Live and How We Might Live,” Morris lists four “claims for a decent life” as being, “first, a healthy body; second, an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present, and the future; thirdly, occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind; and fourthly, a beautiful world to live in” (156). As Naomi Jacobs points out in her discussion of *News From Nowhere* (1891), the fourth condition is frequently taken out of context and related to Morris’s involvement in the Arts and Crafts movement and his writings on the basic human need for beauty in the mundane conditions of life (26). In the context of this particular lecture, however, Morris roots the beauty of this world in the body rather than in the world exterior to it. This beauty of the body, Morris says, is something to which people have a claim as a natural right:

To feel mere life a pleasure; to enjoy moving one’s limbs and exercising one’s bodily powers; to play, as it were, with the sun and wind and rain; to rejoice in satisfying the due bodily appetites of a human animal without fear of degradation or sense of wrong-doing; yes, and therewithal to be well-formed, straight-limbed, strongly knit, expressive of countenance—*to be, in a word, beautiful*—that also I claim.

(“How We Live” 158; emphasis added)

Jacobs sees Morris’s demand “*to be beautiful*” not as insisting upon the right to be beautiful in the eyes of others, but as claiming “for all human beings another kind of beauty, located in the experience of the flesh rather than in the eye, and perceived from the inside-out” (27-8). Grounded in the subjective experience—“perceived from the inside-out,” as Jacobs puts it—Morris’s vision of the body’s beauty insists upon the

dignity of the flesh in the face of “those terrible doctrines of asceticism” that he felt characterized his age’s clumsy attempt to work out the beast in human nature (“How We Live” 158). Arriving at this mature vision of the strongly knit, beautiful body in full possession of its drives and instincts as a good and happy human was a lengthy process for Morris, who, like the age in which he lived, held the status of the flesh as uncertain. His first published volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858), marks the earliest phase of that process through its development of characters for whom the body is both a site of moral confusion and a channel to the divine.

Like the age to which it belongs, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* is a transitional work. As Walter E. Houghton points out in his classic and still very valuable study of Victorian culture, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, every age is by nature an age of transition that negotiates its present on the facts of the past and the promise of the future; however, the Victorians had a particularly strong sense of becoming, of living in an age of rapid change and competing ideas and beliefs (1-2). In the years on either side of the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere*, the era of English Romanticism appears to end with the death of William Wordsworth in 1850 and a new age of science to begin with the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. However, the two events mark neither a clean break with the Romantic past, nor some turning point plotting the course of the future; rather, they occur as an intertwining of worldviews: the Romantic experience of transcendental subjectivity, with its emphasis on imagination, intuition, and emotion, and the scientific emphasis on materialistic objectivity, with its stress on observation, calculation, and reason. During the same period, Morris’s life and early poetry similarly catch the experience of betweenness—of

being caught between mind and body, between objective and subjective experiences of the world, between experiences keenly observed and deeply felt.

In the years between 1853 and 1858, Morris was trying to impose an order and meaning on the experiences of his past and to choose a meaningful direction in which to point his future. For a young man between the ages of 19 and 24, coming to such a crossroads is hardly novel, but Morris perhaps stood there longer than most. In that time, he nearly took the Holy Orders of the Anglican Church (MacCarthy 56, 95-6), he balked at signing the Thirty-Nine Articles for his degree (MacCarthy 98), he almost founded a celibate order of artists (MacCarthy 65-80), he started but abandoned a career in architecture (MacCarthy 102-08), and he was convinced to become a painter but left behind only one easel painting, *La Belle Iseult* (1858) (Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite* 100). In January 1853, he went to Exeter College, Oxford, hoping to find the town still buzzing with the lively doctrinal debates of the Tractarians (MacCarthy 57-8), but found that John Henry Newman's conversion in 1845 had hushed enthusiasm for change. After a brief flirtation with Catholicism in 1854, he continued his Oxford studies of ecclesiastical history and Anglican theology, his enthusiasm for which was gradually replaced by an appreciation of the modern artistic and social ideas of Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Charles Kingsley (Mackail, "William Morris" 197). These disparate endeavours and disciplines indicate less a want of focus and application—his early biographer John Mackail says that Morris "was an incessant, swift, and omnivorous reader, [whose] prodigious memory enabled him in those few years to lay up an enormous store of knowledge" ("William Morris" 197)—than an inability to find an occupation capable of absorbing his surfeit of energy.

At times, his excess energy turned to frustration and violent expression. In these days before his involvement in the Socialist movement, Morris channelled his energy into the sticks and foils at the Oxford gymnasium, which, to the chagrin of his instructor, Archibald MacLaren, he splintered and twisted in unprecedented numbers. What surplus of energy the gymnasium failed to absorb Morris poured into reading, particularly the works of Ruskin and Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, which he read aloud with as much ferocity as he used to lay waste to the equipment rooms of the Oxford gymnasium (MacCarthy 77, 69, 96). The energy that gymnastics and reading could not siphon Morris applied to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which he helped to found and edit in 1856. During its twelve-month run from January to December, 1856, he contributed no less than eight prose tales (including "The Hollow Land"), two or three essays and reviews (including one of Robert Browning's *Men and Women* [1855]), and five poems.⁵³ In this early work, Mackail has noticed that Morris works with "a directness of spiritual vision comparable to that of Blake" ("William Morris" 198). Mackail's comment potentially misleads readers with the expectation of finding in Morris's early poetry prophetic visions that challenge orthodox views of spirituality. Mackail's comment is not necessarily incorrect, but it needs to be qualified: the similarity to Blake is in "*directness*" of Morris's method, which frequently is an attempt to access the spiritual through the corporeal and the concrete. While Blake asserts that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul" (Plate 4) in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* with the directness of a proverb, Morris works towards a similar conclusion gradually in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* through characters whose direct contact with

the world is intensely physical but complicated by a misapprehension of the relationship that exists between the body and the soul.

The Defence of Guenevere, which Morris published at his own expense in 1858, received little attention outside the circle of his close friends and sold fewer than three hundred copies (MacCarthy 142).⁵⁴ What little critical attention it did receive was generally unfavourable and marked with a prejudice encouraged by Morris's own dedication,

TO MY FRIEND

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,

PAINTER

By identifying his volume of poetry with Rossetti and therefore the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Morris had done much to pre-condition the reception of his work by critics predisposed to find fault with anything vaguely associated with the presumptuous young group of rebels, be it painting or poetry. However, for several years there had been little with which to find fault—Dante Gabriel Rossetti retired early and suddenly from the public eye following the hostile reception of his *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in 1850, and the Brotherhood had disbanded in 1853, only five years after its initial aesthetic challenge. By 1858, the idea of Pre-Raphaelite poetry remained vague. There had been no published collection of works from either Dante Gabriel or Christina Rossetti, nor were any poetic principles ever clearly or cohesively established by the various writers of the Pre-Raphaelite literary magazines, *The Germ* and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. So, while Ruskin's letters to the *Times* in 1851 had done much to ameliorate public opinion towards the Pre-Raphaelites (Prettejohn 58-9), the critics whom the

Brotherhood's formation had initially snubbed had within their store a mass of unspent ill will that awaited the day of the Pre-Raphaelite return when Morris published *The Defence of Guenevere*, the first volume of poetry published by anyone considered a Pre-Raphaelite. For example, the anonymous critic of the *Saturday Review* began his review of *The Defence of Guenevere* with the declaration, delivered in the same tone of mock reverence that had been paid to the early P.R.B. artists, that "Mr. Morris is the pre-Raffaelite poet" (43). While there is good reason to doubt a critic whose lamentable reading of the title poem mistakes the carefully woven rhymes of *terza rima* for a "disjointed series of unrhymed triplets" (45), he (or, less likely, she) must be credited for recognizing in Morris's volume (even if he or she did not see it clearly for what it is) a renewal of a Pre-Raphaelite challenge, because *The Defence of Guenevere*, like the work of its P.R.B. predecessors, demands readers to see the world and the bodies that inhabit it with fresh eyes—and to hear them with fresh ears through the synesthetic effects of prosody that play upon the images of the eye.

Ironically, the anonymous critic of the *Saturday Review* simultaneously faults *The Defence of Guenevere* for both its escapist flight into the Middle Ages and its realism. Years before making his anaphoric adjuration to "Forget six counties overhung with smoke, / Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke, / Forget the spreading of the hideous town" in "The Argument" of *The Earthly Paradise* (1-3), Morris was lightly dismissed as a mere escapist by such critics as the author for *Saturday Review*, who complained that Morris's poetry stands too removed from "the living world of men" and "never thinks of depicting man or life later than the Crusades" (45).⁵⁵ The charge of escapism is somewhat perplexing because Morris's work comes on the heels of a school

of poetry largely celebrated for its escapist tendencies: while the nineteenth-century realist novel took up contemporary social questions, poetry frequently offered a refuge from the modern condition in a continued strain of Romantic transcendentalism that looked to mundane objects (particularly natural ones) as thresholds giving access to the contemplation of the sublime. The author of the *Saturday Review* perhaps felt a Carlylean-like call to action that was shared by Matthew Arnold, who believed that poetry ought not be written unless it could guide people to a sense of power and action that could bring a new world of joy into existence in the present.⁵⁶ “Poetry,” says the *Saturday Review* critic, “is concerned about human passions and duties—with men of like moral nature as ourselves” (46),—which perhaps explains his hope that the Arthurian legend would be left to the “fulness of Tennyson’s powers” (46). He got his wish the following year in the first set of the *Idylls of the King*, a Victorian morality play in medieval garb with a Victorian gentleman playing the part of King Arthur. The problem with Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere*, it would seem, is not that it uses settings remote in time and space, but that it challenged the culture from which it emerged with a complicated treatment of gender and sexuality, and language and politics, and with a moral perspective less readily claimed by reviewers such as the *Saturday Review* critic.⁵⁷ Since this complexity of issues and themes has been granted to Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere*, the problem for critics remains how to deal with its complexity of method and design, its rich but obscure patterns of detail, and its narratives of broken time and perception.

Morris wrote poetry with a peculiar attention to surface detail and a strong appeal to the senses. Early readers of Morris tended to judge his work unfairly, erroneously

dismissing the chronicling of surface detail as a mere shallowness. Visually, his method has been connected to the patterns of association that bind dreams together,⁵⁸ and Morris himself, in a July 1856 letter to Cornell Price, declared, “My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another” (*Collected Letters* 1.28). The logic that strains the association of images and patterns in Morris’s poetry seems to owe much to Ruskin and his work on the distorted forms and broken visions of the grotesque.

Many of Ruskin’s theories of art are theories of vision and perception. From the branches of a distant tree to the texture and veins of our very skin, Ruskin emphatically declares in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters* (1856) that the problem with which the artist must contend is that “WE NEVER SEE ANYTHING CLEARLY” (*Works* 6.75). The artist’s genius then lies in the suggestive rendering of things seen only partially and obscurely. Ruskin’s ideas of the grotesque come out of his notion of the human limits of perception when encountering the sublime. In the “Grotesque Renaissance” section in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53)—a book that Morris read aloud to his Oxford friends as though it were a challenge (MacCarthy 69)—Ruskin conceives of a sublime vision as “the truth ... seen by the imagination in its wholeness and quietness,” but says that “the inconsistencies of human capacity” disrupt and fragment the vision of the sublime, rendering it grotesque (*Works* 11.181). Rarely, he says, is “any very exalted truth ... impressed on the imagination without some grotesqueness in its aspect, proportioned to the degree of *diminution of breadth* in the grasp which is given of it” (*Works* 11.181). That is, the grotesqueness of truth’s embodiment is the extent to which meaning is reduced or veiled—or even distorted and displaced—in representation. For Ruskin, the art of the grotesque is the art of failure and frustration: the failure “to grasp

the highest truths” and the frustration of still trying to communicate them (*Works* 11.178). Discussing the task of artists with visions of the sublime, Ruskin uses the figure of the prophet burdened with the task of comprehending and communicating a divine vision as an example of the grotesque form:

In all ages and among all nations, grotesque idealism has been the element through which the most appalling and eventful truth has been wisely conveyed, from the most sublime words of true Revelation, to the . . . [words] of the oracles, and the more or less doubtful teaching of dreams; and so down to ordinary poetry. No element of imagination has a wider range, a more magnificent use, or so colossal a grasp of sacred truth.

(*Works* 5.134)

The grotesque, as Ruskin presents it, is the fragmentation of symbols and signs, the gap between the signifier and signified. Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* is in part a study of signs broken in moments of erotic perception, in which the body functions as both the pivot within a system of signs and the source of desire that disrupts their signification.

The attention to physical detail gives *The Defence of Guenevere* its Pre-Raphaelite pictorial aesthetic, but it is also a consequence of the volume’s focused pursuit of love, which Morris thought was the best that art could pursue. In his March 1856 review of Browning’s *Men and Women*, Morris hesitated to call “‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’” his favourite of the collection because it was not love poetry: “And yet I scarcely know; for this and all the others seem to me but a supplement to the love-poems, even as it is in all art, in all life; love I mean of some sort; and that life or art where this is not the case, is but a wretched mistake after all” (*Collected Works* 1.340).

He emphasizes in this same review the idea of “love for love’s sake”: “if that is not obtained, disappointment comes, falling-off, misery,” he comments, adding, “Pray Christ some of us attain to it before we die” (*Collected Works* 1.340-41). In love poetry, love is usually a precondition—it is ornamented and offered, requited or rejected, but its existence at the core of the work is taken for granted. Morris’s declaration for love, coming from a twenty-two year-old undergraduate, would seem to be a prelude for rather conventional love poetry that makes sentimental appeals to soul-mates. However, if *The Defence of Guenevere* can make a claim to being love poetry—and it can—then it deals with the problems of love: its conflicting claims against the individual and the social, and the physical and the spiritual, and the difficulty of reading those claims that love makes upon the body and soul of both the lover and object of love. The challenge of *The Defence of Guenevere* is the difficulty of reading the experience of love as an embodied experience.

Desire rules the art of Morris’s early poetry. It entwines, entangles, and forms a constituent element in the construction of love in *The Defence of Guenevere*. Desire in these poems is sometimes vaguely spiritual and sometimes physical, but usually so indistinguishably both that readers must consider the spiritual and physical a false dichotomy. Isobel Armstrong has said that Morris’s volume contains “the great poems of desire in the nineteenth century” because they are great poems of frustration (242). She is right: from Launcelot and Guenevere in “The Defence of Guenevere” and “King Arthur’s Tomb” to Sir Peter Harpdon and Lady Alice in “Sir Peter Harpdon’s End” to the unnamed lovers stuck in the dreamscape of “The Wind,” *The Defence of Guenevere* contains narratives in which the satisfaction of desire is endlessly deferred. In fact, the

experience of desire structures the volume's narratives and builds (and ruins) its characters. The poems almost always bespeak a troubled or naïve experience of desire that rises unbidden and mysteriously, dimming the eyes that strain to see its objects more clearly. Desire in *The Defence of Guenevere* is something that is neither wholly understood nor entirely unwelcome, but its inevitable eruption in the text tends to estrange the body from its own experience, disrupting or complicating characters' sense of self. Such a claim for Morris's poetry would seem to steer the discussion towards Freudian analyses of bodies subject to and moved by sexual impulses, and, certainly, the bodies of Morris's poems dance to Freudian rhythms of desire; however, Freud's theories in many ways are too mechanistic, too dependent on causal laws of instincts and drives that make the subjective experience a passive one. So, while many of Morris's poems can be understood in terms of Freudian concepts (of which the discussion below will openly make use), the limits of their utility must be acknowledged, or at least their shortcomings in edifying the work of Morris must be addressed or ameliorated. Morris's characters, though often appearing trapped within some kind of conflict (social, political, psychological, or religious), actively struggle both to be bodily in the world and to spiritually transcend it. This paradoxical struggle that gives Morris's work so much of its tension and makes the body the focal point of *The Defence of Guenevere* involves an existential ambiguity familiar to readers of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*: meaning and personal identity depend on the impersonal experiences and habits of the body. Morris's characters rise bodily towards the physical world (not spiritually towards some sort of heavenly ideal), but in that motion their bodies often seem alien or absent to themselves in situations of desire.

From the “passionate twisting of [Guenevere’s] body” in the volume’s title poem to the dying figure of Sir Ozana in “The Chapel of Lyonesse” to Launcelot’s stigmata in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Morris racks his bodies with passion and pain. Even in later work, after he had thrown off “those terrible doctrines of asceticism” (“How We Live” 158), Morris continued to mortify the flesh in moments of desire. For example, in one of his prose romances published posthumously, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897), the journey of the heroine involves a series of escapes and adventures for a young woman named Birdalone, who must come to terms with her own potentially dangerous sexuality before returning to her knight, Arthur, whose passion for her overthrows his sanity and makes him “more beast than man” (*Collected Works* 20.347). Birdalone comes of age when she masters her own dangerous sexuality and emotional love. She returns to Arthur, who, even after years of penitential wandering in the wilderness, nearly explodes with the passion that his body possesses: at the sudden vision of Birdalone, he sinks to the ground, rolls over, and, with his limbs stretched out and his head turned aside, blood gushes out from his mouth (*Collected Works* 20.337). Morris’s sexualized body begins to look like a steam engine whose release valve fails, literally exploding with passion. A similar analogy of the body as a hydraulic system pressurized by drives and instincts seems to underlie Walter Pater’s 1868 review that sees in Morris’s poetry “a passion of which the *outlets are sealed* [that] begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliance and relief—all redness is turned to blood, all water into tears” (108; emphasis added). For Pater, Morris’s poetry deals with the embodiment of passion, which he implies in his comment that “the poem which gives its name to the volume is a thing tormented and awry with passion, like the body of

Guenevere defending herself from the charge of adultery” (106). Desire is a driving force in *The Defence of Guenevere*, but it has a near crippling effect that seizes its bodies with spasms because it seeks a release that is denied.

2.2 Dangerous Bodies: Reading the Sexualized Body in *The Defence of Guenevere*

The most difficult body to read in Morris’s work is the sexualized one. The tension surrounding the body of desire in Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* likely originates in a degree of sexual naivety and a distrust of what J.B. Bullen calls “the sexualized woman,” culturally impressed upon the minds of Victorian England’s young men. The arrival of the sexualized woman—somewhat different and more problematic than the more familiar “fallen woman”—complicated narratives of desire. In his study of fear and desire in Pre-Raphaelite art, Bullen argues that the “eruption of the sexualized woman into the culture of the 1850s was extremely violent, and the discourses in which she appeared were always excited” (49). Images of sexualized women proliferated in art’s various modes, in literature and in painting, as they did in various other writings, including social, medical, and legal discourses; the images themselves were equally varied, extending “from the filthy and degraded street whore of realism to the fatal woman of fantasy, from the broken female body racked by venereal disease to the alluring and voluptuous flesh of the high-class concubine” (Bullen 49). The Victorian notion of “fallenness in women,” posits Bullen, “was associated as much with the deliciously penitent Magdalene voluptuously brought face to face with the consequences of desire [a favourite subject of the Pre-Raphaelites],⁵⁹ as with the medical wards of lock hospitals, venereal disease, and the inspection of genital warts” (49). Bullen makes the

distinction between the fallen woman, who exists within narratives that diminish her according to strict codes of moral conduct specific to time and place, and the sexualized woman, who evades the containment and diminishment of these codes in unapologetic expressions of desire (50). The cultural eruption in the 1850s of the sexualized and fallen woman, and what distinguished one from the other, seems to have created a sort of constructive confusion for Morris as a young man and artist, whose *The Defence of Guenevere* takes a keen interest in this type of woman, who is both desiring and desirous, and for whom sexuality is a source of strength and almost a virtue.

His attraction to the Pre-Raphaelites and the idea of an artistic monastic order were part of Morris's sexual and artistic development. Even before coming under the influence of Rossetti, he was drawn to the idea of a lay brotherhood. In a May 1853 letter to Cornell Price, Edward Burne-Jones writes, "I have set my heart on our founding a Brotherhood. Learn Sir Galahad by heart; he is to be the patron of our order." Morris, he continues, is committed "heart and soul" to the project (1.77). Fiona MacCarthy, in her recent biography of Morris, says that "for Morris and [Edward] Burne-Jones the ideal of chastity provided a convenient postponement of decision. They were young for their years, with a hazy sexuality" (68). Morris may well have arrived at Oxford knowing only such things about sexual intercourse as had been garnered through the whispered conversations of schoolmates at Marlborough College,⁶⁰ which, to be sure, was represented as a nasty sort of business. Georgina Burne-Jones comments on the sexual naivety that both prevailed within and was guarded by the Oxford Set, a literary intellectual brotherhood of largely Birmingham men that Edward Burne-Jones and Morris joined, which included William Fulford, Richard Watson Dixon (later Canon Dixon),

Charles Faulkner, and later, Cormwell Price (MacCarthy 59-63). She believed that “the mystery which shrouds men and women from each other in youth was sacred to each one of them” (1.105). The sacredly held mystery of the Set and the ideal of chastity as “convenient postponement of decision” have been re-evaluated by Herbert Sussman in light of Eve Sedgwick’s study of homosocial bonds in her work *Between Men*. Sussman’s *Victorian Masculinities*, rooted in Sedgwick’s ideas, considers the formation of artistic brotherhoods (he deals specifically with the Pre-Raphaelites) not as a postponement but as “a rite of passage to artistic manhood” (143). For Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti, Sussman argues that the “all-male communal life of the Brotherhood” would continue to exist in their memory as “the emotional center of their lives, an all-male Eden” out of which they had been thrust (144). In the 1850s, first as part of the Set, and later as part of Rossetti’s “jovial campaign” of mural painting in the Oxford Union building (qtd. in MacCarthy 129), Morris belonged to an “all-male Eden” during a key period of his own sexual and artistic maturation. The strain of this process of maturation tells in *The Defence of Guenevere* in its varied and often violent treatment of the body: the volume appears to be Morris’s “rite of passage to artistic manhood,” in which the impulses of desire are continuously sublimated, deferred, expurgated, and even embraced in flesh that is both sacrificed and sanctified in the rite.

The enthusiasm for the proposed brotherhood seems to have arisen from a confluence of a prevalent cultural distrust of sensuality and Morris’s own masochistic instinct to rule desire in his unruly body.⁶¹ The struggle with desire is not particularly unusual in young men, especially when they are morally earnest young men saddled with a Christian sense of guilt rooted in bodily desire. Morris’s case, however, is special in

terms of degree. From his untamed shock of curly hair (which won him the nickname Topsy) to the occasional cataleptic trance into which he slipped before regaining his faculties moments later with sheepish embarrassment, Morris as a young man appeared to be in some sort of conflict with his own body.⁶² The proposed order, conceived principally, it seems, on an ideal of chastity, must have appealed to Morris as a means to control his unruly flesh within a supportive community of all-male artists. The order was to take an Arthurian hero for its patron—not the stolid king Arthur, nor the tragic lover Sir Lancelot, but the *pure* Sir Galahad (Burne-Jones 77), whose very strength derives from an abnegation of the flesh. The project failed and temporarily left Morris without a libidinal alibi. Morris might have found an alternative to the monastic order for dealing with feminine sexuality in the Pre-Raphaelite pale women of desire and death, who, in the act of transcending the body, become themselves objects of desire.⁶³ However, *The Defence of Guenevere* does not manifest a will to avoid or escape sexuality so much as to find a perspective that makes some sense of it.

Often the poems in the volume engage sexuality as something that confounds the body and soul. *The Defence of Guenevere* marks this struggle with sexuality in characters—women and men—who fully occupy their bodies, but with the uncomfortable awareness that their bodies sometimes speak a language that they cannot understand. The volume presents a body tethered to a Christian conscience and culture that pits the subject soul against the object body, but it also makes the body the pivot of understanding the world seen through a haze of sexuality. As a result, the body becomes a site of moral confusion of the sort that had made the proposed brotherhood so attractive to Morris as a young man. While the fraternity of Galahads failed to formalize, its ethos and function

survive in Morris's early poetry. As an alibi and outlet, *The Defence of Guenevere* absorbs libidinal desire in fetishistic details, defers it in violence, and sometimes attempts to let it escape in the ruptures that appear between sign and signifier of sexually symbolic language. Desire in Morris's poems is a force that disrupts the unity of sense, intellect, and spirit, one of the best examples of which occurs in one of the volume's so-called "other" poems, "The Wind," in which a nameless, old armourer of the Middle Ages sits in a "heavy and carved" chair draped in green fabric, in the folds of which "an orange lies, with a deep gash cut in the rind" (10, 12). Thinking of "days gone by" (7), he begins to dream of Margaret, who appears to have been a former love. The dream creates an atmosphere of sexual longing between the speaker and Margaret: at one point she lies with an "ungirded vest" in the grass and "spreads her arms out wide" (59, 51), while the armourer piles "great sheaves of daffodils" on "her heaving breast" (56, 58). Margaret, however, suddenly bleeds from her chest and appears to die, at which point the dreamer awakens.

The erotic symbolism of the "The Wind," like so many of the poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, functions with precision: with "arms spread wide" and a "heaving breast" (51, 58), Margaret lies down in the grass in "her loose ungirded vest" and appears to be in a state of sexual readiness (59). However, within the dream setting of the poem, symbolism loses its precision and the dreamer's response to Margaret's gestures—to gather "daffodils" and pile them on her "breast"—appears to be a fatal misreading of them, since the woman dies from what appears to be a sudden bursting of all her blood vessels. The dreamer's actions are a bizarre symbolic gesture for a situation that invites a physical response. The daffodils under which the speaker of "The Wind" buries his

would-be lover constitute one of many symbolic fissures in *The Defence of Guenevere* through which meaning and desire escape. D.M.R. Bentley argues that the speaker appears to have a propensity for inaction, and that “Margaret's death has been caused, not by any identifiable act on the part of the speaker, of herself, or of persons unknown, but that it is to be seen as the result of the speaker's failure *to act*, his failure to confront her sexuality” (“The Wind” 33). At the very least, the speaker substitutes a formal, symbolic action for a sexual one, deferring desire under what becomes a funeral pyre of flowers—that is, the lover's reactions frustrate or disrupt the poem's symbolic language of sexuality, and desire escapes like steam through the rupture.

The seemingly disjointed logic in the symbolic language of some of the poems in *The Defence of Guenevere* becomes tighter when considered in the context of the volume's recurrent motif of the dream or reverie. “The Wind,” in fact, is tightly bound by the associative logic of a dream narrative: the gashed orange, lying in the folds of green fabric, whose juices “oozed out like blood” in his waking life, corresponds to Margaret's wounded body bleeding in the grass in his dream.⁶⁴ Here and elsewhere in the volume (for example, in “Rapunzel,” which will be discussed below), the logic in the relation between the dream and waking life is tight enough, but in the dreamland that Morris creates, desire clouds perception such that the signified often goes unrecognized in the signifier. “The Wind” uses the repetition of a chorus to emphasize the state of frustrated perception: “Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind? / Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind, / Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.” The “blind” wind seeking some sort of vague fulfillment in the sought-after lily-seed is typical of Morris's love poetry, which frequently depicts characters searching but not seeing in situations of

desire. Even in the moments when desire takes careful aim, the erotic intention turns awry and becomes a blunt instrument, as it does in “The Wind”: “I held her long bare arms, but she shudder’d away from me / While the flush went out of her face as her head fell back on a tree, / And a spasm caught her mouth, fearful for me to see” (40-2).

Margaret survives desire’s initial blow in this accident of desire to reciprocate passion, but again desire proves to be a poor marksman. When the dreamland lovers of “The Wind” give in to passion, the “hard” kiss he gives her misses her mouth and lands “by the ear” (49); little better, she kisses him “on the brow” (49), which seems like a nearly fraternal kiss, before lying down in the grass with her arms spread wide (50). Here, and elsewhere, these broken signs that appear calculated to thwart desire and render it almost impossible to read in another create a physical tension that strains the flesh in Morris’s poetry.

When it is frustrated, desire often changes to violence and morbidity in *The Defence of Guenevere*. The speaker of “The Wind” holds Margaret’s “long bare arms,” but he holds them against his coat of mail (43), and her flowing hair, which let down is a sign of sexual release in Victorian depictions of women, flies “like a gold flag over a sail” (45). Here, Morris’s use of the language and symbols of war to eroticize the body of Margaret is part of the volume’s larger pattern of reading desire as violence: in “Sir Peter Harpdon’s End,” the disfigured Sir Lambert, stroking the beard of the soon-to-be-hanged title character, makes desire an instrument of torture when he taunts the crying Sir Peter with a grotesque vision of his lover, saying, “Do not go just yet, / For I am Alice, am right like her now, / Will you not kiss me on the lips, my love?” (444-46); in “Rapunzel,” the Prince puts on his armour the moment he decides that it is time to marry;

and in “The Haystack in the Floods,” Godmar’s thwarted lust for Jehane is directly converted into violence by knights who “beat / [her lover’s] head to pieces at their feet” (150-51). In “Concerning Geffray Teste Noire,” the speaker, while waiting in an ambush set for the title character, discovers the corpses of a man and woman, which he contemplates and reads: “an arrow had gone through her tender throat, / And her right wrist was broken; then I saw / The reason why she had on that war-coat, / Their story came out clear without a flaw” (117-20). The story, however, is anything but clear, as the speaker eroticizes the woman’s skeleton in a reverie (“Over those bones I sat and pored for hours, / And thought, and dream’d” [141-42]), in which he becomes the betrayed lover of the lady, who becomes in his dream a *femme fatale* with lips that “lie, / Curled gently,” “like a curved sword / That bites with all its edge” (174-76). The conditions of waking life have forced their way into the reverie. As in “The Wind,” in which the oozing orange of waking life suggests the bleeding body of Margaret in the dream, the act of sitting in the forest underbrush in an ambush shapes the knight’s reverie of the woman whose “hair / Falls down and tangles [the speaker]” in “Concerning Geffray Teste Noir” (163-64). In all of these poems, sexuality is replaced by killing or dying. The failure of sexuality seems to be tied up with a failure of chivalry in “The Wind,” the speaker of which paints shields but does not go off to war, and in the Froissartian poems, in which the age of chivalry is coming to an end with the Hundred Years’ War. In the Arthurian poems and “Rapunzel,” however, the failure of sexuality is even more complicated, involving a more complicated failure of perception.

2.3 The “Unnamed Colours” of the Body in Morris’s *Defence of Guenevere*

In the erotic situations of Morris’s Arthurian poems, characters often suffer from some form of blindness in which colours blur and bleed into one another. In the volume’s “deep / Still land of colours” (“King Arthur’s Tomb” 75-6), even rare moments of clear vision cannot be trusted, because colours seem ready to shift their symbolic value (as they do in the parable of the cloths in “The Defence of Guenevere”). Indeed, *The Defence of Guenevere*, as a whole, is a study of clouded erotic perception that destabilizes the apparent precision of the volume’s sexual imagery, from Rapunzel’s fathoms of flowing hair to Guenevere’s sigh of “agony beneath [her] waist-chain” for Launcelot (“The Defence of Guenevere” 207). In “The Defence of Guenevere,” straining hands and mouths wander and ache “in one way” (136-38), a way which at first seems to be the way the body leads an adulteress towards damnation; however, Guenevere upsets the notion of a sinful body working against the interests of the spirit when she holds up the beauty of her highly sexualized body as “gracious proof” pointing in another way towards innocence (241). If, as she says, her lover’s “wonderful words ... all mean verily / The thing they seem to mean” (“The Defence of Guenevere” 249-50), then Guenevere experiences a rarity in a volume in which words, colours, and bodies all seem to ache after some elusive meaning that often gets lost in a haze of sexuality.

Of all the poems in the volume, “The Defence of Guenevere” continues to draw the most critical attention and to sow the most discord among critics. In the twentieth century, many critics have mired their arguments in the question of Guenevere’s guilt.⁶⁵ The question is a facile one and does not seem to merit all the attention it receives: Guenevere *is* guilty of adultery. While one might cavil that she is innocent of the charges

of having sexual relations with one of the knights of her retinue, Guenevere is guilty of adultery with Launcelot: though perhaps difficult for the Arthurian court to prove, her guilt is an established convention of the Arthurian literary tradition, and Morris does not alter the fact. The critics who detect in Guenevere's monologue an admission of guilt tend to explain her defence as a mere ruse to buy enough time for Launcelot to come to her rescue.⁶⁶ Such simplistic readings undermine the subtlety and complexity of the character and render her defence an empty show of meaningless words and gestures: it becomes merely noise covering the sound of an approaching horse off-stage at the end of the poem. Through Guenevere and the other characters in *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris interrogates the relationship of the body to physical and spiritual desire, and explores the manner in which it is monitored, regulated, and inscribed with social, religious, and political meaning. Although not the first to explore similar relations with the body, Morris has his characters conduct the interrogation in such a way that the body appears in a disturbingly impersonal way—that is, for characters searching out the meaning of desire, their own bodies appear alien or curiously absent, or as unreadable riddles.

Virginia Hale and Catherine Stevenson have helped bring readers back to the body in Morris's poetry by showing that the central thrust of Guenevere's defence is not a denial of adultery—she all but confesses this—but an apology for true lovers. Hale and Stevenson, since followed by others such as Bullen, have put Guenevere's defence in the context of a medieval chivalric code, which privileges above all else—even marriage vows—fidelity to true love. Morris's source, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, certainly follows the established medieval literary tradition that approves of the passion-led queen,⁶⁷ and

Morris would have read the following passage in his copy of the 1817 edition of the *Morte D'Arthur* edited by Robert Southey,⁶⁸ which holds up Guenevere as a model of constancy in love:

Wherfor I lyken loue now a dayes vnto somer and winter, for lyke as the one is hote, & the other cold, so fareth loue now a dayes, therefore alle ye that be louers, call vnto your remembraunce the moneth of may, lyke as dyd quene Gueneuer. For whome I make here a lytel mencyon that whyle she lyued, she was a true louer, and therfor she had a good ende.

(2. 363; bk. 18, ch. 25).

While Malory could compile his Arthurian narrative with the quiet assumption that the “true lover” enjoys a moral dispensation from the strict adherence to social convention, Morris could not expect his queen to receive the same indulgence from a Victorian audience, nor could he so casually give it himself. However, in the handling of the adulterous queen, there is a marked difference between Morris and Tennyson, the latter of whom takes up the same subject matter in 1859 in the first series of *Idylls of the King*. Charged with the laureate’s responsibility of shoring up the nation’s sense of moral progress against the tide of modernity’s corrupting influence, Tennyson dutifully chastens medieval dalliance, contains physical desire with Victorian moral rectitude, and makes tribute to Queen Victoria’s dead husband, Albert.⁶⁹ In the *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson places Guinevere’s body at the centre of the moral and social chaos engulfing Camelot. Following in a long literary tradition of women, such as Lilith, Eve, and Helen, whose bodily appetites precipitate the ruin of a way of life or civilization, Tennyson’s Guinevere is responsible for undermining the chivalric ideals upon which Camelot rose to

a state of political perfection and through which peace was established in Britain.

Looking at his queen in “Guinevere,” Tennyson’s Arthur comments on her infertility:

“Well is it that no child is born of thee” (421). Her children, he says, “are sword and fire,
/ Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws” (422-23). She is to blame for the ruin of

Camelot. Although Morris resists using the adulterous queen as opportunity to lecture on Victorian moral conduct in marriage in *The Defence of Guenevere*, he could not go so far as Malory and guarantee a “goode ende” to those who morally lapse. In *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris puts his characters in pursuit of almost unattainable passion, a grail set beyond various obstacles of prohibition.

Guenevere, pulled in two different directions by her body and soul, is the first victim of the quest that Morris sets in *The Defence of Guenevere*. Following Hale and Stevenson, who argue that “Morris’s Guenevere audaciously celebrates herself as a woman and a lover” (171), Bullen suggests that Morris’s poem “foregrounds the pleasures of physical love” and gives “priority to the flesh rather than the spirit” (81); however, these critics ignore the extent to which Morris uses his queen to *question* physical love. Their affirmations of the flesh in “The Defence of Guenevere” come as a result of reading the poem in an unnatural isolation: any understanding of this poem will be radically incomplete if it does not consider the other three poems in the volume in which the Arthurian players, including Launcelot and Guenevere, move towards a state of holiness *in spite* of the presence of physical love and desire. The difficult question that catches out critics, and one that Morris circles without a clear answer but somehow arrives at through his poetry (particularly “Rapunzel”), is how does one move bodily towards a spiritual goal? The paradox does not seem to have weighed heavily on Malory,

who accepts a degree of sexual misconduct for the sake of true and lasting love.⁷⁰

Morris, in his youthful earnestness, could not so casually step over the entrenched Pauline notion that “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and [that] these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5.17). Nonetheless, the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* show a clear reluctance to deny the flesh outright.

“The Defence of Guenevere” begins *in media res*. Camelot has convened a court to try Guenevere, but the laying of charges belongs to the immediately antecedent action, indicated in the unconnected grammatical conjunction with which the poem begins:⁷¹

BUT, knowing now that they would have her speak,
 She threw her wet hair backwards from her brow,
 Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

 As though she had had there a shameful blow,
 And feeling it shameful to feel aught but shame
 All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,

 She must a little touch it. (1-7)

Together, the opening conjunction and an initial spondaic substitution contribute to the effect of simultaneously experiencing both the swift motion of rushing into action already in progress and the dead calm of the pregnant pause that attends Guenevere’s “defence.” Such an opening puzzles the ear and blurs the eyes, and like dancers in a pirouette, readers look for a fixed spot to ground the whirling scene in the physical presence of Guenevere. Through the swirling rhetoric of her long and complex defence, her body will be the thing from which the poem will have to take its bearing, as it does in these

opening lines. Her body is the key to her defence and the poem, something the touching of her own cheek emphasizes.

Although her defence strategy rests heavily on the moral ambiguity of the parable of the blue and red cloths, which she uses to represent her impossible choice between Arthur and Launcelot, Guenevere mounts her defence silently in the preliminary gesture of touching her own cheek. While the moment suggests a pause in which Guenevere gathers the threads of her rebuttal to the charges laid against her, touching her cheek in this almost absent manner, as though monitoring her own body, is part of the defence that will create for the body an ambiguous status, or, in modern jurisprudence, a “reasonable doubt,” concerning its relation to the politics of the court, the conventions of society, and even her own personal being. This gesture, in which Guenevere seems to interrogate her own flesh a little, acknowledges the status of it as both subjective and objective in a way that resonates with the somewhat famous example Merleau-Ponty gives in *The Phenomenology of Perception* of touching one hand with the other:

If I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place. ... When I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too. ... When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an

ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of ‘touching’ and being ‘touched.’ (105-06)

When her hand questions the cheek for the source of its blush, as though she had an impersonal relationship to her body, Guenevere seems to contemplate her flesh as something that is capable of both perceiving and being perceived; it is, like Merleau-Ponty’s hands, both touching and tangible. In chapter four, “The Intertwining—the Chiasm,” of *The Visible and the Invisible*, a manuscript left incomplete at the time of his death, Merleau-Ponty expands this notion of the touching-touched body using the term “chiasm,” or “crisscrossing,” to describe the subjective experience of the body as it is crossed with its own objective existence. In the expansion of his concept of the touching and touched hand, Merleau-Ponty extends it to the sense of sight, to “the look ... [that] envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things” (133). He extends his argument a degree further to the interactions among individuals, each of whom is both a perceiving subject and a perceived object among other perceiving subjects and perceived objects. This interaction in the world of subject/object chiasm gives chapter four of *The Visible and the Invisible* its other name, “intertwining.”

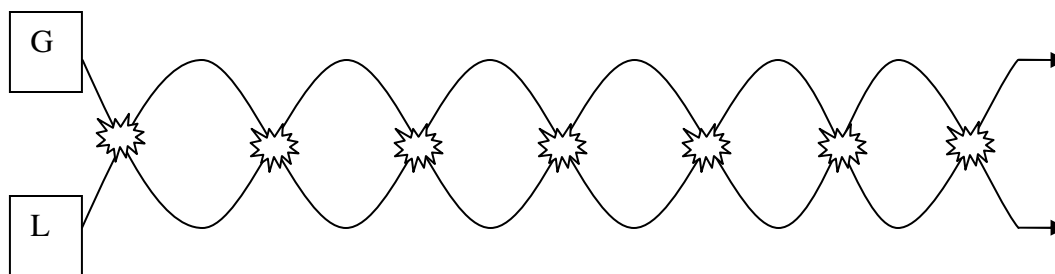
Guenevere’s seemingly simple gesture, entwining the touching and the touched, closes the circuit between subject and object to become both and begins a process of weaving that will entangle the body, as it is lived and observed, throughout *The Defence of Guenevere*. The queen dreamily invokes the presence of her corporeal self in such a way as to make her body strange and yet intensely present to herself and onlookers. A dramatic lyric, the poem takes the perspective of an anonymous witness (presumably one of Camelot’s knights), who grounds the poem in a reading of her body, through which he,

the court, and even Guenevere, attempt to gauge the severity of the charges laid. The reader, of course, having arrived late on the scene, stands at one further remove, looking over the shoulder of the reporting knight, straining to hear her voice and to catch a glimpse of the spectacle the court has made of the queen's conduct and body on trial. This combined effect of the dramatic lyric's perspective and the spectacle of her body intertwines the queen, the court, the witness, and the reader.

The intertwining of bodies and perspectives in *The Defence of Guenevere* is the first instance of its *textual*—literally, “woven”—condition. The most obvious instance of weaving is the rhyme scheme that Morris uses for the title poem, *terza rima*, and the weaving pattern persists over the course of the four Arthurian poems in the volume. Morris's Arthurian poems have a narrative progression that is guided principally by the Guenevere-Launcelot relationship and would look not so much like this:



as like this:



Morris seems to have thought in woven patterns. Like the intricately entwined vines and flowers of his wallpapers, *The Defence of Guenevere* presents a series of intense experiences that weave the poems together: there is a transgression, then a moving apart,

followed by reflection and movement to other events.⁷² From the central transgression of Guenvere and Launcelot's adulterous affair, the movement of events catches up other characters, such as Sir Galahad and Sir Ozana, and intertwines them in a progression towards a state of holiness. Even Morris's noticeably absent Arthur is given a strange intertwining presence in the moments of Guenevere and Launcelot's transgressions (particularly in "King Arthur's Tomb"). Remarkably, the moment that initiates this intertwining lies in Guenevere's subtle touch to her own cheek that lets her body slip into a Merleau-Pontyan gap, or *écart*, where it hides its identity from the court that would condemn it. It is a hiding space somewhere between objective and subjective experiences of the body, between "the body as sensible and the body as sentient," an "abyss," Merleau-Ponty calls it, "that separates the In Itself from the For Itself" (*Visible* 136-37).

The depiction of characters in *The Defence of Guenevere* takes on a quality that points ahead to Merleau-Ponty's search for the structures of perception and thought in the body. In discovering that the hand, eye, and voice are capable of touching, seeing, and speaking at the same time that they are tangible, visible and audible, Merleau-Ponty finds a non-coincidence of the body because the one can never, at the same instant, experience a hand as touching and as touched. He explains the divergence or non-coincidence of the flesh as follows: "Either the right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted, or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it" (*Visible* 148). The chiasm of the flesh does not present two complementary objective and subjective states; rather, it opens up a chasm between them and between other perceiving subjects. Using the first-person singular to deal with the personal perceptual experience, Merleau-Ponty argues that the "body as the stage director

of my perception has shattered the illusion of a coincidence between my perception and the things themselves” (*Visible* 8). The body becomes the pivot of a perceptual uncertainty: I am convinced that my vision is out there in the thing, yet the vision belongs to me, which means I cannot be sure of my perceptual experience. The vision may belong to me, but there are other gazes on the visible thing that are not mine and which are therefore absent from me. By discussing “others who see as we do,” Merleau-Ponty suggests that, when I see, I cannot give others access to my vision; conversely, “by a sort of backlash, they also refuse me this access which I deny to them” (*Visible* 25). It is therefore an absence that structures this chiasm: this lack of access means that, while I may insist that my vision is out there in the thing itself, the vision of others lies not in the thing itself but in their bodies, in the retinal projections, through optic nerves, somewhere in their occipital lobes. The gap widens further still when I must acknowledge the reversibility of the situation: that like the touching-touched hand, the others all feel that their vision rests out in the thing itself, while my vision, for them, exists only as some shadowy mental image locked away within me. Beginning with the gesture of touching her own cheek—a touching/touched moment—Guenevere initiates the volume of poetry to a body that is both accessible and inaccessible, one that “shatter[s] the illusion of a coincidence between perception and the things themselves.”

Guenevere’s intense physicality is characterized as much by absence as by presence, in that Morris presents the picture of a body that is both material and ghostly. Even though it is a spectacle, her body eludes comprehension as an almost unreadable riddle: why is her hair wet? And what is the shame that marks her cheek? Is it the guilt of an adulteress or the indignity of an accused queen? And does the witness rightly interpret

her gesture by naming it shame? He merely notes that she moves her hand to her cheek “*as though* she had had there a shameful blow,” but Guenevere denies greater access to what she perceives with the feeling hand and the touched cheek. At another level, the poem further challenges the reader’s perception by creating a gap between the senses of sound and sight in a textual dissociation of sensibility: the poem’s woven pattern comes under a similar perceptual strain in the *terza rima* rhyme scheme with a sight rhyme in the first two stanzas. The first b-rhyme of the first stanza (aba), which provides weaving thread of the second stanza (bcb), is “brow”; however, the initial b-rhyme of the second stanza that picks up the thread from the first is “blow.” As Shaw has similarly noted (302), in this instance the eye makes a rhyme that the ear can only half hear. The uncertainty of the shame in the phantom blow that the reporter thinks he perceives in Guenevere’s touching-touched gesture becomes doubly uncertain in the conflicting senses of sight and sound in the sight rhyme.⁷³ The riddle of this poem, and so many others in *The Defence of Guenevere*, lies in the body, but, for the most part, critics have been so preoccupied with the poem’s parable of the two cloths that they tend not to notice the corporeal riddle it veils.

