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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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TOUCHING BODIES/BODIES TOUCHING: THE ETHICS OF TOUCH IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE (1860-1900)

(Spine title: Touching Bodies/Bodies Touching)

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by

Ann Marie Carmela Gagné

Graduate Program in English

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

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

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
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The thesis by

Ann Marie Carmela Gagné

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Tactility becomes a marked preoccupation in mid-Victorian literature. The description of how characters touch one another and negotiate their surroundings through tactility reinforces the ethics of intersubjectivity in Victorian England. I argue that touch becomes representative of embodied experience in Victorian literature. As well, touch goes beyond the explicit moral taxonomies found in etiquette books to provide implicit guiding principles for the negotiation of both the public and the private. The Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs) serve as a point of departure for an analysis of tactility in Victorian literature for the CDAs emphasized and reinforced the importance of legislating touch. I focus on four specific categories of touch which create or modify embodiment in Victorian literature.

Chapter one looks at reciprocal touch and the ethics of care as seen in “Goblin Market,” “Modern Love,” and “The Leper.” Chapter two argues that touch can create, reinforce, or destroy material confines and spatial architecture; especially in conjunction with performance, as seen in Ruskin’s “The Ethics of the Dust” and Bell and Robins’s *Alan’s Wife*. Chapter three situates self-touching in relation to textual representations of same-sex relationships as seen in the poetry of Michael Field and Edward Carpenter and *Teleny*. The fourth chapter analyzes the depiction of telepathic touch, a touch where the spiritual