Although not necessarily the key to the riddle, the cloths veiling the body in “The Defence of Guenevere” also provide access to it. The bulk of criticism for this poem has thus far focused on the parable of choosing between the blue and red cloths as the choice Guenevere has had to make between her marriage to Arthur and her love for Launcelot.⁷⁴ When the hypothetical angel of the queen’s argument comes to her and says, “One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell, / Now choose one cloth for ever” (22-23), Guenevere chooses the blue cloth for its traditional association with “heaven’s colour”

(38), and, implicitly, its association with the Virgin Mary. Her choice, says the angel, is hell. Guenevere's parable uses the arbitrariness of meaning assigned to the blue and red cloths as an example of a choice whose unforeseeable moral consequences become clear only in hindsight ("Ah Christ! if only I had known, known, known" (41)). She uses the parable to argue that, while mistaken in her choice, she tried to choose morally. However, Morris was never one to assign meaning to colours casually or arbitrarily.

As Fiona MacCarthy points out in her biography, "Morris was a supreme colourist" (58), to whom nature's hues signified a world of meaning. MacCarthy says that Morris, from the time of his 1856 purchase of Arthur Hughes' *April Love*, associated the colour blue with "pleasure and desire" (113), and similarly, critics of "The Defence" have associated Guenevere's choice of the blue cloth with Launcelot and her decision to side with physical pleasure and desire.⁷⁵ Dennis Balch, in his attempt to attribute meaning to the cloths' colours, contradicts previous readings with the hypothesis that the red cloth represents Launcelot and the blue Arthur, to whom Guenevere ultimately remains faithful. He supports his hypothesis by thoroughly and laboriously noting all references to red in association with Launcelot in both "The Defence" and "King Arthur's Tomb." Blue, therefore reasons Balch, must stand for Arthur by default. Further evidence to support this thesis, which James P. Carley later notes, lies in the Rossetti painting upon which Morris bases his poem and where Launcelot's long red tunic dominates the scene (21).

The parable of choosing the cloths, as Guenevere constructs it, strains the analogy of her choice between Arthur and Launcelot because the two men were not presented to her at the same time. The choice of the blue cloth, representing her choice to marry

Arthur, is really no choice at all, and the reason it proves the hellish one is because Guenevere makes it before she knows the life of passion that red signifies. The hellishness of her choice, which was the “little word [of her marriage vow] / Scarce ever meant at all,” is that she must “prove / Stone-cold for ever” (87-88), living a life on the margins of courtly love. This marginal life begins in the subsequent poem, “King Arthur’s Tomb,” when she finally rejects Launcelot to save their souls and determines to keep her wedding vows, even though Arthur is dead. In this poem, argues Balch, Guenevere continues to wrestle with the choice between Arthur and Launcelot, but reframes it as a choice between Christ and Launcelot. Balch declares that by ultimately rejecting Launcelot, Guenevere “is thus truer to Arthur than her accusers in ‘The Defence’ ever realize” (69), and that her choice of the blue cloth ultimately reveals that “Arthur and Christian asceticism not only can but must, within the context of Arthurian legend, overcome Launcelot and the sensuous life he represents” (70). Balch’s argument makes a good deal of sense within the context of the Arthurian tradition, but the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* suggest another context in which they are not entirely comfortable with such a victory. Balch, in fact, oversimplifies the complexity of the moral choice Guenevere has had to face, which she represents in a riddle that hides hell’s choice in “heaven’s colour,” suggesting the difficulty of reading and interpreting spiritual (invisible) significance in the material (visible) world.

In Morris’s poetry, colour is a concern most often connected with the moral vision of characters trying to see the world rightly. Guenevere knows the moral judgement about to be passed in the case against her depends upon an interpretation of colour, and she openly doubts both the ability and the right of her silent auditors in “The Defence” to

interpret or force meaning from what is called in “King Arthur’s Tomb” the “deep / Still land of colours” (75-76). Indignantly, she asks if there is “any law / To make a queen say why some spots of red / Lie on her coverlet” (174-76). She has reason to doubt interpretations of colour, for, thus far, it has proven an unreliable guide in her experience of the material and moral, an experience she typifies in the allegory of the blue and red cloths between which “No man could tell the better of the two” (36). As Josephine Koster Tarvers points out in her thorough analysis of colour symbolism in *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris does not use colour systematically in a rigid one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified (193); rather, he exploits a full range of symbolic meaning in colour in such a way as to allow him to paint in vivid Pre-Raphaelite hues that convey emotional and spiritual intensity. She concludes her analysis of colour in *The Defence of Guenevere* by claiming that Morris “strives for—and often achieves—what he called in an 1891 lecture one of the most important qualities of Pre-Raphaelite art: ‘definite, harmonious, conscious beauty’” (195). Tarvers mars her otherwise convincing argument with the odd conclusion that Morris’s poetry strives to be “definite” and “harmonious,” for these are the very qualities that his poetry lacks and whose absence makes it all the more compelling. The divided critical debate engendered by the two relatively distinct hues in Guenevere’s parable of the cloths is a fine example of the indefinite and discordant in Morris’s poetry. Morris often uses colour more for its intensity than for its symbolism, in a way that would make sense to someone like Merleau-Ponty, who could imagine “a certain blue of the sea [that] is so blue that only blood would be more red” (*Visible* 132). Beauty and imagery that is ambiguous rather than definite, discordant

rather than harmonious, is the principal strength of many poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*.

Morris's use of colour resists attempts to force a direct "this-means-that" correspondence of allegorical and emblematic meaning. Like the characters in Browning's dramatic monologues (to which Morris acknowledges his poetry's affinity), Morris's Arthurian characters are continuously forced to interpret images—primarily rooted in the senses and, therefore, the body—and draw from them some kind of spiritual significance. The problem is that their vision is clouded by some sort of moral ambiguity that renders the images opaque, as though seen "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). As observed earlier, an undergraduate Morris balked at signing the Articles of Faith to get his degree from Oxford, and while the reasons for his hesitation are unknown, many of the characters of *The Defence of Guenevere* run up hard against Article IX, which is profoundly Pauline in its view of the understanding that has been clouded by the constant struggle between the body and the spirit:

Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that *the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit*; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, *phronema sarkos*, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the

affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God.

And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

As a consequence of the Fall, human perception—previously intuitive, literally seeing into the essence of things—becomes clouded, particularly as it tends toward carnal mindedness (“*phronema sarkos*”), and as a result humanity that once witnessed the divine in the physical world can but see it, as Paul says, with the impaired judgement of one who sees it through a glass, darkly, knowing it only in part (1 Cor. 13: 11-12). Morris’s characters, even when they see sharp contrasts of intense colours, perceive the coloured world through the dark glass of the carnal mind, in which colours that are elsewhere intense and distinct blend into uncertain shades of each other (particularly red and gold) in scenes of moral ambiguity. Unlike the definite black and white lines that severely define the moral and immoral boundaries of Tennyson’s Arthurian *Idylls* along the lines of marriage vows, Morris depicts the moral complexity of Camelot in the shifting and uncertain colours used to weave the body and spirit together on a field of moral confusion.

The Arthurian poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* are best read as images on a tapestry slowly forming scenes as each fateful act of chivalry and passion shoots the shuttle of weft-thread across the warp of the Arthurian legend. Characters such as Guenevere and Launcelot look back at the emerging but still indistinct image of the uncertain consequences of desire cast in subtly shifting hues. In the volume’s second

poem, “King Arthur’s Tomb,” as Launcelot rides towards his final encounter with the queen, he relives in memory his former visits with Guenenvere:

The stars shone above the *doubtful green*

Of her bodice, in the *green* sky overhead;

.....

... *there were no colours then*

For near an hour, and I fell asleep

.....

I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep

I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun

Had only just risen from the deep

Still land of colours. (61-70, 74-76; emphasis added)

Tarvers argues that Morris manipulates a wide range of meaning for the colour green: it can suggest the “green hope” mentioned at line 255 in “The Defence of Guenevere,” symbolize fidelity, or depict time’s indifference to lovers whose former haunts are choked with the rank weed of the material world’s forgetfulness (190-91). Launcelot’s vision of Guenevere is therefore doubly uncertain not only because the colour of clothing resists signification, but also because he is uncertain that it is even the uncertain colour he sees (“doubtful green”) against a green sky. Indistinct and *à contre-jour* (or, rather, *à contre-étoiles*), Guenevere complicates Launcelot’s obscure vision eventually to the point of blindness. Furthermore, Guenevere has once before been the unfortunate model of “doubtful green” clothing within the Arthurian tradition: in the Middle English ballad

“The Boy and the Mantle,” Guenevere dons the mantle whose magical property is to expose unfaithful wives. The mantle first appears red, then hovers in a shade of doubtful green, before turning an unflattering black (Child 41-5).⁷⁶ Morris’s “King Arthur’s Tomb” glosses over the nocturnal transgressions of Guenevere and Launcelot in a way that creates a blind spot in the narrative—they are lost and absorbed into the night in which “there were no colours” and therefore into a time of moral blindness. In the morning, a vague suspicion of sin begins to dawn on Launcelot with the sun rising from the “deep / Still land of colours” (75-76). The land of colour, “deep and still,” profound but silent, withholds meaning from the land of the living, and the suspicion remains vague. The sun casts an uncertain light on Launcelot’s lover, who appears “to have changed in the night” and now holds the scarlet lilies of a virgin martyr in her hand (78-80). The signifiers are as uncertain as the colours in Morris’s Arthurian poems, and passion alters both their appearance and meaning.

The most articulate colours in Morris’s poetry are red and gold. Gold, one of the more stable signifiers in Morris’s poetry, bespeaks states of spiritual advancement, while red is the colour most often used by Morris to denote physical passion in the Arthurian poems. However, Morris’s red often colours its images in variegated hues, as it does in “King Arthur’s Tomb” when Launcelot recalls winding Guenevere’s hair about his neck (a recurring Pre-Raphaelite image of male virtue ensnared in the *femme fatale*’s web of sexuality), “so that it fell / Upon my *red* robe, strange in the twilight / With many *unnamed colours*” (45-47; emphasis added). The frequency with which the poems present red as an uncertain shade representing desire suggests a complicated reading of passion. Morris’s red, which Balch would have readers believe represents Launcelot and

the purely “animal nature” of the lovers (69), often mingles with tints of gold. Indeed, Morris’s use of red acknowledges its complex associations with both sexual and religious passion, and the possibility that they might overlap. In this same poem that mixes red with many “unnamed colours,” Guenevere’s efforts to repent her past deeds are frustrated in church where “Launcelot’s red-golden hair would play, / Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall” (306-07). As Tarvers rightly argues, by bleeding the colours one into the other, Morris paints passion as a thing both holy and profane (186); thus, he opens a taboo that challenges the orthodox notion of the worldly appetites of the body that must be overborne and ruled by an exertion of the will so as to preserve the heavenly aspirations of the soul.

Beneath the medieval raiment and coloured cloths of Morris’s Arthurian poems lies an essentially Victorian and Pauline understanding of the body and soul. While Tennyson obscures the body to elevate the soul according to the traditional notion of dualism in which, as the speaker of his dramatic monologue “Happy: The Leper Bride” says, “the body is but foul at best” (28), Morris invokes a body whose physicality is intertwined with, not separated from, its spirituality. Morris’s Guenevere forbids the medieval court to consider matters ethical, moral, and spiritual as matters distinct from the corporeal. Offended that she should have to account for drops of blood on her bed, she rephrases the question of her interrogators as though they are asking her, “Where did you bleed?” (178). Not for a moment does she let her jurors think that their questions concerning her moral character are anything but a probing of her very body. She cautions,

Say no rash word

Against me, being so beautiful; ...

.....

... see my breast rise,

Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand;

And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

.....

... how the light is falling so

Within my moving tresses: will you dare,

When you have looked a little upon my brow,

To say this thing is vile? (223-38)

A Victorian jury might well concede the point to Guenevere, especially if later in her defence she could call physiognomist Johann Lavater (1741-1801) or phrenologist George Combe (1788-1858) as expert witnesses.⁷⁷ Combe's *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects*, a work of natural philosophy that considers Man as material being subject to natural law, sold approximately 350,000 copies between 1828 and 1900, while Darwin's *Origin of Species*, for example, sold only 50,000 in Britain from its initial publication in 1859 to 1900. Combe's two-volume *magnum opus*, *System of Phrenology* (1819), despite the twenty-one shilling price tag of its luxury edition containing over a thousand pages, six plates, and sixty-one woodcuts, was already in its fifth edition by 1853. Widely accepted by the Victorians, phrenology and physiognomy were the darlings of sociologists and artists alike: Dickens's illustrator Halbot Knight Browne was so good at capturing character in his woodcuts that he was known as "Phiz" (derived

from “physiognomy”); Henry Mayhew used these sciences in *London Labour and the London Poor*⁷⁸ to introduce a “series of facts of utmost social importance,” including the fact that “to each of these tribes a different form of head is peculiar, the wandering races being remarkable for the development of the bones of the face, as the jaws, cheek-bones, &c, and the civilized for those of the head” (2). Phrenology and physiognomy are staples of characterization in more than a century of fiction, making notable appearances in such works as *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and *Heart of Darkness* (1899). While recording a visit that Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Millais made to the phrenologist Cornelius Donovan in early November 1849, Hunt indicates that they did not take their readings very seriously (1.183-86). Nonetheless, it is clear that some of the Pre-Raphaelites took an interest in physiognomy and phrenology for the practical artistic purposes of constructing character: fine examples of Pre-Raphaelite use of these pseudo-sciences are Joseph’s high-domed coronal arch (indicative of a faculty of veneration) in Millais’s *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50) and, conversely, the young rake’s low forehead, broad skull, coarse hair, and generally animalistic features that bear a striking resemblance and symmetry to the predatory cat below him in Hunt’s *Awakening Conscience* (1853-54).⁷⁹ At mid-century, Morris’s *Guenevere* fits neatly into a century of reading the body as a text of inner spiritual truths, and, as a Victorian text rooted in the Middle Ages, *Guenevere*’s readable body fits neatly into the medieval idea that the body expresses inner character—for example, the gap teeth of Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath* are emblematic of her lusty nature. In 1858, the same year in which Combe died, Morris’s *Guenevere* poems enact the difficult drama of a soul on the body’s stage and, in the period costume of the Middle

Ages, depict a Victorian struggle of a soul at work in the “passionate twisting of her body” (60).

Mounting a defence based on a Victorian reading of physiognomy, Guenevere proffers to the court her body’s beauty as a guarantee of virtue. After a scene of voyeuristic entrapment, she asks the court, “Am I not gracious proof” of innocence and virtue (241)? In “Arthurian Ghosts: The Phantom Art of ‘The Defence of Guenevere,’” W. David Shaw points to this phrase as an instance of what he sees as Guenevere’s deliberate attempt to hollow out language and render words ghostly shells with no meaning. His argument is based on the following question that she puts to the court:

Will you dare,

When you have looked a little upon my brow,

To say this thing is vile? or will you care

For any plausible lies of cunning woof,

When you can see my face with no lie there

For ever? am I not *gracious* proof— (236-42; emphasis added)

Already under threat from the materialist reading of it, the idea of grace, claims Shaw, is hollowed out soon after when Guenevere links the “gracious proof” of her body to the smile of her adulterous lover, to whom she recalls saying,

... well I love to see

That *gracious* smile light up your face, and hear

Your wonderful words, that all mean verily

The thing they seem to mean. (247-50; emphasis added)

Doubting that Guenevere employs words in a way that they “all mean verily / The thing they seem to mean,” Shaw insists on a duplicitous intention in her use of “gracious.” Her aspect presents but the hollow husk of a truth. Where other critics have recognized this phenomenon as a “merely materialist or fleshly art,”⁸⁰ Shaw argues that Morris’s phantom art turns words such as “gracious” into “soulless bodies” and creates an atmosphere of a séance in which the characters “levitate like bodies on the ceiling of baroque churches” (299, 301). Guenevere, he says, uses words as might a “victim of Alzheimer’s disease, ... [who] seems to have lost all memory of what they traditionally mean” (299). Instead of suggesting the “favour of a gracious God or virtuous knight,” Guenevere, he says, reduces grace to a “mere ... manner or bearing, [and makes] virtue and vice ... matters of good or bad taste” (301). Rather than emptying out meaning in language, as Shaw argues, Morris makes a deliberate play with the word that has to do with reading the spiritual in the material. The play he makes with “grace” and its cognates resembles his use of “fair,” which, can mean both “beautiful to the eye” and “free from moral stain”: in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Launcelot rides to Guenevere and falls into a reverie that returns him to the “old garden life,” a pre-lapsarian time with Guenevere, who, “smiling like heaven, ... loosen’d [her] hair ... [so] that its fairness might draw up the wind sooner to cool her head”; when Guenevere, the “glorious lady fair” of “The Defence of Guenevere” (56), meets him at Arthur’s tomb in the subsequent poem, she recalls the day she kissed her “Launcelot” in the “garden fair” (24-28) and sees almost immediately an emblem of their transgression in a venomous “fair serpent” as a sign that she must “save his soul” (210, 208). The play is complex and intertwining, but it is not hollow, as Shaw suggests. While he is right in pointing out the way in which

Guinevere projects before her jurors detached images of “hair,” “head,” and “wandering ... mouths” that leave the “hands” far behind, Shaw errs in supposing that Morris hollows both language and bodies of their “referential souls” (300). The majority of critics, including Shaw, see Guenevere’s defence as a mere shadowy lie that attempts to seduce her auditors with “verbal and visual splendor” (Sternberg 48). Guenevere, in fact, does not evacuate words of meaning or bodies of souls, but presents a text—her body—that signifies a truth obliquely told in an elusive and mysterious language.

Initially, Shaw’s reading of “The Defence of Guenevere” seems correct in that it identifies a blatant erosion of meaning in language when Guenevere undermines a legitimate (at least, in Victorian terms) physiognomic claim to God’s “grace” by associating it with the “gracious smile” of her partner in adultery. If emptied of their fuller meaning, as Shaw insists they are, words in the queen’s apology seem mere “sensory marvels, like the ripples of sound that rise in Guenevere’s throat” (301), in which case they cannot “mean verily / The thing they seem to mean.” Shaw’s reading, however, does not give a complete picture, nor does any analysis that fails to consider the poem alongside its companion piece, “King Arthur’s Tomb.” The poem was inspired partly by Rossetti’s watercolour *Arthur Tomb* (1854-55), a painting that Morris owned for a time and which, though it depicts an incident not found in Malory, was the first work of an Arthurian theme by any Pre-Raphaelite.⁸¹ As the title poem’s complement, “King Arthur’s Tomb” thematically develops the drama by presenting the queen in a private moment renouncing the passion that she has just defiantly defended against public judgement. The bridge that prosody forms between the two poems also indicates the necessity of reading them together, for “King Arthur’s Tomb” complements the stanza

structure of “The Defence of Guenevere” by rounding out the latter poem’s three-line *terza rima* in an elegiac quatrain (abab), a connection that is especially obvious in the final stanza of “The Defence of Guenevere,” which is a quatrain that introduces the form of the next poem; furthermore, the opening spondaic substitution of “King Arthur’s Tomb” forms another connection in a distinct echo of the opening sounds of “The Defence of Guenevere.” Taken together, the two poems create a riddle of sight and sound, which has troubled Shaw and been ignored by Balch. At the centre of this riddle, the body struggles to emerge from under both the weight of words and speech, and the burden of a public morality that is more Victorian than medieval. Like most riddles, Morris’s depends on paradox and irony, which in these two poems form a sort of prison for the body. Shaw comes close to answering the sphinx by lighting upon Guenevere’s use of the word “grace,” but his answer misses the signs of paradox and irony that enter “King Arthur’s Tomb” when grace is expressed imagistically in bodily terms.

2.4 Graceful Bodies in “The Defence of Guenevere” and “King Arthur’s Tomb”

The movement towards the redemption of both body and soul in Morris’s poetry is tempered by the Pauline suspicion of their mutually exclusive impulses. Morris does not resolve the uncertainty in his poetry; rather, he uses it to construct layers of irony. Shaw, for example, lifts but one layer of it when he argues that Guenevere’s use of the word “grace” creates an irony of “soulless bodies,” for he ignores the larger irony that preoccupies and perplexes Morris’s poetry: the embodied soul. It is an irony born in part of a culture caught between the rise of scientific materialism and transcendental spiritualism. At first glance, all the irony of Morris’s poetry seems to work against the

love of Guenevere and Launcelot, as Shaw argues it does in Guenevere's speech in "The Defence of Guenevere." The same sort of irony seems to make a victim of Launcelot in his response to her rejection in the subsequent poem, "King Arthur's Tomb": "Lord, forgive her now, / That she not knowing what she does, being mad, / Kills me in this way" (201-03). When Launcelot blurts out these words, exasperated that Guenevere should choose to become a nun rather than follow him and passion now that Arthur is dead, he echoes the plea that Christ makes for clemency on behalf of those who have just made a sacrifice of his body (Luke 23:34). At the moment, Launcelot appears to be the victim of a blasphemous irony that blatantly juxtaposes the selfless offering of the Lord's sacred flesh for the exculpation of human sin and the selfish impulses of a profane attempt to satisfy flesh already polluted with the sins of lust and adultery; however, Morris's poetry does not assume that every physical impulse is inherently ignoble or that the flesh is inherently corrupted, lusting always contrary to the spirit. While the sacred and the profane exist in Morris's poetry, they do not necessarily function as the opposite poles of a constructed irony. The uncertainty with which the burden of the body is borne in *The Defence of Guenevere* has led critics to see irony where there is none, or at least to bear witness to a false instance of it. Thus far, what has passed for irony in Morris's poetry is, in fact, the subtle truth of taboo.

The idea of taboo deals with the combination of the sacred and the profane. In 1878, James Frazer published an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on "Taboo," in which he argues that the dualism that juxtaposes ideas of the sacred and the profane, or the pure and the polluted, takes its origin from a single conceptual root: "The opposition of the sacred and accursed, clean and unclean, which plays so important a part in the later

history of religion, did in fact arise by differentiation from the single root idea of taboo, which includes and reconciles them both and by reference to which alone their history and mutual relation are intelligible” (16). Historians have often noted the general silence surrounding sexual activity in the Victorian era, despite the ample evidence of its occurrence in the number of children issuing from the parents’ beds. For example, Houghton says that sex was a subject touched upon “vaguely but pointedly” in discussions “about ‘uncleanness’ of body and mind” and the necessity of preserving a sense of “purity” against its polluting influence (353-54). Interestingly, Tennyson’s *Idylls*, drawing from the same stock of characters as Morris’s *Defence of Guenevere*, approaches the body with this dualistic divide of pollution and purity: Arthur, mist-like and incorporeal, is purity of law and moral order, while Guinevere is the “flesh ... polluted” (“Guinevere” 550-52). However, Morris’s poetry returns to the body in what Frazer would call a more “primitive” fashion, reuniting in it the sacred and the profane. Morris in fact attempts to reconcile “the sacred and the accursed” in the figure of Launcelot, in whom the mutual activity of body and soul destabilizes a very comfortable Victorian dichotomy and produces a poetry laden with a heretofore unreadable irony.

In the Arthurian poems (and some of the “Other” ones, such as “Rapunzel”), Morris constitutes sexuality in taboo form, in which the profane pleasures of the body intermingle and take part in the sacred activity of the soul. Consider again, for example, Launcelot’s recollection of the queen in the familiar Pre-Raphaelite image of a *femme fatale* catching the unsuspecting knight in the loose web (or, as here, the noose) of sexuality represented by her hair. He combines this image with what appears to be a

blasphemous irony by comparing the act to the moment of Enoch's translation in "King Arthur's Tomb":

And she would let me wind
 Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
 Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
 With many unnamed colours, till the bell
 Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

Through all my ways of being; like the stroke
 Wherewith God threw all men upon the face
 When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
 With a changed body in the happy place. (45–52)

Launcelot imagines Guenevere's passionate kiss works on him as God's grace did on Enoch, who, in Genesis (5: 24), is gathered bodily to heaven. At first glance, the incongruity of the queen's illicit passion and the miracle of God's favour suggest an irony that tells against the two lovers; however, what has passed as irony is an exploration of a sexual taboo.

If irony is, as Stephen Adams insists, a "dissimulation" that is "in its broadest sense a trope of debasement, of dehumanizing" (141), then it is unlikely that Morris should make either Launcelot or Guenevere its unredeemable victim—he has too much sympathy for them. While there is enough evidence within the volume to prove his sympathy, Morris provides further proof of his sympathy for his adulterous pair in his review of Browning's *Men and Women*. Morris describes Browning's "The Statue and

the Bust,” which depicts a situation parallel to Guenevere and Launcelot’s, as a “sad story” of “unlawful love that was never acted, but thought only, thought through life; yet were the lovers none the less sinners, therefore; rather the more, in that they indulged their love freely, and no fear of God, no hate of wrong or love of right restrained them, but only a certain cowardly irresolution” (*Collected Works* 1.343-44). In Morris’s Arthurian poems, the profane passions of desire have a transformative power that leaves the sexualized body bordering on the spiritual. The sole irony, if one exists here, is that the characters feel they are damned by the nature of their *raison d’être*, the pursuit of profane love in a world governed by a code of chivalry at odds with Pauline morality. Guenevere and Launcelot are not the only victims of this irony. As Tarvers argues in her analysis of colour in Morris’s poetry, Sir Ozana in “The Chapel in Lyonesse” is dying of love, but is “trapped between the mortal and divine worlds, paralysed by fear of the profane nature of his love” (186). Galahad plucks “a faint wild rose” from among the lilies and places it on the knight’s lips (46), signifying to Ozana that he can die knowing his profane love is sacred in nature. Similarly, in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Launcelot will wake up with a “changed body” because he feels passion, not in spite of it, and will bear on his body the proof of Christ’s deep sympathy for the love that is denied Guenevere and her gracious knight.

“The Defence of Guenevere” and “King Arthur’s Tomb” depict Guenevere caught on the threshold of the riddle’s moment of choice. Quite rightly, Balch shows that over the course of the two initial poems in the volume Guenevere transforms the choice between Arthur and Launcelot into a choice between Christ and Launcelot. When widowed Guenevere refuses Launcelot’s attempt to kiss her passionately and returns to

the convent where she will live out her days as a nun in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Balch reasons that it is an act of contrition in which Guenevere’s ultimate choice of Christ is her choice of Arthur (68-69). While there is no problem in assuming that Guenevere formulates the choice that she must make along these lines, Balch errs in supposing that the formulation is correct. Both he and Guenevere are misled by the Arthurian tradition that constructs Arthur as a Christ-figure. Certainly, in the *Idylls*, Tennyson invests the once-and-future king with a Christ-like character of self-sacrifice and a power to redeem Britain in the present with a model conscience and in the future with a promised return. However, Morris’s Arthurian poems present a more complex problem than Tennyson’s obvious biblical analogy, one that involves Christ’s sympathy for the sinful lovers.

Underpinning “The Defence of Guenevere” and “King Arthur’s Tomb” is the larger irony that Guenevere is wrong to suppose that Launcelot and Christ represent opposites in the choice she must make between fulfilling her physical desire and preserving her soul. As Guenevere constructs it, her choice is an impossible one because it is predicated on the unstable dualism that Morris seems everywhere to challenge or protest against: that the body exists separately from the soul. She cannot choose the spiritual over the sensual if one is indistinguishable from the other. Distraught and fearful of the outcome of a meeting with Launcelot, Guenevere cries out against the riddle of her flesh’s desire:

I cannot choose

But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep

From loving Launcelot; O Christ! must I lose

My own heart’s love? (173-76)

Against every impulse in her body, she flees to what she thinks is the spiritual safe-haven of the convent, renouncing her bodily investment in the material world and rejecting the passion that she associates with Launcelot. For his part, and in keeping with a Maloryian tradition of what men do in moments of intense grief, Launcelot swoons. The poem closes with the picture of Launcelot coming round, deserted and alone:

How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell:

My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,

When I rose up, also I heard a bell. (394-96; emphasis added)

In her flight, Guenevere misses the chance to read a moment of divine Passion on the body of Launcelot. After having fallen down and cut himself, he awakes to the sound of a bell, presumably the convent church's, bearing wounds that resemble the marks of stigmata. Here is the sign of grace arrived that Shaw overlooks in his attempt to hollow out the meaning of the word in Morris's poem. Bleeding from head and hands, Launcelot bears the marks of grace that reveal the depth of meaning in the visual irony of an earlier construction, "... Launcelot; O Christ! ...," in which the semi-colon, punctuation that suggests parallelism, retrospectively suggests an affinity between the two figures. Christ and Launcelot are bound by blood and punctuation.

Launcelot's stigmata not only mark an unlikely correspondence but also signify an unusual reversal. The grace of stigmata consists of intense pity for Christ and real participation in His sufferings and sorrows for the expiation of worldly sin. Balch misses the point when, of "King Arthur's Tomb," he says that "Arthur and Christian asceticism not only can but must, within the context of Arthurian legend, overcome Launcelot and the sensuous life he represents" (70). Balch's conclusion works to preserve the latter-day

tradition of Arthur as a Christ-figure, but it wrongly attempts to divide Launcelot and Christ, for as Morris would have read in Malory: “sir launcelot is come but of the .viii. degre from oure lord Jhesu Cryst” (2. 209; bk 13, ch. 7). In *The Defence of Guenevere*, Christ has more to do with Launcelot than Arthur. By the end of “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Morris takes Guenevere and Launcelot towards a mysticism of the body when he uses stigmata as a sign of Christ’s intense pity for and participation in the burden of *their* passion as earthly lovers.

2.5 The Bleeding Body: Sexual Stigmata

Many years after the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris avowed that, “if there is a God, He never meant us to know much about Himself, or indeed to concern ourselves about Him at all” (qtd. in Glasier 171). Critics such as John Heath-Stubbs have quoted this comment as a sign of religious resignation from one who had “wandered into the bypaths of agnosticism without any of the spiritual torments which usually accompanied loss of religious conviction among the Victorians” (170). Heath-Stubbs and J. Bruce Glasier observe the state of religious scepticism at which Morris perhaps arrived by the time he joined the Socialist cause in the 1880s, but they ignore the route that he took to get there. *The Defence of Guenevere* tends to reject God as unknowable and tyrannical, but it also observes the body and blood of Christ with a Pre-Raphaelite attention to details.

Morris’s early poetry is suspicious of a God whose involvement in the daily life of men is limited to the imposition of arbitrary laws and unfeeling prohibitions. In the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere*, God, though frequently called upon to intervene

directly, maintains a steady silence. As a gloss in the poem, the very title of “The Judgement of God” must strike the reader as ironic, given the obvious absence of God’s judgement in it. This little discussed poem of *The Defence of Guenevere* depicts Sir Roger moments before he faces Sir Oliver in a trial by combat, the outcome of which shall supposedly manifest the judgement of God, who will lend might to right in the contest.⁸² Yet Sir Roger knows that the contest merely gathers and focuses all the wrongs of both sides “into the circle of these lists” for chance and guile—not God—to put an end to a long dispute (17). Sir Roger thinks, “This giving up of blood for blood / Will finish here somehow to-day” (7-8). The “somehow” is not divine intervention, for Sir Roger counts not on God’s judgement but on his “father’s crafty way” of fighting; neither his party nor the opposing Hainault, he thinks, will accept the outcome of the fight as a divine verdict, so Sir Roger orders his men to be ready to fight, whether he wins or loses. God’s conspicuous absence in this poem is maintained throughout the rest of the volume. The poems of *The Defence of Guenevere*, though occasionally invoking his name, generally assume an unknowable God too removed from the human experience either to sympathize with the ordeal of an earthly life or, conversely, to generate feelings of piety in the human breast. In 1895, Morris would say, “Amazing as is the whole phenomenon of the universe, I cannot see any real evidence of God” (qtd. in Glasier 171); however, in 1858, Morris had not yet wandered so far down the bypaths of agnosticism (a term not even coined until 1870)⁸³ as to expurgate his poetry of Christianity altogether. While God is unknowable and inaccessible in the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere*, Christ still holds a privileged place in the volume, for it is *his*

grace—not God’s—that the Arthurian characters seek. Morris’s Christ is a figure of special import here because he represents the divine experience in the flesh.

Appropriately, for its medieval setting, Morris’s volume contains elements of Catholic mysticism such as Launcelot’s stigmata-like wounds in “King Arthur’s Tomb.” The late medieval Catholic Church was fascinated by the body of Christ and fetishised the details of his crucifixion, which became at this point in Church history the dominant representation of Jesus: a humiliated, stripped, tortured, and bleeding body affixed to the cross. During the counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church used the passion of Christ in a revival of asceticism, pointing to the bodily sufferings in the lives of saints as models of Christianity. The Church’s first stigmatics come out of this period, in which the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus came to be known as the “Passion.”⁸⁴ At this point, instances of stigmata appear to become sexualized, respecting a heterosexual line of selection, for, as Dr. Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre (1818-1912) points out in *La Stigmatisation*, stigmata overwhelmingly—eight-five percent of the time—prefer female hosts (536-37).⁸⁵ The term “the bride of Christ” is generally understood to be a metaphor signifying the relationship that Christ, the bridegroom, has with the Church, the bride, but its sexual connotations seem to dominate the term to mark the special relationship that women are capable of having with Christ: Catholic nuns are mystically betrothed to Christ as “brides of Christ,” as their devotion to the Church substitutes a marriage with a real man. Similarly, a woman with stigmata was the “bride of Christ,” chosen for a mystical marriage that united her to Christ in mind, spirit, and body as she entered a spiritual union regarded as the highest mystical state possible in this earthly life. Protestant England dismissed stigmata as the superstition of the Catholic Church

(Heinmann 155). Morris's subtle use of it in "King Arthur's Tomb," therefore, becomes especially hard to read: signs of stigmata might not have deep resonance for Morris's Protestant readers, who had distanced themselves from such traditions, but for Catholic readers and those who recognize their mystical significance, the marks constitute troubling signs as they appear in "King Arthur's Tomb," for they appear to come in a moment not of spiritual victory but of sexual defeat.

"King Arthur's Tomb" drives a strange wedge between God and Christ, for it seems as though Christ sides with Launcelot against God and Arthur. Here, again, Rossetti's watercolour *Arthur's Tomb* is of some import as a source of inspiration:

Beginning near the top left corner of the picture, where Launcelot's grazing horse provides both a spatial and a narrative prelude to the episode depicted, this line of force takes the viewer's eye along the knight's shield, across the thematically significant gap between his face and Guenevere's, down the curvature of the queen's headdress, and out of the picture near the bottom right of the picture space. Continuous despite interruption, or, conversely, a form of interrupted continuity, the serpentine line of *Arthur's Tomb* thus links Launcelot and Guenevere, reflects their separation, and invites meditation on the (dis)continuity between sacred and profane love. It is also a compositional allusion by way of the presence and shape of the serpent in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture space to the temptation of Eve, a narrative to which the fallen apple beside the serpent and the apple tree behind the figures also alludes.

(Bentley, "(Dis)continuities" 19)

The invitation to “meditation on the (dis)continuity” in the picture is an invitation to meditate on the intertwining of figures and the “sacred and profane” nature of their love. In the crowded arrangement of the figures, Rossetti positions characters in such a way that the hands receive a special emphasis: as Bentley observes, the crowded composition, with its “serpentine line of force,” is “centred on the faces of Launcelot and Guenevere and the queen’s upheld hand” (“(Dis)continuities” 21). However, the other hands of Launcelot, Guenevere, and Arthur’s effigy equally contribute to the picture’s “(dis)continuity” or “interrupted continuity” because they intertwine, disappear, and reappear from behind interposing bodies and tomb in a series of tangled gestures. With the gaze concentrated on all the praying, pushing, and pulling hands in the painting, viewers will notice that the supplicant hands of Arthur’s tomb effigy divide Guenevere and Launcelot with an almost knife-like gesture into the throat of the latter, and that Guenevere’s right hand, coming up from behind the tomb effigy to repulse Launcelot, is drawn in parallel to her husband’s. Morris makes use of the same detail in his poem when he has Launcelot observe the action of Guenevere’s hand: “Lo you her thin hand, / That on the carven stone can not keep still, / Because she loves me against God’s command” (274-76). The stone effigy of Arthur seems to communicate God’s command “Thou shalt not commit adultery” to the hand of Guenevere in both the poem and painting. Although everywhere invisible, both Arthur and God are present in the four Arthurian poems as a superego governing the conscience with rigid, Mosaic law. *The Defence of Guenevere* constructs both God and Arthur as the disembodied law, abstract and remote, and they function as antagonists to characters of the flesh and passion. In “The Defence of Guenevere,” Arthur’s haunting presence is felt in the “little word” of the

wedding vow, one which Guenevere says was “scarce ever meant at all” (86-87). In the Maloryian tradition, the vow, as a bond between husband and wife, was “scarce ever meant at all,” because Arthur contracted the marriage primarily as a military alliance with Guenevere’s father, King Lodegrian, from whom he received the Table Round (Malory 1: 70-71; bk. 3, ch. 1). Furthermore, when he hears that Launcelot has slain more of his knights to rescue Gwenyver, Malory’s Arthur weeps and swoons, exclaiming, “Moche more I am soryer for my good knyghtes losse, than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenes I myghte have ynowe, but suche felaushyp of good knyghtes shall neuer be to gyders in no company” (2: 404; bk. 20, ch. 9). In Morris’s “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Arthur, though now dead, is still capable of rendering Guenevere’s passionate nature as “stone-cold” as his tomb (“The Defence” 88).

In “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Arthur is the dead figure ruling living passion with the absolute law of God. In a key passage of the poem, Morris makes the subtle distinction between Lord as God (connected to Arthur) and Lord as Christ (connected to Launcelot). When Guenevere chooses to honour her marriage vows to her dead husband rather than her passion for her living lover, Launcelot cries out,

Yea, she is mad; thy heavy law, O Lord,
 Is very tight about her now, and
 Her poor heart, so that no right word

 Can reach her mouth; so Lord, forgive her now,
 That she not knowing what she does, being mad,
 Kills me in this way. (198-203)

The first “Lord” is the Old Testament God who deals in absolute and “heavy” laws of prohibition that rule the flesh: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Together, God and Arthur constitute the phantoms of these poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, providing the text with the spectral presence of a conventional Victorian morality to divide true lovers. The second “Lord” appeals to the New Testament Jesus, or at least speaks through him in an obvious allusion to the saviour’s dying request to mitigate the sins of the flesh. The second appeal seems to draw a mystical response at the end of the poem, when, as has been seen, after Guenevere flees the temptations of the flesh and returns to the convent, leaving Launcelot in a collapse, the sound of church bells rouses the fallen knight, who now has wounds on his head and hands. Launcelot’s stigmata-like wounds imagistically imply the sympathy of Christ, who knew the weakness of the flesh that existed in spite of the will of the spirit (Matt. 26:41).

The Passion of Christ seems to redeem the passionate suffering of Launcelot and Guenevere. So, where Shaw would seem to deny grace to the lovers who have given in to passion and must live with its painful consequences, Jesus comes to their defence. Shaw is correct in that Guenevere’s words do nothing to invoke the grace of *God*, but only because it remains distant and inaccessible in *The Defence of Guenevere*; however, the combination of the verbal and visual signs in the small cluster of Arthurian poems do invoke *Christ’s* grace, which is strangely different from God’s in this volume of Morris’s poetry. As his own comments near the end of his life indicate, Morris would never be fully reconciled to existence of God: He is too abstract, too immaterial, on his own (Glasier 171). However, Jesus takes on a special status in *The Defence of Guenevere*, not as the incarnation of God, but as a living, breathing divinity with material being in the

world. Christ, whose physical, human nature seems to set him apart from God, offers hope in spite of God's punitive justice. The Christ of *The Defence of Guenevere* extends the new law of mercy in forms that are both Catholic and sensual, expressed through Launcelot's stigmata in "King Arthur's Tomb" and through the appearance he makes to Galahad in the subsequent poem.

In the third of the Arthurian poems, "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," the title character is developed according to his struggles with the nature of desire. This poem elaborates upon the theme of "King Arthur's Tomb" and Rossetti's *Arthur's Tomb* painting, in which Galahad's image on the king's tomb contributes to the tension that the painting constructs between sacred and profane love. The presence of Christ, which is implied in "King Arthur's Tomb," becomes direct in "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," as Christ appears to the purest knight of the Round Table at the moment he begins to regret his chastity. Jealous of his fellow knights who ride out with the memories of their ladies' kisses to warm them in the cold nights of the quest from which so few will return, Galahad laments, "But me, who ride alone, some carle shall find / Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow" (49-50). His "arms" is a pun whose double meaning comprehends the suit of armour, the life within which the deadly quest will hollow out, and the emptiness of a death in which the only arms to encircle his "poor chaste body" will be his own (55). With no fair lady to bemoan his loss, Galahad questions his reasons for standing outside the general life of chivalry and worries that his self-imposed abnegation of the flesh signifies nothing. At this moment, "with sleepy face bent to the chapel floor" (77), Galahad is roused by "a sharp bell from close behind," much as

Launcelot is roused from his swoon by church bells after Guenevere rejects the life of fulfilled desire with him. When Galahad follows the sound into the chapel, he finds

One sitting on the altar as a throne,
 Whose face no man could say he did not know,
 And though the bell still rang, he sat alone
 With raiment half blood-red, half white as snow. (85-88)

By musing on his sacrificed sexuality, Galahad appears to invoke Christ, who materializes in the flesh. Trying to console the regretfully chaste Galahad, Christ offers the tangled affair of Guenevere and Launcelot as a cautionary example of a knight's undoing:

He is just what you know, O Galahad,
 This love is happy even as you say,
 But would you for a little time be glad
 To make ME sorry long day after day?
 Her warm arms round his neck half-throttle ME. (105-09)

Although he appears to condemn Launcelot for his illicit passion, Christ in fact reserves his judgement. Launcelot, he says to Galahad, is "just what you know." Well, what *do* we know? From what Morris shows in "King Arthur's Tomb," Launcelot possesses a complex and subtle psychology, replete with guilt, shame, and questions of self-identity (3-5, 13-14); he has false memories (90-91); and he has at least a partial indulgence from Christ, whose grace of stigmata somewhat endorses the lovers' passion. The evidence of the text does not wholly convict Launcelot, but rather does much to mitigate the conditions of his wrongdoing. Furthermore, Christ, as he appears to Galahad, is so

fleshly in his manifestation as to be endowed with an erotic sensibility that responds to Guenevere's bodily beauty. Although her cry, "dost thou reck / That I am beautiful, Lord" (168-69), seems odd in "King Arthur's Tomb," Guenevere is in fact right to assume that Christ is sensitive to her body's beauty, for he admits in the subsequent poem that her "hot love-tears burn deep like spots of lead" and that "her warm arms *half-throttle* [HIM]" (109-10; emphasis added), presumably throttling the very human half of his nature. Christ's response appears to simultaneously counter and reverberate with the erotically charged passion that Launcelot suffers for Guenevere in these poems that consistently leave the grossly sensual and mystically spiritual inextricably entwined.

2.6 "Has God's body ever been in sight?": Catholic Bodies and the Holy Grail in *The Defence of Guenevere*

The Victorians were responsible for reviving the Arthurian legend in Britain after about two centuries of dormancy. During the Reformation, British Catholics and Protestants alike abandoned the narratives revolving around the Grail legend: Protestants had little taste for its fictionalization of history or the association with a generally prurient cast of adventurers, and Catholics wished to guard the legitimacy of the Church against a potentially undermining threat of association with Arthurian fictions (Barber 227). The Victorians returned to Malory's king in search of a heroic literature that defined the national character and reflected their rise in the world; ironically, Malory had been all but banished from the literary realm two hundred years ago by their immediate moral predecessors, the Puritans, for the sake of preserving the national character.⁸⁶ However, by the nineteenth century, the details of the Arthurian legend were a vague memory of

adulterous wrongs and grail quests with noble kings, false queens, and a stock cast of characters in knights embodying a range of vice and virtue. That the memory was vague is evident in the example provided by Matthew Arnold: his poem “Tristram and Iseult” appeared in the 1852 collection *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*, but owing to the readers’ unfamiliarity with Malory, a prefatory summary of Tristram’s adventures was added for subsequent editions of the poem.⁸⁷ The passage of time had loosened the legend’s ties with Catholicism, and knowledge of Malory had remained relatively limited because the only relatively reliable version of the Arthurian romance, Southey’s 1817 edition of Malory, was a limited luxury edition of only three hundred copies and therefore not widely available.

Prince Albert’s great love of the Arthurian romances did much to promote their popularity, and in the 1840s, the House of Lords commissioned frescoes by William Dyce depicting virtues exemplified in scenes from the medieval romances. A conveniently hazy recollection of details, a desire to establish a heroic past that could account for the rise of British culture and power, and a neo-gothic fad that cultivated a nostalgic perception of a Middle Ages that had hardly existed—all these things conspired to make the Arthurian romances a suitable and comfortable medium for the poet laureate, Tennyson, to politicize the legends, changing what in Malory is a series of personal tragedies into a single tragedy of social collapse: Malory tells of individual knights who strive nobly to pass beyond the limits of human frailty in search of the perfection of the grail but who fail within sight of the goal; Tennyson presents a narrative of social irresponsibility in which the private passions of Guenevere precipitate the worst of public crises, a civil war that pits Launcelot’s kinsmen against Arthur’s.⁸⁸ Still, reviving the

Arthurian romances in search of a national identity meant potentially reviving also the self-same moral and religious concerns that had dogged them and driven them into exile in the first place. The problem for Victorians was how to lift the legends out of the traditions of the medieval Catholic Church, which had woven its pathos, symbolism, and lore into the Arthurian romances, particularly in the episodes whose central motivation is the search for the Holy Grail. Unlike Tennyson, who would de-mystify the grail legend in the very public drama of *Idylls*, Morris accepted the strong Catholic symbolism of the grail legend in *The Defence of Guenevere* and makes it a mystery of the body and soul.

Morris, unburdened by any political expectations or aspirations, preserves the personal and mystical aspects of Malory's telling of the search for the Holy Grail.

Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* identifies the grail with the Catholic sacrament of Eucharist:

And thenne the Bisshop made semblaunt as thouz he wold haue gone to the sacrynge of the masse. And thenne he tooke an vbblye whiche was made in lykenes of breed. And at the lyftyng vpon, there came a fygur in the lykenes of a chyld, and the vysage was as reed and as bryghte as ony fyre, & smote hym self in to the breed, so that they all sawe hit that the breed was formed of a flesshely man, and thenne he putte hit in to the holy vessel ageyne, and thenne he dyd that longed to a priest to doo to a masse.

(2.310; bk. 17, ch. 20)

Tennyson includes mention of this event in the "Holy Grail" section of the *Idylls*, but the political and social ramifications of taking on the quest overshadow its significance. The treatment of this episode in *Idylls* in effect contributes to the loosening of the Grail's symbolic value, such that it begins to take on the modern but vague meaning of a highly

sought after artefact that is an example of rare excellence or, in a more abstract sense, an unattainable ideal whose real existence is improbable. Tennyson treats the physical Grail with Protestant circumspection as a false idol that distracts the Round Table from pursuing the political Grail of social order and good governance; Morris, however, reinvests the Grail with some of its earlier—though not necessarily original—symbolic meaning.

From start to finish, Morris's "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery" codes itself in Catholic symbols that leave the flesh and spirit inextricably entwined. On the longest night of the year, just days before Christmas, Galahad turns his thoughts towards Mary, much like Sir Gawain on his search for the Green Chapel of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, when, tired and lost, he prays to the Virgin, whose image on the inner part of his shield gives him courage (lines 649-50).⁸⁹ Morris's Galahad, however, turns his mind to Mary less directly and less hopefully. Down-trodden by the apparent futility of his efforts in the days leading up to Christmas, Galahad imagines that his dead body will be discovered in the thaw of Candlemas (2 February), which is the Feast of the Virgin, commemorating the purification of the Virgin Mary and the presentation of Christ in the Temple. However, if Morris's Galahad turns his thoughts to Mary, it is with the bitter irony of a reluctant virgin near death bemoaning a misspent life of chastity—he is in no mood to celebrate virginity, Mary's or his own. Though not unwaveringly committed to chastity in the way that Tennyson's pure knight is, Morris's Galahad is compensated—at least partially—for his restraint by being initiated in the mystery of the Grail and Eucharist.

The “mystery” of “Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery” is of a theological kind. Specifically, it involves the Real Presence in the sacramental rite of the Eucharist. When Morris’s Galahad enters the chapel and finds Christ “sitting on the altar . . . with raiment half blood-red, half white as snow,” Morris once again tempts the reader into the kaleidoscope of his complicated colour symbolism. The red and white clothing of Christ presages the imagistic echo created by Galahad’s plucking of the red rose from among the lilies in the next poem, “The Chapel in Lyonesse,” a coloured-coded gesture in which Galahad shows Sir Ozana that he is offered absolution through the passion and purity of Christ. However, the more obvious association has been overlooked: it is one thing to have Christ wearing clothing that suggests the bread and wine of the Eucharist, but by having Christ—body and blood—materialize on the altar, Morris wanders into dangerous theological territory involving the issues of the Real Presence and transubstantiation.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith⁹⁰ emphatically reject transubstantiation:

Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith. (Article 28)

Although they vary in their opinions, Anglicans generally consider the sacrament to be a symbolic rather than a material event, and the Real Presence they consider to be spiritual rather than corporeal—that is, they reject the Catholic belief in the substitution of one

material substance for another. The scene that Morris constructs in “Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery” smacks of the type of Anglo-Catholicism with which critics (particularly Wornum and Dickens) had charged the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1850. Immediately preceding the appearance of Morris’s Christ to Galahad, the chaste knight has his head bent down to the chapel floor when he hears the sound of a bell. It is at this moment that Christ appears—in the flesh and on the altar. The scene enacts the theological mystery of the Real Presence in a Eucharistic mass and looks like a literalization of the Catholic version of the sacrament and its accompanying belief in transubstantiation, which holds that the bread and wine of the sacrament indeed become the body and blood of Christ. In “Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery,” Morris constructs the mystery that is reserved for Galahad by entwining the secular mystery of the Grail and the theological mystery of the Eucharist in a way that is consistent with his treatment of the profane and the sacred, and of the body and the soul in matters of love.

Reviewing his life of abstinence with regret, Morris’s Galahad recalls scenes of parting lovers as the errant knights of the Round Table set out in search of the “Sangreal” (67). Morris’s choice of spelling is of interest here. A study of the etymological evolution of “grail” reveals a long history of writers trying to discover old meanings of the word through new spellings of it.⁹¹ While its origins are obscure (some argue it comes from the Latin *gradale* for cup or dish [Barber 96]), the word had had its meaning and spelling changed by the time Malory encountered it for use in the *Morte D’Arthur*. In the *Morte D’Arthur* at the end of Book Twelve, Malory announces that he will tell “the noble tale of the Sancgreall, that called is the hooly blood of our lord Jhesu Cryste, blessed mote it be, the whiche was brought in to this land by Joseph of Armathye” (2.

200; bk. 12, ch. 14). Malory almost always uses some variant of “Sancgreal” reflecting the English tradition of using “the pseudo-etymological form *sang roial* [which] appears in Anglo-French of the fifteenth century” (“Sangrail”). This spelling, which remained current from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (including the 1817 edition of Southey), changed the nature of the holy relic—the vessel was displaced by its contents: the blood of Christ. Morris’s choice to use a form that he finds in Malory is more than simple deference to the book whose status rivalled the Bible within their circle. His specific choice of “Sangreal” preserves the suspect etymology of “royal blood” (which Tennyson avoids), a choice that not only reinforces the Eucharistic Catholic symbolism of the Grail, but also allows Morris to re-read the Grail legend as a mystery of the body as much as of the spirit.

The mystery of the Grail is bound to the flesh in “Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery,” and the flesh in Morris’s volume of poetry is bound to desire. Materializing before Galahad on an altar in raiment half white and half red, Christ appears as a living Eucharist or a Real Presence. Reinforcing the mystery of the grail as a Eucharistic mystery, Morris’s Galahad asks his fellow knights of the grail quest, “Has God’s body ever been in sight?” (184). This passage goes out of its way to contemplate the physicality of Christ; rather than ask, “Has the Lord Christ ever been in sight?” (or “Christ Jesus” if one wishes to preserve the meter of the line), Galahad emphasizes Christ’s corporeal nature as much as his divinity. Morris wants his readers to *look* at the body—God’s body, in this case—to see a truth as it appears in the flesh. Moreover, although the fuller question Galahad asks makes for what seems like another jarring juxtaposition between Launcelot and Christ: “Tell me what news of Launcelot you have,

/ And has God's body ever been in sight?" (183-84), "King Arthur's Tomb" has prepared readers in such a way that the juxtaposition no longer jars when the question brings them together again in "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery." The poem reinforces the affinity that Christ shares in his body's association with the true but sinful lover. The odd tone of these two lines arises from placing them together without any transitional logic, so close that they—"God's body" and Launcelot—appear to compete for the same space. In fact, they do. Launcelot's stigmata, Guenevere's use of punctuation, and Christ's own sensual response to Guenevere's beauty create fleeting but repeated images of a palimpsest in which the image of Christ surfaces in the figure of Launcelot and Launcelot in the figure of Christ.

Morris's Arthurian poems never fully reconcile the body and spirit. Even "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," in which Galahad sees God's body, ends in a tone that is bitter and dark: "Everywhere / The knights come foil'd from the great quest, in vain; / In vain they struggle for the vision fair" (198-200). Rather than emphasize the state of sin that bars Launcelot from the goal, as Tennyson does in *Idylls*, Morris follows Malory, who emphasizes Launcelot's relative fitness for the quest and allows the sinful lover to come the closest to achieving a vision fair in which the physical and the spiritual simultaneously coexist.⁹² At the end of "Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery," the narrative action of the quest appears incomplete, with Launcelot waiting for Galahad to join him upon a ship that will carry them across some northern sea (154-62). Although he leaves the external incidences of the quest incomplete in this four-poem fragment of the Arthurian cycle,⁹³ Morris picks up in another poem what become in his version of the legend the essential components—the competing but entwined demands of the spirit and

the flesh. In “Rapunzel,” one of the “Other” poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris continues the work of recognizing the spirit in the flesh and the flesh in the spirit that his Arthurian poems initiate, and attempts a more positive reconciliation of sexuality and spirituality through a renewed power of perception.

2.7 “I Read My Riddle”: The Spiritual Body and the Fleshly Soul in “Rapunzel”

Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* is a study of thwarted desire and enduring penance, of sexual longing and frustrated passion. As has now been seen, the volume’s Arthurian poems depict the spiritual struggles of those who succumb to sexual desire, and the Froissartian poems paint scenes loaded with desire but which erupt in violence and bloodshed. Morris’s poems get behind the lofty sentiments and idealized love that an ideology of chivalry took for granted as the motivation for action the medieval romance. His poems lift the veil on chivalry to tell tales of tainted love, displaced desire, and frustrated passion; in short, they are grotesques in which the spiritual and the sexual collide.⁹⁴ Of these poems of desire, only one manages to balance the demands of both the body and the spirit— “Rapunzel.”

Morris’s poem of course has its origin in the fairytale of the same name. English editions of the Grimm fairytale “Rapunzel” arrived in England in the 1850s.⁹⁵ A cautionary tale about dangers of carnal appetite, it is a bare narrative of swift action: a woman, coveting her neighbour’s rapunzel (a rampant plant with blue bellflowers and lettuce-like leaves used in salads), sends her husband on a midnight raid into the garden next door. Unfortunately, it belongs to a wakeful witch who catches the would-be thief. Trapped between his wife’s inordinate lust for the vegetable and his fear of the witch, the

guilty man agrees to a Faustian pact that trades the Rapunzel against the future of his family in the forfeit of his firstborn child. The woman's cravings were apparently indicative of pregnancy, and soon after the witch is in possession of a beautiful baby girl, whom she names, with a touch of irony, Rapunzel. Raising the girl to the age of twelve (the age approximately when girls first show signs of sexual maturity), the witch removes Rapunzel to the woods and imprisons her in a tower with neither doors nor stairs. At the witch's secret command, Rapunzel lets fall from the window her long golden plaits for the witch to climb. One day, an eavesdropping Prince witnesses the ritual, and later uses the command to gain access to the tower. Putting off their plans for a future escape, the Prince and Rapunzel dally for days in the privacy of the tower. The witch, of course, finds out and sends Rapunzel into exile, but not before cutting the long golden braids to lure the Prince once more to the top of the tower where, to his surprise, he finds only the witch. In fear, he leaps from the tower, and lands, apparently face-first, in the thorns below. Blinded, he wanders for six lonely years until he finds Rapunzel whose tears of joy restore his sight. With his fresh eyes, the Prince sees not only fair Rapunzel but also the approximately five-year-old twin children she has borne in his absence. They live happily ever after.

For his poem of the same name, Morris seizes upon the fairytale's element of sexual desire, but inverts the narrative technique of the original. Working through simple allusions, Morris's "Rapunzel" evokes the action of the fairy-tale in near-still scenes that, as some of his early detractors have said, have about them a "cold, angular, and artificial" feel and even a "dark weirdness."⁹⁶ The objective third-person narrative of the fairytale becomes the subjective inner-voice of the dramatic soliloquy in the poem, action gives

way to reverie, linear discourse lapses into *non sequiturs*, and blindness becomes visionary, all to sift out the spirituality of sexuality in an exercise of grotesque design. Morris's poem allusively evokes the action of the fairy-tale to run a parallel course to it in a series of tableaux that frame fragmented visions of sublime desire only partially understood.

Dramatic in structure, the poem opens with alternating stanzas from the three principal figures, the Prince, Rapunzel, and the Witch, each speaking in the gathering darkness of dusk. Solitary and isolated, their voices surface, not in dialogue, but in such a manner that each figure's speech breaks the syntactical flow of the preceding speaker, producing the effect of three voices speaking together yet separately. As Robert Stallman suggests, it is as though we hear three distinct soliloquies delivered almost simultaneously (222): the Prince recounts the circumstances of the day that he set out in search of a bride (21-24; 31-34), Rapunzel bewails her plight of imprisonment and the Witch's abuse of her hair (7-10; 37-40), and the Witch, whose soliloquies always come between the youths', creates a pervasive atmosphere of evil that paralyzes the would-be lovers on the threshold of their own desires through a reiterative chant: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, / Let down your hair... Rapunzel, Rapunzel / Wind up your hair...Rapunzel, Rapunzel / Weep through your hair"(25-26; 35-36; 45-46). The structure serves Morris in three ways. First, it effectively places in view the pattern underpinning the poem without having to recount the already familiar narrative details of the Grimm fairytale. Second, it creates a dark stage with three spotlights into which the players step only long enough for readers to identify voices with figures, before the weavings of past-tense reflections and incantatory couplets create a dreamscape so misty that the players become

disembodied voices in the darkness. Lastly, the structure signals a central rupture through the semi-presence of the Witch. Her invocation of the braids intrudes upon the Prince's narrative of the days leading up to his quest in an obvious way, but also disrupts in a silent textual way. Used to set scenes and indicate speakers, the dramatic convention of stage directions (textual elements present in drama but read over silently) further *shows* the division of potential lovers. The dramatic textual convention is so familiar that it hardly seems out of place here, but in a poem that often works its imagery against its dialogue, even the silent yet visible conventions of drama speak to an absent presence operating just beneath the surface. Through this structure, Morris shows the separation of lovers and establishes the conditions under which he can manipulate patterns of imagery, speech, and prosody according to the degree that the Prince and Rapunzel apprehend sublime truths in symbolic visions of the human body. Unlike the speaker of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," who would leave behind his body that grows old, "pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" by taking flight on the "viewless wings" of poetic imagination (26, 33), Morris's characters become models of the consequences of ecstasy: instead of attempting to transcend the flesh, they struggle to occupy their own bodies while trying to read signs written on another's, to understand the personal experience of physical desire and reconcile it intersubjectively with the desire of another without forcing a political, social, or spiritual compromise.

In the opening scene of "Rapunzel," the Prince sits paralysed by the mist before his eyes at the tower's foot, trying to "think" through the events that have rendered him helpless. Unlike his Grimm counterpart, upon whom blindness falls as the penance of a

fornicator, Morris's Prince loses his sight, not for having climbed the golden ladder of Rapunzel's hair, but merely for having *seen* it:

And now she stood above the parapet,
 And, spreading her arms, let her hair flow,
 Beneath that veil her smooth white forehead set
 Upon the marble, more I do not know;

Because before my eyes a film of gold
 Floated, as now it floats. ...

Would that I could thy yellow stair behold (125-31)

As a fantastical distortion, Rapunzel's hair is a grotesque of female sexuality, whose erotic potential veils a higher spiritual quality. Her hair is in fact very much like the veil of art that Chiaro dell'Erma in Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" must draw apart to reach his sublime vision, the "visible embodiment of his thought" (46).⁹⁷ It will be recalled that the vision escapes Chiaro because he paints first to win fame and then to edify others, until one day a mystical woman, clad in green and grey, appears in his room. To Chiaro, "it seemed that the first thoughts he had ever known were given him as at first from her eyes, and he knew her hair to be the golden veil through which he beheld his dreams" (51). She is, as she tells him, the image of his own soul (51). This anima figure leads Chiaro back to himself with a lesson in expressionism that guides him to attempt to recreate his own soul on the canvass. Similarly, the Prince of Morris's "Rapunzel" is confronted with a golden veil through which he must learn to see his own soul reflected back in the image of Rapunzel and the symbol of her hair. As a grotesque symbol,

Rapunzel's hair is overloaded with meaning at this point in the poem. To master the grotesque, the world of irrationality and fantasy, the Prince must learn not so much to *think* clearly as to *see* clearly, for his mind is as Ruskin says most men's minds are: "dim mirrors, in which all truth is seen ... darkly, [promoting] dullness of the heart and mistiness of sight, increasing to utter hardness and blindness; Satan breathing upon the glass, so that if we do not sweep away the mist laboriously, it will take no image" (*Works* 11.180-81). Furthermore, for any image that his dark mind might reflect, the Prince must allow for some distortion, says Ruskin in his discussion of the "Symbolical Grotesque," for "the fallen human soul ... must be a diminishing glass, and that a broken one, to the mighty truths of the universe...; and the wider the scope of its glance, the vaster the truths into which it obtains an insight, the more fantastic their distortion is likely to be, as the winds and vapours trouble the field of the telescope most when it reaches farthest" (*Works* 11.181). For Morris's Prince, trying to "think" does only so much good as it clears Satan's hot breath from the rippled surface of the mirror and allows him to see a spiritual quality through the golden veil of an erotic sign.

By placing his Prince at the foot of the tower to "think" through what he sees, Morris takes action that is physical in Grimm and makes it perceptual, cognitive, and imaginative. Grimm's Prince, it must be remembered, falls blind through a fault of action; Morris's Prince falls blind through a fault of perception. The figure of the embowered woman in the tower is often treated as an emblem of oppression by male sexual desire; however, there are instances in Victorian poetry in which the tower is used in ironic treatments of vision for characters who cannot see the world clearly. In Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," the confined title character cannot look directly upon

the world but must look at images of it reflected in a mirror, which she weaves into her tapestry, and in Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the "round squat turret, blind as a fool's heart" (182), is a parody of the "open watch-tower" that offers a clear and commanding view of the landscape to the "watchman" poet that Browning describes in his essay on Shelley (1002). As Donald Hair explains (107), this parody of a watch tower that offers such a limited view is associated with the limited perception of Childe Roland, who is initially like "a fool [who] finds mirth, / Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood / Changes and off he goes!" (147-49). The tower in "Rapunzel," however, is doubly blind: Rapunzel is as blind to desire from the top of the tower as the Prince is from below it. When the Prince comes to this tower without a door, he does not understand what he sees because he makes images and then mars them with his mind like the fool in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." Morris's tower houses an object of desire and represents inaccessible sexual knowledge, but, like Childe Roland, the Prince is no fool—he will stay "to read [his] riddle through" at the foot of the tower (100), while Rapunzel will try to read it from above. The answer to the riddle comes to them at once in a moment of clarity, as it does to Childe Roland by the dark tower when he exclaims, "Burningly it came on me all at once" (175).

Unable to comprehend how he *feels* about his *physical* response to the call of love, the Prince sits in a blind reverie or trance that signals a disengaged body in Morris's poetry (as it does in "The Wind" and "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire") and tries to read the past and present experiences of his own body. Cultural inscriptions of the body mar his first reading of desire. The chivalric culture of the medieval knight has taught him that the pursuit of love is a martial adventure, and so he dons armour the moment he

decides that the time is “fit that [he] should’st wed” (24). The donning of armour is not particularly unusual for a medieval knight who anticipates a wedding ceremony or goes out on an adventurous search for a bride, but the juxtaposition of the martial and the marital alerts readers of Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere*, who have been conditioned, especially by the Froissartian poems, to expect failure in poems in which violence and desire compete for space.

The structure of three distinct separate soliloquies in the opening scene of “Rapunzel,” in which the characters do not hear the speech of one another, has the added effect of creating a sense of dramatic irony for readers. The readers, therefore, can recognize that the separate speeches weave a charged atmosphere of sexuality, in which the characters circulate and to which they seem just barely sensible. The patterns and arrangement of speech sustain a dramatic irony in “Rapunzel” that seems to provide the characters with motivation. Although unable to hear Rapunzel’s lament that “no help comes ... / To free [her] golden hair” (39-40), the Prince is still *sensible* to, if not cognizant of, the charged atmosphere of sexuality, and rides, he says, “Till hot my armour grew, / Till underneath the leaves / I felt the evening dew” (42-44). Following hard upon Rapunzel’s overtly sexual reference to hair, these lines suggest in the Prince a state of arousal and desire that he does not yet understand. The obliqueness with which he speaks of his own body is confused but consistent with the manner in which desire surfaces in *The Defence of Guenevere*. The Prince appears as a palimpsest of the flesh, a body legible in parts but largely written over and partially erased by a culturally inscribed mind. On the Prince’s body, atop its impulses and drives, the socio-politics of medieval chivalric culture have been written in a code of violent and repressive Christianity;

however, beneath the cultural inscriptions, beneath the layers of mail and plate, the body offers its subjective signs—signs expressive of sexual desire. Indeed, it is not the sun that makes him “hot,” nor the evening that gives rise to dew. In the privileged position that allows them to take in the dramatic irony set by Morris’s staging of characters and significance of the imagistic patterns of horse-back riding and tumbling waves of hair that weave together the phallic and the feminine, readers can see what the Prince yet cannot: that the wet warmth he feels rises from a fountain of desire, originating from within and responding to the sexually charged atmosphere without.

Although suffering a dissociation of sensuality, the Prince moves closer to the goal as he mines his memory to construct images for interpretation, as he does in his memory of the tower:

Because it seem’d a dwelling for a queen,
 No belfry for the swinging of great bells;
 No bolt or stone had ever crush’d the green
 Shafts, amber and rose walls; no soot that tells

 Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
 On the flower-carven marble could I see;
 But rather on all sides *I saw the proofs*
 Of a great loneliness that sicken’d me. (83-90; emphasis added)

In this scene, the Prince “*s[ees]... proofs / Of great loneliness*” in this place that war has not visited. The absence of any signs of chivalric activity leads him to intuit that his coming challenge is not to be a feat of arms: “Making me feel a doubt that was not fear, /

Whether my whole life long had been a dream” (91-92). That is, he begins to doubt the course that his life has taken from chivalric notions of love in which the intention “to wed” depends on a preparedness “to fight.” Understanding the body is complicated for the Prince and comes slowly to him, but he has made the first step towards dissipating the fog that is keeping him from a lived body experience in the real world. However, the success of the quest lies not entirely with him—Rapunzel too must work through the riddle towards a saving understanding of the mind, body, and spirit.

Morris’s poem, like Grimm’s fairytale, is the story of the dramatic awakening of sexuality in a young woman coming of age. Robert Stallman has described “Rapunzel” as a youth’s rite of passage into adulthood (228). Coming-of-age rites, generally, are material gestures that are meant to account for changes in the mind and body. For its depictions of maturity, “Rapunzel” uses such rites to re-map the body’s interior on its exterior and its exterior on its interior, anticipating Freud, who posits that the ego “is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (“Ego” 19: 26). Also useful for understanding Morris’s construction of the poem’s central figures is Freud’s idea that the ego takes its form from a psychical projection of the body’s erotogenic surface, so that “for every such change of erotogenicity of the organs there might then be a parallel change in the libidinal cathexis in the ego” (“Narcissism” 14: 84). Stallman argues that Rapunzel refers to the “accompanying menses” of a “woman’s sexual maturity” in her description of the Witch’s “scarlet cloak spread broad and gay, / Over [her] golden hair” (225). Such a reading is not altogether convincing, and certainly one that Morris would not likely have foreseen, for it looks too hard for a change in the “erotogenicity of the organs” that in

turn signals the coming change in the “erotogenicity of the ego.” While marring the symbol somewhat, Stallman rightly recognizes in Rapunzel’s hair the sign of sexual-physical maturity, though surely the mark of which is better read in the profusion of hair than in menstrual detail that is “broad and gay.”

Nonetheless, readers witness Rapunzel constructing her sense of self in contemplation of her body, and, in the language of Freud, the id and the ego (and even the superego) reorganize through a psychical projection that corresponds to changes of her body:

See on the marble parapet

I lean my brow, strive to forget

That fathoms below my hair grows wet

With the dew, my golden hair. (27-30)

Rapunzel’s musings associate her imprisoned hair with confined sexuality that is touched by the cold sterility of the stone marble of the tower, the phallic prison-house of the repressive (super)ego in Victorian poetry and art. However, her prison, like the Prince’s blindness, is largely hers to make or unmake. Her attempt to “forget ... her hair [that is] wet with dew” both recalls an image of shame connected to sexuality in Guenevere, who in the title poem stands before the court pushing back her inexplicably wet hair from her brow, and represents an ecstatic impulse to be absent from her own body that parallels the Prince’s dissociation of sensibility, his separation of mind and body. And yet, subtly, her words connect a thread of desire to the Prince, who grows wet with unknown desire’s dew beneath his armour. Between the two characters there seems to grow an erotic connection through which, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, “one body ... aims at another

body, and takes place in the world, not in a consciousness. ... There is an erotic 'comprehension' that is not of the order of understanding, since understanding subsumes an experience, once perceived, under some idea, while desire comprehends blindly by linking body to body" (*Phenomenology* 157). Locked in the tower, Rapunzel wants to forget her hair for the abuse it has suffered at the will of the Witch, whose presence guards the tower and, therefore, Rapunzel's virtue with the prohibitive force of a superego. Thus far, her hair, a metonymic representation of her subjectivity, has been the plaything of a "Devil's bat," a sexuality prohibitively inscribed by a construction of sin as lust. The end of the first scene closes upon Rapunzel in a trance-like state, loosening and folding her hair, while "for want of love [her] heart grows cold" (48). She, like the Prince, sits alone in the dimming light of evening with a riddle woven of the flesh, spirit, and self.

Rapunzel's hair is the central trope around which the poem's dramatic perspective shifts, and it is the thing to which the young woman returns in contemplation; however, this contemplation is conducted at such a strange remove that Rapunzel likewise finds herself entangled in the grotesque symbolism of her own hair.⁹⁸ Unlike the blinded Prince below who thinks about what he cannot see, Rapunzel sees what she cannot understand:

See on the marble parapet
 I lean my brow, strive to forget
 That fathoms below my hair grows wet
 With the dew, my golden hair.

See, on the marble parapet,
 The faint red stains with tears are wet;
 The long years pass, no help comes yet

To free my golden hair. (27-30, 37-40; emphasis added)

In dealing with the grotesque vision of her own mass of hair, Rapunzel has the advantage at least of seeing symbols clearly, even if she appears not to fully understand them.

There is this strange disjunction between the naivety of Rapunzel's way of perceiving the otherness of her own hair and its emergence in the text as a symbol of sexual maturity.

Rapunzel's insistent repetition to "*see*" directs readers' attention to the constellation of signs that crowd her hair with meaning, both within and without the poem. Her hair bears as heavy a load as a symbol as it does as a ladder. In the fairy tale, Rapunzel's hair pulls the Prince up to her chamber in a literal enactment of the German proverb, "A woman's hair pulls stronger than a bell rope." In Morris's poem, Rapunzel's hair is the riddle of desire: the reward of fulfillment awaits the Prince if he sees the answer correctly, but the danger that lurks for the Prince in the hair of Rapunzel, as for Launcelot in the noose-like locks of Guenevere ("King Arthur's Tomb" 44-45), is the punishment of lust.

To free Rapunzel and all her golden hair from the tower's cold, slow waste of feminine beauty and pull her into the world of courtly love runs the mortal risk that awaits the other romantic couples who tempt fate with an excess of passion in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. Described in "fathoms" and "waves," Rapunzel's hair portends a drowning for those who become entangled in it, but the

would-be lovers in this poem manage to escape such a disaster by resolving the symbolic paradox in the grotesque reverie of the Prince.

The poem's second tableau is a split scene, divided between the laments of the Prince and Rapunzel, and takes place the following morning. Although the scene's waking motif promises to clear the mist clouding his sight, more and more fog seems to gather about the Prince's head as he tries to recall a dream that reminds him of tales

of men, who in the night

Saw paths of stars let down to earth from heaven,

Who follow'd them until they reach'd the light

Wherein they dwell, whose sins are all forgiven;

But who went backward when they saw the gate

Of diamond, nor dared to enter in;

All their life long they were content to wait,

Purging them patiently of every sin. (51-58)

Unable to recall the dream itself, so thick is the fog about his head, the Prince gropes after mere hints of it in stories he remembers vaguely. Nevertheless, the dream reverie awakens the Prince to the spiritual implications of his distorted vision. At its heart are two biblical references: the first, to Jacob's dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder that joins heaven and earth (Gen. 28:10-17), and the second, to the gates of the New Jerusalem, beyond which nothing shall pass that "defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (Rev. 21:27). While it is true that the ladder and the gate of "Rapunzel" are allusions to biblical passages, the direct line of their

provenance very likely descends through Ruskin's discussion of the sublime and the grotesque:

Nearly all dreams recorded in the Bible ... are grotesques, and nearly the whole of the accessory scenery in the books of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse. Thus, Jacob's dream revealed to him the ministry of angels; but because this ministry could not be seen or understood by him in its fullness, it was narrowed to him into a ladder between heaven and earth, which was grotesque. (*Works* 11.181)

In the second scene of "Rapunzel," Morris's blinded Prince, like Ruskin's biblical dreamers, recounts visions of things whose meaning he cannot fathom. For both the Prince and Rapunzel, her hair remains a grotesque symbol whose superfluity of meaning leaves them in frustrated ignorance and deeper darkness when the scene closes. Such is also the condition of Launcelot and Guenevere when they part: the symbols that surround them (the coloured cloths, the stone of Arthur's tomb, the many unnamed colours, Launcelot's stigmata) do not impart their significance, leaving them frozen in their frustration.

All the signs in "Rapunzel" thus far point to a poem that will end in frustration. In the chapter of *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* that discusses Morris's use of the grotesque as cultural critique, Armstrong recognizes the influence of the *political* writings of Ruskin. "Rapunzel," says Armstrong, "explores the Grotesque as resistance and objectifies it ... in the golden hair, ... a symbol of mediation, ... a fetishised symbol" (246, 248). The ladder of demons and princes alike, Rapunzel's hair is the common commodity in an economy of desire, and, as a symbol, its value is

indeterminate, or ambiguous, until it is inscribed with a particular quality of desire.

Armstrong suggests that Morris's use of the golden hair invokes Ruskin's metaphor in *The Political Economy of Art* (1857) of the "golden net" of wealth that is either "entangling and destroying" like a spider's web when ill-used, or "liberating when used in the social good" (248). In a book on "Poetry, Poetics, and Politics," the emphasis necessarily falls on poetry's relation to critiques of contemporary culture, but Armstrong seems to let the socialist activist that Morris would become overshadow her reading of his early poetry. When he began writing "Rapunzel" in 1856,⁹⁹ a year before *The Political Economy of Art* was published, Morris was only twenty-two years old and had yet to conceive of art and politics as having mutual aims, as he says in a July 1856 letter he wrote to Cornell Price: "I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest, for on the whole I see that things are in a muddle, and I have no power or vocation to set them right in ever so little a degree. My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another" (1.28). Armstrong correctly identifies Rapunzel's hair as a "fetishised symbol ... that is implicated in desire and substituted for different things in different ways" (248-49), but she strains her argument to make *The Defence of Guenevere* volume appear to offer either a Marxist resistance, or a critique of culture. The "golden net" of Rapunzel's hair is not the Marxist "commodity fetish" of *Das Kapital* that will ensnare the individual in the cash nexus of a capitalist society, but the sexual fetish of desire that will net an unwary man. Furthermore, Armstrong wrongly implicates the "golden" aspect of Rapunzel's hair in the ambiguity of the sign—its goldenness is its edifying quality.

Without any transitional narrative logic or action, in the third scene the Prince suddenly appears standing next to Rapunzel in the tower. Unable to see causal connection in Morris's poem, some critics suggest that the lovers successfully unite through some sort of mutual wish act,¹⁰⁰ but this psychoanalytic conclusion neither satisfies the complexities and subtleties of the poem's grotesque design, nor finds a home in a volume of poetry in which the mutual wish acts of frustrated lovers admit no escape from the ironies of fate. The lovers' progress in "Rapunzel" requires the careful management of a constellation of signs flowing out of patterns established not just in the poem but in the volume as a whole.

The lovers' quest for a sexual-spiritual union depends on a right reading and a clear perception of colour. Armstrong's discussion of "Rapunzel" pays close attention to the "fetishised symbol" of "golden hair," noting an ambiguity of function in which it is "idealized as a 'path of stars' or 'a golden cord,' ... [and] narrowly literalised so that it is used as if it *were* the object it symbolizes. Or it is seen, as the Prince ... see[s] it, as an obfuscating 'film' or 'veil' of gold" (248-49). While Armstrong is right in attributing a degree of ambiguity to the central trope of Rapunzel's hair, she errs in assigning the same ambiguity to the colour that Morris uses to describe the luxuriant locks. They are alternately "golden" and "yellow." With anyone else, the substitution of one for the other might be insignificant since they both scan as trochees, but Morris, like his Pre-Raphaelite associates, was a careful colourist.¹⁰¹ As stated earlier, throughout *The Defence of Guenevere* volume, Morris uses gold to signal moments of spiritual elevation and divine blessing, but the first time the Prince sees Rapunzel, her hair is "yellow," not gold:

Ah Christ! it was no dream then, but there stood

(She comes again) a maiden passing fair,

Against the roof, with face turn'd to the wood,

Bearing within her arms waves of *yellow* hair.

.....

And now she stood above the parapet,

And, spreading her arms, let her hair flow,

Beneath that veil her smooth white forehead set

Upon the marble, more I do not know;

Because before my eyes a film of gold

Floated, as now it floats. O unknown love,

Would that I could thy *yellow* stair behold.

(109-12, 125-31; emphasis added)

Described in “waves” and “fathoms,” Rapunzel’s hair presents a sea where men go to drown in visions of their own lust, particularly when they see the hair as *yellow*. For the Prince to read through the “riddle” of Rapunzel’s hair (115), he must sift out the difference of meaning between gold and yellow. The golden and blessed aspect of her hair is blurred by his desire to see the crisp outline of the *yellow* stair, the symbolic counterpart to Rapunzel’s hair.

In moving his characters in the general direction of the sacred in *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris carefully distinguishes between qualities represented by the colours of yellow and gold. Tarvers claims that Morris, as a medieval scholar, would surely have known that the colour yellow was associated with vice and deceit, as it is with Chaucer’s

Pardoner, whose hair is “yellow as wax” (184). In the kaleidoscope of bright and shifting colours that Morris uses to depict virtue and sin, gold is the one colour in the volume that acts as a reliable guide. The sight of Rapunzel’s golden hair is capable of inspiring the Prince to acts of virtue of the kind that stirs the valour of Christian knights of the chivalric tradition, but the sight of it as yellow threatens to ensnare him in a web of lust. The Prince cannot ascend the “stair” while to his eyes it remains “yellow,” because it indicates that he sees only the erotic potential of her hair. The Prince comes very close to dispelling the mist when he tries “hard to read this riddle through, / To catch some golden cord that [he] saw gleaming / Like gossamer against the autumn blue” (99-102). Against a background of blue, a colour that Morris elsewhere associates with desire and heaven,¹⁰² the vision almost succeeds in condensing the golden mist into solid form (the cord). Into this reverie, however, intrudes the voice of the Witch:

Is there any who will dare
 To climb up the yellow stair
 Glorious Rapunzel’s golden hair? (133-35)

While Grimm’s witch is a physical menace, shearing locks and forcing the Prince from the tower into the blinding thorns below, Morris’s Witch is little more than a haunting voice. Nonetheless, she is a potent force of confusion in the poem, an incorporeal threat to the eyes and mind that would solve the riddle of Rapunzel’s hair. While using repetition’s power to fascinate and paralyze the Prince, the Witch also attempts to create confusion by using “yellow” and “golden” interchangeably to describe the hair and its symbolic referent, the stair, as though the colours were of equal value. The shift, though subtle, that the Witch makes between colours is in fact key to the riddle of the hair,

whose meaning is veiled precisely through the confusion of two qualities, a confusion that is deliberately constructed throughout *The Defence of Guenevere*.

While *The Defence of Guenevere* uses gold generally to signal moments of spiritual elevation and divine blessing, it also uses the colour to indicate moral lapses when it is dimmed, veiled, stained, or tarnished. For example, the poems in the volume that focus on the queen tend to consider the corruption of the golden state, such as in “King Arthur’s Tomb.” In this poem, Guenevere seems to associate her adulterous wrongs with her hair, for when she is told that Launcelot has arrived at the convent, the reader sees “a spasm t[a]k[e] / Her face, and all her frame,” as she catches “her hair, / All hair, in both hands, [and] terribly sh[a]k[es]” (146-48). She goes forth to meet him, but with “a blight/ ... settled on her” (128-29), the sign of which is that the queen has withdrawn from “the deep / Still land of colours” by hiding her golden hair beneath “robes [that are] black, / With a long white veil only” (75-76, 129-30). A dream from the previous night, in which “all her golden hair” frames the recumbent head of Launcelot on her breast, reveals to Guenevere the distortion desire has played upon the potentially sacred quality of the symbol of her golden hair when she awakes to a reality in which her transgressions have turned her world into “grey ... lumps of sin” (137-40). Her actions imply that it is better to hide a golden symbol that fails to signify the sacred than to have it misinterpreted for the profane. Later in the poem, Guenevere sits in church, distracted from prayer by thoughts of “Launcelot’s red-golden hair” (306). The thoughts lead her eyes to a painting of the repentant Mary Magdalen, whose eyes are dimmed and “red at the sight of hell” and upon whose hair shines “no golden light” (315-16), a figure analogous to her own—an adulteress on the brink of hell. Conversely, in “The Chapel of

Lyonesse,” Sir Ozana is dying slowly behind a gilded screen, clutching a golden lock of hair that is suddenly bathed in golden sunlight when Galahad revives him with the dew of a rose in a final moment of redemption. For Sir Ozana, the colour gold is indicative of an advanced spiritual state and the red of the rose that Galahad puts on his breast reassures the stricken knight that his passion for his lady is sacred in nature. In “Rapunzel,” the Prince is on a vision quest that involves distinguishing the value in shades as subtly different as yellow and gold.

As inexplicably as they clouded his vision, the mists of confusion lift from the eyes of the Prince in “Rapunzel,” when he laments that

every morning do I whet my sword,

Yet Rapunzel still weeps within the tower,

And still God ties me down to the green sward,

Because I cannot see the gold stair floating lower. (151-54)

That Rapunzel’s hair has become in his mind’s eye a “gold stair” indicates a perceptual shift towards a spiritual understanding of a corporeal sign, but one that does not necessarily preclude sexual desire. Unlike Sir Galahad in “A Christmas Mystery,” who passively receives the divine vision given to him in recompense for prolonged chastity, the Prince has a distorted vision that wells up from within his own sexual and spiritual desires, in response to the promise of fulfillment he senses without. The Prince succeeds in his vision quest when he connects the overtly phallic symbol of the repeatedly “whett[ed] sword” with the will of God and the *golden* stair of salvation. From the vantage point provided by the dramatic monologue of this section of the poem, the reader sees into the workings of a Ruskinian “disturbed,” or grotesque, imagination that receives

distorted reflections of sublime truths from the mind's mirror, clouded by sin and fogged with the hot breath of Satan (*Stones* 3.156, 68). Through his efforts to clear his fogged imagination, the Prince manages to connect the golden stair of Rapunzel's hair to his earlier grotesque dream in which he has seen men ascend starry ladders to the gates of heaven where they are "content to wait, / Purging ... patiently ... every sin" (57-58). Imaginatively, the Prince has unified the sexual and spiritual components in the symbolism of Rapunzel's hair.

The spiritual-sexual victory in "Rapunzel" is not one-sided, however: in the tower, Rapunzel, immediately following the Prince's rectifying vision of the golden stair, turns her thoughts heavenward in a prayer, a condensed version of which follows here:

Christ, bring me to thy bliss.

Mary, maid withouten wem,

Keep me!

...Give me a kiss,

Dear God....

...Send me a true knight,

Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,

Broad and trenchant; yea, and seven

Spans from hilt to point, O Lord!

.....

Lord give Mary a dear kiss,

And let gold Michael, ...,

...bring me that kiss

On a lily. (162-71, 177-81)

Though innocent, even childish, in tone, Rapunzel's prayer employs highly sexual imagery. The significance of the knight's large sword seems obvious enough (not to mention slightly ridiculous), but the lily is more complicated. Because the colour is not specified, it is probably safe to assume that most readers envision the angelically-borne white Madonna lily frequently used in depictions of the Annunciation, as a tribute to the purity and virginity of Mary. In "Rapunzel," a poem that tries to reconcile spirituality and sexuality, the lily seems the right symbol to set against the phallic image that she constructs of her knight. Yet, in grotesque visions, symbols veil and distort as much as they represent. By the time the lily finds its way into the hands of the "gold" angel Michael in "Rapunzel," having come through works such as *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and "The Blessed Damozel," where it is an emblem of purity, and several earlier poems in *The Defence of Guenevere* volume, where it is associated with desire, death, and martyrdom,¹⁰³ it is already a doubled sign that fuses spirituality and sexuality, which is what makes it function so well in this poem. The two lovers come together when the Prince purges sin without diminishing desire and Rapunzel claims a sexual character without foregoing innocence.

Having met the symbolic conditions of the poem and volume, "Rapunzel" shifts with characteristic swiftness to the third scene, which shows the lovers united. In this most structurally complex poem, Morris registers the union in poetry's semiotic undertone, the non-verbal system of signification at work in the elements of prosody—meter and rhyme.¹⁰⁴ In the opening scene, the Prince's speech appears in what looks and sounds something like a short meter, ballad quatrains, rhyming *abcb* or *ab(a)b* (second a-rhyme is slant) and using trimeter in all four lines. The form produces an effect that is

almost juvenile in its use of a conventional sing-song tone typical of ballads: “I put my armour on, / Thinking on what they said: / ‘Thou art a king’s own son, / ’Tis fit that thou should’st wed’” (17-20). Rapunzel’s speech comes in tercets in tetrameter, followed by a b-rhyme refrain in trimeter that focuses on the state of her hair (for example, “Over my golden hair” [10], “The fathoms of my hair” [50]). Having safely gone through a rite of passage to sexual maturity, the lovers unite in the third scene, and the poem marks the occasion in a change to the stanza form that contains their dialogue. Now, they both speak in quatrains, not the juvenile quatrains in trimeter used for the adolescent Prince, but matured versions of them, true heroic quatrains in a pentameter. The poem further marks their mature union when Rapunzel’s story breaks mid-line (244) and the Prince’s response preserves perfect pentameter and maintains the abab-rhyme scheme—it is an act of completion in prosody that reflects the sexual and spiritual completion they find in each other. With no sign of the Witch, all seems well—thematically and prosodically—at this point; however, the poem does not move with descending action towards a sublime vision of a blessed marriage bed but continues in its weird and dislocated strain. The couple still has work to do.

The drama passes over the six-hour gap in the narrative (“Love, we have been six hours alone” [208]), whose action has united the lovers in the tower. The Prince, however, has awoken in a troubled state:

Nay, draw a little nearer, that your breath
 May touch my lips, let my cheek feel your arm;
 Now tell me, did you ever see a death,
 Or ever see a man take mortal harm? (207-10)

His first imperative request seems perfectly fitting for a post-coital moment (readers know from Grimm that Rapunzel's twins are conceived in the tower), but the second seems very out of place: the Prince asks her if she has ever witnessed someone being killed. Nonetheless, Rapunzel answers in the affirmative and tells of a fight between two knights that left one moaning in the grass with the bars of his visor twisted towards his face and the other dead, "bleeding from head to breast, / Yet seem'd it like a line of poppies red / In the golden twilight" (219-20). As a *non sequitur*, the Prince's morbid question is a disconnected fragment of speech—a verbal grotesque—in a poem of fragmented scenes and images, and his response to her story is just as strange:

Ah, they were brothers then,

And often rode together, doubtless where

The swords were thickest, and were loyal men,

Until they fell in these same evil dreams. (245-48)

Stallman, Dianne Sadoff, and Deborah Baker Wyrick have explained this passage in psychoanalytic terms of the alter-ego, or the doppelganger, of a man at war with himself, focusing on the Prince's later comment that he "too should have slain [his] brother" had he not ridden out of the court in search of the woman he heard of in a minstrel's song (271). The "evil dreams," however, receive short shrift from critics who do not see how they relate to the general dreamscape of the poem. Stallman says that the Prince realizes it is an evil dream to imagine that love can be won through violence (229); Sadoff, in her analysis of "Rapunzel" as an example of Romantic imaginative transformation, claims that before the Prince made his dream of loving a reality, he mistook the evil dream of war and violence for reality (160); and Wyrick finds that the brother battle comes as a

warning against the aestheticizing of *liebestod* visions to the Prince and Rapunzel, who reject them as evil dreams (378). Morris, however, makes dreaming more complicated than these critics allow.

The Prince tells Rapunzel the story of how he took inspiration from “a word / Sung by a minstrel old” to forge a sword with “golden hair / Flowing about the hilts” (261-63). The Prince repeats the song:

‘Twixt the sunlight and the shade

Float up memories of my maid:

God, remember Guendolen!

Gold or gems she did not wear,

But her yellow rippled hair,

Like a veil, hid Guendolen!

‘Twixt the sunlight and the shade,

My rough hands so strangely made,

Folded Golden Guendolen;

Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard,

Framed her face while on the sword

Tears fell down from Guendolen.

Guendolen now speaks no word,

Hands fold round about the sword.

Now no more of Guendolen.

Only 'twixt the light and shade

Floating memories of my maid

Make me pray for Guendolen. (287-304)

“Guendolen” is the name both of a figure in the past and the name that Rapunzel will adopt by the end of the poem as part of a transformation of identity. To facilitate the transformation, the Prince connects this song to the world of dreams, so crucial to the mediation of perception and understanding in Morris’s volume. The Prince says that the word within the song (presumably the name “Guendolen”) set him “dreaming / Of a sweet bow’d-down face with yellow hair, /... / A half smile” (263-67). Dreams are dangerous places in *The Defence of Guenevere*: the signs in dreams reveal as much as they conceal and can paralyze the body. The Prince reads the story of the two slain men as the tale of two brothers who fall into “evil dreams”; his interpretation suggests Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* tale of Balyn and Balan, two brothers who mistake each other’s identity and slay one another in battle. The Prince’s dream of Guendolen is a grotesque like his other dream of the yellow/golden stair, and the evil aspect of this dream lies once again in signs half-seen. The “yellow rippled hair” has hidden Guendolen like a veil until now, when the Prince can see a higher, golden quality in the overtly sexual sign. The song sung by the Prince makes another echo with Rossetti’s “Hand and Soul,” in which Chiaro laments that his art veils the truth he would see and paint: “Am I not as a cloth drawn before the light, that the looker may not be blinded; but which sheweth thereby the grain of its own coarseness; so that the light seems defiled” (51). After a prolonged period of adolescence in which he matures in his craft, Chiaro sees that the golden veil that had obscured his dreams is the golden hair of his soul or anima (51). The evil

dreams of the brothers and the Prince are ones of faulty perception, grotesque visions seen in the imagination of distorted mirrors. Guendolen herself is not an object of terror, but she becomes a danger to the mind that perceives her and fears its own distortions. This treatment of Rapunzel/Guendolen's hair seems to descend from Ruskin's description of such challenges to perception in his discussion of the "Symbolical Grotesque": "For even if the symbolic vision itself be not terrible, the sense of what may be veiled behind becomes all the more awful in proportion to the insignificance or strangeness of the sign itself" (*Works* 11.182). For the Prince, the song-inspired dream is a mixed blessing: it glimpses at sublime golden truths, but they are so difficult to see clearly and interpret rightly that misreading them threatens to paralyze the dreamer.

To the Prince, the dream of Guendolen is an adolescent fantasy that he must work through before he can realize the woman in a mature perception of reality. Like the mystical woman to Chiaro, Rapunzel's hair speaks to the Prince from without and from within, as something that both clouds vision with desire and enjoins him to look for a greater spiritual truth. Because it is only partially comprehended, the revelation of sublime truth motivates the Prince to act without a clearly developed purpose or logic—a sort of adolescent impetuosity impels him to move lest "wars and business kept [him] there to die" (270). Having seen or imagined "a half smile" in the perceptually uncertain space "'Twixt the sunlight and the shade" (266, 287, 293, 302), the Prince goes off half-cocked in search of a golden woman hidden by her "yellow rippled hair" before he has teased out a spiritual (golden) meaning embedded in a carnal (yellow) sign. He acts under the influence of signs he cannot comprehend and under the fear of inaction itself. At first, the actions inspired by the song can be read as purposeless in the warlike, or

even masturbatory, gestures of one whose “Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard” (296). The Prince needs his sexual nature secured within the protective circle of a woman’s devoted love, symbolized by the image of the openly phallic sword with the golden hair flowing about the hilt. Although often depicted as the *femme fatale*’s ensnaring web, a woman’s hair is a double sign that can also signify devotion, as it does in William Holman Hunt’s painting of *Isabella* (1867), whose hair drapes over the pot of basil containing her dead lover’s head in a sign of devotion beyond death. Guendolen of the Prince’s song is never recovered from the veil of the symbolical grotesque and remains hidden behind the veil of her *yellow* rippled hair, a floating memory “twixt the light and shade.” Rapunzel, having knelt at the opening of the fourth scene, rises as Guendolen at the end of it and lifts the veil of yellow rippled hair to reassure the Prince that his sexual desire is spiritually chaste: “Your hands need never grip the hammer’d sword again, / But all my *golden* hair shall ever round you flow” (306-07; emphasis added). The Prince loses sight of his maiden in the song-inspired dream, but he gains her in reality. To signal the attainment of mature sexuality for both characters, Morris simply invokes the fairytale pattern of changing names to reflect the achievement of a mature identity when he changes the names of the Prince and Rapunzel to King Sebald and Guendolen.¹⁰⁵

Having united them in body, spirit, and prosody, Morris would seem to have little left to do for the happy couple, yet the poem follows them into marriage in a fifth and final scene containing allusions to the only other married couple in the volume, King Arthur and Queen Guenevere. The scene shifts to the Prince’s kingdom where he now sits in state as King Sebald with his Queen, Guendolen, in whose name we see and hear an echo of “Guenevere.” The marital bliss of Sebald and Guendolen stands in stark

contrast to Guenevere's misery at having been "bought / By Arthur's great name and his little love" in the volume's title poem (82-83). While all that is golden in Guenevere turns grey and colourless in the Arthurian poems, the atmosphere of "Rapunzel" becomes increasingly golden. The redemptive gold that Guendolen offers to Sebald becomes the gold of a kingdom by extension of his kingly aspect:

KING SEBALD

We rode throughout the town,

A gold crown on my head,

Through all the gold-hung streets,

"Praise God!" the people said

.....

"For Sebald the high king

And the lady's golden head." (319-32)

For her part, Guendolen appears unaffected by the romantic failure that other women endure in the chivalric poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* when she trades one tower for another:

I am so glad, for every day

He kisses me much the same way

As in the tower; under the sway

Of all my golden hair. (315-18)

Freeing the maiden from the tower is difficult business in nineteenth-century poetry. The figure of the lonely lady in the tower is an aesthetic object of pent-up passion so strong that its release is usually fatal, as it is for Tennyson's doomed Lady of Shalott; otherwise,

if the imprisoned woman finds release in marriage, it is only momentary and incomplete, and marriage is but another lonely tower, as it is for Guenevere. Unlike Guenevere, however, Guendolen enjoys pre-marital passion in a sanctified state of marriage without being fettered by the chains of domesticity.

Strangely, the Witch, who has long been absent in the poem, reappears at the height of this marital success, perhaps for the sake of structural unity. In an echo of the opening scene, the text of the final scene sets out three characters in alternating stanzas with the Witch flanking Guendolen at the end. This time, however, the vanquished Witch calls out from hell, as indicated in the stage directions, and her chant no longer has its paralytic effect on Sebald or Guendolen, though in a vague way, Guendolen still senses the Witch's presence:

Nothing wretched now, no screams;

I was unhappy once in dreams,

And even now a harsh voice seems

To hang about my hair. (335-38)

Morris raises the spectre of the Witch again as a reminder that marriage does not veil or diminish Guendolen's sexuality, which, like Guenevere's, remains a potent visible sign to all who look on her. Marriage may have made Guendolen golden, but Rapunzel's yellow hair still has its pull. The last lines of the poem come as an ambiguous warning from the Witch:

WOE! THAT ANY MAN COULD DARE

TO CLIMB UP THE YELLOW STAIR,

GLORIOUS GUENDOLEN'S GOLDEN HAIR. (349-51)

The “WOE!” suggests a Witch defeated by the Prince having gained a spiritual reward set atop a sexual ladder, yet the modal auxiliary “could” of the verbal phrase “could dare to climb” presents a problem: if it is the past participle of an accomplished feat, it suggests lasting success; if it is the subjunctive case of impossibility, it predicts an imminent fall for Sebald, who must inevitably lapse into “yellow” visions of lust. The ambiguity seems to be deliberate, for in a poem that moves through grotesque visions half-seen, it is appropriate that the Witch’s voice hangs about Guendolen’s hair half-heard. The shadowy whisper of the Witch still sends a shiver because it touches the fear of sin and death, which, says Ruskin, is the work of the grotesque: “It is the trembling of the human soul in the presence of death which most of all disturbs the images on the intellectual mirror, and invests them with the fitfulness and ghastliness of dreams” (*Works* 11.185).

Critics must be content to deal in riddles if they take on the task of reading *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. They await readers in several places in the volume: in the angelic riddle of the cloths in the title poem, the visual riddle (or emblem, a type of riddle combining images and words) of Launcelot’s stigmata in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” or in the riddle of the hounds in “Welland River.” In this last poem, Ellayne is another embowered woman, who, like Mariana, awaits the return of her lover. He finally returns, but he has another woman with him. Ellayne confronts him with a riddle:

O, I have gotten two hounds, fair knight,

The one has served me well,

But the other, just an hour ago,

Has come from over sea,

And all his fell is sleek and fine,

But little he knows of me.

Now, which shall I let go, fair knight,

And which shall bide with me? (63-70)

Robert gets the answer: “The one that best loveth thee” (72). Morris plays with a familiar ballad convention in which a lady typically fends off amorous advances with a riddle that her suitor must answer as proof of his worth before she yields to him. Ellayne's riddle of the two hounds echoes the formula, but the point of her riddle is in the obviousness of the answer. Her riddle is calculated to win the lover back, not hold him at bay. Morris inverts the operation of the ballad riddle, but he preserves its end effect: the lovers are united because of a correctly answered riddle. Robert's riddle, however, is easier than the readers', who must read the poem as yet another issuing from the volume's “deep still land of colours.” While she waits for Robert, Ellayne grows “both pale and green, / From gold to gold of [her] girdle / There is an inch between” (18-20). This part of the riddle is a simple one: the gap in her girdle bespeaks her pregnancy. More interesting, though, in terms of the volume's use of colour is the image made by her alterations to the golden girdle: “I sew'd it up with scarlet silk” (21). The last stanza tells readers that Robert makes a happy choice in Ellayne (“he has kiss'd sweet Ellayne on the mouth, / ... / And long and long days after that / Sir Robert's house she did keep” [85-88]), but readers of *The Defence of Guenevere* know by this point that the secret to the volume's grail is a union of sensuality and spirituality, which is signalled in colours of her girdle: golden spirituality shot through with red passion. Because readers are familiar with the Prince of “Rapunzel,” who has had to try “so hard to read this riddle through” (100), they have less

trouble with it in “Welland River.” As has been argued, the large pattern of riddle in the poems discussed above seems to owe a debt to Ruskin and his idea of the grotesque, which, he writes in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, constitutes “a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character. . . . All noble grotesques are concentrations of this kind, and the noblest convey truths which nothing else could convey; and not only so, but convey them, in minor cases with a delightfulness,—in the higher instances with an awfulness,—which no mere utterance of the symbolised truth would have possessed, but which belongs to the effort of the mind to *unweave the riddle*” (*Works* 5.132-33; emphasis added). Morris’s poetry participates in a like vision of the grotesques in its “bold and fearless” connection of symbols and colour. As constructions that rely on the grotesque, the poems often rest on what seem to be jarring juxtapositions, but ones that remain bound together by a “concentration . . . [to] convey truths which nothing else could convey,” and communicate an “awfulness” in proportion to the riddle they attempt to solve.

At the core of *The Defence of Guenvere* is a riddle of the body that seems designed after Descartes’ assertion that “the soul is easier to know than the body” (qtd. in Sartre 404). Indeed, in Morris’s poetry, the body is often more ghostly in its presence than the immaterial mind or soul. Armstrong states that Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere* contains “the great poems of desire in the nineteenth century” (242), but they are more than works of sexual longing, frustrated passion, and lasting regret. They make

erotic perception, the depiction of what Merleau-Ponty calls the “body in its sexual being,” the subject of their art. It is a type of perception that speaks to the understanding in a barely audible whisper, like Ruskin’s grotesques; Morris’s figures perceive things through an erotic haze, which, Merleau-Ponty argues, is in fact a condition of perception: “sexuality is neither transcended in human life nor shown up at its centre by unconscious representations. It is at all times present there like an atmosphere” (*Phenomenology* 195). In the Arthurian and Froissartian poems of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, the haze gathers into a thick fog in which characters frequently lose their way; it is “Rapunzel,” the fairy-tale “other” poem, whose threads tie together the colourful scenes of violence, passion, and lust that constitute the volume’s grotesque riddle of human desire.

**THE SEXUALIZED BODY AND THE CLEAVING MEMORY IN
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE'S
*POEMS AND BALLADS, FIRST SERIES (1866)***

It is difficult to define pleasure in its highest sense—the definition involving a number of apparent paradoxes. For, from an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature, the pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being. (Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* 71)

3.1 “Use every man after his desert and who shall ’scape whipping?”:

Algernon Charles Swinburne and the Body of his Work

The publication of Algernon Charles Swinburne’s first series of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 marked a new phase in the debate over the merit and deficiency, and even “degeneracy,”¹⁰⁶ of Pre-Raphaelite art, and once again the debate focused on representations of the body. It was the publication of Swinburne’s volume, followed by Rossetti’s *Poems* (1870), that led Robert Buchanan to write the infamous “Fleshly School of Poetry” piece for the *Contemporary Review*. From its earliest reviews in the *Athenaeum*, *Saturday Review*, and *London Review* to more recent works, such as Yopie Prins’ *Victorian Sappho* (1999), *Poems and Ballads* has drawn criticism that reads like a medical history—from the anonymous critic of the *London Review*, who sees the volume as the product of a “diseased state of mind” (35), to Prins, who connects Swinburne’s command of meter to his algolagnia (112-56), *Poems and Ballads* and its author have been pathologized and diagnosed. The earliest reviews of *Poems and Ballads* tend to err on the side of prudishness, and its latter-day critics err on the side of psychobiography, but in either case, the volume has been treated as though it were the symptom of one condition or another, an approach that forever casts the poet as a passive participant in the

creation of his own work. However, a close examination of *Poems and Ballads* does not reveal work of a diseased and disorderly mind; rather, it reveals work that is highly controlled in its exploration of the bodies a person can inhabit, or the diverse states in which, to borrow Merleau-Ponty's terminology, the "lived body ... rises towards the world" (*Phenomenology* 87), especially as its rise is conditioned by complex and varied sexual drives. *Poems and Ballads*, as this examination will show, tends to ground itself in the states of body that can either sharpen or occlude its presence, often by dwelling on moments that conjure absent bodies into existence out of the memory under conditions of desire, disease, or death, and sometimes all three.

The volume was denounced for its sensuality by the guardians of virtue in the popular press. Buchanan was one of the first to review *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 in the *Athenaeum*, and later expanded his criticism in his 1871 article "The Fleshly School," in which he concluded that the volume was part of a conspiracy of "fleshly gentlemen [who] have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver ... that the body is greater than the soul" (334). In the initial review, his predominant complaint is that the work is not "sincere," a word (or variant of it) that Buchanan uses no less than nine times in his short review. He traces the root of Swinburne's insincerity to the poet's sensuality, associating "insincerity" with "impurity" and, by the same token, "genuineness" with "morality" (30-31). Thus, poets cannot be genuinely or sincerely offensive, according to Buchanan, nor can they be earnestly insincere (34), which poses a difficulty for Swinburne, whose offences are sincere challenges and whose insincerity is the earnest part of his satire. *Poems and Ballads*, as far as Buchanan can tell, is "unclean for the mere sake of

uncleanliness” (31). On the same day that Buchanan’s review appeared in the *Athenaeum* (4 August 1866), the *London Review* and the *Saturday Review* similarly denounce *Poems and Ballads* for its gross sensuality. The unsigned review in the former describes the volume as “a carnival of ugly shapes,” “depressing and misbegotten,” and “so utterly revolting” as to be a shock to “English conventional morals” (35). John Morley, in his review for the *Saturday Review*, felt the shock perhaps more strongly than most. His shrill cry of offended sensibility lamented that Swinburne should find “nothing in women worth singing about except ‘quivering flanks,’ ‘splendid supple thighs,’ ‘hot sweet throats,’ and ‘hotter hands than fire,’ and ... their blood as ... ‘hot as wan wine of love’” in a volume of poetry revealing “a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in Lemprière” (24, 23)—that is, John Lemprière’s *Bibliotheca Classica* (1798). The rhetoric of Morley’s denunciation of Swinburne had the unintentional effect of making *Poems and Ballads* an enduring *succès de scandale*. However, Morley’s attack also established an ugly line of *ad hominem* interrogation for *Poems and Ballads* that has obfuscated the critical evaluation of some of the finest poetry of the Victorian period.

The initial assault on *Poems and Ballads* fell along personal lines from critics who, perhaps, had heard rumours of Swinburne’s strange and erratic behaviour at the Arts Club, where he drank heavily, swore loudly, and, in general, behaved badly—one often recounted occasion involved a drunken spree of destroying members’ hats in the cloakroom.¹⁰⁷ By 1866, Swinburne had developed a “deplorably vicious reputation,” as Josephine Butler puts it in a cautionary letter to Lady Trevelyan (qtd. in Trevelyan 218), and, at the same time, critics began reading faults in his poetry as faults in his personal

character. In his review of *Poems and Ballads*, Buchanan laments that Swinburne had “no splendid individual emotions to reveal” (31), and Morley repeatedly comments on the poet’s lack of “soberness” and the “mad intoxicated sensuality” of his verse (27, 29), bewailing the futility of reforming “an artist of such power and individuality as Mr. Swinburne,” who is “much too stoutly *bent* on taking his own course” and “works as his character *compels* him” (22; emphasis added). With mixed success, Swinburne fought back against the criticism of his poetry and tendency of seeing art through the filter of the artist’s personality in his pamphlet entitled *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866).

In his public rebuttal to the negative reviews, the first point that Swinburne insists upon is that his poems are “dramatic, many-faced, multifarious; and no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed as the assertion of its author’s personal feeling or faith” (*Swinburne Replies* 18)—that is, he insists that his poetry should not be read biographically.¹⁰⁸ However, he quickly sets aside the issue of biography to deal with the issue of censorship, of which the publication of *Poems and Ballads* had given him firsthand knowledge. Swinburne had originally arranged to publish his volume with Edward Moxon and Company, but, when it became known that the *Times* was planning an attack on the work and its publisher, and after Mudie’s Library removed the volume from circulation, James Bertrand Payne at Moxon decided to withdraw the work (Rooksby 130, 137). At this point, John Camden Hotten (a less reputable bookseller whom Swinburne had intended to avoid [Rooksby 130]) took over the distribution of *Poems and Ballads*.

At base, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* is a defence of art that openly explores sexuality.¹⁰⁹ Swinburne’s rebuttal takes a deeply ironic tone, at times antagonizing “the

chaste and candid critics of the day” by professing ignorance as to why *Poems and Ballads* should draw “such sudden thunder from the serene heavens of public virtue” (*Swinburne Replies* 19, 17). Although he appears to take some delight in goading critics such as Buchanan and Morley and exposing the hypocrisy of their “prurient prudery and ... virulent virtue” (19), Swinburne makes a more serious appeal to his wider audience to broaden the standards of contemporary literature beyond conventional morality: the “poet’s business,” he says elsewhere, is “presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society” (“Baudelaire” 28). As he had done before in his defence of George Meredith’s *Modern Love* (which was attacked for depicting marital infidelity and dissolution) in the 7 June 1866 issue of the *Spectator*, Swinburne complains in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* that publishers and editors print only the most innocuous works for the most innocent readers: “Our time has room only for such as are content to write for children and girls” (*Swinburne Replies* 24). He further laments that the economics and politics of printing had made publishing a book “the equivalent to thrusting [it] into the hands of every mother and nurse in the kingdom as fit and necessary food for female infancy” (24), for which reason he regrets not prefixing to his work the warning of the French poet and humorist, Théophile Gautier:

*J’en préviens les mères de familles,
Ce que j’écris n’est pas pour les petites filles
Dont on coupe le pain en tartines; mes vers
Sont des vers de jeunes hommes.* (qtd. in *Swinburne Replies* 24)

Swinburne’s peevish mockery in fact echoes an opinion of Morley, who had made the following point in his unfavourable review of *Poems and Ballads*:

If he [Swinburne] were a rebel against the fat-headed Philistines and poor-blooded Puritans who insist that all poetry should be such as may be widely placed in the hands of girls of eighteen, and is fit for the use of Sunday schools, he would have all wise and enlarged readers on his side. But there is an enormous difference between an attempt to revivify among us the grand old pagan conceptions of Joy, and an attempt to glorify all the bestial delights that the subtleness of Greek depravity was able to contrive. It is a good thing to vindicate passion, and the strong and large and rightful pleasures of the sense, against the narrow and inhuman tyranny of shrivelled anchorites. (23-24)

Swinburne similarly wonders how the subject of human passion treated in classical literature can be considered fit material for schoolboys to translate but be inexplicably prohibited themes for contemporary artists (20), wondering aloud “whether or not the first and last requirement of art is to give no offense; whether or not all that cannot be lispd in the nursery or fingered in the schoolroom is therefore to be cast out of the library; whether or not the domestic circle is to be for all men and writers the outer limit and extreme horizon of their world of work” (*Swinburne Replies* 29). With *Poems and Ballads*, he says, “No one wished to force men’s food down the throats of babes and sucklings” (24). While Morley and Swinburne may have agreed on the stifling effect of prudery in the publishing industry, they differed on the treatment of passion in art—Morley (like Matthew Arnold) wanted passion that affirms “Joy,” but Swinburne—and this is what most likely offended Morley’s sensibility—deals more often with “pleasures of the sense” that cannot be called “rightful” and passion that fails and recoils on itself.

Through *Poems and Ballads* and *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne proposes a new standard of manliness for art that is openly erotic and erotically open. “The office of adult art,” he says, “is neither puerile nor feminine, but virile. . . . [T]he press will be as impotent as the pulpit to dictate laws and remove the landmarks of art. . . . Then all accepted work will be noble and chaste in the wider masculine sense, not truncated and curtailed, but outspoken and full-grown” (*Swinburne Replies* 24, 32). What Swinburne advocates, then, is an enlarged male aesthetic that encompasses a free and frank examination of sexuality, unfettered by the conventional morality and exigencies of the nineteenth-century domestic sphere. For “literature to be worthy of men,” argues Swinburne, it “must be large, liberal, sincere” (30), but he makes it clear that his notion of sincerity” is not the same as Buchanan’s, which Swinburne constructs as morally pedantic and naïve. Swinburne pursues “sincerity” in the etymological sense (meaning “without wax”) of getting at an unvarnished truth when he declaims that in sincere literature “purity and prudery cannot keep house together” (*Swinburne Replies* 30). The real artist, says Swinburne, is a manly one who ought to be free “to deal with the full life of man and the whole nature of things” (30), including a full range of human passions, for the sake of a sophisticated manly audience.

Time has assuaged the recriminations against Swinburne, but, as observed earlier, *Poems and Ballads* still suffers at the hands of critics who would treat his creation of poetry as a psycho-sexual symptom, as a compulsive act that arises out of a personal pathology. Many since Morley and his critical contemporaries have preserved the idea that poetic composition for Swinburne begins as an unhealthy compulsion. Certainly, Swinburne himself is partly to blame—his history is a compelling and unhealthy one that

tempts critics to indulge in a degree of biographical criticism to explain the sadomasochistic strain of his verse. He made no secret of his enthusiasm for flagellation, the record of which he left behind in his correspondences. In one letter, for example, he recalls an Eton tutor's particularly gifted use of the birch switch:

I have known him¹¹⁰ prepare the flogging with burnt scents; or choose a *sweet* place out of doors with smell of firwood. *This* I call real delicate torment. ... Once, before giving me a swishing that I had the marks of for more than a month, he let me saturate my face with eau-de-Cologne. I conjecture now ... that, counting on the pungency of the perfume and its power over the nerves, he meant to stimulate and excite the senses by that preliminary pleasure so as to inflict the acuter pain afterwards on their awakened and intensified susceptibility. (1.78)

Swinburne reveals in this letter a keen observation of pain's relationship to pleasure, a relationship that he explores in his poetry. Such joint readings of Swinburne's life and work (his work through his life, or his life through his work) have yielded the various discoveries of intellectual hermaphrodites, male lesbians, feminised male poets, misogynists, female sublimes, male heroines, effeminate men, and manly women.¹¹¹

As also observed earlier, the latest instance of biographical and bodily abuse to be suffered by Swinburne comes from Prins in *Victorian Sappho*, a work which attempts to connect the poet's algolagnia and his "impulsive, uncontrollable ... metrical virtuosity" (112). Prins claims that Swinburne's unusual nostalgia for the flogging block at Eton is connected to a poetic epiphany.¹¹² It was there, on the block, says Prins, that the poet learned the principles of prosody: "through rhythmic beating Swinburne learns to

internalize the beat of poetry” (122). While Swinburne would have been able to discern spondaic slaps sounding against his posterior, surely Prins strains the argument by crediting his Eton school “swishings” for his masterful ““incorporation”” of meter (151). (Here, as elsewhere, Prins’ use of suggestive quotation marks should raise readers’ suspicion.) The problem with Prins’ argument is that it makes flogging the special condition of the poet’s metrical ear. Her assertion that “flagellation proves a necessary initiation rite for poets” is far too romantic (151): to argue that the basis of Swinburne’s meter lies in flagellation and flagellation only is so far-fetched as to be absurd.

In fairness to Prins, she retains some credibility in her argument with reference to the following lines from Swinburne’s *The Flogging Block*: “Most of the Nurslings of the Muse require / The Lash that sets their lyric Blood on Fire, ... / Till Heart & Head the rhythmic Lesson learn” (qtd. 152). Certainly, Swinburne does connect the rhythm of flogging to the rhythm of verse in his work, but it is misleading to suggest that the former is the prerequisite of the latter based on what he says comically and sardonically in a set of pornographic eclogues that open with the parodic invocation, “I sing the Flogging Block. Thou, red-cheek’d Muse.” In the same way that she takes elements of *The Flogging Block* out of their humorous context, Prins also takes passages from Swinburne’s correspondences out of context,¹¹³ or at the very least, she ignores the possibility of “what Cecil Y. Lang calls Algermonic hoaxes” (Thomas 24). In the end, the major fault of Prins’ theory of ““incorporation”” is that it falls into the tempting fallacy that Swinburne’s work must necessarily be the product of a masochistic compulsion over which he had very limited control.¹¹⁴ Whether or not his fondness for the block is a hoax that he perpetuated,¹¹⁵ Swinburne proves that he is capable of analyzing the sadistic

tendencies of his Eton tutor and the effects of his ministrations, and that he is equally capable of explaining the sadomasochistic strain in his erotic poetry.

Swinburne's poems and his defence of them announced a revolution of perception in poetry that Morley was among the first to recognize when he writes in his review that "it is a very bad and silly thing to try to set up the pleasures of the sense in the seat of the reason they have dethroned" (24). Although priggishly and memorably calling Swinburne "the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs" (29), Morley did recognize the revolutionary aesthetic of the flesh in *Poems and Ballads* as upsetting the hierarchy of mind over body. As one of the early English champions of "art for art's sake,"¹¹⁶ Swinburne perhaps had little care for poetry that is "good" and "wise" in the moral sense implied by Morley, but he (Swinburne) did care about the unstable relationship of the mind and the body. As Swinburne says in his Dedicatory Epistle to the collected *Poems* (1904), the poems of his volume are "studies of passion and sensation" (vii), which cast prudery out of doors and return to the body in such a way as to "do justice to that much misused and belied thing, the purely sensuous and outward side of love" (qtd. in Lafourcade 138). However, to do justice to the "purely sensuous and outward side of love" is to show how inextricably it is tied to the psychological and the inner; thus, the justice of these poems is also the source of their richness and complexity. For *Poems and Ballads'* frank exploration of excessive, cloying, and deviant forms of sensuality, Swinburne was accused by Morley of using poetry, not to "vindicate passion and the strong and large and rightful pleasures of the sense," but to debase art and leave it "grovelling down among the nameless shameless abominations" (23-24). However, the program of justice that Swinburne announces for his treatment of passion in *Poems and*

Ballads, in part, names and illustrates these “shameless abominations” in a wide-ranging erotic experiment that combines sensuality with leprosy, male homosexuality, lesbianism, necrophilia, blasphemy, sadism, and masochism. The experimental forays of certain poems into various deviant sexualities may have struck many, as they did Morley, as merely immature and vile sensationalism (24), but the effect of the whole volume would have been even more unsettling to its Victorian audience, because collectively the poems of *Poems and Ballads* constitute a broader challenge to heteronormative sexuality and personal identity. Gender, sexuality, and identity face numerous challenges and disruptions in *Poems and Ballads*, which will be discussed in the sections below, the first of which considers one of the volume’s predominant figures, the *femme fatale*.

3.2 “Those Lips that No Bloodshed Could Sate”: Swinburne’s *Femmes Fatales*

The interaction of men and women of *Poems and Ballads* taps into a mid-Victorian anxiety concerning unstable categories of masculine and feminine, male and female. In both male and female characters, Swinburne presents sexuality as fluid through drives that his contemporary readers would have considered perverted and termed “inverted.” His men are distinctively unmanly: a band of spectators, forsaken and the leprous lovers, transsexuals, bisexuals, and fallen knights, whose sexuality appears passive and therefore stereotypically feminine. Passive sexuality, however, is not marked as a sign of weakness in the volume’s male characters—more often than not, Swinburne constructs their sexual passivity as a voluntary act of will and curiosity that tests the gendered boundaries of sexual behaviour. Conversely, his women are active and predatory. Lucrezia, Sappho, Dolores, Faustine, Phaedra, Félice, and Venus all manifest an

aggressive and stereotypically male sexuality, which in women presents itself as a grotesque and chaotic threat to the natural order that Victorians sought to define, determine, and fix.

In its zealous effort to define natural social and biological orders, Victorian culture reveals a high degree of gender trouble and anxiety. From Sarah Stickney Ellis, who puts before the women of her age their “highest duty ... to suffer and be still” (161), to Ruskin, who in confirming gendered spheres of action grants that “the man’s power is active, progressive, defensive,” while insisting that the woman “must be enduringly, incorruptibly, good; instinctively, infallibly wise, ... not for self-development, but for self-renunciation” (*Sesame* 59, 60), the effort was continual. Moreover, the hyper-masculine and active muscular Christian man and the docile and self-sacrificing model of modest feminine virtue in the Angel of the House seem constructions that overcompensate and posture before some subversive but vague danger that threatens to unbind what ought to be the mutually sustaining relationship between gender and sex defining men and women. The emerging discourse of sexuality (whose meaning of possessing a sexual instinct is not used with any regularity until the end of the nineteenth century) took its lead from conventional views of gender to consider a natural order of sexual difference. One of the consequences of normalizing a sexuality of difference was to apportion sexual appetite to men and deny it to women. The difference became an accepted commonplace in various disciplines of study throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. One of such authority in the emerging discourse was Dr. William Acton. According to Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets, and William Veeder, “to understand Victorian attitudes towards sexuality, readers today must

understand such a figure as Dr. William Acton—both as a ‘repressive’ writer on sexuality and as a ‘representative’ of the age” (58). Acton’s 1857 medical sexual-advice book, *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, which went through several editions in England and America, deals almost entirely with male sexuality; the book justifies the omitted discussion of female sexuality with the comment that “the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind” (133).¹¹⁷ Frequently anthologized and oft-quoted as proofs of a narrow Victorian vision of masculinity and femininity, these examples also imply the need to shore up sex and gender against other cultural forces that challenge them. In the closing decades of the century, the challenge takes clearer form and focus in discourses dealing with homosexuality, a topic brought to the fore by Oscar Wilde’s trial,¹¹⁸ and in discourses dealing with gender trouble, particularly concerning the figure of the so-called “New Woman.”¹¹⁹ The conservative cultural response was to adapt the theory of evolution, reasoning that what could evolve could also devolve, to develop ideas and perpetuate fears of degeneration linked to a sense of disappearing sexual difference. In 1866, Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads*, with its manly women and womanly men, is the writing on the wall of gender trouble to come.

Poems and Ballads opens with tributes to deadly sex. The first poem, “A Ballad of Life,” appears to be a conventional admiration of the feminine beauty of “a lady clothed like summer in sweet hours” (4). The subject of the speaker’s homage, however, is none other than Lucrezia Borgia, whom legend has cast as a murderous, licentious, and even incestuous *femme fatale*. The speaker, neither active nor defensive, passively worships the dangerous beauty who makes his “blood burn” and beat “in feverish

rhymes” (9, 77) and seems destined to a fate similar to one of Borgia’s former admirers, “some dead lute-player” with whose hair she has strung her “little cithern ... / Shaped heartwise” (11-2). Like the ill-fated former lover, the speaker appears ready to become a passive instrument upon which Borgia will play her notes of desire and death. The next poem of the volume, entitled “A Ballad of Death,” is written as a companion piece to “A Ballad of Life” and is an elegy on the occasion of Borgia’s death. While playing against Petrarch’s *Il Canzoniere* sonnet sequence, in which the first part is dedicated to Laura when she is alive and the second to her after her death, Swinburne’s the “Ballads of Life and Death” together reflect the equivocal relationship of desire and death that runs throughout *Poems and Ballads*. The final stanza of “A Ballad of Death” carries with it a keynote of the volume in the poet’s instructions to his own ballad: “Now, ballad, gather poppies in thine hands / And ... / Seek out Death’s face ... / And say ‘My master that was thrall to Love / Is become thrall to Death’” (101-09). The two ballads introduce the elements of desire and fear, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, that string the tension of the volume’s poems and sets them to vibrate (as it were), as in the next poem, “Laus Veneris,” in which Tannhäuser utters his subjunctive lament: “Ah God, ... / That death were not more pitiful than desire, / That these things were not one thing and the same!” (65-8). The first three poems, therefore, establish female sexuality in *Poems and Ballads* as threatening and unmaning. Unlike Ruskin’s ideal woman, who is a model of self-sacrifice, Swinburne’s various women are figures to whom sacrifices are made.

The volume’s third poem, “Laus Veneris,” Latin for “In Praise of Venus,” has been misread as a poem in which sensuality triumphs over spirituality. As already intimated, the poem is based on the legend of Tannhäuser, a knight who, after being

refused absolution by Pope Urban IV, returns to Venus at Mount Horsel (her home of exile in the Christian age) as her resigned paramour. The poem picks up the tale at this point in the narrative and in this mood of resignation. Antony Harrison, in his *Swinburne's Medievalism*, has argued that "Laus Veneris" is an instance in which Swinburne works the triumph of pagan *eros* over Christian *agapé* (60). Harrison's argument depends on Swinburne's criticism of religion as so many Blakean "mind forg'd manacles" and an assertion that the knight has truly rejected the spiritual salvation of God in favour of the carnal delights of Venus. There are two problems with this reading. The first is the assumption that Swinburne's personal religious beliefs are Tannhäuser's, despite Swinburne having reminded contemporary readers that these poems "are dramatic ... and no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed as the assertion of its author's personal feeling or faith" (*Replies* 18). The second problem with Harrison's reading is that the tone of the poem does not support his characterization of it as a "self-willed liberation" (61). Akin to Milton's fallen angels in hell, Swinburne's knight wins a freedom that is punitive:

Alas! for sorrow is all the end of this.
 O sad kissed mouth, how sorrowful it is!
 O breast whereat some suckling sorrow clings,
 Red with the bitter blossom of a kiss! (313-16)

Just as Milton's fallen angels are transformed into serpents and compelled in their triumph over Eden to eat fruit fair to eye but ashen to the mouth (10.504-70), so Swinburne's fallen knight is condemned in his victory over Christianity's doctrines of abstinence and restraint to glut himself on a sensual reward turned bitter (a word repeated

six times in the poem). Tannhäuser's rejection of God is certainly "self-willed," but the knight protests too much for this to be believed as a sign of his liberation. As one who has been "cast out of God's sight" (411), Tannhäuser rails against the prison of regret that his sensuality has built.

In "Laus Veneris," Swinburne creates a cultural crossroads where history, religion, sin, sex, and gender all intersect in a question of identity. While downplaying the poem's erotic elements, he offers perhaps the most accurate reading of the Christian knight's divided response to a life committed to sensuality:

The immortal agony of a man lost after all repentance—cast down from fearful hope into fearless despair—believing in Christ and bound to Venus—desirous of penitential pain, and damned to joyless pleasure. ... The tragic touch of this story is this: that the knight who has renounced Christ believes in him; the lover who has embraced Venus disbelieves in her. Vainly and in despair would he make the best of that which is worst—vainly remonstrate with God, and argue on the side he would fain desert. Once admit or accept the least admixture of pagan worship, or of modern thought, and the whole story collapses into froth and smoke.

(Replies 26)

Far from finding a "self-willed liberation," Tannhäuser is "lost" because he is denied the pleasure of painful penance and the freedom of redemption. Instead, he has become the prisoner of self-consuming lust, condemned to partake of pleasures that sicken the body and damn the soul. He is free from codes of Christian conduct only because he has been cast into a special hell of desire:

Yea, all she slayeth; yea, every man save me;
 Me, love, thy lover that must cleave to thee
 Till the ending of the days and ways of earth,
 The shaking of the sources of the sea.

Me, most forsaken of all souls that fell;
 Me, satiated with things insatiable;
 Me, for whose sake the extreme hell makes mirth,
 Yea, laughter kindles at the heart of hell.

Alas thy beauty! for thy mouth's sweet sake
 My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake
 As water, as the flesh of men that weep,
 As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break. (137-48)

In this passage, the loneliness of Tannhäuser's hell can be felt in the repetition of "me" that echoes within the underground walls of his Mount Horsel home. However, Horsel's hellish quality is more than loneliness, and Tannhäuser's suffering is more complex than isolation. The anaphoric use of "me" also takes on a degree of urgency: it is the cry of someone clinging to a fading sense of self. Tannhäuser has lost his identity, and more specifically, he has lost his identity as a man.

Paradoxically, life with the goddess of physical love and fertility unmans Tannhäuser because Venus offers only sex without issue: he "waxe[s] faint with fume of *barren* bowers," in which "Love shed *fruitless* flowers" (325, 328; emphasis added). In

his painting *Laus Veneris* (1869), Edward Burne-Jones (to whom Swinburne dedicated *Poems and Ballads*) recreates in part the experience of Swinburne's speaker in a depiction of Venus' boudoir: a tapestry of Venus in her chariot hunting with Cupid, five knights in a window, four musical maidens, and a pallid and languid, and somewhat masculine Venus, uncrowned. The telescopic effect of the perspective that collapses back-, middle-, and foregrounds and the richness of detail that fills the canvass make the already crowded scene of eroticism's retreat feel all the more stifling and claustrophobic. The other quality that Burne-Jones' painting carries over from the poem is the blurring of gender. In the masculine features of heavy-jawed Venus and the delicate, feminine features of the knights appearing in the window that gives out onto the world outside Horsel, Burne-Jones' painting replicates the gender confusion of Swinburne's poem. Remembering that he was once "God's knight" (209), Tannhäuser longs to rejoin the chivalric world of manly action that had once defined the "me" that he beckons in the passage quoted previously; since being shut out from that world of men and manliness, he lives as the passive victim of aggressive female sexuality. In the close air under Mount Horsel, Venus, the supreme *femme fatale*, binds men with locks of hair and with "her lips divides [them] vein by vein" (136). Like the devotee of Lucrezia in the volume's opening ballads, "God's knight" in "Laus Veneris" has become the "thrall to Love" and therefore the "thrall to death."

Poems and Ballads, then, teeters on sexual ambivalence, in which fear and desire, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual impulses and characteristics compete and blur. However, one type of female character predominates in *Poems and Ballads*: the *femme fatale*, the "deadly woman," whose literary roots extend

back to the Bible and beyond. She is a particularly fascinating figure in Pre-Raphaelite circles, appearing on numerous canvasses in depictions of the popular subject La Belle Dame Sans Merci and in such works by Rossetti as *Helen of Troy* (1863) and *Lady Lilith* (1864-68), both of which Swinburne was very fond.¹²⁰ Rossetti inscribes the former painting on the back: “*Helen of Troy* ... destroyer of ships, destroyer of men, destroyer of cities” (qtd. in Surtees 92); Swinburne describes the latter: “She draws out through a comb the heavy mass of hair like thick spun gold to fullest length; her head leans back half sleepily, superb and satiate with its own beauty; ... she charms and draws down the souls of men; ... she attracts and subdues all men at once in body and spirit” (“Royal Academy Exhibition” 46).¹²¹ With Lilith and La Belle Dame, danger lurks in the web of female sexuality, signified in the long hair either cast as a net across the canvass or already bound round the neck of an ensnared knight. The trap of sexuality in Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* is not so finely or subtly laid, but it is more complex.

Swinburne’s sexualized women are openly brutal, violent, and barren, qualities to which his passive men seem despairingly drawn. Morley predictably recoiled from this representation of sexuality: “This stinging and biting, all these ‘lithe lascivious regrets’, all this talk of snakes and fire, of blood and wine and brine, of perfume and poisons and ashes, grows sickly and oppressive on the senses” (25). The *femme fatale* in her various forms as a murderous seductress, such as in Keats’ ballad “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (itself derived from Alain Chartier’s fifteenth-century poem of the same name), has traditionally been used to chasten male desire and to express a male fear of sex through stories of men who are undone by their natural sexual instinct. Although leaving a trail of desiring dead men, Swinburne’s *femmes fatales* rarely threaten the speakers of the

poems with death; however, they do play upon specific sexual anxieties. These “stinging and biting” women nauseate someone like Morley because their aggressive sexuality, negotiated through violence and sterility, presents itself as a direct threat to the natural order.

The poem “Dolores” is a prayer of sexual liberation that awaits the re-awakening of female sexuality in a revolution whose sadomasochist violence seems to spring from a desire to be free of the constraints of society, religion, and history. The poem’s form signals an attack on conventional beliefs. About a demonic *femme fatale*, alternately referred to as “Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs” and “Our Lady of Pain,” “Dolores” parodies the Virgin Mary, whose tenure in Christian culture is as a model of femininity in whom sexuality has no hold. The speaker of the poem laments the time period in which he lives for shrouding sexuality in a culture of sin and shame, with Christian “creeds that refuse and restrain” (278), and so he offers his prayer to “Our Lady of Pain” that she might “come down and redeem us from virtue.... Ah, forgive us our virtues, forgive us, / Our Lady of Pain” (391-92). The parody also makes a subtle play with gender: the phrase “forgive our virtues” addressed to “Our Lady of Pain” is a parody of the Lord’s Prayer that asks “Our Father” to “forgive us our sins.” Gender and sexuality seem to collapse entirely as the speaker wonders, from “kisses [that] are bloody / ... /From the lips and the foam and the fangs, / Shall no new sin be born for men's trouble, / No dream of impossible pangs?” (83-92). “Dolores” is an homage to dangerous female sexuality, but the quality of the danger she incarnates is an ensnaring sexual ambiguity. In her sensuous full lips that hide fangs in a “red mouth like a venomous flower” (4), the speaker’s hope for “new sin,” or sexual liberation, seems to lie in the dissolution of

distinct masculine and feminine sexualities that is sealed with a kiss from a vampiric mouth, an inviting orifice that penetrates.

“Faustine” is a celebration of sexual deviance as timeless and perennial. In his defence of *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne says that “Faustine” deals with “the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty” (*Replies* 26). The poem’s epigraph, “Ave Faustina Imperatrix, morituri te salutant” (“Hail, Empress Faustina; we who are about to die salute you”), makes the wife of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius the ostensible subject of the poem, but, as Swinburne indicates, Faustine is the incarnation of desire that runs through human history, “since first the devil threw dice with God” for her (15-9). Since being consigned to the devil’s care, Faustine has been a “sarcophagus” (61), literally, a “body-eater,” who loves “the games men played with death” because they maintain the constant supply of blood needed to continually “revive” her (65-8). Faustine possesses vampire-like sexuality that is uncanny; monstrous and familiar, it distorts “normal” sexuality into something that is perverted and non-procreative (reproduction is parasitic rather than generative), literally rendering the metaphors of sexual appetite.

In the “transmigration of her soul” over time, Faustine maintains a stereotypically aggressive male sexuality, though the nature of her desire changes. After the time of the Roman empress has passed, “a new Faustine” awakes to “stray breaths of Sapphic song that ... / Shook the fierce quivering blood” with a “shameless nameless love that makes / Hell’s iron gin / Shut on you like a trap that breaks the soul” (117-24). This passage containing her incarnation as an embodiment of lesbian desire, tuned to the “Sapphic

song” of love, blurs seamlessly with the following one that constructs Faustine as a phallic woman, about whom “adders c[o]me to shed their coats” and “small serpents with soft stretching throats” come to caress (133-35). The blurring effect reflects the ambiguous nature of her sexuality, which is not distinguished by heterosexual or homosexual desire, but, rather, a barren desire that disrupts the economy of sexual reproduction. She is the ghost of desire that haunts the “straitened barren bed” that is home to both the “sterile growths of sexless root” and the “flower of kisses without fruit” (129, 131).

There is something about all the “stinging and biting” women and their bloodlust in Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* that anticipates the abomination to nature and sexuality in *Dracula*. *Poems and Ballads* bleeds with the bites of numerous vampire-like figures. The bloodiness of the text has been absorbed in discussions of sadomasochism, but no critic (to my knowledge) has commented on characters’ impulse to drink blood in the volume: from the speaker in “Love and Sleep,” who contemplates the “bare throat made to bite” of his lover (4), to the subject of “Satia te Sanguine,” a title that pays tribute to one who is “glutted with blood,” to Faustine, who “by slain man’s blood and breath / [is] Revived” (67-68), to Dolores, whose “lips that no bloodshed could satiate” (263). Similar to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in this respect, *Poems and Ballads* thrills with the sexual instinct, appeal, and perversity of a vampire, and the drinking of blood is an act that partakes in the volume’s repeated impulse to blur boundaries between masculine and feminine sexualities.

The fluid relationship between gender and desire in *Poems and Ballads* is most strikingly expressed in scenes of blood-sucking, which develop (and prefigure) the

nineteenth-century narratives that construct the vampire as a figure of monstrous sexuality invoking both fear and desire. The drinking of blood for Swinburne seems to have signified sexual displacement and frustration, even in his personal life. In a letter to John Lucas Tupper, on 15 March, 1868, William Michael Rossetti recounts the events of an evening in which Adah Isaacs Mencken, a sensationalistic American actress with whom Swinburne seems to have had a brief liaison, turned down the poet's invitation to stay the night. Swinburne grabbed his "Dolores" (his pet name for Mencken), "pulled her to the ground, and was throttling her" until the police were called in.¹²² Rossetti adds the interesting note that, in "a small *gentillesse* of excited and thwarted affection," Swinburne yelled after the fleeing Mencken something about "sucking her real blood" (*Letters* 193). In his poetry, Swinburne connects the draining of the body's blood with frustrated and failed eroticism, as in "Satia te Sanguine." The subject of this poem is a vampire-like figure, whose fatal allure suggests something syphilitic as she sweeps through crowds of men "as a plague in a poisonous city" (49), murdering love:

You carve him ["love"] a cross of needles,

And whet them sharp as your smiles.

He is patient of thorns and whip,

He is dumb under axe or dart;

You suck with a sleepy red lip

The red wet wounds in his heart.

You thrill as his pulses dwindle,

You brighten and warm as he bleeds,

With insatiable eyes that kindle

And insatiable mouth that feeds. (55-64)

She is both an epidemic and Pontius Pilate crucifying love: “Your hands nailed love to the tree, / You stript and scourged him with rods” (65-66). In this grim parody of the Passion, she is also a vampire, who derives strength from the blood that she sucks from the “red wet wound” of love’s heart. Metaphors and allusions mix in the poem as the swirl of humanity’s indeterminate desires throughout history and its various cultural constructions of sexuality seem to mix in her blood, as in the blood of Faustine and Dolores. And like the metaphors that mix, the blood that circulates and bleeds in *Poems and Ballads* loses its definitive quality, merging and combining with other exchanged fluids in the volume’s continual process of loosening the body’s relationship to gender and sexuality.

The disruption of male and female sexuality in “Dolores” is accomplished in part through the confluence of blood, milk, and semen. As part of the sustained religious parody, it is an unholy confluence that seems to take place in the Eucharistic cup:

All thine the new wine of desire,
 The fruit of four lips as they clung
 Till the hair and the eyelids took fire,
 The foam of a serpentine tongue,
 The froth of the serpents of pleasure,
 More salt than the foam of the sea,
 Now felt as a flame, now at leisure
 As wine shed for me. (137-44)

Unlike the Eucharistic cup that contains the blood of Christ “shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26: 28), this cup holds the “new wine of desire.” At first, the cup and its contents are described as “all thine”—that is, as an offering to Dolores; however, by the end of the stanza, it is wine shed for the speaker. This effect of confluence between speaker and subject is as mixed as the fluids in this poem, in which semen (“the froth of the serpents of pleasure”) and blood mix in lips that are “intertwisted and bitten / Till the foam has a savour of blood” (115-16). The theory of blood exchanging during sexual intercourse has a long medical and literary tradition behind it, perhaps most memorably encapsulated in John Donne’s “The Flea.” The blood that is shed or exchanged in Swinburne’s sexual acts, however, is of a violent and sadistic sort that robs life without generating it. Furthermore, it is an unstable liquid: blurred, blended, and confused with the semen, blood in *Poems and Ballads* is fraught with the potential for yet another stage of transubstantiation whose enactment further destabilizes the categories of sex and gender over which the Victorians anxiously fretted.

The sexual confusion mounts in another liquid exchange in “Dolores.” After having been offered the “froth of the serpents of pleasure, / More salt than the foam of the sea” (141-42), by the phallic and serpentine Dolores, the male speaker appears to take on the maternal function of breastfeeding, completing the dissolution of the boundary between male and female bodies and sexuality as blood and milk become indistinguishable:

O lips full of lust and of laughter,
 Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,
 Bite hard, lest remembrance come after
 And press with new lips where you pressed.

For my heart too springs up at the pressure,
 Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;
 Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,
 Ere pain come in turn. (25-32)

The speaker implores Dolores, who elsewhere is given “fangs” (90), to press her lips like “curled snakes” and feed from his breast. The image of the male speaker breastfeeding Dolores anticipates the famous moment of Mina Harker’s vampire initiation in Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel, *Dracula*:

With ... his right hand [he] gripped her by the back of her neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (322)

When Mina is asked to tell what she remembers of the event, she says, “He pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he ... pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some of the—Oh my God! my God!” (328). As Christopher Craft has noted, “Mina’s verbal ejaculation supplants the Count’s liquid one,” and the unnamed fluid implies a series of substitutions and displacements: the blood from Dracula’s breast is first milk drunk by the forced kitten and then semen in a scene of forced fellatio (125). Earlier in the text, Jonathan Harker plays the passive part in the seduction scene involving the “weird sisters” in Count Dracula’s castle: “The skin of my throat began to

tingle ... I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart” (70). Caught, he says, between “a wicked, burning desire” and “deadly fear” (69), Harker passively waits for the weird sisters to fulfill a fantasy of male penetration. In “Dolores,” Swinburne accomplishes a similar erosion of gendered sexual behaviour through a male speaker who begs the penetrating woman to “Bite hard” and “fill [him] with pleasure.” Sexuality and gender completely unravel as Dolores transfers the defining quality of heteronormative female sexuality—maternity—onto the poem’s male speaker, from whose breast she feeds. This sadomasochistic sexual act blurs the distinction between blood and milk and completes the poem’s work to subvert the notion that gender determines sexual function and that sexuality determines gender function.

Both Dracula and his predecessor, Dolores, are agents of degeneration and social decay. Dracula’s blurred sexuality threatens to rain ruin on everyone: “Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and other shall be mine yet” (347). Although *Dracula*’s vampire bites respect heterosexuality, they are nonetheless a threat to it. Throughout the narrative exists the fear that the Count may bite another man, as in the early scene in which he jealously intervenes when the weird sisters are on the verge of penetrating Harker: “This man belongs to me,” he says. Through Lucy Westenra, Count extends his bloody kiss to the other men in the text, whose blood—transfused into Lucy—he drains. Furthermore, as Dracula inverts gender and sexuality, the women whom he vamps become his penetrators by proxy; they are, he says, “my creatures to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed” (437). In turn, these women (the

weird sisters and Lucy) become monstrous mothers, who—instead of feeding—feed *upon* children. In *Dracula*, the threat the Count and his tainted women pose is the middle action that the narrative overcomes with “corrective penetration” performed by the novel’s exemplary men (Craft 118), and the essentially conservative text closes with a vision of the Harkers’ happy and procreating family. “Dolores” presents a similar threat to sexuality, but the poem does not attempt to make any sort of return to normal sexual behaviour. With her phallic body that “shrivels or swells to a snake’s” (290), Dolores disrupts the economy of sexual reproduction, eroding heterosexual institutions of procreation as “time turns the old days to derision, / Our loves into corpses or wives; / And marriage and death and division / Make barren our lives” (157-60). Dolores leaves behind nothing but the husk of sexuality.

While Morley lamented that Swinburne finds “nothing in women worth singing about except ‘quivering flanks,’ ‘splendid supple thighs,’ ‘hot sweet throats,’ and ‘hotter hands than fire,’ and their blood as ‘hot as wan wine of love’” (24), the offence *Poems and Ballads* initially generated more likely had to do with its unnatural and inverted constructions of desire. Swinburne’s volume and the reaction to it in the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrate the degree to which, as Camille Paglia says, sexuality and eroticism are “the intricate intersection of nature and culture” (1). Swinburne’s sexually aggressive *femmes fatales* commit an offence against the former to the shock of the latter. In the cultural context that, as has been seen, generally attempted to deny women a sexual instinct, Swinburne’s sexually aggressive women seemed unnaturally to appropriate male sexuality, to stand outside the natural order of sexual behaviour, as envisioned at mid-century by such men as Acton. By the end of the century, Acton’s idea

of female sexual indifference had been modified in the work of criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who not only reaffirmed the general absence of the female sexual instinct but also pathologized it as a sign of lunacy in women. In *The Female Offender* (1895), Lombroso reads both male and female sexuality symptomatically:

We see, then, that another characteristic of the female lunatic, and consequently of the criminal lunatic, is an exaggeration of the sexual instincts. These which in male lunatics are almost always in abeyance, lead in women, even in very old women as in quite young girls, to the most disgusting and unnatural excesses. ... Nymphomania transforms the most timid girl into a shameless bacchante. She tries to attract every man she sees, displaying sometimes violence, and sometimes the most refined coquetry. She often suffers from intense thirst, a dry mouth, a fetid breath, and a tendency to bite everybody she meets. ... Krafft Ebing remarked also that in women madness is usually more turbulent and indecent in its manifestation than in men. Briefly, in female criminal lunatics we find to a more marked degree than which we had already noted in the ordinary female criminal, namely, an inversion of all the qualities which specially distinguish the normal woman; namely, reserve, docility and sexual apathy. (295-97)

The cultural anxiety over female sexuality surfaces in Lombroso's pathological reading of the female offender that both criminalizes sexuality and sexualizes crime: "normal" women are sexually apathetic, whereas sexual apathy in men is deemed a symptom of lunacy. The manifestation of female sexual instincts is a sign of nymphomania, a gender-

specific pathology characterized by morbid and unrestrained desire. In such a cultural context in which female sexual instincts were increasingly denied and distrusted, the aggressive sexuality of Swinburne's "stinging and biting" women presents itself as a direct threat to the natural order and, specifically, to male sexuality.

The offence generated by Swinburne's women stems from their will to penetrate. Studies of sexuality that would develop later in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth would consolidate the male prerogative to penetrate. Havelock Ellis would read the natural order of penetration and passivity anatomically in the woman's body:

There can be little doubt that, as one or two writers have already suggested, the hymen owes its development to the fact that its influence is on the side of effective fertilization. It is an obstacle to the impregnation of the young female by immature, aged, or feeble mates. *The hymen is thus an anatomical expression of that admiration of force which marks the female in her choice of mate.* So regarded, it is an interesting example of the intimate matter in which sexual selection is really based on natural selection. (140; emphasis added)

Ellis's Darwinian reading of the hymen as the "anatomical expression of ... admiration of force" becomes a principle of natural selection that invites female penetration and explains the nature of female passivity. "Dolores" presents a male speaker who takes on the typically female passive role in his desire, asking "splendid and sterile Dolores" to "Bite hard" and "feed me and fill me with pleasure" (71, 27, 31). Like Harker, the speaker of "Dolores" takes on the role of female sexual receptivity, a vessel to be filled and penetrated.

Poems and Ballads presents a world of sexual anarchy. While “Faustine” represents desire that levels all sexuality in perversion, “Dolores” disrupts sexuality in a demonic parody that inverts socially constructed norms of male and female sexual conduct. Both “Dolores” and “Satia te Sanguine” are grotesques of female sexuality that present female demons equipped with masculine drives and phalluses. The poems take leading roles in the sexual revolution within Swinburne’s volume and confirm Paglia’s theory that “whenever sexual freedom is sought or achieved, sadomasochism will not be far behind” (3). The sexual revolution taking place in *Poems and Ballads* is violent and bloody, almost a purge of sexual frustration. Certainly, Swinburne’s Sappho, who would “Vex [Anactoria] with amorous agonies” (“Anactoria” 29), and Faustine, who is revived “through slain man’s blood” (67), not to mention Dolores, “Our Lady of Pain,” are sadistic figures of female sexual freedom, inaugurating a revolution of sadomasochist violence that loosed upon the world would render it barren and sterile, two words that are repeated throughout the volume. To a culture that was anxious to affix the boundaries of sexual character for men and women, *Poems and Ballads*, with its familiar yet monstrous sexuality, came both as an uncanny challenge and as a dire warning of a degenerate future, as “fruits fail and love dies and time ranges” (“Dolores” 57).

In acts of “biting and stinging,” Swinburne’s penetrating women and their victim/lovers exchange and mix sexualities as easily and confusedly as they do bodily fluids. Faustine is a lasting monument to intense sexuality, but one in whom desire is as aimless and uncertain as the fluids she proffers from her “carved lips” where the speaker drinks the “wine and rank poison, milk and blood, / Being mixed therein” (17-18). The

parallel elements of this line suggest that wine is to poison what milk is to blood, a parallel suggesting Swinburne uses blood's conventional association with death, and milk's with life; however, Swinburne's love of mixed effects extends to his use of these two liquids, as well. In "Anactoria," Sappho cries, "Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed / On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled! / ... / That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat / Thy breasts like honey!" (107-12). Since Anactoria abandoned her for a male lover, Sappho turns her own "barren" and "sterile" lesbian love into an act of sublimation. The blood that Sappho imaginatively drains from the figuratively murdered Anactoria becomes the maternal milk of the Muse that feeds and gives life to Sappho's art. The work of sublimation and transubstantiation of blood to Muse's milk in the case of "Anactoria," however, requires further explanation of the poem's intricate acts of both engaging and disengaging the flesh, which will be discussed below in Section 3.4. Before the discussion turns to "Anactoria," it would be best to turn to another poem that bridges the theme of sexual chaos in such poems as "Faustine" and "Dolores" and a discussion of the work of sublimation that comes out of such chaos in a poem like "Anactoria."

The next poem to be given an in-depth consideration, "Hermaphroditus," prepares readers of *Poems and Ballads* for other female figures in *Poems and Ballads* who are inscrutable, inaccessible, and, above all, impenetrable, making the poem in some way complementary to the penetrating women of "Dolores" and "Faustine." Inasmuch as Swinburne's construction of sexuality may be barren, his poetry is not. "Hermaphroditus" presents another figure of sexual confusion in whom a fusion of the sexes produces "the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss" (19); however, this figure of sexual sterility also gives

life to the imaginative spark—“something like as fire”—that “shall not be assuaged till death be dead” (15-17). The poem partakes in the overriding impulse of *Poems and Ballads* to liberate sexuality from “creeds that refuse and restrain” (“Dolores” 278). “Hermaphroditus” manages to undo the limits of erotic perception in a gesture towards alternate sexualities, which, though sterile and barren, are part of a strange alchemy that gives life to *Poems and Ballads*.

3.3 “Marked Cross from the Womb”: The Double Vision of Desire in “Hermaphroditus” and Swinburne’s Use of Chiasmus

Many of Swinburne’s poems in *Poems and Ballads* have a disorienting sensory effect. If, as Jerome McGann suggests (echoing Blake) in his Introduction to selected works by Swinburne, “poetry is a machine for cleansing doors of perception” (xxv), then the swirling visions and blurry images of his poetry present a peculiar perceptual problem. However, in Swinburne’s poetry the problem is the point: perception is limited and distorted by sexuality, especially by its forms of sexuality that are conventionally regarded as aberrant. If Swinburne’s poetry attempts to cleanse “doors of perception,” as McGann argues it does, then *Poems and Ballads* opens onto particular experiences of sexuality and passion that many of Swinburne’s contemporaries would have been reluctant to witness or experience. While the Romantic attempt to open perception to a broader constitution of the universe in the infinite sublime was considered heroically tragic in its hard fall back to the material mundane that circumscribes the limits of perception, Swinburne’s attempt to open erotic perception to a broader vision of sexuality was considered simply depraved in its descent into sadomasochism. Nonetheless,

Swinburne's most powerful erotic poetry possesses the same Romantic challenge to the sensory experience. As McGann notes, "To read [Swinburne] is to be reminded that a full awareness of even the simplest human experience is unachievable." Swinburne is remarkable, not because he has a particular power for delineating events or objects, "but because he makes a drama of our experience—our knowledge—of the apparition and evanishment of [the] phenomena" that constitute them (xxv). Of particular interest is the manner in which Swinburne constructs erotic experience under conditions that limit vision and the powers of image-making. For all the "quivering flanks," and "splendid supple thighs," "hot sweet throats," and "hotter hands than fire" against which Morley so vociferously protests, the sexualized bodies of *Poems and Ballads* are hardly pornographic; rather, they are imagistically indistinct, glimpsed only in fragments. It is an irony of vision that pervades the volume, in which bodies are seen through their absence or disappearance, particularly as they come under a sexualized gaze whose power is remarkable not for bringing objects into focus but for obliterating them from view. The poem "Hermaphroditus" is an extreme example of desire's distorting effect on vision—in fact, it is doubly distorting in its choice of object and in Swinburne's poetic treatment of it.

Even though "Hermaphroditus" is an instance of ekphrasis based on Swinburne's contemplation of a real marble sculpture, the poem's object is a visual riddle, or a perceptual hoax, that both elicits and frustrates desire. Swinburne appends a note to the sonnet sequence reading "*Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863*," indicating the occasion of the poem as the Paris visit that he made with James McNeil Whistler to the Louvre, where they saw the Hellenistic sculpture of the recumbent figure known alternatively as

the “Sleeping Hermaphrodite” or the “Borghèse Hermaphrodite.” J.J. Pollitt describes the ancient genre of hermaphroditic sculpture as a marble drama of spectacle and blocking: “The work was probably designed and positioned so that one saw first the sinuous female contours of its back and also, because of the extreme turn of the neck, its face. If one then asked who was this beautiful creature who sleeps so restlessly and walked around it in order to investigate further, the answer would have come as a typically Hellenistic theatrical surprise” (149). The positioning of the Borghèse Hermaphrodite with its back to the entrance in one of the galleries of the Louvre offers the same “theatrical surprise” because it breaks the guarantee of identity formed by what Merleau-Ponty calls the “object-horizon structure” (*Phenomenology* 79). In the object-horizon structure, the object takes shape through not only the point of view of the perceiver but also the implied gaze of other objects within the horizon—that is, the seer invests his gaze in other objects within the horizon, producing a multiplicity of gazes that complete the object, as it were, by imagining the visual object from the perspective of the other objects within the field of vision. The phenomenology of perception relies upon a system of objects in which “one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects and as a guarantee of the permanence of those aspects” (79). In the object-horizon structure that Merleau-Ponty describes, the “completed object is translucent, being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies which intersect in its depths leaving nothing hidden” (79). In the case of the Hellenic sculpture, the positioning of the nude figure, with erotic sinuous female contours, sexualizes the infinite number of scrutinies and intensifies the guarantee of a feminine object of desire. The hoax, or “surprise” of the sculpture, as one walks round to its front, comes from the

broken guarantee of the object-horizon structure, or rather, the guarantee of the object's identity breaks before the sexualized gaze, and the moment in which the erotic perception is confounded and desire is invested in ambiguous sexuality constitutes the uncomfortable "surprise." The perceptual experience of the Borghèse Hermaphrodite marble sculpture is paradoxically fluid and unstable; Swinburne seizes upon this flux of perception that unsculpts the image of desire for his poem, which dwells in the dramatic moment of the "surprise," the lingering moment of ambiguous sexual longing.

In the case of "Hermaphroditus," the subjective mode of the poem positions readers as eavesdroppers who silently but intimately partake in the mood of the speaker. Through this positioning of readers in the lyrical mode, the poem extends an invitation for intense empathy, or at the very least, a shared object-horizon structure of erotic perception. Yet it is unlikely that Swinburne expected the conditions of reading lyric poetry to overcome the lack of sympathy in readers who would distance themselves from the speaker and his ambiguous desire—that is, the poem extends an invitation but anticipates rejection. A similar pattern can be even more easily traced in "The Triumph of Time," a poem that tends to be read biographically as an account of Swinburne's disappointment following the rejection of his one and only proposal of marriage.¹²³ What matters more than the work's biographical dimension, however, is the consciousness that Swinburne stands outside of readerly sympathy and empathy: "As I have been, I know I shall always be; / .../ For the worst is this after all; if they knew me, / Not a soul upon earth would pity me" (236-40). *Poems and Ballads* depicts (to borrow Browning's phrase) "action in character" in situations of such extreme psychological and sexual stimulation that would seem to force the poetry to live on the margins, yet as a work of

art that had to surmount obstacles to its publication, the volume enters forcefully into the emerging public discourses on the nature of sexuality in the nineteenth century, to which “Hermaphroditus” presents a specific aesthetic challenge.

The poem begins with an invitation to look and see: “Lift up thy lips, turn round, and *look* back for love” (1). Made ostensibly to a piece of carved marble that can no more return a sexualized gaze than it can “lift up [its] lips,” the invitation that the speaker makes comes back to him and the reader at his side as an echo and a self-reflexive invitation to contemplate the nature of love and desire. However, the poem immediately joins the idea of looking for love with blindness: “Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest” (2). Ironically, for an ekphrastic poem in which the spectator muses on the erotic significance of what he sees in a work of art that Swinburne describes as “purely physical” (*Replies* 27), blindness is a central quality in “Hermaphroditus.” In this poem and others in *Poems and Ballads* that look hard at desire, blindness, paradoxically, becomes a necessary precondition of seeing clearly because of the tendency to half perceive and half create what one sees according to entrenched habits of thinking, particularly as they relate to gender and sexuality. The invitation, then, to “look back for ... blind love” beckons readers to look at sexuality and desire blindly wise, with *insight*.

“Hermaphroditus” breaks down conventional Victorian conceptions of “normal” sexuality and argues for the coexistence of disparate ways of inhabiting one’s flesh and therefore disparate modes of erotic perception. However, as a poem that takes the form of a direct address to the Borghèse Hermaphrodite and invites readers to see the statue through the eyes of the spectator, “Hermaphroditus” considers the exploration of sexuality in art while simultaneously confessing its own isolation amidst readers blind to

notions of sexuality that extend beyond the limits of conventional Victorian mores. In the second sonnet of the series, the spectator loses himself in contemplation of the sexual significance of the figure before him:

Love made himself of flesh that perisheth
 A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin.
 But on the one side sat a man like death,
 And on the other a woman sat like sin.
 So with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath
 Love turned himself and would not enter in. (23-28)

The “pleasure house” that Love builds is the hermaphrodite, designed to be a sight/site of desire for all forms of love, sanctioned and illicit; however, Love—Cupid—finds that access to the broader and more inclusive notion of sexuality that the hermaphrodite offers is barred. Instead of a house of pleasure that Cupid makes for “all the loves his kin,”¹²⁴ the hermaphrodite turns out to be imprisoned by other agents of Christianity, for the “man like death” and the “woman ... like sin” who block the way to the “pleasure-house” allude to the gate-keepers of Hell in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the allegorical figures of Sin and Death, the two figures who are themselves products of illicit, or at least peripheral sexualities: the former is conceived asexually and born from the head of Satan, and the latter is conceived incestuously by Satan and the child that springs fully formed from his head. Moreover, in the vicious cycle of illicit sex, Death’s first act is to rape his mother, who is left pregnant with hellhounds that ring her waist and hourly devour her innards in an allegory of the guilt and shame of sin. With such guardians staving off desire in “Hermaphroditus,” Love must avert his eyes. The effect of the guardians’ presence, as

witnessed in Love's "veiled eyes," is one of blindness, and in this Swinburne signals the moments of seeing and unseeing in erotic perception and art. In spite of his belief in the body, Swinburne presents a more compelling belief in the complexity of desire that eclipses any clear vision of the body in "Hermaphroditus."

Swinburne's reference to the figure of the hermaphrodite as a "pleasure house" connects the poem to another poem whose subject is art, Tennyson's "The Palace of Art," which opens with the lines "I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house, / Wherein at ease for aye to dwell" (1-2). In Tennyson's pleasure-house,¹²⁵ the soul shall reign apart, "lord over the senses five" (180), "while the world runs round and round" (13-14). Tennyson's soul is given the opportunity to live as Pater would later claim the wisest do, "in art and song" (*Renaissance* 152-53); however, the soul in "The Palace of Art" fails to burn with the "hard, gem-like flame" of ecstasy that Pater describes as the reward of those successful in the art of living (*Renaissance* 152-53). In Tennyson's poem, the movement from portrait to portrait of great literary figures leads, not to an accumulation of profound experience, but only to a surfeit of surface detail. If, as W. David Shaw argues, the "soul were to become as immaculate and remote as these portraits, it would be dead"; for the soul isolated in his "pleasure house," "art has become, not an affair of life and people, but a tomb" (*Tennyson's Style* 58). Tennyson's soul, of course, gives up the aesthetic surfeit of the palace and beats a conventional retreat to the life and people in the valley, which presumably welcome its return. Swinburne's spectator, however, faced with a surfeit of sexual perception, remains standing before an aesthetic tomb, the "fruitless" and "barren" hermaphrodite. Rather than look for a conventional recourse, a path of retreat back into

the equivalent of life in the valley, Swinburne's spectator stays before the barred entrance of the tomb of erotic art, with the despairing hope that he might at least *see* life within.

As a poem of erotic desire, "Hermaphroditus" works through what Merleau-Ponty describes as "an erotic 'comprehension' that is not of the order of understanding, since understanding subsumes an experience, once perceived, under some idea, while desire comprehends blindly by linking body to body" (157). Swinburne's spectator is caught in the paradox of intuiting (literally "seeing into") desire blindly. Swinburne captures the complexity of vision in the poem in the literary device of chiasmus:

And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair;

Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;

A strong desire begot on great despair,

A great despair cast out by strong desire. (11-14; emphasis added)

Chiasmus (from the X-shaped Greek letter *chi*) is a crossing of parallel elements that can both sharpen and blur the sense of the words that it repeats and inverts. The literary device provides a way to effect what John Rosenberg has appropriately called Swinburne's "love of mixed effects" and to charge his poetry "with the tension of delicately poised opposites" (149).¹²⁶ Rosenberg argues persuasively that Swinburne's parallel structure reflects the poet's obsession "with the moment when one thing shades off into its opposite, or when contraries fuse, as in 'Hermaphroditus,' one of his earliest and finest poems" (149). For the spectator in Swinburne's poem, the physical fusion of sexes in the hermaphrodite, in whom "sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed" (ln. 17), creates a moment in which to contemplate "delicately poised opposites" held in the tension of ambiguous desire. It is this tension of ambiguous desire that renders the vision

of a concrete image—the statue—indistinct. In the passage above, “Hermaphroditus” employs chiasmus particularly to blur vision with desire blinded by despair that is both sexual and aesthetic. Aesthetic despair in Tennyson’s “A Palace of Art” is enough to drive out the soul, but Swinburne’s poem begins at the point when Tennyson’s ends, in the moment when despair and desire cross over and blur into one another as pain and pleasure. In “Hermaphroditus,” the simultaneous experience of despair and desire gives rise to a contemplative moment that rests on a chiasmus of biological and psychological cross-purposes.

In “Hermaphroditus,” the hermaphrodite, immaculate and remote, generates a form of desire in the spectator—and possibly in the eavesdropping reader—that points towards frustration and despair:

Where between sleep and life some brief space is,
 With love like gold bound round about the head,
 Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,

Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his

To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss. (15-9)

The fusion of sexes in the hermaphrodite marks the moment of transition from the “fruitful feud” of procreative heterosexuality to the “waste wedlock of a sterile kiss” of ideal and aesthetic beauty. Scattered with references to sexuality that is “barren,” “fruitless,” and “sterile” (which is sexuality’s general state in *Poems and Ballads*),¹²⁷ “Hermaphroditus” appears to present a failure of sexuality to the spectator who contemplates the significance of the hermaphrodite’s strange beauty:

Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
 Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
 Shall make thee man and ease a woman's sighs,
 Or make thee woman for a man's delight.
 To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
 The double blossom of two fruitless flowers? (33-8)

Although the flanking cupids signal the hermaphrodite as a figure of desire in the third sonnet of the series, the “fruitless” sexuality of the hermaphrodite represents a failure and a death. Indeed, David G. Riede reads the mergence of the two sexes into a “thing of barren hours” (ln. 42) as the failed attempt to quell the pain of sexual desire (57). Such a reading forces a rhetorical resignation onto the question, “To what strange end hath some strange god made fair” the *image* of the hermaphrodite? Riede assumes the question is rhetorical and moves too quickly to his answer before the poem gives its own: if treated as a question to which the poem seeks an honest answer, it becomes possible to see the hermaphrodite as an erotic aesthetic figure of positive potential.

While Love—the coerced agent of reproductive heterosexuality—seems forced to disavow his own creation in the second sonnet of the series, the aesthetic spectator discovers an erotic life beyond the cycle of human reproduction. In the fusion of the sexes, the spectator sees “the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss” (15), but he also recognizes in the spectacle that “something like as fire is shed / That shall not be assuaged till death be dead” (16-17). In her reading of this passage, Catherine Maxwell finds the “image formed here is less like the Louvre sculpture than illustrations of the so-called ‘alchemical hermaphrodite,’ itself the basis for what is known as the ‘philosophers’

stone' or the Elixir of Life" (209). The hermaphrodite therefore becomes a figure of art and the imaginative spark that lends immortal life to the artist whose creations live on after his death. Sappho in Swinburne's "Anactoria" rescues a failure of sexuality in like fashion. Sappho defies the conventional retreat from lesbianism back into heterosexuality made by her former lover, Anactoria, whom "the years shall cover" and erase from memory: "Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine / Except these kisses of my lips on thine / Brand them with immortality" (189, 201-02). While Sappho imagines the lasting life that her art can give to alternative sexuality, the spectator in "Hermaphroditus" struggles to envision it in the "pleasure house" and palace of art before him.

In a final and masterful instance of chiasmus in "Hermaphroditus," Swinburne equates knowing with seeing in a poem that, ironically, offers little to see. The fourth and final sonnet of the series opens with the following lines:

Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.

Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know. (43-4; emphasis mine)

In this final sonnet, the spectator's contemplation of the object before him moves towards the idea that to know love is to see its complexities and contradictions with an openness not unmixed with fear and doubt. Initially, the two lines look as though they negate one another: the "Yea, love" of the first line in the "Nay, sweet" of the second line appears to initiate a reversal, but the second is really offering an affirmation in the negative. The complexity of knowing love, of cleansing the doors of erotic perception, requires both moments of keen and concentrated vision and moments of blurred vision that grant clearer insight. Swinburne gathers the complexities of love in these lines, first, through

the double use of “love,” whose meaning shifts mid-line from the initial term of endearment to the name of the emotion, as well as resonating with references to Cupid named as “Love” in the poem. Then, with consummate craftsmanship, Swinburne constructs a double figure of chiasmus that crosses the elements of “see” (in the sense of “understand”) and “know” and “love” and “fear,” leading up to a final moment in which Swinburne creates in the intersection of the lines between corresponding elements some brief space that allows the spectator to hold a double vision of the doubled sex of the hermaphrodite.

The complex and elusive vision of desire in “Hermaphroditus” starts to come into focus, ironically, in moments of double vision, which Swinburne frequently manipulates through his use of chiasmus.¹²⁸ In the transition and crossing of boundaries in moments of “betweenness,” McGann argues that Swinburne approaches something like clarity of sight in double vision: “The place is important for the obvious advantage it offers for seeing into two worlds at once. The quality of that double vision is related to the character of the worlds set off from it” (*Experiment* 172). Swinburne’s use of chiasmus in the final sonnet of “Hermaphroditus” both blurs and sharpens the image with such double vision: it blurs the sexes of man and woman and opens a brief space for the hermaphrodite to occupy; however, the amplified chiasmus here also signifies an amplified double vision. What the rhetorical figure accomplishes for the physical creature it also accomplishes for abstract desire. The spectator similarly occupies a space of “betweenness” with ambiguous desire: he sees a space in art where all forms of desire circulate (“all the loves his kin” [24]), but finds access to a fuller vision of desire barred by conventional sexual mores. Yet he does intuit a broader, more inclusive form of

sexuality (“I see ... I know” [43-44]), even though his intentions seem crossed with desire and prohibition (“not love but fear. / ... not fear but love” [43-44]). At this moment, the spectator, whose fluid contemplation has moved among aesthetic appreciations of sculpture, mythology, and sexuality, and the pressures that religious and social injunctions exert upon them, finds a permanent space in art to contemplate the figure “so dreadful, so desirable, so dear” (50):

Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
 Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
 Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
 And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
 And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs. (51-6)

Now he sees and knows the world of ambiguous desire that art opens alongside the world of conventional sexuality. Critics such as Thais Morgan and Richard Dellamora have attempted to turn the poem into explorations of male same-sex desire and male lesbianism, but while attempting to free it from reductive interpretations of barren sexuality, they commit new acts of reductive violence against the poem through their readings of its homosexuality, bisexuality, and lesbianism. Certainly, all these forms of sexuality are welcome guests in Swinburne’s “pleasure house,” but such readings that resolve the question of sexual desire fail to clarify and protect the deliberate ambiguity that the poem constructs for sexuality in the realm of art.

The hermaphrodite as figure of art resembles the fullness of sexual potential frozen in the moment before gratification can lock it into the limitations of experience, much like the lovers on Keats’ urn who are forever frozen in an erotic limbo.¹²⁹ The

contemplator of the urn, who, by one reading, resolves the poem's complexities into a statement identifying truth with beauty and beauty with truth; Swinburne's spectator, with a similar degree of ambiguity, recognizes the complexities of "love and life and death" that exist in the moment of metamorphosis that has taken place "[b]eneath the woman's and the water's kiss" (49, 52). "Hermaphroditus" ends on what may sound like an elegiac note lamenting the limits of erotic perception that mar the beauty of a sexual truth that is ambiguous. The momentary aesthetic vision of fused bodies and ambiguous desire seem to collapse in the final line: "But Love being blind, how should he know of this?" (56). With a reference to "Love," a word whose meaning has been multiplied and elided in the poem, the poem comes to rest on a rhetorical question aimed at blind Cupid (or Eros); however, the rhetorical question deepens the ambiguity—Love may be blind, but surely the eyes of the spectator and the reader have been opened and their understanding widened. The vision closes on the open question of knowing love, and the spectator moves on (presumably to the next work of art). The poem's ambiguity and its moments of distorted vision did not rest well with contemporary critics, whose responses appear conditioned by a vision of sexual orthodoxy; Swinburne, it seems, had little desire to resolve the poem's ambiguity or clarify its deliberate distortions. Indeed, the poet's rather disingenuous response to critics who found fault with the poem only perpetuated the text's ambiguous afterlife.

The disorienting sensory effect in the vagueness of erotic perception that the poem manipulates was particularly disconcerting for Morley, who sees a "fevered folly" in a poem that chooses for its subject the "embodiment of ... that [which] is loathsome and horrible" (24). In *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne attributes such hostility

to the uncultivated taste of critics who do not recognize “the delicate divinity of this work [which] has always drawn towards it the eyes of artists and poets” (*Replies* 27); furthermore, in a rhetorical move that locates him on the shift from Arnold to Pater to Wilde in terms of the relationship that exists between a literary work and its reader or critic, Swinburne argues that the loathsomeness found in this figure of “ideal beauty” exists within the perceiver’s mind and not the thing perceived (28).¹³⁰ The hermaphrodite, says Swinburne, is as P.B. Shelley describes it in the *Witch of Atlas*:

A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
 It seemed to have developed no defect
 Of either sex, yet all the grace of both;
 In gentleness and strength its limbs were decked;
 The bosom lightly swelled with its full youth,
 The countenance was such as might select
 Some artist, that his skill should never die,
 Imaging forth such perfect purity. (qtd. in *Swinburne Replies* 27)

Swinburne presents Shelley’s hermaphrodite as having passed beyond the moment of erotic perception and confounded desire—it is already a “sexless thing” that, if captured in art, would forever show the skill of the artist. However, his defence of “Hermaphoditus” blurs, somewhat disingenuously, the figures of the androgyne found in Plato’s *Symposium* and the hermaphrodite found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, creating yet another moment of complexity for readers of his poetry.¹³¹

Swinburne’s rather deliberate blurring of the two figures corresponds to a shift in signification that A.J. L. Busst has indentified in the nineteenth-century. In this period,

he argues, the tradition of the theoretically ideal androgyne in Plato gives way to the physically degenerate hermaphrodite in Ovid. At the centre of the myth that explains the natural phenomenon of “how the pool of Salmacis / Found its ill fame” lies the figure that is not ideal but emasculated (4.285-86). By the time Swinburne is writing *Poems and Ballads*, the hermaphrodite or androgyne had begun shifting away from its ideal character, becoming instead an affront to nature and an effacement of the “wisdom and goodness of God.”¹³² The tale of the androgyne, which Swinburne calls the “original hermaphrodite” (*Notes* 28), was one that became increasingly difficult to tell by the middle of the nineteenth century because its representational significance shifts under pressure from an increasingly materialist culture. Busst, who suggests that the terms “androgyne” and “hermaphrodite” are more or less interchangeable in nineteenth-century political, social, and aesthetic contexts (1), would find neither Swinburne’s slippage of usage for the figure, nor the varied response it receives from Swinburne and Morley, particularly remarkable.¹³³ Busst sees the symbolic shift of significance in the moving away from the idealized figure of oneness in the hopeful years at the beginning of the century to the decadent figure of sterility in the disappointing years at the close of a century that did not fulfill its promise (10-11). Other pressures were brought to bear on the figure and reshape it in the new scientific discourse of the nineteenth century. As noted by Michel Foucault in his introduction to the memoirs of a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, the associations of ideal form in the androgyne give way to a medical rejection of a “mixture of the two sexes in a single [hermaphroditic] body” (*Herculine* viii) and would continue to give way to emerging scientific discourses of sexuality and

evolutionary biology that would re-shape the body in the mind's eye and affirm the strict division of sex as the new original ideal.

The speaker in Swinburne's "Hermaphroditus" is a counter-culture figure who dismantles the rising sexual divide and helps to usher in what Foucault describes as an age of "sexual heterogeneities" (*History* 37). While tending to undo the repressive hypothesis in his analysis of the discourses of sexuality in the last three centuries, Foucault argues that the discursive explosion of disparate sexualities resulted from a centrifugal movement of power anchored in hegemonic heterosexuality:

The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter. On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage. It was time for all of these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were. No doubt they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to; and if regular sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities. (*History* 38-9)

"Hermaphroditus," as so many other works in *Poems and Ballads*, comes forward with a confession of the speaker's openness to "peripheral sexualities," to which critics like Morley responded with condemnation that resisted any "reflux movement" to question

“regular sexuality.” However, it is a poem that speaks of a genie that has been let out of the bottle in the multiplication of discourses on sexuality in the nineteenth century.

“Hermaphroditus” becomes a key work in *Poems and Ballads* for the double vision it creates of the life of human passion, undoing the limits of erotic perception and opening a way for other confessions of sexuality from “mad men and women, and criminals; ... [from] those who did not like the opposite sex,” confessions that Swinburne brings forth in “reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage.” As part of the proliferation of discourses that Foucault identifies in the nineteenth century, “Hermaphroditus” widens the scope of eroticism for other poems in the volume that deal with deviant or alternate sexualities, such as homosexuality, by sweeping aside the boundaries of conventional Victorian sexuality and finding the erotic in the sexually ambiguous image of the hermaphrodite. Swinburne’s treatment of homosexuality participates in the shift of thinking on the subject that Foucault identifies:

“Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). As a lyric in which one overhears the speaker’s intimate sexual musings, Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus” resists the idea of dealing with homosexuality in terms of a habitual sin of sodomy; instead, the poem represents sexuality as a core constituent of identity and facilitates readings of other poems in a volume that centres on desire traditionally deemed illicit. The widened understanding of sexuality that “Hermaphroditus” promotes makes possible a deeper appreciation of other works in *Poems and Ballads* that deal with the

peripheral sexualities such “Anactoria,” a dramatic monologue in which the speaker, Sappho, muses on the relationship between her sexuality, her identity, and her art.

3.4 “The Flesh that Cleaves”: Mourning and Melancholia in “Anactoria”

Several reviewers condemned *Poems and Ballads* at the time of its publication as a catechism of carnal delights, but certain poems seem to have struck certain reviewers, such as the anonymous critic for the *London Review*, as “especially horrible, ...depraved and morbid to the last degree” (36). Of these poems, “Anactoria” holds a place of distinction for its sadomasochistic eroticism, its openly lesbian love, and its blasphemous ranting. The critiques of the poem quickly turned into critiques of the author’s character in the subsequent *ad hominem* attacks—in all that was bad in “Anactoria,” the public saw all that was bad in Swinburne. The sensuality, paganism, and blasphemy of the poem were proof of Swinburne’s own private deviancies. In the end, these responses reconstructed the poem as a symptom of psychological and sexual disorders, and the poet as a passive and effeminate masochist working and writing as his algolagnia compelled him.

Although set apart by a dramatic Sapphic voice, graphic sensuality, and erotic lesbianism, “Anactoria” shares in common with other poems in the volume the central motif of a lone dramatic speaker, a lyric persona, whose active engagement with the memory of frustrated love and loss leads to a profound melancholy that renders barren both the entire cosmos and the individual soul. Swinburne’s construction of the Sappho persona looks back to the Romantic past and its introspective, brooding Byronic hero, whose rebellion against conventional morality both elevates and isolates, and even

destroys, the character; however, Swinburne's development of the Sappho figure also looks ahead to the Freudian future as it explores the crisis of object-loss involved in states of mourning and melancholia.¹³⁴ Other poems in *Poems and Ballads* deal with loss, but one in particular, "Itylus," because it deals with a different sort of loss than what Sappho loses in "Anactoria" but traces a similar response to loss, becomes useful in comparison. Sappho in "Anactoria" and Philomela in "Itylus" are two exemplary melancholics through whom Swinburne deals with the volume's recurrent motif of frustration and loss, the experience of which he grounds in the lost bodies of Anactoria and Itylus. In their own anatomy of melancholy, Sappho and Philomela (as well as her sister, Procne) painfully dissect and consume, obliterate, and reconstitute the lost bodies of Anactoria and Itylus as sites/sights of memory, melancholia, and mourning.

For Swinburne's Sappho and Philomela, mourning becomes a psychological quagmire from which the two struggle to escape, and their grief takes on the quality of melancholia described by Freud in his "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). In this essay, Freud characterizes mourning as the conscious deactivation of cathectic energy as a reaction to an object-loss and melancholia as the unconscious crisis resulting from an ego-loss. Examining the coping mechanism of one who has lost a loved object, he sees in the melancholic a "regression from object-cathexis to the ... narcissistic oral phase of libido" ("Mourning" 14: 251). That is, the psychological crisis of loss is not experienced as an external happening, but as a fracturing of the ego because the lost object had been incorporated or consumed by the ego in a fashion comparable to the early stages of libidinal development. In this way, the symptoms of melancholia are largely attributed to the fact that the sufferer is not conscious of the nature of his loss—"he may know *whom*

he has lost, but not *what* he has lost in him” (“Mourning” 14. 245). “Anactoria” and “Itylus” exhibit symptoms of a melancholic reaction to a loss that escapes understanding.

While Swinburne takes inspiration from the fragment of Sappho’s poetic apostrophe to an absent lover, at 304 lines of decasyllabic couplets “Anactoria” is far more than a translation of Sappho’s fragment; it is an extended Browningsque dramatic exercise capturing “Action in Character, rather than Character in Action” (Browning, Preface iii). Swinburne’s speaker does not quietly contemplate the beauty of Anactoria, whose loss Sappho calmly but resignedly accepts in the original tribute;¹³⁵ rather, Swinburne’s poem seizes upon a transitional moment in the workings of the soul when the subject actively confronts a traumatic loss. As Swinburne explains in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, “I have striven to cast my spirit into the mould of hers [Sappho’s], to express and represent not the poem but the poet” (329). Swinburne’s poem achieves a much more passionate expression of melancholy than what has survived in the fragment left by Sappho, whose passion escapes in a sublimation that compares Anactoria’s beauty to the “all the troops of Lydia in their chariots and / Glittering armor” (19-20). Swinburne’s Sappho, too, will sublimate her desire by the end of the poem, but not without first working through the significance of losing Anactoria to her own sense of self. In his explanation of his attempt to recreate Sappho in such a way as “to bear witness how ... her verses strike and sting the memory in lonely places” (*Replies* 21), Swinburne asks readers to consider his poem not as a translation of Sappho’s verses but as a keen expression of the anguish of mourning in isolation.

Any consideration of the reconstruction and, indeed, destruction of the absent lover in the memory of Sappho depends on the fact that Anactoria has indeed already left

the island of Lesbos, a point which some critics dispute, choosing rather to characterize the poem as a dramatic monologue. The original fragment makes Sappho's solitude plain: "Anactoria, / She's not here" (16-17), and Swinburne's poem gives no indication of Anactoria's direct effect on the speech of Sappho, as one expects in a dramatic monologue. While Sappho's speech manifests violent shifts of mood, no direct encounter with a physically present Anactoria precipitates them. Instead, the poem depicts a speaker in the initial phases of dealing with a lost object, in this case Anactoria, the memories of whom Sappho invokes with the strong desire to kill them:

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
 Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
 Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
 And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
 I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
 Let life burn down, and dream it is not death. (1-6)

In the initial six lines of the poem, Swinburne establishes the melancholic frame of mind that Freud would outline in his essay some fifty years later. Although the imperative pleadings of the fifth line could be used to argue for a present Anactoria, the sighs that divide Sappho's flesh in the third line spring internally from recollection, calling into being the memory of Anactoria in a fashion similar to the mental recreation of the lover in Swinburne's "Love and Sleep," a sonnet also in *Poems and Ballads*.¹³⁶ That there should be some confusion over the presence or absence of Anactoria in the dramatic situation works in the poem's favour: there is enough to indicate that Anactoria has left, but Sappho's direct speech invokes the memory of her lover with such force and intensity

as to make her almost take shape in the moment. The memories of the lost object—which in Sappho’s case are erotic—are “brought up and hypercathected” such that a “hallucinatory wishful psychosis” takes place in the process of mourning (14. 245, 244). So, the lurid and vivid details with which Sappho recollects Anactoria that early critics viewed as pornographic excess in fact function within the libidinal economies of mourning and melancholia.

While Sappho constructs Anactoria in a pornographic *blason du corps féminin* that inventories burning tresses, blinding eyes, bruising lips (1), kindling breasts, and stinging lips (2), what strikes the reader is the absence of a clear image of the body that Sappho steadily invokes in her memory; it is a perceptual paradox that so much visual detail creates a blurred image in the text. However, the blurring of images is also something Sappho’s memory seems to desire:

I *would* the sea had hidden us, the fire...
 Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that *cleaves*,
 And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
 I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
 Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein,

Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,

Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour. (7-14; emphasis added)

With subtle fineness, Swinburne infuses Sappho’s lament with the will to recreate and obliterate Anactoria in memory using the wonderfully ambiguous phrase, “the flesh that cleaves.” The word *cleaves*, which appears no less than twenty times in *Poems and*

Ballads, can mean both “to cling to” and “to divide.”¹³⁷ Appearing at the end of the line, without any clarifying preposition, the word “cleave” could be expressing Sappho’s wish that the fire would sever the flesh that clings, an interpretation that involves a second ambiguity because the object the flesh clings to could be either “the bones that bleach” or the flesh of a lover. Alternatively, the “flesh that cleaves” could mean the “flesh that divides,” which also makes sense, given that what divides Anactoria and Sappho is not love but forms of the flesh: the sameness of their sex in fact divides them and excludes them from the biblical edict often read in marriage ceremonies: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2.24). The barrenness of lesbian or homosexual bodies is a theme in several of the volume’s poems, and Sappho’s frustration is intensified by knowing that Anactoria has sacrificed their lesbian passion to go with a male soldier whose love is less intense but socially sanctioned. Such are the bodies of “Anactoria,” and *Poems and Ballads* generally: melancholic memory is ever engaging bodies in the process of *cleaving*, ever clinging to and dividing them.

In the passage quoted earlier, Anactoria’s “sharp sighs [that] / Divide ... flesh and spirit” issue from within Sappho, suggesting a body entombed that she will reconstitute, consume, and destroy—that is, she will cleave (to) it. In Freudian terms, Sappho’s utterance sets the poem in a discourse of libidinal cathexis and narcissistic oral identification with a loved-object (that is, Anactoria), precursors to the state of melancholia. As the passage proceeds, Sappho expresses the desire to dissolve any difference that lies between her loved-object and herself by breaking down Anactoria’s body into consumable parts, and by metaphorically mixing either their lives in blood (“I

feel thy blood against my blood”) or their deaths in the “sifted ashes” of their bodies. The psychological agency of reality-testing¹³⁸ forces Sappho to realize that Anactoria is indeed gone, a fact that is indicated in the poem by the idiomatic verb “would [that]”(7), which functions as a past tense optative, denoting a desire for an unlikely opportunity already missed. Sappho’s despair at being caught in love’s cross-currents surfacing subtly and suitably in a grammatical mood more fully used in Greek:¹³⁹ abandoned by her lover, Sappho must detach her libido from the loved-object lost, but her libido, the basic human instinct to cling to life, which has invested itself in or cathected the object, does not willingly abandon its position of attachment. Indeed, Sappho’s libido, for the moment, has departed with Anactoria, and *Thanatos* fills the void, which Sappho expresses as a wish for an undifferentiated and amalgamated final existence with Anactoria in ashes that have been “*sifted*”—a curious modifier of “ashes” but one that works precisely, removing the coarser elements that marked the separateness of their living bodies while leaving their finer elements of dead bodies to come together in indissoluble union.

In the first half of the poem, Sappho’s desire for union with Anactoria has a cannibalistic aspect that Freud would describe as a form of excessive identification with a loved-object. What Freud describes in the logical and clinical language of an essay, Swinburne expresses in the intense language and imagery of poetry in Sappho’s cannibalistic (and blasphemously eucharistic) outburst:

Ah that my mouth for Muses’ milk were fed
 On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
 That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste

The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
 That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
 Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
 Thy body were abolished and consumed,
 And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed! (107-14)

This passage, while wishing the bodily incorporation of Anactoria, which metaphorically represents the ego's attempt to incorporate the loved-object into its own structure, indicates in its violence of expression a conflicting instinct of hatred toward her. Such violence stands in stark contrast to the gentle wooing of the lines preceding: "Are there not gods for other loves? / Yea, though she [Aphrodite] scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake, / Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break" (102-04). The initial question posed by Sappho may remind readers of Love (Cupid) who is turned away from the hermaphrodite by Sin, the embodiment of the Christian moral condemnation of non-heterosexual desire, and Death, the embodiment of the biological argument against non-procreative desire in "Hermaphroditus." Just as Cupid would look upon the hermaphrodite as a symbol of an inclusive vision of the diversity of sexuality, "a pleasure-house for all ... loves" (89), so Sappho would tenderly ask for recognition of unconventional love. With "veiled eyes and sobs between his breath" (27), Cupid reacts to the rejections of his model of inclusive love with sadness in "Hermaphroditus," but Sappho reacts to a similar rejection of her homosexual love with greater emotional complexity, as befitting the response to a threat to a complex human identity.

In the sudden emotional swing from an affectionate clinging to a lost love to a reviling hatred that seems to hinge on the implied answer, Swinburne depicts a state of

mind that Freud would later incorporate in his theory of melancholia. Indeed, Freud argues that this ambivalence of love and hate was one of the preconditions of melancholia:

In melancholia, the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence. ... Countless separate struggles are carried on over the object, in which hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the assault.

(“Mourning” 14: 256)

Similarly, the object to which Sappho clings with professions of erotic love is also the one that she would violently assault. The violence that Sappho directs toward Anactoria represents the psychological process by which she is trying to break her libidinal attachment to her. Sappho hints only slightly that the process of libidinal disengagement is beginning to press upon her consciousness by using the subjunctive mood, “that my mouth *were* fed,” a grammatical state of “betweenness” that reflects the psychical betweenness of a transitional moment for the jilted poet. The subjunctive here suggests that the conscious part of Sappho’s coping mechanism—the process of reality-testing—demands that the libido withdraw its attachment to Anactoria.

Sappho’s memories of Anactoria focus on her body in a way that records the conscious work of mourning: “memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object [are] brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it” (Freud, “Mourning” 14: 245). As Anactoria’s tresses, eyes, eyelids, mouth, breasts, veins, girdles, vagina, and faultless feet all become hyper-

cathected in her memory, Sappho redoubles the strength with which she clings to the images (to which her ego is inextricably tied), while at the same time she tries to crush them out of existence (which, therefore, imperils the ego). Swinburne mirrors this psychological state of ambivalence in a passage of Sappho's dialogue that literally redoubles itself. It begins with a renunciation of carnal delights:

/ x / x x / / / x / / /
 I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,

 Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,

 And all the broken kisses salt as brine

 That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,

 x / x / x x / x / x /
 And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours

 That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,

 / x x / x / x / / /
 Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,

 But all the flower-like white stained round with blue;

 The fervent underlid, and that above

 Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;

 Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,

 x / x x x / x x / /
 And leavings of the lilies in thine hair. (35-46)

By renouncing these absent things and the memory of them, Sappho of course succeeds only in giving them new presence. As Freud explains, “the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged” when the memories of it are hypercathected (“Mourning” 14: 245). Sappho's complicated response is something that Swinburne also treats through

rhythm and meter, which is why the stressed (/) and unstressed (x) syllables have been marked here for the discussion that follows.

The real feat in “Anactoria” is that Swinburne further demonstrates this cyclical paradox of the melancholic memory when he has Sappho prolong Anactoria’s existence in a larger pattern of repetition. With consummate poetic skill, Swinburne creates an echo of image and sound in the next eleven lines of the poem:

/ / / / x / x / / /
 Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,

And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,

And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine

That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,

x / x / x x x / x /
 And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,

Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,

/ x x / x / x / x /
 Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through

Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,

Clothed with deep eyelids under and above--

Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;

Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,

x / x / x x / / x /
 And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair. (47-58)

The parallel passages of repeated images, words, and rhymes are a subtle act of iteration whose forms mirror Sappho’s response to object-loss. The repetition of images alone constitutes a form of hypercathexis, but Swinburne completes the effect by preserving the identical series of rhymes in the two passages. However, the passages differ enough that

their parallel structure has escaped all but Heather Seagroatt and McGann,¹⁴⁰ and their subtle differences emerge as the quiet work of mourning, slowly detaching the libido from the lost-object.

In the first attempt at renunciation, Sappho appears only to charge the memory of Anactoria with more libidinal energy. Although Sappho begins the passage with repudiation (“I am weary of ...”), her resolve to sever ties falters with the recollection of once-shared carnal delights. Swinburne marks the turn, from reluctant resignation to delicious rumination, at the end of the first line in the phrase “sóft stránge wáys,” an enlarged spondaic substitution that both marks a shift in the faltering intention of Sappho and slows the line down to allow for savouring of remembered pleasures. What follows is a thinly veiled depiction of an act of cunnilingus: “all the broken kisses salt as brine / That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine” (37-8). This first attempt to detach her libido appears unsuccessful; it has instead hypercathected the memory of Anactoria. By the final lines of the first passage, Sappho has managed to give Anactoria new and stronger presence: “Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair, / And leavings of the lilies in thine hair” (45-6). The second passage attempts to repair the broken intention of the first. Following the second passage’s initial emphatic spondee, the first line recovers a perfect iambic meter, repairing the substitution in the first passage. In fact, the second passage, while reemploying much of the same language and imagery, generally repairs instances of broken meter in the first by adhering more strictly to the predominant iambic foot and by sometimes removing a caesura that had interrupted the flow of lines in the first passage or by placing them closer to the lines’ middle in the second passage to create a balanced tempo. By the end of the second passage, after revisiting both the image and

the sound of her initial repudiation, Sappho recognizes a pathological attachment that she must sever: “Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love” (56). Although the exercise permits her to empty Anactoria’s girdle of the object of her meditation and see the ruinous reality of lilies that have fallen from her, Sappho is still caught in a pathological state characterized by ambivalence.

In his review of *Poems and Ballads*, Morley complains of poetry that “grows *sickly* and oppressive on the senses” with a “*nauseating iteration* of the same fervid scenes and fervid ideas” (25; emphasis added). He is quite right—on two accounts. Swinburne writes the poetry of sickness, specifically melancholia, and its primary symptom is repetition. Freud describes both mourning and melancholia as pathological conditions, but “it never occurs to us to regard it [i.e., mourning] as a pathological condition . . . because we know so well how to explain it” (“Mourning 14: 243-44). The difference between the two conditions, Freud notes, is the melancholic’s “extraordinary diminution of self-regard, an impoverishment of . . . the ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (14: 246). The pathology of melancholia, however, presents an interesting epistemological insight. For Freud, who wonders “why a man must be ill before he be accessible to a truth” concerning his own character, pathology sheds light on undiscovered personal truths in those moments when normal contact with the world is suspended.¹⁴¹ Such truths, however, are tied up in the lost object, which, though gone, casts a shadow long and deep across the ego. If and when these truths emerge from states of mourning and melancholia, they surface after a process of “nauseating iteration” (to borrow Morley’s phrase). Freud argues that the occasions of loss that give rise to

melancholia include not just death but “all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence” (“Mourning” 14: 251). The “nauseating iteration,” which Morley finds distasteful in *Poems and Ballads*, constitutes in “Anactoria” what is both the work of mourning that attempts to resolve some difficult ambivalence and the snare of melancholia that traps the subject in an ambivalent state. The parallel passages quoted earlier reflect Swinburne’s psychoanalytic prescience in that they demonstrate iteration not simply as symptomatic but operative, amplifying or shifting the balance between longing and rejection, love and hate—that is, they mirror the cleaving action and ambivalent structure of mourning and melancholia.

The paired, but seemingly opposite sentiments of love and hate, Freud argues in “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” both have origins in the narcissistic ego (13: 138-39). While love extends the ego around a loved-object and devours it, and hate forces the ego to react against a hated object, both affects function as part of a self-preserving instinct to make separate the individual identity from the rest of the world. It is for this reason that hate often emerges when a love-relation is broken off (“Mourning” 14: 251). Swinburne’s back-and-forth movement between Sappho’s instinctual sadism and tender reasoning anticipates much of what Freud’s “Instincts” explains, and the self-abasement and even suicidal impulse elicited by the memory of Anactoria sheds further light on Freud’s explanation in “Mourning and Melancholia” of the melancholic masochism that arises out of the ego’s inability to extricate itself from the object which has been lost. Sappho, Swinburne’s model melancholic, expresses this more tightly in the following wish: “O that I / Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die, / Die of thy pain and my

delight, and be / Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!" (129-32). She desires an undifferentiated identification with Anactoria, a "sanguinary confluence of organic tissue," as David Cook puts it (81); however, the frustration of this desire (and all the other frustrations attendant upon barren homosexual love) erupts in violence directed at both the object and the ego because, from Sappho's melancholic perspective, they are one and the same.

In the state of melancholia, the demand for separation is assigned to the unconscious system (Freud, "Mourning" 14: 256), and, since the libidinal attachment of the pre-melancholic stage is one in which the object has been fused with the ego, the object-loss of mourning becomes the ego-loss of melancholia (Freud, "Mourning" 14: 246). In mourning the loss leaves the world a little emptier; in melancholia the self seems emptier for the loss. This diminution of self-regard, the impoverishment of the ego that is specific to melancholia, colours some of Sappho's memory of Anactoria. At one point, Sappho cries out, "Thy body is the song, / Thy mouth the music" (75-76), a fitting tribute to an erotic muse, but she completes the apostrophe to her absent lover by saying, "Thou art more than I" (76). Sappho's obviously false utterance has to be recognized as something more than false modesty. Swinburne would not have expected his nineteenth-century readers to believe that Anactoria, even as a muse, excelled the poet who still sang to them as one of history's finest lyric poets. What Swinburne did expect was an empathetic understanding of the depth of devotion and self-pity from which Sappho sings. Sappho's utterance echoes a similar passage in "The Triumph of Time." In this poem, Swinburne proclaims his determination to give up his connection with the beauty of the world, particularly as it is found in song, at love's retreat:

I shall never be friends again with roses;
 I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
 Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes,
 As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
 There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
 Face to face with its own desire;
 A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes;
 I shall hate sweet music my whole life long. (353-60)

In losing their respective loves, Swinburne in “The Triumph of Time” and Sappho in “Anactoria” feel they have lost the better part of themselves: their song. Renouncing their music in each case is an act of self-pity and self-loathing.

The blasphemy of “Anactoria” was to Victorians an outrage second only to its openly erotic lesbianism, but Sappho’s defiance of omnipotence should be read not as a breach of faith or piety but as a suicidal symptom of melancholia:

Of me the high God hath not his will.

 Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
 Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
 And mix his immortality with death. (267, 182-84)

Even lovers of Swinburne’s works were forced to convince themselves that his characters reviled only the pagan Greek gods so that they might enjoy the music of his poetry without compromising their own Christian aesthetic.¹⁴² However, Sappho’s lyric voice in “Anactoria” is so thoroughly modern and Romantic that the ancient pagan context seems

to fade from view, and when Sappho takes aim at the “God above all gods and years” (155), her blasphemies reached the ears of Victorian auditors as a challenge to the God of their modern Christian age. The vituperative *London Review* article, which Swinburne admitted was the work of a gentleman, castigates the poet for the volume’s gross blasphemies; however, the reviewer recognizes, though to the poetry’s discredit, the nature and meaning of blasphemous utterances in *Poems and Ballads*: “The strangest and most melancholy fact in these strange and melancholy poems is, not the *absence* of faith, but the presence of a faith which mocks itself, and takes pleasure in its own degradation” (36). Such work indicates, says the reviewer, a “diseased state of mind” (35). In this case, Swinburne and the anonymous critic agree—not on to whom the diseased mind belongs (the critic points to the poet; Swinburne to Sappho), but on blasphemy as a symptom. Swinburne explains in his public rebuttal that the blasphemy is less a matter of conviction than an “outcome or outburst of foiled and fruitless passion recoiling on itself” (*Replies* 22). In other words, Swinburne is saying that Sappho’s blasphemy is a form of self-punishment, an “outcome” or symptom of melancholia. Whether the “high God” is Christian or pagan is moot; what signifies is the suicidal impulse that drives Sappho to dare draw divine wrath upon her head. Although he was an agnostic till the end,¹⁴³ Swinburne treated the soul as the core of identity, just as Freud would treat the ego years later, noting in his melancholic patients the tendency to take revenge on the original object by the “circuitous path of self-punishment” (“Mourning” 14: 251). Sappho’s blasphemy, what Swinburne described as “passion recoiling on itself,” corresponds to the melancholic’s sadistic impulses for revenge upon the object recoiling

on the ego. Just as Freud's melancholic patient imperils his own ego, so Swinburne's Sappho imperils her own soul.¹⁴⁴

In "Anactoria," the loss suffered by Sappho does not leave her ego so impoverished that she commits suicide (this time).¹⁴⁵ Instead, the reader witnesses Sappho rally against the effects of her melancholia and resolve it in her address to Anactoria's memory:

Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be

As a song sung, as a word said, and fall

Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,

Nor any memory of thee anywhere;

.....

Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine. (189-201)

The change reflects a shift in perception: Anactoria changes from being an ego-loss to an object-loss. From this point till the end of the poem, Sappho no longer uses language that blurs the bodily distinction between Anactoria and herself; rather, she asserts the independence of her identity with a self-reflexive, redundant phrase, "I Sappho shall" (275), in the attempt to clearly demarcate an ego in full possession of its will. Sappho's difficult rescue of her own ego looks ahead to Freud's description of the psychological success of which melancholia is capable through struggles of "ambivalence [that] loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it," after which "the object [can be] abandoned as valueless," so that "the ego may enjoy in this the satisfaction of knowing itself as the better of the two, as superior to the object" ("Mourning" 14: 257).

The unconscious process by which Sappho's libidinal attachment to Anactoria had dangerously regressed into the ego ends with a clear affirmation of the self. Sappho is then able to redress the moment of false self-deprecation in which she declared Anactoria to be the greater figure of music and song (75-76). In the following one sentence passage, Sappho and her art become the central focus of the poem:

Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
 Except these kisses of my lips on thine
 Brand them with immortality; but me –
 Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
 Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
 Cast forth from heaven, with feet of awful gold
 And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
 Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
 Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown,
 But in the light and laughter, in the moan
 And shudder of water that makes felt on land
 The immeasurable tremor of the sea,
 Memories shall mix and metaphors of me. (201-14)

The sentence is syntactically and grammatically difficult, and guards meaning until the very last, but, as Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor points out, the full weight of the passionate passage lands on Sappho herself, on “me” (924). In the final line, Wagner-Lawlor also sees a visual repetition, “*Memories shall mix and metaphors of me,*” that “initiates the self-reification, the obsessive ‘like me ...like me ...like me’ in the succeeding lines.

Although her interest in “Anactoria” is as a “Romantic crisis in language,” Wagner-Lawlor perceives in this moment a “wedge [that] pries apart [Sappho’s] rhetorical incorporation of Anactoria” (925). In psychoanalytic terms, the “me” moment marks the ascendancy of Sappho’s ego over the lost object through a contemplation of the transcendental quality of her art and its reward of immortality in the memories of man.

As much as art has saved her, and as much as she has been able to see the lost Anactoria as *object*, Sappho must still do the work of mourning to confront a “world which has become poor and empty” (“Mourning” 14: 246). Although her libidinal instinct to cling to life has returned in a defiance of death (“and me / Earth shall not gather though she feed on thee” [245-46]), Sappho now sees the world as a cruel thing:

... The earth,
 Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
 Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
 Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
 Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
 Ashes. (233-38)

Her dim view of the world and her isolation in it, expressed in the repetition of “me, ... me, ... me” in the last one hundred lines of the poem, bespeak of a terrible isolation, but they also signal a positive psychological move in the right direction for Sappho, who, in rejecting the world, has regained her sense of self by defining her worth in opposition to its barrenness.

3.5 The Bodies of Traumatic Experience in “Itylus”

Like “Anactoria,” “Itylus” situates a psychological crisis in the body of an absent figure. The poem engages a paradoxical function of the memory as a faculty capable of both remembering and forgetting. Swinburne associates affliction with remembrance and ease with forgetfulness, and this tension of memory is something that provides *Poems and Ballads* with a basic structural element. In “Itylus,” the title, as a clue to the poem’s subject matter, is a subtle act of misdirection or a half-truth; the murder of Itylus is central to the myth but it is only part of the traumatic experience of which the nightingale sings. Her song is one of an unclaimed experience, a trauma that presses upon the conscience but one that the memory evades.

Swinburne bases his dramatic monologue on the Greco-Roman myth of the two sisters, Philomela and Procne. In the myth, Procne’s husband, Tereus, rapes Philomela and hides her far away but not before cutting out her tongue lest she report the crime to Procne. Philomela, however, conveys the history of her torture and Tereus’ treachery in a piece of embroidery that she manages to send to her sister. Blind with rage, Procne takes revenge upon her husband by murdering their son, Itylus. With the help of newly-rescued Philomela, the sisters “carve and joint” Itylus while he yet breathes for a dish they serve to Tereus (Ovid 6.640). Tereus dines, swallowing “flesh of his flesh” (6.650), before he learns of his unwitting cannibalism, when Philomela and Procne throw the bleeding head of his son in his face for dessert. Wailing and calling himself “his son’s / Disastrous tomb” (6.665), Tereus draws his sword to murder Philomela and Procne, but divine will intercedes to put a stop to the spiralling violence and turns Tereus into a hoopoe, and Philomela and Procne into a nightingale and a swallow. (Greek and Roman

poets differ as to which sister is the nightingale and which the swallow. The distinction is left ambiguous in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.)¹⁴⁶ Swinburne's poem picks up the narrative well into its ornithological phase, long after Procne and Philomela's flight from Thrace. Morse Peckham mistakenly identifies Procne as the nightingale mourning the loss of her child (59n); however, it is clear that Philomela, the sister raped by Tereus, is speaking to Procne in Swinburne's poem when the lyric voice says, "O sister, sister, *thy* first-begotten!" (55; emphasis mine). The pronoun "*thy*" indicates clearly the direction of the speech, and since the only child of the tale is Itylus, son of Procne, Philomela must be the voice of the poem. The point here is not to show where Peckham nods, but first to clarify the position from which the nightingale's lament issues, and then to establish the melancholic conditions of her memory.

Swinburne's swallow and nightingale are models of mourning and melancholia; one has worked through the past's losses, while the other struggles to grasp their significance. Philomela wonders that Procne, as the swallow, can chatter with gaiety for the arrival of spring. A "thousand summers are over and dead" (3), and for Procne the work of mourning has been done—lost Itylus has been separated from the structure of her ego as a lost object, and her libido has been reactivated by the signs of spring. For Philomela, Daulis—the ancient Greek city in Phocis associated with Tereus—and its past evils constitute the sole site of her memory,¹⁴⁷ and the beauty of the spring in the present makes no impression on her. Indeed, her memory holds the present in the melancholic grip of the past. Much like the curse of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* who is condemned to forever repeat his tale,¹⁴⁸ the transformation of Philomela commits her eternally to sing in the woeful notes of the nightingale's song the story she would sooner forget.

Swinburne's *Philomela*, in fact, does not sing of directly remembered events long past but of the plague of memory that makes life in the present impossible and almost freezes her voice, as in the following lines that she sings to her sister, whose chatter calls ahead to the coming spring:

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
 Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
 The soft south whither thine heart is set?
 Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
 Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
 Hast thou forgotten ere I forget? (7-12)

Philomela marvels at her sister's ability to forget, but she does not reveal what it is that has been forgotten (the murder of Procne's child) until the final stanza, which forces the reader into a recursive interpretation of the text, a search for clues that lead to the revelation. As with "Anactoria," Swinburne uses the title "Itylus" in such a way as to anchor the poem to an absent figure, a body somehow situated in a core of a psychic trauma that gives the work its melancholic aspect. The poem's title conjures the long absent body of Itylus and offers a general context, but only upon getting to the final stanza, which identifies the speaker, can the reader begin to assess the pain of *Philomela's* memory. In fact, it is never exactly clear what memory pains her so—she never mentions it explicitly, pointing only to that which should afflict Procne more, the murder of her child.

While the murder of Itylus constitutes a portion of her painful memory, *Philomela* has lost other, less tangible things in Thrace. Tereus's brutal rape steals her virginity

(something that Ovid makes explicit [6.526]) in which there is a loss more abstract than the material object of a hymen. Freud, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” states that one of the exciting causes of melancholia involves “loss of a more ideal kind” (14: 245). Philomela’s losses fit this pattern, for she loses not only her nephew but also her virginity and her tongue. Her brutal rape exists in the text as a psychic trauma, an unmentionable and unclaimed experience: she cannot touch the memory directly but must approach it circuitously with reference to “the woven web” in which she recorded the rape that would lead to the death of Itylus (52). In Ovid’s version of the tale, Procne says that with the loss of her virginity Philomela loses her “honour” (*Metamorphoses* 6. 620), a trite term that cannot comprehend the effects of Tereus’s violation of her being, effects that are compounded by the excision of her tongue. If the loss of her virginity and “honour” is of an “ideal kind,” what abstract portion of her identity has fled with her ability to speak? To what extent is her identity fragmented by the inability to express the will, the emotion, and the intellect that constitute her personality? She well knows the tissue and muscle that have been lost, but not *what* she has lost in them. Her loss (or losses) are more complex than Procne’s, which perhaps explains why Swinburne chose to follow the Latin tradition that gives the voice of the nightingale to Philomela. The haunting quality of the notes she sings corresponds to her state of melancholia, in which she cannot detach herself from losses she barely comprehends but which haunt her memory.

Swinburne’s Philomela feels that her losses ought to be shared by her sister, and, in part, they are; however, their paths of grieving differ according to their losses, and Philomela feels the isolation of her own continued state of melancholic grieving. Indeed, Swinburne indicates that the difference dividing them is a difference of memory: “But

thou wouldst tarry or I would follow, / Could I forget and thou remember, / Couldst thou
 remember and I forget” (40-2). Swinburne illustrates the cross-purposes of the sisters’
 respective memories (that is, their respective abilities to remember and forget), in the
 lines’ syntactical chiasmus, and he further uses this technical device to illuminate the
 state of Philomela’s perception of memory: “For where thou fliest I shall not follow, / Till
 life forget and death remember, / Till thou remember and I forget” (28-30). For
 Philomela, memory is the natural foe of the libido, except in its capacity to forget; and to
 her, the only true forgetfulness life offers is in death. Swinburne enshrines the
 paradoxical crux of Philomela’s theory of memory and grieving in a chiastic expression
 whose pattern permits lines 29 and 30 to be read as “till I forget life, till thou remember
 death.” The title “Itylus” in fact alludes less to the murdered boy than to a pattern of
 mourning and melancholia of losses tied to the body. Philomela wonders why she cannot
 mourn (and seemingly forget) after the pattern set by her sister. The problem, however,
 is that she does not see that they do not necessarily grieve after identical losses.
 Philomela’s memory operates circuitously and obliquely when it delays the mention of
 any specific loss until the final stanza, which suggests that the murder of Itylus is but one
 aspect in a constellation of losses that remain yet unclaimed in her melancholic memory.

Ovid begins the *Metamorphoses* and his invocation with his statement of purpose:
 “Of bodies changed to other forms I tell” (1.1). In so far as he distinguishes between the
 body and the soul, he privileges the body as the defining aspect of human identity. So
 too does Freud, who suggests that the ego “is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not
 merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (“Ego” 19: 26). In
 “Narcissism,” he further suggests that the ego takes its form from a psychical projection

of the body's *erotogenic* surface, so that "for every such change of erotogenicity of the organs there might then be a parallel change in the libidinal cathexis in the ego" (14: 84). Freud also concludes that bodily pain contributes to the formation of the ego and differentiates it from the id: "Pain seems to play a part in the process, and the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illnesses is perhaps the model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our own body" ("Ego" 19: 25). Swinburne's "Itylus" alludes to bodies butchered and lost, bodies violated and transformed, and bodies in flux, creating a poem that enacts a Freudian crisis of a bodily ego in which sexuality, pain, and identity meet and collide.

This collision in "Itylus" repeats itself throughout *Poems and Ballads*, whose overwhelmed characters frequently seek escape from the body and all its burden in some form of forgetfulness. The theme of loss and frustration that shapes much of *Poems and Ballads* generates the constant tension between remembering and forgetting. In "Anactoria," Sappho's acute memories of her lover's body and her own excessive sensuality lead ultimately to the wish for oblivion, expressed in the final lines of the poem:

Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew
 Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,

 Till fate undo the bondage of the gods,
 And lay, to slake and satiate me all through,
 Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,

And shed around and over and under me

Thick darkness and the insuperable sea. (295-305)

Although Sappho reclaims a sense of her self as she emerges from a state of melancholia, she still longs for the release from memory that death will bring, signalled in the allusion to the classical river Lethe, a taste of whose waters frees the soul from care in long forgetfulness, and the Lotus, the flower of forgetfulness.

In “Dolores,” the lover of “Our Lady of Pain,” as Swinburne explains, has been “foiled in love and [is] weary of loving,” having pursued “‘violent delights’ which ‘have violent ends’” (*Replies* 22), an allusion to the immoderate and volatile love that Friar Laurence cautions Romeo against pursuing (*Rom.* 2.6.9). Swinburne’s spent lover seeks forgetful ease in the subsequent two poems, “Hesperia” and “The Garden of Proserpine,” poems that refer to either the land of the happy dead or its goddess, Proserpine, the queen of Hades, whose garden grows poppies and grapes to make “For dead men deadly wine” (32). Taken together, the set of three poems demonstrate once again Swinburne’s mastery of meter. As the tension of passion eases over the course of the three poems so does the tension of meter: the catalectic lines, irregular meter, and frequent anapests (a foot charged with energy) in “Dolores” become slightly more regular and calm in the less passionate iambic feet of “The Garden of Proserpine, and calmer still in the attenuated heptameter lines of “Hesperia.”

In the less frequently discussed “Rococo,” the idea of remembering a moment of excessive sensuality crossed by an impulse to forget lies in variations of a single set of phrases:

Forget that I remember,

And dream that I forget.

.....

But not that you remember,

And not that I forget.

.....

The day that you remember,

The day that I forget.

.....

For love may not remember,

But time will not forget. (15-6, 31-2, 47-8, 63-4)

Although marked by repetition, the phrasing swings dramatically in meaning. The poem is a tangled record of a tangled psychological state: the speaker finds himself in the grip of an insistent personal memory, while addressing a lover who insists on forgetting their erstwhile erotic love, and even though their love forgets itself, there is something of it that lasts, perhaps in the permanence the poem affords it. As in so many other poems in Swinburne's volume, "Rococo" catches at the body's experience with the memory's woven impulse to simultaneously remember and forget.

The body and its experiences are both foundational and elusive in *Poems and Ballads*, and the frankly erotic and erotically frank treatment the body receives in the volume results in a number of effects. As "studies of passion and sensation" (vii), as Swinburne calls them in his Dedicatory Epistle to the collected *Poems* (1904), the poems

appear to delight in freeing sexuality from the constraints of heteronormativity, in the freedom of identity that comes from freedom of sexuality; however, in the freedom that perversity offers is the hint of a melancholic regret for firmer ground upon which to build identity. While opening up the relationship between the mind and the body, the volume rests uneasily on the underlying assumption that there is an irreducible gap between the two.

Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* simultaneously constructs the gap in the experiences of the body and the sense of self and depicts the struggle to reduce it in the performance of sexuality and gender in identity. In the struggle to reduce the gap, the body often functions as a site of melancholic memory. "Anactoria" exemplifies melancholia encrypted in the personal memory of another's body and the ambivalent desire to cling to an object wished forgotten, and the entire volume manifests a similar tension between remembering and forgetting, a dialectic of memory, in a melancholic relationship of energetic hyper-cathexis and wilful oblivion. The body in "Itylus" is a palimpsest of flesh inscribed with violence and trauma, partially erased in the Ovidian metamorphoses but still read through the memory that clings to the flesh. This tension between forgetting and remembering provides a structural element to the volume at a macrocosmic level, as seen in the arrangement of such poems as "Dolores," "The Garden of Proserpine," and "Hesperia," and at a microcosmic level, as seen in the prevalent device of chiasmus, which Swinburne frequently uses to balance the contradictory impulses of *Eros* (all the creative, life-producing and life-preserving drives) and *Thanatos* (the urge to return to a state of calm, or, ultimately, of non-existence). In the end, the best way to describe the relationship between memory and the body in *Poems and*

Ballads requires the use of a word whose ambiguity the volume fully appreciates and exploits, and whose ambivalence finds apt application here: in *Poems and Ballads*, the melancholic memory and the body are ever in the process of *cleaving*.

CONCLUSION

Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
 And can't fare worse! ...

 Why can't a painter ...
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like
 Both in their order?
 (Browning, "Fra Lippo Lippi" 198-208)

4.1 The Burdens of Body's Beauty

One of the most basic of human impulses is to render the abstract concrete. In the flesh, we look for manifestations of the spirit; in the body, we seek out the secrets of the mind. To structure thoughts, to organize complex or unfathomable concepts, we often resort to metaphors of the body, or when there is no proper name for something, we extend the body towards it in the form of catachresis—the *leg* of a table, a *head* of lettuce, or the *face* of a mountain. Embodied metaphors resonate with the emotions and the deepest patterns of human behaviour. The physical body provides a ready model of the social body that can be understood in terms of drives, patterns of organization and circulation, vitality, and morbidity. For example, in his "biography" of London, Peter Ackroyd includes the foreword "The city as body," in which he offers the image of the great city as a "young man with his arms outstretched in a gesture of liberation," with "byways that resemble thin veins and ... parks ... like lungs" (1).¹⁴⁹ As a metaphor to which the human mind is instinctively drawn, the human body provides an inexhaustible fountain of representation not only in its gendered forms, and all its various shapes, sizes, and colours, but also in its ever-changing relationship with the culture that presses in on it and with the mind and pulses that press out against its surfaces. This dissertation has shown how Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* and Swinburne's *Poems and*

Ballads take up the body under special Pre-Raphaelite demands that define and obscure the perception of its experiences, particularly as those experiences relate to desire and sexuality.

Much of the finest poetry in Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* depicts characters struggling to grasp the significance and value of the body in situations of desire. The Arthurian and "Other" poems in the volume often depict the soul and flesh in conflict, and the more eroticized the flesh becomes the greater the conflict, often culminating in moments of blindness or confused imagery, particularly when characters are trying to determine what the body signifies in situations of erotic intensity. In these moments when the experiencing subject is overborne by the conflict, Morris's poetry often enters into a dream or dream-like atmosphere. Earlier critics, such as the anonymous reviewer of the *Saturday Review*, considered the dreamscape as mere evasion or escapism, but the closer examination conducted in this dissertation reveals that the dream in Morris's poetry functions with a very modern understanding of the consciousness, processing the hard data that press in upon the brain for later application and understanding in waking life. "The Wind," for example, presents the internal action of a dream that works and knits together the hard and unfiltered detail of waking life in a series of images bound by feelings of desire and frustration. The interpretation of dreams does not come easily to the characters of Morris's poetry, and only in "Rapunzel" does the work of dreams seem to reconcile body and soul; nonetheless, the dream in Morris's poetry is less of an escape than a path back to a reality marked by a clearer perception of the body and its relation to the soul.

In and out of dreams, Morris's poetry demonstrates a special visual engagement with the body that is a defining characteristic of Pre-Raphaelitism. The same critic for the *Saturday Review* who complained of escapist tendencies in Morris also remarks that "in the poet we trace the painter" (44). In a manner reminiscent of the advice that Millais received from critics in 1850 to idealize form and abandon the attempt to paint what the eye sees, the critic reviewing Morris's poetry for the *Saturday Review* complains that when poets and painters "think it their duty to work through a microscope, and try to paint every stain on every leaf, as well as every leaf on every tree, they not only forget what art is, but are ignorant of what artistic imitation is" (44). This critic strikes at the core belief of the Pre-Raphaelite artistic practice, at least inasmuch as it was espoused by William Michael Rossetti and defended by Ruskin, of pursuing truth in the most minute study of natural detail and of "rendering ... nature as it is,—in other words, as it seems to the artist from his point of view, material and intellectual (for there is no separating the two)" (W.M. Rossetti, "Pre-Raphaelitism" 956). The problem however is that human nature is inherently complex, almost impossible to determine, and difficult to represent in anything but a caricature.

To force the body to signify more, the Pre-Raphaelite painters observed the flesh in moments of intensity: annunciation scenes depicting the moment when Mary's body is about to take on its holy burden (for example, Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*), scenes of sexual awakening (Millais's *The Bridesmaid*); scenes of epiphany depicting exact moments of moral revelations (Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*), and scenes depicting the moment of death (Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*). These moments' monuments¹⁵⁰ in some of the Pre-Raphaelites' early works tend to eroticize moments of wonder, pain, ecstasy,

or *translatio*, in which the body is becoming something more or other than itself, while still anchoring the experiences in expressions of the body even as it is somehow being left behind. Although the depiction of the body in these works is provocative and original, the Madonna/Whore binarism that underlies many of them is highly conventional and orthodox within the Victorian social context. To an extent Morris escapes this constraint of moral vision; his treatment of the body, though Pre-Raphaelite in its attention to detail, observes the motions of the sexualized body in such a way as to destabilize the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane that conditions the perception of Madonna and Whore figures. Morris writes the poetry of taboo and the grotesque in that it attempts reconcile the dichotomy, while dwelling in the moments of incongruity between the experiences of the body and the soul.

While acknowledging *The Defence of Guenevere* as love poetry, this dissertation asks readers to recognize that the volume's particular challenge is to read the experience of love as an embodied experience. The poems continually monitor the flesh for signs of the spiritual; however, to get at the soul, they must access the body, not as a veil of the soul, but as something that is entwined with and interpenetrated by it. The problem that Morris's dramatic characters confront is not so much the mysterious character of the soul as the elusiveness of the body. When René Descartes said that "the soul is easier to know than the body" (qtd. in Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 404), he may have been more concerned with the experience of the mind or soul, but his comment points to a fundamental but silent corollary in the history of western thought: the body, though central to the human experience, is easily absented from it. The history of western philosophy, from the Platonic emphasis on the purified soul to the Cartesian focus on the

cogito, has tended towards a dualism that divides mind (or soul) from body. Both philosophy and religion have at different times and in different ways contributed to, or reconciled, an essentially disembodied human existence, in which subjectivity is the experience of the mind or the soul within an estranged, alien body. Even the personal and quotidian experience admits the strangeness of our own bodies when one considers that the very hands—those agents of work, necessity, and intimacy—with which a person wields tools of labour, prepares food, and caresses the bodies of others are so unfamiliar that nine out of ten people cannot distinguish their own in a small series of other hands (van den Berg 169).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, materialist philosophy attempted a return to the body, but did so by constituting the human being as merely one kind of material object in a world of material objects, whose subjective experience can be calculated in terms of a causal analysis of objects pressing in on the sense organs and the material brain. This materialist view of the body posits a person who does not actively inhabit the world, but merely responds passively and mechanically to external stimuli, as matter responding to matter. The status of the body in subjective experience developed into a central issue of debate among not only philosophers but also artists and critics: Coleridge and Wordsworth disputed the relation of the body and mind, Ruskin studied the “modifications of the bodily ideal owing to the influence of the mind” in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (*Works* 4.178-79), and Robert Browning tried to reconcile mind and body in an amalgamation of subjective and objective poetry in the work of the “whole poet” (*Essay* 33-50). Still, the problem persists of a body that seems integral to experience yet foreign to it, a body that slips somewhere between the objective and

subjective. This gap provides a fundamental structural element for the poems of *The Defence of Guenevere* volume in which characters encounter bodies as texts to interpret or as stages upon which the spiritual and sexual impulses enact a drama of conflict. By employing some of Merleau-Ponty's ideas of phenomenology, the dissertation pulls some of the volume's bodies out of the "ch[i]asm" and makes them more legible as texts by demonstrating how Morris returns to the flesh as the pivot of perceptual uncertainty in poetry that treats the body as something both intensely present yet ghostly absent to the experiencing subject.

In *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne shares Morris's determination to observe the human body with Pre-Raphaelite eyes that "go to nature in all singleness of heart ... rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing" (Ruskin, "Pre-Raphaelitism" 339). Both poets exhibit an openness to the experiences of the body, but their works differ in their observations and expectations of the flesh. Swinburne seems little troubled by the division of body and soul that Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* labours to reconcile. The attempt to unite body and soul appears all but pointless in Swinburne's poetry—a fool's errand worthy of parody in his later poem "The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell":

Body and spirit are twins: God only knows which is which:
 The soul squats down in the flesh, like a tinker drunk in a ditch.
 More is the whole than a part: but half is more than the whole:
 Clearly, *the soul is the body: but is not the body the soul?*

(13-16; emphasis added)

In this parody of Tennyson's "The Higher Pantheism,"¹⁵¹ Swinburne makes sport with the poet laureate's enduring attempt to determine the way of the soul by casting confusion where Tennyson so earnestly sought clarity;¹⁵² however, concealed within the lightness of his parody lies a weightier idea that Swinburne takes up earnestly, though often despairingly, in *Poems and Ballads*: that in the experiences of the body lies the essence of human existence.

In *Poems and Ballads*, the body is also a site of sorrow and confusion, but it is subject to a different sort of probing and interrogation than the body of Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere*. Morris's characters, particularly his Arthurian figures, struggle with a fractured sensibility; their bodies appear broken between conflicting impulses that are simultaneously sexual and spiritual. The general movement of the volume, culminating (as I have tried to show) in "Rapunzel," is the progress of characters who, body and soul, track steadily, if slowly, towards a state of holiness. Like Morris's characters, Swinburne's suffer from a fractured sensibility. At times, *Poems and Ballads* seems to revel in the fractured sensibility that so troubles Morris's poetry, delighting in martyring the soul to the pleasures of the body; however, there is rarely any triumph in the dark delight that the volume takes in its wreckage, the scattered remains of which become a poignant reminder of how foreign the experiences of the body and soul can be. There is little true pleasure in the events that Swinburne's figures recount, and, more often than not, their stories tell of a fractured identity that comes from the deadened sensibility of gluttonous desire. *Poems and Ballads* does not attempt to reconcile body and soul, but its poems frequently depict characters whose sense of self is crossed by their physical senses; that is, they possess bodies whose experiences seem remote and

inaccessible even to themselves, especially when linked to the body of another, as in “Anactoria” and “Itylus.”

Like *The Defence of Guenevere, Poems and Ballads* gropes towards an understanding of the value and significance of the flesh, but it does not share the hopeful *telos* that threads together the poems of Morris’s volume. *The Defence of Guenevere* develops its characters consistently in relation to a body that is caught between sexuality and violence (as in the Froissartian poems) or in relation to the conflict between the body and soul (as in the Arthurian poems), and the overall pattern in the work is one that suggests a progression, a movement towards something. *Poems and Ballads*, however, is the work of “an intellectual hermaphrodite” (to borrow Buchanan’s phrase [“Fleshly” 335]) that blurs the lines of sex and gender—often violently—as it tries on the different bodies a person can inhabit under extreme conditions of psychological and sexual strain. “Hermaphroditus” is a poem of desire that undoes the limits of erotic perception prescribed by a dominant heterosexual discourse. What follows in the wake of such a poem is not a pattern of progress towards a desired goal, but neither is it the compulsive or frantic overflow of a sick mind that critics, past and present, have tended to see. Instead, what comes out of the destabilized body and erotics pushed forward by “Hermaphroditus” is a volume of poetry that conducts a carefully directed exploration of the mind in relation to the body in states that can either give the body stronger presence or obscure it to the point of blindness. It is too facile to treat the poems of *Poems and Ballads* as symptoms or distortions of disease and not see in them a valid description of experiences lived and relived in the memory that conjures absent bodies into existence in fundamentally human situations of desire, disease, and death.

Poems and Ballads repeats scenes of bitter frustration and poignant crises of identity tied up in a near-blind relationship with the body and sexuality. In 1866, the crises of identity that the volume connects to the blurring of sex and gender tapped into contemporary anxieties and pointed to the future of the body in literature and culture. Swinburne depicts sexual attraction as a combination of lust and resignation between aggressive, violent, barren women and passive, acquiescent, desperate men. In the volume's atmosphere of stifling and claustrophobic eroticism ("Laus Veneris" provides a strong example), a pervasive sense of sexual ambiguity not only undermined the patriarchal wish to preserve manly men and womanly women but also fed the future late-Victorian fear of degeneracy. Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892; English translation in 1895) stands as a testament to this fear. A journalist, novelist, and playwright, Nordau dabbled in the evolutionary theories of Darwin, particularly with the theory that, under certain conditions, the human species could devolve and return to a less advanced state. Nordau's assessment of the Pre-Raphaelites in a degenerate culture once again combines the aesthetics of the flesh with the weightiest scientific discourse of the day, namely evolutionary biology.

While the P.R.B. was critiqued for its "retrograde character" (Wornum 269), Swinburne and Burne-Jones were labelled as "degenerate" because their sexually ambiguous or androgynous-looking characters pointed evolution in the wrong direction. In a discussion of the "Lower Stages in the Genealogy of Man" in *The Descent of Man* (1872), Darwin connects sexual ambiguity to an earlier stage of human evolutionary history with "some remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom [who] appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous" (225-26). Bram Stoker, who at the end of the

nineteenth century gives the vampire its definitive literary form as a monster of desire and fear, expresses this fear of physical degeneracy through the dilution of masculine and feminine physical characteristics:

All men and all women ... have in themselves the cells of both sexes; and the accredited masculinity or femininity of the individual is determined by the multiplication and development of these cells. Thus the ideal man is entirely or almost entirely masculine, and the ideal woman is entirely or almost entirely feminine. Each individual must have a preponderance, be it ever so little, of the cells of its own sex; and the attraction of each individual to the other sex depends upon its place in the scale between the highest and lowest grade of sex. The most masculine man draws the most feminine woman, and *vice versa*; and so down the scale till close to the border line is the great mass of persons who, having only development of a few of the qualities of sex, are easily satisfied to mate with anyone. This is the true principle of selection which is one of the most important of Nature's laws. (*Lady Athlyne* 82)

Drawing, as he says, on the ideas of Otto Weininger,¹⁵³ Stoker hints at a fear of the indiscriminate “great mass of persons” whose careless breeding threatens the survival of the masculine and feminine ideals with ever increasing numbers of androgynous progeny. Swinburne and Burne-Jones created sexually ambiguous figures who, in the Darwinian world growing up around their work, step off the path of progress, representing instead a regression or degeneration of the species' higher masculine and feminine qualities.¹⁵⁴

The publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 was a leading edge of an increasing

anxiety over the instability and fluidity of sexuality and gender that moved the nation ever closer to a degenerate state without sexual difference.

The ancient Roman architect Vitruvius has provided posterity with the idea of the body as a model of organic unity and the image of the perfect human body as the mirror of the greatest and most perfect whole, the universe. Using the notes from the third book of Vitruvius's *De Architectura* to generate the Canon of Proportions, Leonardo illustrates the Vitruvian Man in 1487 and fashions the human body as a symbol of functional harmony, order, and grace in its general form. Nonetheless, the individualized experience of the body will invariably include conflict, disorder, and even grotesqueness. By the time it had made its way through Romanticism's emphasis on the individuality of experience and Pre-Raphaelitism's minute scrutiny, while being the subject of yet greater scrutiny in the study of medicine and the law, the body seemed less knowable than ever, as it does to Lord Henry Wotton in Wilde's novel at the end of the century:

Soul and body, body and soul—how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the psychological impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools! Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation of spirit from matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit with matter was a mystery also.

(Picture of Dorian Gray 96-97)

Lord Henry's musings on the flesh and spirit in 1891 signal the collapse of a sensibility that the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic had begun to precipitate some decades earlier. Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* and Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* mark a return to the body that negotiates a space between the western tradition of Cartesian dualism and materialistic monism and looks to recover something lost in a fractured sensibility while seriously questioning "where the fleshly impulse cease[s] [and] the psychical impulse beg[ins]," and whether or not anything whole can be recovered from in between.

In 1847, Lord Lindsay's *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* entered the fray concerning the re-evaluation of "Christian" art of the early painters and sculptors (so-called "primitives") of the German and Italian schools with the observation that "Man is, in the strictest sense of the word, a progressive being, and ... has still held, upon the whole, a steady course towards the great end of his existence, the re-union and the re-harmonizing of the three elements [Sense, Intellect, and Spirit] of his being, dislocated by the Fall, in the service of his God" (qtd. in DeLaura 375). I hope that I have demonstrated through a combination of close-reading and analysis, using in particular the theories of Freud and Merleau-Ponty, the manner in which Morris's and Swinburne's early volumes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry recreate a dissociation of sensibility grounded in the experiences of the body. Morris's poetry and his figures grope towards harmonized perceptions but remain frustrated prisoners of their own fractured sensibility; Swinburne's poetry, resigned to its condition of fragmented sensibility, plays with the fragments and re-arranges the parts in a creative interplay of the phenomena of perception, with a sort of self-destructive glee that leaves behind a sterile world in a heap of broken images. Morris's efforts to harmonize perception frequently fail and frustrate

(as with Launcelot and Guenevere), but there is something heroic in the attempt to make sense of the flesh; Swinburne's poetry assumes failure and discord in a world of physical desire but challenges the body to signify more, to speak what it had dared not say.

To make the bodies of Morris and Swinburne's poetry speak, I have referred to both Freud and Merleau-Ponty because they argue for a sense of self that develops from the experiences of an impersonal body and a gradual integration of inherent drives, impulses, and tendencies of the body in a more unified and conscious structure of identity. For *The Defence of Guenevere* and *Poems and Ballads*, Freud and Merleau-Ponty illuminate both the function of the body in forming personal identity and the body's impersonal character that prevents complete control of this identity. Merleau-Ponty's theories, which, so far as I am aware, have not been brought to bear on Pre-Raphaelite poetry, involve a more active engagement with the world of objects and bodies and conceive of a mode of perception that is granted agency or intentionality. These theories have facilitated a fresh reading of Morris and Swinburne, whose poems imagine bodies that take erotic aim at other bodies. By keeping Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenology of perception in mind, I have tried to bring a new focus to Morris's and Swinburne's poetry that helps readers recognize characters struggling to actively inhabit the world as embodied subjects in whom desire arises from a flesh that complicates the formation and the control of identity.¹⁵⁵

The success of this dissertation depends finally on having proved that Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* and Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, First Series* take up the sexualized body with a Pre-Raphaelite commitment to see it afresh. George Steiner has said that "the list of writers who have had the genius to enlarge our

actual compass of sexual awareness, who have given the erotic play of the mind a novel focus, an area of recognition previously unknown or fallow, is very small” (206). Steiner distinguishes Sappho as one of these writers, and this dissertation argues that Morris and Swinburne deserve similar recognition. Through *The Defence of Guenevere* and *Poems and Ballads*, Morris and Swinburne have enlarged poetry’s compass of sexual awareness by giving erotic play to the perceiving mind and the sexualized body, and to the sexualized mind and the perceiving body.

Notes

¹ The phrase “The Fleshly School of Poetry” comes from Robert Buchanan’s famous attack in the eighteenth volume of *Contemporary Review* (October 1871) against the Pre-Raphaelite poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. The occasion of the attack by Buchanan (writing under the pseudonym of Thomas Maitland) was the publication of Rossetti’s *Poems* (1870). Rossetti responded with piece titled “The Stealthy School of Criticism” published in the *Athenaeum* (16 December 1871). Buchanan expanded the *Contemporary Review* article to be published as a pamphlet in 1872 under the title *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*.

² Michel Foucault overturns the “repressive hypothesis” in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, and Steven Marcus explores the rich and varied, official and illicit, discourse of sex in *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*. Other works dealing with Victorian sexuality include Lynda Nead’s *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Lacqueur’s collection of essays in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, and the numerous studies of prostitution and sexual politics in Victorian Britain by Judith R. Walkowitz. In *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aesthetic*, Richard Dellamora examines changing male sexual attitudes in the late-Victorian period, including Swinburne’s role in imagining male-male desire and perversity in *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (69-85).

³ Theodor Schwan (1810-82) and Matthias Schleiden (1804-81) are credited with developing cell theory (Coleman 17). For further reading on eighteenth- and nineteenth-

century vitalist theories, see the collection of essays *Vitalisms from Haller to the Cell Theory* edited by Guido Cimino and François Duchesneau.

⁴ The nickname derives from British slang word “slosh,” which at the time referred to anything weak or conventional. In his Introduction to *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, James Sambrook observes that William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and John Everett Millais, the three founding members of the Brotherhood, dismissed the “conventional pyramidal composition of so many Academy pictures, their emphatic, stylized chiaroscuro light-effects, the superficial bravura of their free, open brushwork”—and therefore Reynolds’ *Discourses*—as “slosh ” (1).

⁵ The aesthetic roots of the Platonic ideal form can be found in Plato’s *Republic* (Book Ten). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* (delivered in Heidelberg and Berlin between 1818 and 1829 and published posthumously in 1835) offers an analysis of the development of aesthetics in which the “Classic Form” (especially as it is found in ancient Greek sculpture) best embodies Reynolds’ Platonic notion of ideal beauty.

⁶ Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), the half-cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the word “eugenics,” meaning literally “well born,” from Greek in 1883. Works fearing the degeneracy of the human species would circulate widely in the fin de siècle, including Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1892; trans. 1895), in which a chapter is dedicated to the Pre-Raphaelites.

⁷ Locke’s more famous, but misquoted term, *tabula rasa* (he in fact refers to the mind not as a “blank slate,” but as “white paper” [*Essay* 2.1.2]) is comparable analogy that allows experience to write the raw materials of understanding upon the mind. (It is

one of history's ironies, first, to have altered his trope, and, second, to have seized upon this particular image of writing to represent the theory of a philosopher who deeply distrusted the ability of language to contain truthful meaning [cf. Book Three of his *Essay*]). In Western philosophy, the idea of the mental "impression" goes back through the "white paper" of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (2.1.2) to Plato's *Theatus* and Aristotle's *De Memoria*, which employ the idea of mental images (memories) as impressions in a wax, after the manner of a signet ring leaving its mark on sealing wax. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, would revive the notion of *tabula rasa* in his theological writings, but the Victorian understanding of the term is more closely tied to Locke's *Essay*, which holds the theory that the human mind is at birth a "blank slate" without rules for processing data, and that data is acquired and rules for processing are formed solely by one's sensory experiences. Locke interpreted the *tabula rasa* in such a way as to emphasize the individual's freedom to author his or her own soul, to define the content of his or her character, but within the fixed limitations (physical and material) of the human species. From this notion of a free, self-authored mind or soul combined with an immutable human nature, Locke derives his theories of "natural" rights.

⁸ In 1815, Samuel Taylor Coleridge asks Wordsworth to reconsider the relation of the mind and body and recognize that "the Senses were living growths and developments of the Mind and Spirit in a much juster as well as higher sense, than that the mind can be said to be formed by the Senses" (4.574). Coleridge explains his notion of innate ideas (what he calls "the original moulds of the mind" [2.682]) in a series of

letters to Josiah Wedgwood in February 1801 on the errors of Locke's epistemology and on Locke's indebtedness to Descartes.

⁹ Hans Aarsleff includes a chapter entitled "Locke's Reputation in the Nineteenth Century" in *From Locke to Saussure*. In this chapter, Aarsleff demonstrates both the wide impact of Locke's *Essay* (the tenth edition of Locke's *Works* appeared in 1801 and four more editions appeared in the course of the century, in 1812, 1823, 1826, and 1854; the twenty-first edition of the *Essay* was published in 1805, after which eleven more editions appeared by 1860 [122]) and the prejudice with which it was read. He demonstrates the tendency to reduce Locke to his discussion of "simple ideas" in Book Two of the *Essay* through the examples of William Hazlitt, in his "Lectures on English Philosophy" (1836), and William Whewell (Locke's chief denigrator in the nineteenth century), in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1840) and *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy in England* (1852). To his Victorian detractors, Locke was a "sensualist, a materialist, a sceptic, [and] an atheist" who reduced the nature of human existence to a series of physical sensations (Aarsleff 121).

¹⁰ Woolner's design for the Wordsworth monument competition includes two allegorical figures, Control and Aspiration. William Michael Rossetti record in the *P.R.B. Journal* that "the manhood of the controlling figure in the first symbol is the suggestion of Carlyle, who expressed his entire approval of the general conception of the monument" (90).

¹¹ In his attack on Utilitarianism in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle puns on the surname of James and John Stuart Mill with references to "Motive-grinders and Mechanical

Profit-and-Loss Philosophies” (126), who in their “Logic-mill ... grind ... out Virtue from the husks of Pleasure” (124).

¹² Although the tendency is now to think of Bacon, Victorians thought of Locke as the father of British empiricism (Aarsleff 126).

¹³ Despite his tendency towards linguistic extravagance and hyperbole, Carlyle does not stretch the facts in this instance, for these theories were already crossing the Channel from such thinkers as Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780), whose philosophic purpose was to establish a “single principle” to explain human nature. The central argument upon which Condillac founds his two major works, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746) and *Treatise on Sensation* (1754), is that ideas—all ideas, even those contemplating divinity—are nothing more than sensations transformed. Deriving its strength from experimental philosophy, Condillac’s work marks the unseen extremes to which later generation would take Locke’s empiricism: a phenomenological materialism whose philosophy posits that matter is the premise of existence and that we can know only what can be perceived by the five senses. Against this invasion of French Sensualist thought, Carlyle, the stalwart transcendentalist, attempted to shore up the defences of conservative British thought and preserve the organic and mystical union of body, mind, and soul against the march of thinkers who “walk[] through the land of wonders, unwondering” (“Signs” 65).

¹⁴ In his journal entry for September 1830, Carlyle makes the first reference we have to what would become *Sartor Resartus*: “I am going to write—Nonsense. It is on ‘Clothes.’ Heaven be my comforter!” (qtd. in McSweeney xiii). Between his original notion to call the book *Teufelsdröck* and the final title of *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle, in a

direct allusion to one of his favourite fictional works by Laurence Sterne, considered publishing his work as *Thoughts on Clothes; or Life and Opinions of Herr. D. Teufelsdröckh*, which is how the editor characterizes the book in the “Editorial Difficulties” chapter of Book One. For the first collected edition sold to the English public in 1838 (a private edition of fifty-eight copies had been printed by *Fraser’s* in August 1834), Carlyle added to *Sartor Resartus* the subtitle “the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh.”

¹⁵ Coleridge, nonetheless, was very interested in scientific reasoning and was particularly steeped in the work of Hartley. His letters to Josiah Wedgwood in February 1801 clearly demonstrate his familiarity with debates in epistemology and involve discussions of Locke, Hartley, Descartes, and George Berkley (2.677-703).

¹⁶ Paley’s work, whose full title is *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, considers the phenomena of nature as divine “attributes” in that the signifier (nature) partakes in, and is an extension of, the signified (God), an idea that is reminiscent of Coleridge’s idea of “consubstantial symbols,” the fullest discussion of which appears in *The Statesman’s Manual* (for a discussion of Coleridge’s notion of “consustantiality,” see Hamli [355-56]). For Carlyle, the transcendent is equally apparent to the feeling poet of nature and the thinking natural scientist, if he open to the idea of the divine when he trains the penetrating acuity of his vision on the richness of nature’s design. Carlyle recognized Paley as such a scientist, who, interestingly, contemplates the design of the body’s circulatory system as scientific evidence of a divine intelligence:

One use of the circulation of the blood (probably amongst other uses) is to distribute nourishment to the different parts of the body. How minute and multiplied the ramifications of the blood vessels, for that purpose, are; and how thickly spread, over at least the superficies of the body, is proved by the single observation, that we cannot prick the point of a pin into the flesh, without drawing blood, i.e. without finding a blood vessel. (176)

Paley's *Natural Theology* considers the minute organization and intelligent design of the body as evidence of the purposeful and caring Creator.

Paley was particularly influential at Cambridge, where he was both a student and, later, a fellow and tutor. At Oxford, the Museum of the History of Science in the Old Ashmolean building was re-organized and reformed because of the Paley's work on *Natural Theology*, and, by 1836, the first division of the museum was designed "to familiarize the eye to those relations of all natural objects which form the basis of the argument in Dr. Paley's *Natural Theology*; to induce a mental habit of associating natural phenomena with the conviction that they are the media of Divine manifestation; and by such association to give proper dignity to every branch of Natural Science" (qtd. in Gunther 142). With the same scientific eye for minute analysis, Carlyle approaches phenomena of nature with a sense of wonder and supernatural awe, sharing Paley's religious reverence for the human body, not as a thing to transcend but as a symbol that partakes of the transcendent. Both Thomas and Jane Carlyle make numerous references to Paley in their correspondences.

¹⁷ While a deeply flawed work (see Allan R. Life's review [270-72]), Herbert L. Sussman's *Fact into Figure* does offer a useful discussion of Carlyle's "symbolic realism" (xvii).

¹⁸ The record of this conversation with Carlyle is contained in Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Hunt received a letter from Jane Carlyle dated 13 April 1853 (1.354). Carlyle's visit to Hunt's studio appears to have taken place soon after.

¹⁹ In its original form, the list appears atheistic in its belief that there was "no immortality for humanity except that which was gained by genius and heroism" (1.110). The criteria of "genius and heroism," judging by the names on the list, are aesthetic and honour "the few far-seeing ones [who] revealed to us vast visions of beauty" (1.111). The names on the list effectively construct an almost completely Anglo-Italian pantheon (40 of 57 "Immortals" are either English or Italian), except for the inclusion of three biblical characters (Jesus Christ, the author of Job, and Isaiah) and a few other outsiders such as Goethe, Homer, Joan of Arc, Cervantes, and "Early Gothic Architects" (1.111). The English "Immortals" are largely writers, including Romantic and Victorian notables such as Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Elizabeth and Robert Browning, Coventry Patmore, William Thackeray and Alfred Tennyson; the Italian "Immortals" are predominantly High Renaissance artists such as Raphael, Michael Angelo, Giovanni Bellini, Giorgioni, Titian, Ghiberti, Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci (Hunt 1.111). The names on the list are further distinguished by the assignation of one, two, or three stars, which accorded to the "different degrees of glory in great men" (1.111). Originally, the author of Job and Shakespeare topped the list with three stars, but "there was one

Captain of men who could not be left out of the list of heroes,” says Hunt, “One who had not only sung persuasively of the way conducting to peace, but had trodden the thorny way Himself” (1.112). The final name to be added to the list was Jesus Christ, who took top honours as the only name beside which four stars appear. Hunt’s version of the list is also included in William Michael Rossetti’s *The P.R.B. Journal* (107).

²⁰ Citations for Hunt’s *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* refer to the 1913 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

²¹ There is some question concerning which volume of the two available—*Modern Painters I* (1843, 1844, 1846, 1848) or *Modern Painters II* (1846, 1848)—fired the imaginations of Hunt and Millais in either late 1847 or early 1848, the period immediately preceding the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in September 1848. In a recent study of Pre-Raphaelite typology, D.M.R. Bentley supports George P. Landow’s argument that it was volume two that so impressed Hunt because he refers to paintings that Ruskin describes in this volume’s chapter on “The Imagination Penetrative” (“Typology” 822-23). In the same article, Bentley also identifies the person who lent Hunt the volume, a fellow student named W.D. Telfer (821n).

²² It should be noted that while the young rebels scorned the prevailing tastes of the marketplace, they did make their living by it. Rossetti, particularly it seems, was sensitive to the pressures of capitalism on art in his wry comments concerning his “pot-boilers,” as he called the “small things and watercolours” that he seemed condemned to paint for middle-class merchant men, such as J.H. Trist (a Brighton wine-merchant), for his living, even though he would much prefer to develop his talent in a more challenging medium by doing “almost exclusively large works in oil” (qtd. in Marsh 273).

²³ References to work the Pre-Raphaelites considered slosh appear in numerous writings. For some examples, see Hunt (1.134), William Michael Rossetti (*P.R.B. Journal* 61), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Letters* 1.65).

²⁴ Woolner's bid for the Wordsworth memorial in Westminster Abbey competition was unsuccessful (Hunt 1.223-4).

²⁵ In the "Rules of the P.R.B.," drawn up by William Michael Rossetti, the membership of the P.R.B. was limited to seven: "The P.R.B. originally consisted of 7 members—Hunt, Millais, Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti, Stephens, Woolner, and another" (*P.R.B. Journal* 103). The "other" was James Collinson. He has often been cast as a comic figure in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as the narcoleptic suitor of Christian Rossetti. His suit and his involvement in the P.R.B. were complicated and ultimately terminated by his religious vacillations between High Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. Ronald Parkinson offers a valuable overview of the artist's life and works in "James Collinson" in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers* (1984); however, for a more recent consideration of Collinson's contribution to Pre-Raphaelitism, see Bentley's "The Principal Pre-Raphaelite Pictures of James Collinson" in the *Victorian Review* (2004).

²⁶ As Prettejohn notes, Collinson also had a work in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1849, but that he had not yet adopted Pre-Raphaelite methods and innovations (34). Rossetti's pen and black ink drawing *Dante Drawing an Angel on the First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849), intended as a gift to Millais, also bears the "P.R.B." insignia.

²⁷ For a general discussion of the contemporary critical response, see Sussman's "The Language of Criticism and the Language of Art: The Response of Victorian Periodicals to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood."

²⁸ As Prettejohn points out, the subject matter of the three works had been enough to set them apart, given that English art in the 1840s favoured subject matter that ranked traditionally low—landscapes, such as were painted by J.M.W. Turner, and, indeed the lowest of subject choices, animals, such as were painted by Edwin Landseer, one of Victorian Britain's most celebrated artists (35). The sacred subject selected by Rossetti and the literary and historical subject matter by Millais and Hunt in fact correspond to the highest categories in traditional theories of art, including those espoused in Reynolds' *Discourses*. The subjects of both Millais's and Hunt's paintings are technically literary: Hunt's *Rienzi* depicts the revolutionary oath of a fourteenth-century Roman leader, but its source lies in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Rienzi: The Last of the Roman Tribunes*, a novel originally published in 1835 but re-issued in 1848 with a preface linking it to the contemporary movement for Italian independence. Millais's *Isabella* similarly traces its origins back to fourteenth-century Italy in the works of Boccaccio but has a more immediate source in a modern poem by Keats.

²⁹ Rossetti's *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* was sold to the dowager Marchioness of Bath for 80 pounds (Surtees 11; Hunt 1.120), *Isabella* to three tailors on Bond Street for 150 pounds (Hunt 1.122), and *Rienzi* to Mr. John Gibbons for 100 pounds (plus five pounds more for the frame) on August 14, 1849 (Bronkhurst 132; Hunt 1.127).

³⁰ Rossetti painted *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-49) on primed white canvass using watercolour brushes, and Hunt experimented with painting on a wet-white ground

for *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia* (1850-51). William Bell Scott describes the process of working a primed white canvass that Rossetti used for *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* in his *Autobiographical Notes* (1.250), and Hunt describes in detail the technique for working a wet white ground in *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1.276-77). For a discussion on these and other Pre-Raphaelite innovations, see Prettejohn's chapter on "Technique" in *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (135-64).

³¹ *The Germ* ran for only four issues in 1850, the first of which appeared on 1 January, and the last on 30 April. The last two issues were renamed *Art and Poetry, Being Thoughts towards Nature*. It was edited by William Michael Rossetti, the principal critical voice of the P.R.B.. Although the magazine was short-lived, he credits it with the impetus that inspired William Morris's *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, through which Pre-Raphaelitism would continue to have its voice heard.

³² In a similar strain, the *North British Review* devoted twenty-six pages to William Cunningham's particularly vituperative attack on the evils of Catholicism in an 1848 article entitled "Mariolatry."

³³ As William Michael Rossetti records in the *P.R.B. Journal*, the group did in fact contemplate living together in monastic fashion, much as the Nazarenes had done (22-3). Besides Dickens and Wornum (discussed below), other critics frequently chastised the P.R.B. for its monastic affectation, including Tom Taylor, who deplored the "monkish follies" of their art in the *Times* (8), and the editor of the *Times* who advised the P.R.B. to "throw off the monkish disguise in which they [had] been fooling" (qtd. in Ruskin, "Pre-Raphaelite Artists" 9). Sussman deals with the aspect of gender roles in the

formation of the Pre-Raphaelites' "monkish" brotherhood in his book *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*.

³⁴ Collinson also exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1850, but his painting, *Answering the Emigrant's Letter* (1849-50), is not particularly Pre-Raphaelite in its execution or treatment of subject. Charles Collins, a figure closely associated with the P.R.B., exhibited *Berengaria's Alarm for the Safety of her Husband, Richard Coeur de Lion, Awakened by the Sight of his Girdle Offered for Sale at Rome* (1850) at the Royal Academy in 1850, but it was in the following year, with his painting *Convent Thoughts* (1850-51), that he became noticed as working in the Pre-Raphaelite manner, particularly in his treatment of minute detail. Millais had one other work on exhibition at the Royal Academy, *Portrait of a Gentleman and His Grandchild* (1850), which depicts James Wyatt with four-year old Mary; although the portrait is Pre-Raphaelite in its treatment of space and detail (compared with the composition and detailed fabric of Millais's *Mariana* [1850-1]) and its naturalistic posing of the human portrait figure, it was not drawn into to the Pre-Raphaelite debate. *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* was renamed *The Annunciation* in 1853 "to guard against the imputation of 'popery'" (W.M. Rossetti, *P.R.B. Journal* 99).

³⁵ Young England was a splinter group of conservative and religiously-minded Tory aristocrats, whose unofficial leadership included George Smythe, Lord John Manners, Henry Hope, Alexander Baillie-Conchrane, and Benjamin Disraeli. The group was part of the same counter-reaction to the despiritualizing materialistic Radicalism, or Benthamite Utilitarianism, that engendered the Oxford Movement. The connection between Young England and the Tractarians is traceable to the early influence of Frederick Faber (1814-63), a disciple of Newman, upon Smythe and Manners.

³⁶ Wornum devotes much of his article decrying the fad for Gothic revival architecture, which had been led principally by one of the century's most famous converts to Catholicism, the architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-52).

³⁷ In his second letter to the *Times* (30 May 1851), Ruskin is able to allay Romanist and Tractarian suspicion, citing a letter from the group assuring him that the P.R.B. has no such sympathies (8). However, for more on the Anglo-Catholic leanings of members of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, see Bentley's "The Pre-Raphaelites and the Oxford Movement" and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona's "Oxford and the Pre-Raphaelites."

³⁸ Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's study of the homosocial world, *Between Men*, Sussman makes a similar argument about the sexual immaturity of the P.R.B., but without connecting it to any Catholic tendencies. He traces a pattern of sexual development in the early phases of Pre-Raphaelitism in which the Brotherhood becomes a rite of passage for individuals who would grow into "artistic manhood" (*Victorian Masculinities* 144).

³⁹ For further discussion of the critical reception of the 1850 works of Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais, see Sussman's article "The Language of Criticism" and Robyn Cooper's "The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s." See also J.B. Bullen's *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (6-48).

⁴⁰ Stone's assessment is tainted by a personal bias. He had in fact been favourably disposed towards Pre-Raphaelite art until his own painting was unkindly reviewed in 1850 by the Rossetti brothers in *The Critic* (Marsh 71-74).

⁴¹ Bentley has commented to me that Wornum may also be alluding to the Wretch in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While I feel that Wornum's comment refers to the cholera epidemic because of the language of pathology throughout the review, Bentley's comment is interesting in that Frankenstein's creature is the product of innovation that does not respect sacred boundaries of knowledge. Both Frankenstein and his creation perish on the ice of the Arctic Sea.

⁴² William Gaunt was one of the critics in the first half of the twentieth century to empty Pre-Raphaelitism of the principles that Hunt had tried to secure in his autobiography. Of the Pre-Raphaelite principle of fidelity to nature, Gaunt says, "There could be no such thing as truth to nature. ... They had embarked on a search for something that did not exist. ... Pre-Raphaelitism was a misunderstanding they all misunderstood" (24).

⁴³ In May 1851, Ruskin defended Pre-Raphaelite realism in two letters printed in the *Times*, and later that year published a pamphlet supporting *Pre-Raphaelitism*. Two weeks after Ruskin's initial letter to the *Times*, William Michael Rossetti, who had been the regular art critic for the *Spectator* since late in 1850, used Ruskin's assessment of Pre-Raphaelite realism as the basis for his defence of the works by Hunt and Millais in his fourth instalment of the Royal Academy review (31 May 1851).

⁴⁴ Ruskin in many ways facilitated the bond between the Pre-Raphaelites and Romanticism, and his own work provides one of Romanticism's continuing strains throughout the nineteenth century. For example, the title page of every volume of *Modern Painters* includes the following passage from Wordsworth's *The Excursion*:

Accuse me not

Of arrogance, ...

If, having walked with Nature,

And offered, far as frailty would allow,

My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,

I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,

Whom I have served, that their Divinity

Revolts, offended at the ways of men,

Philosophers, who, though the human soul

Be of a thousand faculties composed,

And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize

This soul, and the transcendent universe,

No more than as a mirror that reflects

To proud Self-love her own intelligence. (4.978-92)

Through frequent quotations of Wordsworth, Ruskin calls people back from their introverted and self-centred ways to the beauty of divine creation that they might recognize that their participation in a transcendent universe. For more on Ruskin's connection with Wordsworth (the poet most often referred to in *Modern Painters*), see the chapter entitled "Ruskin and Nature" in Robert Hewison's *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (13-29).

⁴⁵ Charles Lyell, generally considered the father of modern geology, published his three-volume *Principles of Geology* between 1830 and 1833. His work confirms the vast scale of geological time in "eons" and anticipates the evolutionary theories of

Charles Darwin with a “uniformitarian” theory of steady, regular natural forces that shape the world and everything in it. For a study of the encounter between science and poetry in the period leading up to Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, see William Rutland’s “Tennyson and the Theory of Evolution” and Michael Tomko’s “Varieties of Geological Experience.” The Pre-Raphaelites have a personal connection to Lyell: Dante Gabriel Rossetti was born Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti—Gabriel, after his father, and Dante, after Dante Alighieri, the subject of his father’s study. Charles comes from his godfather, Charles Lyell, the father of the famous geologist.

⁴⁶ The theory expounded by Gosse in his *Omphalos: an Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* attempted to reconcile the contradiction in the age of the earth between biblical accounts of creation (which, according to the internal evidence of the Bible, happened in 4004 B.C.) and geological evidence of eons of earth’s existence, most of which do not include humanity, as set for by such men as Charles Lyell, the author of *Principle of Geology* (1830-33). Gosse reasoned that, in the act of divine creation that drew forth the world out of nothingness, God left behind a false record of previous existence—in short, Gosse posits a divine cover-up. The absurd logic of the argument depends upon an equally absurd premise: Adam, the first man, had a belly-button (*Omphalos* is Greek for “navel”). Although he did not require a navel because he was never born, Adam must surely have had one, as do all complete human beings, just as the first trees God made had rings telling of ages in which they never grew. Thus, Gosse argued that the evidences of geology and palaeontology are a record of “prochonic” events (events “before time”) that had never actually existed but that were formed already in the past tense at the instant of creation (Thwaite 216).

⁴⁷ Millais's picture is sometimes connected to Tennyson's poem "Mariana in the South" in *Poems* (1832); however, it is clear that Millais had in mind the version of the earlier poem "Mariana" in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) because the painting, when it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, was accompanied by the poem's refrain instead of a title (Prettejohn 11; Fowle):

She only said, "My life is dreary,
 He cometh not," she said;
 She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!" ("Mariana" 9-12)

⁴⁸ The window was painted from stained glass in Merton College, Oxford. Alicia Faxon mentions Millais's trip to Oxford on 21 September 1850 to paint this picture in *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts* (64), but I have Bentley to thank for pointing this out to me.

⁴⁹ For further reading on this subject, see Mary Cowling's *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art*. For readings that deal specifically with Pre-Raphaelite art and its engagement with phrenology and physiognomy, see Susan P. Casteras' "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty," Julie F. Codell's "Expression Over Beauty: Facial Expression, Body Language, and Circumstantiality in the Paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood," and Stephanie Grilli's "Pre-Raphaelitism and Phrenology."

⁵⁰ Rossetti painted a much more conventional version of the Annunciation in 1861, depicting a well-clad Virgin, whose open-armed gesture abandons the body to the holy spirit about to enter it in the form of a dove.

⁵¹ For further reading on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's body and soul, see Jerome McGann's "Rossetti's Significant Details," as well as Bentley's two articles "'The Blessed Damozel': A Young Man's Fantasy" and "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*, *Sibylla Palmifera*, 'Body's Beauty,' and 'Soul's Beauty.'"

⁵² While I feel justified in making the claim that Morris's and Swinburne's volume represent the first complete volumes of Pre-Raphaelite poetry in term of their treatment of subjects, themes, and image, I must acknowledge an obvious omission: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Her exclusion from the present discussion is more than anything a matter of limited space, but my future work in this area will expand to address the treatment of the body in both this volume and her brother's later one, *Poems* (1870).

⁵³ An exact tally of Morris's contributions is impeded by the fact that the works appearing in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* were unsigned. Mackail and Fiona MacCarthy (though the latter seems to rely on the former here) agree that Morris contributed eight prose tales and five poems (Mackail, "William Morris" 198; MacCarthy 100). Mackail mentions "only one or two essays and reviews" (198). These works Mackail mentions are the review of Browning's *Men and Women* in the March number and the essay on the Amiens cathedral in the February number. To these contributions, MacCarthy also adds the article in the August number on Alfred Rethel's engravings (100), entitled "Death the Avenger and Death the Friend," which others have termed a story (Henderson 52), probably because Morris builds a narrative on Rethel's images instead of critiquing or assessing their aesthetic merit.

⁵⁴ Most new books were published in small editions in the range of 750 to 1250 copies. Works by established authors were often printed in larger quantities. For example, the first edition of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* was of 60,000 copies.

⁵⁵ The charge of escapism lasted throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. Some critics claim that Morris's poetry achieves mere historical accuracy in its medieval subjects without striking any universal chords of human experience. Laurence Perrine, for example, insists that any interest in "The Defence of Guenevere" must be merely academic in so far as it is "written by a reader of Malory for readers of Malory. . . . [Morris] assumes that the story told by Malory will be as vivid in his reader's mind as his own" (236), which presumably is how Perrine also feels about the poems Morris sets during the Hundred Years War and readers of Froissart's *Chronicles*. Similarly, Lionel Stevenson describes Morris's poetry as "outrageously trite," with characters lacking any "inner ethical conflict" and having the "life of automata rather than of people" (149).

⁵⁶ Arnold explains in the Preface to *Poems* (1853) that poetry should choose for its subject "an excellent action" (657), whose depiction will "inspirit and rejoice the reader" (655). He would likely have rejected Morris's dreamscape poetry because it partakes in the paralytic and melancholy habit of the nineteenth-century "dialogue of the mind with itself" (654). However, he would not have disapproved of Morris's use of the distant past as a setting; in fact, Arnold denies that all poetry "must leave the exhausted past, and draw its subjects from matters of present import" (656).

⁵⁷ For examples of this late-twentieth century reconsideration of Morris's volume as a challenge to contemporary values, see Florence Boos' "Sexual Polarities," Laura

Struve's "The Public Life and Private Desires of Women in William Morris's 'Defence of Guenevere,'" and Karen Herbert's "Dissident Language in *The Defence of Guenevere*."

⁵⁸ Morris has long been a figure associated with the dream-world. After meeting Morris and his friend Edward Burne-Jones in 1856, D.G. Rossetti said they were "the nicest young fellows—in *Dreamland*" (qtd. in Marsh, *Dante* 154). Walter Pater, in his unsigned 1868 review of Morris's poetry, found in *The Defence of Guenevere* volume that "the strangest creations of sleep seem here, by some appalling licence, to cross the limit of the dawn" (107), and in a revised version of the essay entitled "Aesthetic Poetry" that was printed in the 1889 edition of *Appreciations* but dropped in the 1890 and later editions, he refers to Morris as a "master of dreams" (222). Other commentators since have discussed the treatment of dreams in *The Defence of Guenevere*, including Margaret Lourie, whose insightful "The Embodiment of Dreams" sheds an important light on dream logic of the volume's "Blue Closet" group of poems, and Carole Silver, whose "Dreamers of Dreams" discusses the use Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne make of dreams in their poetry in relation to nineteenth-century dream theory. For other discussions of the dreamlike in Pre-Raphaelite work, see also John Dixon Hunt's *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination*, Wendell Stacy Johnson's "D.G. Rossetti as Painter and Poet," and John Heath-Stubbs' "Pre-Raphaelitism and the Aesthetic Withdrawal."

⁵⁹ Although not taken up by Millais, the fallen Magdalene figure was taken up by Hunt and Rossetti, as well as other artists who adopted a Pre-Raphaelite style of painting. Rossetti accused Frederick Sandys of plagiarizing his own treatment of the subject in *Mary Magdalene Leaving the House of Feasting* (1857). Robert Anning Bell's *Mary*

Magdalene (1903) is a latter-day example from the Arts and Craft movement of the Pre-Raphaelite influence on the treatment of Magdalene as the penitent sexualized woman. For more on this subject, see Marsh's chapter on "Fallen Magdalens" in *Pre-Raphaelite Women* (77-93).

⁶⁰ Morris entered Marlborough College, founded in 1843, just ahead of his 14th birthday in 1848 and was a student there until the age of 18 in 1852.

⁶¹ Morris's contemplated celibacy was not particularly eccentric in a culture that promoted it in both the public and private spheres as a form of restraint that preserved the social order. Houghton attributes this culture of continence to a twofold reaction against an emergent utopian socialist philosophy of free love and the profligate legacy of the Regency, combined with a mainstream awareness of the larger social dangers of prostitution and extramarital sex that greatly increased through the wide dissemination of the studies conducted by such proto-sociologists as William Acton and Henry Mayhew. To keep the body, and therefore the mind, pure in a society increasingly motivated by pleasure and less by the imperatives of religion, the Victorian Galahads of the British Empire were urged to seek strength—both physical and moral—in an ethic of *purity*. In the opening pages of his 1850 publication, *Social Aspects*, John S. Smith cautions against the national hubris that has marked other great nations of the past:

The whole array of history, speaking through Greece, Rome, France, Charles II courts, and George Barnwell ballads, is there to proclaim that, of all the plagues that human sin creates to scourge itself, there is none so paralyzing to the individual body and mind, so disastrous to the national safety, and poisonous to the High and the True in man, as immorality. (75-6)

Smith and the other voices of empire asked young men to guard against the dangers of lust by chastening their own perception with a lasting image of feminine purity kept before their eyes—not the Virgin Mary (mere popish idolatry), but the incontestably chastening figure of the Victorian Mother.

⁶² MacCarthy speculates that Morris’s “fits,” “rages,” “trances,” and “translations” were in fact the partial seizures of an epileptic (77-79).

⁶³ Many readers will associate this phase of Pre-Raphaelitism with D.G. Rossetti’s work following the death of Lizzie Siddal in 1862, including such paintings as *Beata Beatrix* (c. 1864-70) and *Proserpine* (1873-77), or with Swinburne’s dead or dying women in the first series of *Poems and Ballads* (1866), whose underlying aesthetic is influenced by Edgar Allen Poe. However, the Pre-Raphaelite moribund aesthetic of feminine beauty has an earlier history. Rossetti’s various studies of Dante’s Beatrice begin as early as 1849, with his pen and black ink design of *Dante Drawing an Angel of the First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, according to the 15 May 1849 entry in the *P.R.B. Journal* that William Michael Rossetti kept. Millais and Hughes had both eroticized dead or dying women in their paintings of suicidal Ophelia in 1852, as did the 1850 contributions to *The Germ*, the short-lived journal of the P.R.B., including D.G. Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel” (a work directly influenced by Poe’s “The Raven” [Marsh, *Dante* 23]), Thomas Woolner’s “Of my Lady in Death,” and Ellen Alleyn’s (Christina Rossetti’s adopted pseudonym for *The Germ*) “Dreamland.”

⁶⁴ In “Gertha Lovers,” one of his early prose romances that he contributed to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (July and August 1856 numbers), Morris uses a similar dream technique. Leuchnar dreams that “Gertha had come to him, shrieked out that Olaf

was slain, then thrown her arms about his neck” (188). He wakes to discover that the sensation of the embrace in his dream had been stimulated externally by his horse’s bridle hanging on his head. For more on nineteenth-century theories of the relation between external stimuli and dreams, see Silver’s “Dreamers of Dreams” (7-9).

⁶⁵ In his “Morris’ Guenevere: An Interpretation,” Perrine concludes that Guenevere is guilty of adultery, though not perhaps in the instance named by Gauwaine. The same is true in Malory: in Book Nineteen, chapter six, Guenever is being held captive by Meliaguant, who sees a spot of blood on her sheets and accuses her of sleeping with one of her wounded knights. In truth, she has been with Lancelot, who cut his hand climbing through the window. As Malory says, “Launcelot wente to bedde with the Quene and toke no force of his hurte honde, but toke hys plesaunce and hys lykyng untyll hit was the dawyng of the day” (2.371; bk. 19, ch. 6). She is falsely accused of sleeping with her wounded knights, but Meliagaunt is right to accuse her of adultery. Angela Carson in her “Morris’ Guenevere: A Further Note” likewise establishes Guenvere’s guilt, pointing out that her refutation of the charge carries with it an implicit admission of guilt. Moving closer to the point, John Hollow’s “The Judgement of God” insists that Guenevere does not deny the charges brought against her but rather her judges’ authority to rule in the matter.

⁶⁶ Perrine argues that the parable of the cloths is the only “genuine and sincere” part of the defence—the rest is but an attempt to delay legal proceedings and stay her execution long enough to give Launcelot time to rescue her. Ellen W. Sternburg makes a similar assumption in her essay “Verbal and Visual Seduction in ‘The Defence of Guenevere,’” and Dennis Balch interprets Guenevere’s defence as an act of both self-

preservation and self-destruction in his essay “Guenevere’s Fidelity to Arthur in ‘The Defence of Guenevere’ and ‘King Arthur’s Tomb.’” More recently, in “Arthurian Ghosts: The Phantom Art of the ‘Defence of Guenevere,’” W. David Shaw makes a more complicated argument concerning difficulty of reading Morris’s “phantom art,” which is “self-voiding and spectral,” but he similarly empties out Guenevere’s defence refers to it as a “sleight of hand” (300).

⁶⁷ For an example, see Chaucer’s “Legend of Good Women,” in which the two figures in the dialogue acknowledge that no blame should attend a true lover, for “Love ne wol nat countrepleted be / In right ne wrong” and conclude that “ne shall no trewe lover in helle” be (Prologue F lines 476-77, 553).

⁶⁸ Although closely linked with the Victorian Arthurian tradition now, Morris did not discover Malory until 1855, when he was visiting Burne-Jones in Birmingham. Burne-Jones discovered an edition of the *Morte d’Arthur* edited by Robert Southey at Cornish’s booksellers but could not afford the luxury edition, so Morris bought it (MacCarthy 96-7; Burne-Jones 1.116-17). For the two friends and D.G. Rossetti, their newly discovered *Morte d’Arthur* “became an alternative gospel” (Marsh, *Dante* 164)—indeed, there were, said Rossetti, but “two books in the world: the *Morte d’Arthur* and the Bible” (qtd. in Marsh, *Dante* 163-4). References to the *Morte d’Arthur* throughout the discussion rely on Southey’s 1817 edition.

⁶⁹ In “Under the Microscope” (1872), Swinburne famously dismissed the high moral tone of the *Idylls* by dubbing them the “Morte d’Albert,” because he thought that Tennyson glossed over the moral complications of Arthurian legend to paint an ideal

Arthur supposedly modelled on Victoria's dead husband and prince consort, Albert (*Swinburne Replies* 56).

⁷⁰ Malory puts Launcelot and Guenever alone together in her chamber, but discreetly turns his eyes away, saying, "And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make mention, for love at that time was not as is nowadays" (Bk. 20, ch. 3). In the preface to the edition of *Morte D'Arthur* that Morris owned, Southey writes, "The virtue of chastity might be dispensed with, provided they [women] were constant in their love," and counsels his readers to differentiate between "our ordinary morals which are conventional ... [and] those feelings which belong to human nature in all ages."

⁷¹ In the Introduction that she provides for *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* in the *Collected Works of William Morris*, May Morris includes a "fragment of a descriptive opening" of an earlier version of "The Defence of Guenevere." She says that "it is characteristic of my father's way of working that he should re-model a poem, sometimes on entirely different lines and in a different measure, discarding pages and pages of matter with the cheerful indifference of one to whom the production of these beautiful things appeared to be the spontaneous flow of a spring that is never dry" (15). W. Dixon Scott (39) and Paul Thompson suggest (49), however, that the poem's brilliant *in medias res* opening is the result of the printer's accidental omission of the first page of Morris's manuscript. David Latham has since convincingly demonstrated the apocryphal nature of the story of the printer's error and has dispelled the myth of Morris as a careless craftsman of poetry in his article "'A Matter of Craftsmanship.'"

⁷² Credit for the diagram must go to Bentley, who drew it on the chalkboard for the graduate students of English 566: Introduction to Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Poetry, in 1998-99. Bentley has since elaborated upon this drawing in his article “(Dis)continuities: *Arthur’s Tomb, Modern Painters*, and Morris’s Early Wallpaper Designs.”

⁷³ As Shaw notes (302), Morris makes another rhyme for the eye that the ear misses using “wands” as a rhyme for “commands” (16, 18).

⁷⁴ The readings include Dennis Balch’s “Guenevere’s Fidelity to Arthur in ‘The Defence of Guenevere’ and ‘King Arthur’s Tomb,’” and James P. Carley’s “‘Heaven’s Colour, the Blue’: Morris’s Guenevere and the Choosing Cloths Reread,” Josephine Koster Tarvers’ “‘The Deep Still Land of Colours’: Color Imagery in *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*.”

⁷⁵ Hollow and Perrine both explain the parable of the cloths as Guenevere’s choice of Launcelot over Arthur, the moral consequences of which only become clear with hindsight.

⁷⁶ “The Boy in the Mantle” has a long literary history, reaching back into the Middle Ages, which Francis James Child outlines in his Introduction to the ballad in volume one of his collection of *English and Scottish Ballads*, published in 1857, one year prior to the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere*. The ballad, however, is much more damning than either Malory or Morris could be with Guenevere: after Guenevere slanders the sole woman of virtue in the court, the little boy says to Arthur,

King, chasten thy wife,

Of her words shee is to bold:

Shee is a bitch and a witch,

And a whore bold:

King, in thine owne hall

Thou art a cuckold. (145-50)

⁷⁷ Now discredited as a pseudo-science, phrenology, or the study of determining character by the shape and size of the cranium, is the scientific descendant of Lavater's physiognomy, both of which enjoyed wide belief in Victorian England. Although phrenology was generally discredited as a true science in the twentieth century (the British Phrenological Society, founded in 1887, was only disbanded in 1967), it is founded on some scientific truth. The father of nineteenth-century phrenology, Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall, based his "true science of the mind" on the logical basis that the brain is the organ of the mind and that the distinct faculties of the mind must have specific seats or organs (the size of which is the measure of their power) in the brain and ultimately give it its shape. Furthermore, he argued that the skull takes its shape from the brain, which means that the surface of the skull provides a topography of innate psychological aptitudes and traits (van Wyhe). While it might not be possible to read character through the cranium's lumps, modern science recognizes that the brain, which governs much of the body, does in fact give shape to the skull. Furthermore, modern brain imaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), have demonstrated that functions of the brain are localized to specific areas, validating the phrenologists' belief of organs in the brain (van Wyhe). Phrenology is less a dinosaur of the scientific world than an ancestor. For example, palaeontologists, working as

phrenologists in disguise, will make endocasts from the skulls of early hominids to determine the shapes of their brains, using the evidence to suggest an enlarged node at Broca's region is evidence of language use. Proof of enlarged mental power and function lies in the increasing skull size of the species over the course of evolutionary time (van Wyhe). Though made by palaeontologists and neurologists, these are phrenological claims.

⁷⁸ *London Labour and the London Poor* first appeared as a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849-50. The four-volume work was completed in 1861-62.

⁷⁹ For an extended reading on these and other Pre-Raphaelite works, please see Stephanie Grilli's "Pre-Raphaelitism and Phrenology."

⁸⁰ Shaw cites Robert Buchanan and Jerome McGann as examples of critics who have offered materialist readings of Morris's poetry, citing the former's 1871 review "The Fleshly School of Poetry" and the latter's 1992 article "'A Thing to Mind': The Materialist Aesthetic of William Morris." Shaw ascribes a "fleshly" meaning to the use of the word "materialist" in the work of McGann, who, in fact, offers a bibliographer's reading of the poetry's "material encoding" (55)—that is, his concern is for matters of material production, involving typefaces, paper, binding, layout design, etc.

⁸¹ The poem by Morris and the painting by Rossetti show a meeting at Arthur's tomb between Laucelot and Guenvere, after she has taken up life as a nun. In the final book of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur is buried in Glastonbury, and when Guenevere hears of Arthur's death, she takes herself off to a convent in Amesbury.

⁸² Hollow offers one of the very few clear readings of this poem in his 1971 *PMLA* article "William Morris and the Judgement of God" suggesting that the title is

ironic because, in Morris's medieval world, the judgement of God is impenetrable for (or absent in) the human world.

⁸³ Thomas Huxley is generally given credit for coining the word agnostic at a party prior to the formation of the Metaphysical Society in 1869. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the first written record of the term from a report on one of Huxley's lectures that appeared in the 29 January 1870 *Spectator*. The word suggested itself to him "from St. Paul's mention of the altar to 'the Unknown God'" ("Agnostic").

⁸⁴ Strangely, the Gospels do not use this term which usually connotes inflamed emotions. Only Acts 1:3 mentions "his Passion." More commonly the Bible speaks of the "necessity" that the "Messiah" suffer (Mark 8: 31; Luke 17:25; 24:26, 46; Hebrews 9:26).

⁸⁵ St. Francis of Assisi is the first person recorded to bear the marks of stigmata in 1224, but in the hundred years following his death more than twenty cases of stigmata occur. By 1894, the number of recorded cases of stigmata would increase to 321, the majority of which came from Italy with 129 cases, to which France added sixty-seven, and Spain forty-seven; ninety-one percent of the cases originated with Catholic orders, such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who in their competition for canonized saints each recorded approximately one hundred cases (Imbert-Gourbeyre 536-37).

⁸⁶ After the first printed edition by Caxton in 1485, and the successive reprints by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498 and 1529, and by Robert Stansby in 1634, *Morte Darthur* was driven underground by Protestant Reformers, such as the Puritan preacher Nathaniel Baxter (1569-1611), who could countenance neither the moral indiscretions accommodated by codes of chivalry and courtly love nor the evident Catholic idolatry in

the “vile and stinking story of the Sangreall” (qtd. in Paryns 59), and it was driven further underground by the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which, in its attempt to retain legitimacy, had no desire to be associated with Grail cults or the fantastical world of Arthurian romance. Two centuries later, the Arthurian romance resurfaced when three editions of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* appeared in 1816 and 1817. The two 1816 editions were based on a 1634 text printed full of errors, but the 1817 edition edited by Southey had taken for its copytext Caxton’s original 1485 imprint (Barber 227-28).

There were few literary adaptations of the Arthurian legend: John Dryden writes *King Arthur or, The British Worthy* (1691) for an opera performance, but this narrative is based on the conflicts between Arthur’s Britons and the Saxons, not on the stories centred in Camelot; Sir Walter Scott anonymously publishes *The Bridal of Triermain*, which blends elements of the Arthurian legend with the *Sleeping Beauty* fairytale. Wordsworth’s “The Egyptian Maid,” which deals with Merlin and the Lady of the Lake, appears in 1822, and Emerson’s “Merlin I” and “Merlin II” appear in 1840. It is the Gothic Revival of the mid-nineteenth century that would inspire so many literary versions of the Arthurian legend.

⁸⁷ The prefatory note was part of Arnold’s attempt to meet the charge of obscurity made by Arthur Clough and others (Dawson 72, 89). In his letter to Clough of 25 August 1853, Arnold says that “[J.A. Froude] recommends prefacing *Tristram and Iseult* with an extract for Dunlop’s *Hist. of Fiction* to the story” (*Letters of Matthew* 140).

⁸⁸ Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* has two Holy Grails: a figurative one and a literal one. The literal Grail is the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper and which Joseph of Arimathea reputedly used to catch the blood falling from Christ’s crucified

body; the figurative Holy Grail, in the metaphorical sense of a desired but rarely achieved object or goal of perfection, is a nation ruled by law and order. In the *Idylls*, Tennyson all but discards the former in favour of pursuing the latter.

The *Idylls*, reworked and revised, reflects the responsibility of a poet laureate. Tennyson published his *Idylls* in several editions throughout the nineteenth century. The first four idylls (“Enid,” “Vivien,” “Elaine,” and “Guinevere”) were published in 1859. In 1869, Tennyson published “The Coming of Arthur,” “Pelleas and Ettarre,” “The Holy Grail,” and “The Passing of Arthur.” “The Last Tournament” appeared in 1871, “Gareth and Lynette” in 1872, and “Balin and Balan” in 1885. In the final dedicatory section of the poem, “To the Queen,” which was published in 1873, Tennyson makes an explicit connection between the death of Prince Albert and the Passing of Arthur.

The final version of the *Idylls* consciously tries to affirm a personal relationship between the ruler and the ruled, for whom the conscience of the king was as their own. The true Grail—the desired but elusive quest object—of the *Idylls* is good and lasting governance. Herein also lies the tragedy of the *Idylls* with the factional dissolution of Camelot’s governing body, the Round Table, and a king who laments,

Ill doom is mine

To war against my people and my knights.

The king who fights his people fights himself.

And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke

That strikes them dead is as my death to me.

(“The Passing of Arthur” 70-4)

In the wake of the American and French revolutions and their dangerous, and often bloody, experiments in natural rights and freedoms, the Victorians clung to a domestic peace that was tenuous, especially during the Time of Troubles in the 1830s and '40s when a growing portion of the populace was agitating for political reform and the sort of democratic changes enshrined in the Peoples' Charter. Tennyson's king is a response to the political tensions of the age. As an embodiment of stable rule, Arthur is the figurative Grail that his knights overlook to instead pursue the literal but illusory one.

Although the infidelity of Guinevere divides Camelot into warring factions, the Order of the Round Table is decimated by the quest for the Holy Grail, or the chalice of the Last Supper, which, as legend has it, Joseph of Arimathea had brought to Britain. Tennyson faithfully adheres to the account given in the *Morte D'Arthur* of these two precipitators of ruin, but he alters their political significance. In the seventh chapter of Book XIII of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur is present when the Grail, shrouded in "white samyte," enters the hall (2.209). Arthur is about to give thanks for the vision when Gawain swears an oath to pursue a quest of the holy vision, which the other knights take up in a contagion of enthusiasm. The king regrets the rashness of their vow, for it will, he says, "berafte me the fayrest felauship and truest of knyghthode" (2. 210). In the *Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur suffers a personal loss; in the *Idylls*, Tennyson's king suffers a political catastrophe. Tennyson in fact dissociates the king from the Grail quest as much as possible by removing him from the original scene in which the Grail appears. Arthur is administering justice and preserving order in the land when Galahad sits in the Siege Perilous and invokes the Grail vision that tempts the Round Table knights on the quest from which so few return. When he learns of what has happened in his absence, Arthur

says that the vision is sent as a “sign to maim this Order which I made” (“The Holy Grail” 297). The “Order” to which he refers is of course the Order of the Knights of the Round Table, but Tennyson loads the word in such a way that its meaning clearly encompasses the public order he will no longer be able to enforce when his knights leave on the quest. Frustrated with the foreseen collapse of the Round Table, Arthur asks his knights,

What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales—

nay ... but men

With strength and will to right the wrong'd, of power

To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,

.....

But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.

Go, since your vows are sacred, being made.

Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm

Pass thro' this hall—how often, O my knights,

Your places being vacant at my side,

This chance of noble deeds will come and go

Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires

Lost in the quagmire! (“The Holy Grail” 306-20)

Arthur’s remonstrance represents the conservative Victorian reaction against the dangers of the Romantic imagination that pursues unrealizable sublime visions into quagmires of inaction. To pursue an unattainable sublime vision of the grail, his knights abandon the responsibility that falls to everyman to perform his social duty by actively contributing to

the rule of law. When the knights return to the king to report their failures (Galahad, having seen the grail, is assumed into heaven), Arthur laments the quest that has left “a lean Order ... and ... human wrongs to right themselves” (“The Holy Grail” 890-4). Tennyson’s telling of events in *Idylls* has its basis in Malory’s, but the emphasis of their importance has undergone a change from the personal to the political, from the mystical to the secular.

⁸⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* descends from a single manuscript copy originally bound with three other poems, *Pearl* (thought to be by the author of the *Gawain* poem), *Patience*, and *Cleanness*. The manuscript was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was edited and printed for the first time in 1839. Two further editions were published in 1864 and 1869. The British Museum acquired the manuscript of “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” in 1802 (Hale and Stevenson (391). Georgina Burne-Jones recalls that Morris and her husband, Edward, spent their evenings reading Chaucer, and “in the daytime they went often to look at the painted books in the Bodleian. Old chronicles too they devoured, and anything of any kind written about the Middle Ages” (1.104). Silver names *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in her list of medieval texts that Morris either owned or knew well (*Romance* 158).

⁹⁰ The Articles of Faith originally numbered forty-two in 1553. In the Church convocation of 1563, the number was reduced to thirty-nine, and an Act of Parliament in 1571 ordered clergymen to subscribe to them. There are two editions of the 39 Articles: those of 1563 are in Latin and those of 1571 are in English. The 39 Articles constitute a Protestant repudiation of certain Catholic teachings and practices, including those dealing

with Transubstantiation (XXVIII), the sacrifice of the Mass (XXXI), and the sinlessness of Our Lady (XV).

⁹¹ Twelfth- and thirteenth-century medieval French Arthurian narratives make it clear that grails were vessels that could be either secular or holy. Irish and Welsh versions of quest narratives adhere to the French with translations of “Holy Vessel,” *Soidheach Naomhtha*, and “Holy Greal,” *y seint greal* (Barber 214-15), but Malory uses a form that opens up the word to etymological abuse. Richard Barber identifies two other contemporaries of Malory—John Hardyng and Henry Lovelich—who perpetuate the “royal blood” etymology by using the misreading of “sang real” for “san greal” (227). Interestingly, D.G. Rossetti painted three watercolours for which he uses the holy “grael” variant: *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* (1857), *Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Receiving the Sanc Grael* (1864), *Sir Launcelot’s Vision of the Sanc Grael* (1857; unfinished study). He later paints another version of *The Damsel of the Sanct Grael* (1874) in oil, but in a style more typical of his later work.

⁹² In Malory, Launcelot is rendered unconscious when he tries to enter the chamber of the grail. At this point in the narrative, his quest ends, and he says, “Now I thanke God for Hys grete mercy of that I have sene, for hit suffisith me. For, as I suppose, no man in thys worlde have lyved bettir than I have done to encheve that I have done” (307; bk. 17; ch. 16).

⁹³ May Morris indicates that her father intended to write a complete Arthurian cycle (*Collected Works* 1.xix); Mackail too records the same intention to take up the cycle in 1870: “the Arthurian legend once more attracted him, not now filling his mind. ... But on its mystical and religious side the cycle of the Sangreal was a subject from

which, like Tennyson, though for different reasons, he instinctively shrank” (1.209-10). Although one would expect that such a complete cycle from an older Morris would have been much different in tone, it is interesting to note that the poet still shrank from the mystical side of the cycle, implying that his is a poetry much more focused on the material.

⁹⁴ Here, my ideas are informed by a reading of Sir Walter Scott’s “Essay on Romance,” first published in the supplement to the 1824 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which he notes the behaviour of those “who affected to found their attachment on the purest and most delicate metaphysical principles [but who] carried on their actual intercourse with a license altogether inconsistent with their sublime pretensions,” while also being informed by Ruskin’s concept of the grotesque as a broken vision of the sublime in the third volumes of both *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*.

⁹⁵ Before the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* in 1858, the only two English editions of Grimm fairytales to contain the story of “Rapunzel” were *Household Stories Collected by the Brothers Grimm*, illustrated by E.H. Wehnert (London, 1853), and *Home Stories*, translated by M.L. Davis (London, 1855). Judging by textual evidence, Lourie suggests that Morris drew inspiration—and exact lines (5-6)—from the Wehnert edition.

⁹⁶ The anonymous critic of the *Saturday Review* called the poems “cold, angular, and artificial” (45) and B. Ifor Evans noted a “dark weirdness” in “Rapunzel” (48).

⁹⁷ That Morris knew “Hand and Soul” is evident from other echoes of it in his prose romance “The Hollow Land,” which was published in the September and October 1856 numbers of *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*.

⁹⁸ Strands of Rapunzel’s hair would appear in the coming decades of Pre-Raphaelite art, which would continue to code dangerous female sexuality in hairstyles. The snare of virtue lurks in the *femme fatale’s* loosened hair, as in Rossetti’s painting of semi-clad women plaiting or brushing ripples of Pre-Raphaelite hair, the best example of which is *Lady Lilith* (1864-68), whose hair fills the centre of the painting as the erotic web set to catch Adam. In something like John William Waterhouse’s *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1893), depicting the Keatsian temptress wrapping her hair about the neck of a weakening knight, the code is radically simplified. Although it is never free from the connotation of desire, long flowing golden hair is also a central trope in the conception of courtly love and an indicator of maidenly innocence and virtue, as in Millais’s *Apple Blossoms* (1856-58) or in his Rapunzel-like *The Bridesmaid* (1851). Many Pre-Raphaelite artists would seem to take their lead from Morris, paradoxically combining carnal lust and spiritual salvation in images of feminine beauty to complicate viewers’ modes of perceptions and association. For example, in *Apple Blossoms*, the viewer’s quiet contemplation of pastoral innocence in the group of girls is broken by a sense of urgency concentrated in the bottom right corner of the canvas, where a young woman strikes an abandoned pose that suggests a loosening of decorum effected by seclusion and carefree maidenly innocence; however, her direct gaze engages the viewer with a sexual frankness that is conscious of the arched blade of time’s scythe above her head. In *The Bridesmaid*, Millais similarly loads innocence with sexuality, visually through the

profusion of hair that frames the orange blossom (a symbol of both purity and marriage) and the rather phallic caster, and thematically as it catches a moment of innocent sexual curiosity by depicting the tradition in which a young girl passes wedding cake nine times through a ring to gain a vision of her future husband. Many other Pre-Raphaelite women wait for a freedom that is represented as sexual liberation. Millais shows his *Mariana* (the forlorn and death-driven maiden of Tennyson's poem) with her head tilting back, hips straining towards the empty horizon, and her tightly bound hair waiting to fall at the arrival of her lover who "cometh not"; Hunt paints *The Lady of Shalott* (1886-1905) at the moment she breaks the confinement of her tower, depicting her short-lived freedom as a moment of sexual release in the wildness of her flying hair. Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry, including works by Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris, often depict the experience of death as the pleasure of letting go of sexual restraint.

⁹⁹ Although Morris did not publish "Rapunzel" until 1858, the kernel of the poem, the Prince's song about Guendolen, appears in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in July 1856, as a poem entitled "Hands."

¹⁰⁰ Sadoff says that "wishing creates fulfillment" (158); Stallman uses the phrase "wish fulfillment" (228).

¹⁰¹ His closest friend and one-time roommate, Burne-Jones, saw days of the week in colours (Sunday, for example, was gold); and when there was talk of clearing the Oxford Union walls of the traces of Rossetti's abortive fresco project, Morris in a letter to James Richard Thurdfield defended his own painting of a "Tristram and Iseult" scene, not for its strength of design or perspective, but for its "merits as to colour" (1.101).

¹⁰² Guenevere makes the association with heaven in the parable of the cloths in “The Defence of Guenvere” (“heaven’s colour, the blue” [38]). MacCarthy, in her biography, claims “blue [is] the colour Morris most associated with pleasure and desire” (113).

¹⁰³ In “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Launcelot describes Guenevere as sleeping “lily-like” (57), and rising in the morning with hands full of “scarlet lilies, such / As Maiden Margaret bears” (79-80). The traditional symbolism of the white lily albeit ill fits Guenevere, who is neither pure nor virginal, but her association with St. Margaret, a virgin martyr, suits her little better. Morris further complicates the relationship of vehicle and tenor by tinting the lilies scarlet, a colour symbolizing both carnal desire and martyrdom in *The Defence of Guenevere* collection. “The Blue Closet,” one of the “Other” poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, uses a red lily, which shoots through the floor “with a patch of earth from the land of the dead” (61), as part of its tightly managed symbolic language betokening the love that exists beyond death.

¹⁰⁴ The idea of “semiotic undertone” of prosody originates with Julia Kristeva, who designates “two modalities” of the “signifying process: ... *the semiotic* ... and *the symbolic*. These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved” (34).

¹⁰⁵ A similar example occurs in Hans Christian Andersen’s “Thumbelina.” Thumbelina is given by a fairy to a woman wishing for a child. However, Thumbelina, or Tiny, is scarcely half the size of a thumb and is carried off by a toad, who would have her for a daughter-in-law. At the end of a series of adventures that mark her difference

from the animal world, she meets a fairy king who renames her Maia. In Greek mythology, Maia is the daughter of Atlas and mother of Hermes. Zeus was father of Hermes. He saw Maia and immediately fell in love with her. Maia's encounter with Zeus is similar to that of Thumbelina's with the fairy king, who falls in love with the girl who is not diminutive to him, and thus discards her former name because it does not suit her in her new life to rename her Maia.

¹⁰⁶ In a chapter devoted to "The Pre-Raphaelites" in *Degeneration*, Nordau points to the work of Morris and Swinburne as examples of degeneracy, but the latter receives the honorary distinction of being a "higher degenerate" (94).

¹⁰⁷ Three versions of the story survive. In one version, Swinburne drunkenly searches for his hat, using fit as his method. The hats that did not fit he stamped flat. A second version involves an accomplice, who assisted Swinburne in making a double line of the members' hats over which they ran a one-legged race. A third version states that Swinburne had shown up to the Arts Club with no hat at all when he made his assault on the cloakroom (Rooksby 129).

¹⁰⁸ When W.M. Rossetti questioned the degree to which his poems were dramatic, Swinburne replied, "As to the antitheism of 'Félice' I know of course that *you* know that the verses represent a mood . . . not unfamiliar to me; but I must nevertheless maintain that no reader (*as* a reader) has a right (whatever he may conjecture) to assert that this is *my* faith and that the faith expressed in such things as the 'Litany' or 'Carol' ['A Christmas Carol'] or 'Dorothy' ['St. Dorothy'] is not. Of course it is a more serious expression of feeling; and of course this is evident; but it is not less formally dramatic

than the others; and this is the point on which it seems necessary to insist and fair to enlarge” in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (*Letters* 1.193).

¹⁰⁹ Swinburne’s criticism of the prudery and power of publishing houses and circulating libraries in many ways anticipates the complaints that Thomas Hardy would make in “Candour in English Fiction” in 1890.

¹¹⁰ Cecil Y. Lang conjectures that this tutor was James Leigh Joynes (*Letters* 1.77n).

¹¹¹ Buchanan referred to Swinburne as an “intellectual hermaphrodite” in his “Fleshly School” review (335); Thais E. Morgan discovers “male lesbian bodies” in his essay on Courbet, Baudelaire, and Swinburne; Camille Paglia considers manly women in *Poems and Ballads* and calls Meleager in Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) a “male heroine” (469); Allison Pease thinks Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus” and his discussion in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* reifies “the misogyny implicit” in Ovid’s myth (55); and Catherine Maxwell discovers in Swinburne’s work the “female sublime” in her book of the same name. Several of Swinburne’s contemporaries made their *ad hominem* attacks by effeminizing the poet, including Buchanan, who sneered at the poet’s “falsetto voice” (*Fleshly* 31), implying castration. Alfred Austin, who also mentions the “falsetto notes which appear to compose most of Mr. Swinburne’s emasculated poetical voice,” comments that Swinburne’s poetry reveals a “feminine fault” (109).

¹¹² In a letter dated 1867, Swinburne says, “I should like to see two things there [at Eton] again: the river—and the block” (*Letters* 1.256).

¹¹³ Citing one of Swinburne’s letters about a tutor whose “pet subject was *metre*” and who, according to Swinburne, “never wanted reasons for making rhymes between his

birch and my body” (qtd. in Prins 122), Prins claims that the poet “learns to internalize the beat of poetry” and that “memorization becomes a form of incorporation for him” (122). In the letter she cites, Swinburne says, “I can boast that of all the swishings I ever had up to seventeen and over, I never had one for a false quantity [i.e. an error in scanning classical metre] in my life” (1.78). (Swinburne does receive a swishing, however, for his experiments in Galliambics, a notoriously difficult meter used in Greek poetry [*Letters* 1.110]). Although this tutor, whose pet subject was metre, would use the birch to reinforce lessons in classical quantitative metre with other students, he never needed to do so in Swinburne’s case. According to Swinburne, it was his problems not with poetry but *arithmetic* that gave his tutor “reasons for making rhymes between his birch and [Swinburne’s] body” (1.78). Were Prins’ estimation of the birch switch’s value as a pedagogical device accurate, then Swinburne ought to have been a renowned mathematician.

¹¹⁴ Prins and other commentators who tend to read Swinburne’s poetry this way work on the assumption that the masochist is a figure of passivity; however, modern theorists of masochism, such as Gilles Deleuze and Anita Philips, recognize the contractual nature of sadomasochistic sexuality, in which the supposedly submissive masochistic subject effectively controls and dictates the conditions and terms of the relationship. The submissive figure in fact controls both pain and pleasure. Swinburne exercises a like control of his expressions of both pleasure and pain in his poetry, and his revisions to poems and his own critical work confess a careful awareness and interrogation of the body and its being-in-the-world.

¹¹⁵ Although Donald Thomas dismisses Swinburne's letter to Richard Monckton Milnes (*Letters* 1.76) regarding the sadistic tutor Joynes as a hoax, the content of the letter (whether true to historical fact or not) reveals a penetrating understanding of masochistic pleasure that would wait to be validated by writers such as Philips in the next century.

¹¹⁶ Swinburne speaks "in defence of work done for the work's sake" in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (32); the idea appears frequently in his critical work (for example, in his essays on Baudelaire and Meredith), and he actually uses the phrase "art for art's sake" in a study on the visionary work of William Blake in 1868 (*William Blake* 101). The slogan is perhaps most closely associated with Walter Pater, who uses the phrase first in his 1868 "Poems by William Morris," an essay whose ideas he would later develop in "Aesthetic Poetry" in his 1889 *Appreciations*.

¹¹⁷ While Acton is often cited for proof of the Victorian belief in female sexual indifference, he does say that to "suppose an absence of the sexual ideas ... is to suppose an imperfect and objectless human being" (161). Nonetheless, the sexual instinct predominates in men, according to Acton.

¹¹⁸ The trial ended in May 1895. Wilde was charged and sentenced to two years of penal servitude with hard labour for gross indecency under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 (48 & 49 Vict. C.69). The Act, which was designed to "make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes," setting out the penalties for sexual offences against women and minors and strengthening laws against prostitution, very deliberately recriminalized male homosexuality. The scandalous trial can also be viewed as an exertion of the sexual

orthodoxy of a culture enshrined in law at the moment heteronormative sexuality was facing its strongest challenge to date from figures such as John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis, whose joint work in the 1890s sought to normalize homosexual behaviour (or, to use their preferred term, “inversion”).

¹¹⁹ For more on the social and sexual bonds that the Victorian woman and her female friends cultivated and how these relationships affected notions of sexuality and gender for women, see Sharon Marcus’s *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. See also Vol. 2 of Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder’s *The Woman Question: Social Issues*, which considers how Victorian England imagined issues of female sexuality and gender in relation to the law, science, work, and religion.

¹²⁰ In *Essays and Studies*, Swinburne shows his appreciation of *Helen of Troy* in the description of its subject’s dangerous beauty: “the picture of Helen, with Parian face and mouth of ardent blossom, a keen red flower-bud of fire, framed in broad gold of wide-spread lock, the sweet sharp smile of power set fast on her clear curved lips, and far behind her the dull flame of burning and lights from reddened heaven on dark sails of lurid ships ...” (99).

¹²¹ Swinburne co-authored “Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868” with William Michael Rossetti, who did “Part I” of the two-part essay on the exhibition. Swinburne’s part is notable for its concluding seven pages (45-51).

¹²² The *femme fatale* figure in “Dolores” is not based on Mencken, whom Swinburne does not meet until the winter of 1867–68, during which time he had a scandalous affair with the American entertainer, whose indecorous theatre performances had outraged the public (Rooksby 156-59).

¹²³ There is much speculation about the object of the proposal, the most likely candidates of which are Mary Gordon (Swinburne's cousin) and Jane Faulkner. See Rooksby (102-07) and Thomas (76-77).

¹²⁴ In *Poems and Ballads*, "Love" can refer to Eros (in the broad sense) or be an address to an object of desire, and sometimes Swinburne multiplies the ambiguity of the word by employing its different referents closely together or using it at the start of a line where the significance of the initial uppercase letter is ambiguous (see the third and fourth sonnets of "Hermaphroditus"). However, the Love that builds himself a pleasure-house in this given example has more in common with other personifications in the volume that clearly refer to Cupid. For examples of Love as Cupid, see "Laus Veneris," in which Love is Venus's faithful attendant, or "Fragoletta" (a poem closely related in theme to and immediately following "Hermaphroditus"), in which Fragoletta is named as "Love's sister, by the same / Mother as Love" (39-40) and in which Venus is explicitly named (28).

¹²⁵ Most critics acknowledge Tennyson's indebtedness to the "pleasure-dome" in "Kubla Khan" by Coleridge, whom Tennyson admired and Swinburne refers to as the "master of masters" (*Replies* 97).

¹²⁶ Several critics have commented on Swinburne's heavy use of the device, including George Saintsbury, who in 1876, bewailed the fact that the "dangerous licence of the figure called chiasmus has been to him [Swinburne] even as a siren, from whose clutches he has been hardly saved" (105). As corrective to Saintsbury and other critics who dismissed Swinburne's work as mere mannerism and "word-music" (both Buchanan [30] and Morley [26] use this phrase), Rosenberg has noted that Swinburne's use of

paradox, alliteration, and antithesis spring from “deep impulses” of a poet who in fact “*perceived* in paradoxes: pain passing into pleasure, bitter into sweet, loathing into desire” (150). Other critics who have commented specifically on Swinburne’s use of chiasmus include J.B. Bullen (187) and Randolph Hughes (501n). Catherine Maxwell, however, offers the best analysis to date of Swinburne’s use of chiasmus in chapter five of *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (204-05).

¹²⁷ In “*Laus Veneris*,” the captive knight of the Tannhäuser legend lives within Venus’s post-Christian era residence of Mount Horsel, a “barren bower” in which Love (Cupid) sheds “fruitless flowers” (325, 328). (It is interesting to note that in “*Laus Veneris*” heaven is a barren place, too [413]). To the title character of “*Faustine*” hiding in a “straitened barren bed” (128), the speaker exclaims, “What sterile growths of sexless root / ... / What flower of kisses without fruit” (129-31). In “*Dolores*,” the speaker blasphemously worships the title character, in a hellish parody of the Virgin Mary, as “O splendid and sterile Dolores, / Our Lady of Pain” (71-72). Fruitless desire and barren love are themes repeated throughout the volume, including in such poems as “*The Triumph of Time*,” “*Anactoria*,” “*Satia Te Sanguine*,” and “*Félise*.” In the “*Dedication*” poem, Swinburne says that his verses, after having been “Blown white round the capes of the north; / Or in islands where myrtles are sterile / And loves bring not forth” (22-24), will be “cast forth [i.e., published] without fruit upon air” (6).

¹²⁸ The same blindness marked by the same rhetorical device affects the subsequent poem in *Poems and Ballads*, “*Fragoletta*,” with a similar sexual ambiguity. The speaker begins this poem with an address to “Love” as the “son of grief begot by joy,” but then asks of the traditionally blind Cupid, “Being sightless, wilt thou see?”

Being sexless, wilt thou be / Maiden or boy?" (1-4). The second stanza shifts to the dream of one whose "strange lips" are coloured with "ambiguous blood" (6-7), and then in the subsequent stanzas, the poem returns to a second-person address ("thee") to what appears to be a female love object, who is named as "Love's sister" (39). The poem's climactic expression strains both passion and sight in another instance of chiasmus:

O sole desire of my delight!
 O sole delight of my desire!
 Mine eyelids and eyesight
 Feed on thee day and night
 Like lips of fire. (21-25)

In this instance, chiasmus calls readers back to retrace the X-shaped pattern, which Swinburne visually disguises in the parallel elements that both begin with "de-." Indeed, the lines blur into one another because lines are almost perfect reflections of each other, crossing only parts of words. The speaker, whose own eyesight is worn out through the intensity of his own gaze, blurs all the markers of sex in the object of desire. The subsequent descriptions of her "close hair" (31), "strait soft flanks" (32), and bosom that is both "low" and "barren" (31, 47), as well as the phallic and Medusan implications of the "serpent in [her] hair" (51), create another figure of indeterminate sex and strange longing, which becomes all the stranger in the descriptions of the figure's "strange lips" in which "ambiguous blood" has run cold (6, 7, 41). In a poem that vaguely combines bisexuality and effeminacy, the suggestion that the desired figure is also dead compounds the strangeness of the poem's dealing with desire with hints of necrophilia. By the end of the poem, it is no longer clear that "Love," who is the "son of grief begot by joy" in the

first two lines of the poem, and “Love’s sister,” as she is named at line 39, are different figures. Instead, Fragoletta seems to possess the sexual characteristics of both men and women, and could be either “maiden or boy” like the hermaphrodite (5). As a blazon describing the “head,” “lips,” “cheeks,” “hair,” “throat,” “bosom,” and “feet” of its subject, “Fragoletta” does not construct a clear image of her (or him?) because she (or he?) undermines the strict binary of heterosexuality. The poem invokes desire, but a clear vision of the object of desire never forms because the vagueness of sex in the desired object (“being sexless”) becomes the mark of blindness (“being sightless”) in a poem of sexual ambiguity.

¹²⁹ Maxwell suggests that Swinburne had this Keats poem in mind when he thought of the hermaphrodite’s “sterile limbo” (207).

¹³⁰ In his “Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” which was his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1857 and later served as an introduction to *Essays and Criticism* (1865), Arnold said that the critic should endeavour to “see the object as in itself it really is” (258). In the Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Pater picks up this tag of Arnold’s, saying it “has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever,” but points his readers towards “aesthetic criticism,” in which “the first step of seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly” (xxix). In “The Critic as Artist,” Oscar Wilde develops Pater’s highly subjective notion of art criticism and the idea of “art for art’s sake” (of which Swinburne was an early English proponent) in the exchanges between Gilbert and Ernest, who use Arnold’s aim of the critic as a point of departure. Responding to Gilbert’s idea that the “highest Criticism . . . criticises not merely the

individual work of art, but Beauty itself, and fills with wonder a form which the artist may have left void, or not understood, or understood incompletely,” Ernest confirms the idea that the “highest Criticism, then, is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not” (159). Swinburne’s response to his critics marks a shift in literary criticism that asserts that much of the meaning of a work of art is generated in and by the spectator.

¹³¹ As one of many who have “translated into written verse this sculptured poem,” Swinburne accounts for the tradition underlying both the statue and his poem in classical literature as follows:

How favourite and frequent a vision among the Greeks was this of the union of sexes in one body of perfect beauty, none need be told. In Plato the legend has fallen into a form coarse, hard, and absurd. The theory of God splitting in two the double archetype of man and woman, the *original hermaphrodite* which had to get itself bisected into female and male, is repulsive and ridiculous enough. But the idea thus incarnate, literal or symbolic, is merely beautiful. (“Notes” 28; emphasis mine)

When it comes time to tell the tale of the hermaphrodite, which according to the poet is so well known that “none need be told,” Swinburne in fact tells the wrong one. The account that Swinburne offers in his critical rebuttal is not really the tale of the “original hermaphrodite” but the myth of the prelapsarian androgyne found in Plato’s *Symposium*. In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes recounts the tale of human ontogeny in the spherically double-faced, double-sexed beings, androgynes, with “two organs of generation and everything else to correspond” (59). When, with overreaching ambition, the creatures

attempt heaven, Zeus strikes them down and divides them. Where once there was unified harmony, there now exists division and discord, out of which desire emerges as one of the consequences of the fall. Ironically, Swinburne grounds his defence of the poem in the wrong classical narrative. This moment of misdirection does not betray a lack of learning in Swinburne, of whom Ruskin said, “He is so boundlessly beyond me in all power and knowledge” (*Letters* 1.183). As one of the strongest classical scholars of the Victorian era, Swinburne would well have known that the real basis of the statue lies not in Plato but in Ovid.

Plato’s figure of the androgyne posits an ideal prelapsarian figure of wholeness whose falls gives rise to sexual division and desire; however, the tale of Hermaphroditus starts with division and desire and results in emasculation. In Ovid’s telling of the tale in the fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*, Hermaphroditus (son of Hermes and Aphrodite) comes to the pool in which the nymph Salmacis dwells. She sees in him her “heart’s desire” but fails to seduce the young beautiful boy, who is embarrassed by her overtures. Feigning compliant resignation, Salmacis pretends to accept that her love is unrequited and departs, leaving the boy thinking he has the pool to enjoy in solitude. Salmacis, however, remains nearby and secretly gazes spellbound as the boy strips down by the water’s edge, feeling her “desire / Flame[] for his naked beauty” (4.346-47). When he claps his hands to his sides and dives in the pool, she dives in after him and cleaves to the struggling boy and prays to the gods that the two shall never be separated. The gods grant her prayer, and “thus, when in fast embrace their limbs were knit, / They two were two no more, nor man, nor woman— / One body then that neither seemed or both” (4.375-77). However, it is the male consciousness of Hermaphroditus that lives on in the

figure of the hermaphrodite, who retains the masculine name after the transformation. Looking at the pool that “had rendered him / Half woman and his limbs now weak and soft,” Hermaphoditus raises his “unmanned” voice in a curse upon the water such that thenceforth any man who bathes in the pool will “emerge half woman, weakened instantly” (4.384-85). His parents grant his wish and drug the water “with that power impure” (4.388).

¹³² The quotation is an allusion to William Kirby’s 1826 work, *On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God as Manifested in the Creation of Animals and in Their History, Habits and Instincts*. To accommodate the increasingly irrefutable evolutionary narrative, the nineteenth century adapted it to fit its core belief in progress in such a way as to retain an essentially Christian teleology; however, smoothing the way for Charles Darwin meant sacrificing the myth of the androgyne as an ideal creature in whom the sexes are harmoniously fused. As Wendy Bashant notes, Darwin, in a discussion of the “Lower Stages in the Genealogy of Man” in *The Descent of Man*, places sexual ambiguity in the distant past with “some remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom [who] appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous” (225-26). In the movement from “lower stages” to upper, Darwin makes sexual division a key moment in the narrative of humanity, preserving the Christian and Victorian notions of progress. Even before Darwin’s first major work, *Origin of Species*, appears in 1859, the word “sexuality” enters the English lexicon with the same progressive notion of difference advancing nature through biological diversity and hybrid vigour. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites one such early usage of “sexuality” in the introduction to entomology of

Kirby's aforementioned work: "The wonderful diversity of forms to which mere sexuality gives rise among insects."

¹³³ For another view on the same topic, see Kari Weil in *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, where she makes the distinction between hermaphroditism and androgyny by suggesting the former deals in the physical and the latter in the abstract.

¹³⁴ Freud, of course, was not the first to identify or describe melancholia—it has a long literary history, originating in the black bile of humoral theories of Greek physicians, flourishing in the Renaissance with such works as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholia* (1621), with Albrecht Dürer's *Melencholia I* (1514) and with Freud's melancholic archetype, Hamlet, and later maturing in the brooding, introspective Byronic hero of the Romantic era. Jennifer Radden, however, credits Freud for his innovative new ways of portraying melancholia, "which diverge quite markedly from both the psychiatric thinking of Freud's own era, and from the much earlier, more literary tradition of writing about melancholy" (211). Radden points to Freud's notion of melancholia as loss and his identification of the association between melancholia and self-loathing as innovations; however, Swinburne convincingly portrays the same melancholic states in the dramatic poetry of *Poems and Ballads*, evincing a deep understanding of both cause and symptom.

¹³⁵ Sappho's "Ode to Anactoria":

Some say thronging cavalry, some say foot soldiers,
 others call a fleet of ships the most beautiful of
 sights the dark earth offers, but I say it's whatever
 you love best.

And it's easy to make this understood by
 everyone, for she who surpassed all human
 kind in beauty, Helen, abandoning her
 husband—that best of
 men—went sailing off to the shores of Troy and
 never spent a thought on her child or loving
 parents: when the goddess seduced her wits and
 left her to wander,
 she forgot them all, she could not remember
 anything but longing, and lightly straying
 aside, lost her way. But that reminds me
 now: Anactoria
 She's not here, and I'd rather see her lovely
 step, her sparkling glance and her face than gaze on
 all the troops of Lydia in their chariots and
 glittering armor.

¹³⁶ “Love and Sleep”:

Lying asleep between the strokes of night
 I saw my love lean over my sad bed,
 Pale as the duskiest lily's leaf or head,
 Smooth-skinned and dark, with bare throat made to bite,
 Too wan for blushing and too warm for white,
 But perfect-coloured without white or red.

And her lips opened amorously, and said—
 I wist not what, saving one word—Delight.
 And all her face was honey to my mouth,
 And all her body pasture to mine eyes;
 The long lithe arms and hotter hands than fire,
 The quivering flanks, hair smelling of the south,
 The bright light feet, the splendid supple thighs
 And glittering eyelids of my soul's desire.

¹³⁷ I owe a debt of thanks to Florence Treadwell and her brilliant volume of poetry *Cleaving* for making me sensible to the word's double meaning in such a way that I could recognize it in Swinburne's poetry. Shaw, I have since been reminded, mentions the two potential meanings of the word "cleave" in his essay on William Morris entitled "Arthurian Ghosts"; however, he argues that the two meanings create a paralytic effect in Morris's poetry, and that such use of them is an example of "language [that] becomes deathlike" (304). I do not see such an effect in the poems by Swinburne; rather, he uses the word, as Treadwell does in *Cleaving*, such that readers are alive to the fullness of its ambiguous meaning.

¹³⁸ The phrase "reality-testing" is one Freud uses in "Mourning and Melancholia" in his assessment of the libidinal attachment to the lost loved-object:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a

libidinal position.... This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis [sic]. (14.244)

The reality of loss will gradually assert itself, says Freud, “at great expense of time and cathectic energy,” but in the meantime, “the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged” (14.245). Sappho’s libidinal attachment to the memory of Anactoria gives the illusion of real presence that reality-testing must dispel.

¹³⁹ The optative mood “is retained most fully in Sanskrit and Greek, and is the so-called Subjunctive of the Teutonic languages” (“Optative”).

¹⁴⁰ McGann notes in passing that the passages are a virtuoso poetic performance but leaves others to surmise their significance (“Introduction” xxiv). Heather Seagroatt does look at the parallel passages to demonstrate that, despite repeated description of Anactoria, Sappho captures only a fragmented vision of bodily surfaces (46).

¹⁴¹ Out of this off-hand, almost throw-away comment by Freud, Drew Leder develops a phenomenological study, *The Absent Body*, which concentrates specifically on the conditions under which the normally absent body surfaces in the consciousness in an object relation. The idea that disease disrupts intentional links and constricts spatial and temporal perception derives more directly from F.J.J. Buytendijk, who says that “being ill is before all alienation from the world” (62).

¹⁴² Maurice Baring recalls such a conversation with his aunt in *The Puppet Show of Memory* about *Atalanta in Calydon*. When he mentioned *Poems and Ballads* the room fell quiet and a new topic of conversation was quickly introduced (112). Christina

Rossetti would paste strips of paper over lines dealing with “the supreme evil of God” (qtd. in Hyder xv-xvi).

¹⁴³ For an account of Swinburne’s religious beliefs, see Lang’s Introduction to *The Swinburne Letters* (xxv-xxvii).

¹⁴⁴ The pattern of a suicidal impulse that arises out of melancholia through a process of incorporation, object-loss, ambivalence, and sadism in “Anactoria” is one that repeats itself elsewhere in *Poems and Ballads*. In “Phaedra,” Swinburne follows the narrative of Euripedes’ play of the same name, in which the title character falls in love with her step-son, Hippolytus, and attempts to seduce him. He repulses her advances and she commits suicide, leaving behind an explanatory note claiming that Hippolytus had raped her. Theseus (Hippolytus’s father) reads the note and curses his son to death, a wish that Poseiden carries out. Although Euripedes’ play does not contain a scene of direct confrontation between Hippolytus and Phaedra, Swinburne makes it the premise of his dramatic poem, very likely because it stages the moment of loss and frustrated desire that *Poems and Ballads* repeats in other poems, including “Hermaphroditus,” “Dolores,” “The Triumph of Time,” and “Anactoria,” whose dramatic speakers are frustrated by biology, sexuality, conventional morality, and circumstance. Swinburne’s elaboration of the Euripedes play retains its Greek flavour with a prophetic chorus offering commentary on the staged action between Hippolytus and Phaedra. It foresees a tragedy, similar to the one of “Hermaphroditus” though more deadly, born of the forbidden lust that Phaedra can neither sate nor abandon: “This is an evil born with all its teeth, / When love is cast out of the bound of love” (73-74). Her desire does in fact have teeth, which Phaedra refers to in terms of appetite, begging Hippolytus, “Let me not starve between desire and

death” (17). The metaphor of appetite for sexual desire certainly does not originate with Swinburne, but the terms in which he constructs Phaedra’s attachment to Hippolytus edges ever closer to Freud’s concept of a cannibalistic phase of libidinal development. For example, Phaedra articulates her desire to Hippolytus as follows: “I ache toward thee with a bridal blood, /.../ ... I will feed full of thee, / My body is empty of ease, I will be fed” (65-67). Like Euripedes’s play, Swinburne’s “Phaedra” has its title character seeking out death. She asks Hippolytus to murder her, but, when he refuses, she turns to suicide, taking, as she says, “death a deadlier way, / Gathering it up between the feet of love” (182-83). In both cases, her love turns deadly as Phaedra attempts to exact her revenge, in the fashion that Freud describes in his essay on mourning and melancholia, “by the circuitous path of [supreme] self-punishment” (14.251).

¹⁴⁵ Tradition has it that Sappho commits suicide for the love of a young boy, Phaon (Peckham 61n).

¹⁴⁶ There are several variants of the story told by Ovid, Pausanias, Conon, Achilles Tattius, Apollodorus, and Hyginus. Swinburne’s “Itylus” and Matthew Arnold’s “Philomela” appear to follow the later Latin version which gives the voice of the nightingale to Philomela. The eleventh edition of Lemprière’s *Classical Dictionary*, published in 1820, also supports the Latin tradition of transforming Philomela into the nightingale (240). Interestingly, the version that would later appear in Charles Mills Gayley’s *The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art* (1893) and Alexander Stuart Murray’s *Manual of Mythology* (1874) tells how Tereus cuts out Procne’s tongue and hides her away in the countryside, letting it be known that she is dead, so he can be with Philomela. The tongueless Procne weaves her sad history into a piece of tapestry and

gets it to Philomela, who comes to her rescue. Together, the sisters take their revenge by killing young Itylus, the son of Procne and Tereus, and serve him to Tereus as a stew during the festival of Bacchus. When Tereus asks for his son, they reveal the ingredients of the stew. With Tereus in pursuit, they flee, and, calling on the gods for aid, they are metamorphosed into birds: Procne into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale.

¹⁴⁷ While Swinburne identifies the Daulis as the site of Itylus' murder and the centre of Tereus' reign, most versions of the story identify the locale as Thrace proper. Swinburne mentions Daulis, perhaps, because Tereus's realm later incorporated Daulis, which was inhabited by Thracians at the time of the story. In the version of the myth told by Apollodorus, Tereus overtakes the fleeing sisters at Daulis, where they are all transformed into birds (133). Swinburne may have also been influenced by Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* which mentions Daulis as the place where "Philomela and Procne made Tereus eat the flesh of his son" (240).

¹⁴⁸ When the Ancient Mariner asks to be shriven, the Hermit crosses his brow and exclaims, "Say quick, ... I bid thee say— / What manner of man thou art?" (574-77). The moment marks a lifetime assignment of penance that renders the Ancient Mariner subject to an "agony ... at an uncertain hour" that finds no relief "till [his] ghastly tale is told" (582-84).

¹⁴⁹ London's parks have long been called the "lungs" of the city. The first use of the metaphor is generally attributed to the eighteenth-century statesman, William Pitt the Elder (qtd. in Symes 128).

¹⁵⁰ From the opening sonnet that was made part of Rossetti's sonnet-sequence, "The House of Life," when it was published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), the phrase describes the sonnet form:

A Sonnet is a moment's monument,
 Memorial from the Soul's eternity
 To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,
 Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,
 Of its own arduous fulness reverent. (1-5)

The sestet of the poem describes the sonnet as "a coin: its face reveals / The soul,—its converse, to what Power 't is due" (9-10). The sonnet therefore records a moment of intensity out of which comes an expression of the soul.

¹⁵¹ In a letter dated 15 January 1870, Swinburne writes, "I looked at Tennyson's 'Higher Pantheism' again—not bad verse altogether, but what gabble and babble of half-hatched thoughts in half-baked words!—and wrote at the tail of this a summary of his theology:

'God, whom we see not, is; and God, who is not, we see:
 Fiddle, we know, is diddle: and diddle is possibly dee.'

I think it is terse and accurate as a Tennysonian compendium" (*Letters* 2.86).

¹⁵² "The Way of the Soul" was the original title of *In Memoriam*.

¹⁵³ Otto Weininger was a Viennese philosopher who believed that the predominance of feminine qualities in a nation was a sign of its degeneration. Stoker gets his ideas of male and female cells from Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1903), which argues that people are composed of a mixture of male and female substances. The male

substance promotes a character that is active, productive, conscious, moral, and logical, while the female substance promotes a character that is passive, unproductive, unconscious, amoral, and illogical.

¹⁵⁴ J.B. Bullen offers a particularly useful reading of Edward Burne-Jones' androgynous figures in *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (149-216).

¹⁵⁵ For reasons of space, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry is largely absent from this dissertation, which is regrettable since it was Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) that sparked Buchanan's attack against the "Fleshly School." However, Bullen supplies a deficiency here in his emphasis on Rossetti's work in *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, and McGann has considered "Rossetti's divinized love [which is] sensational in effect and sublime in value" in a complementary way to the analysis given here to the poetry of Morris and Swinburne ("Significant Details" 241).

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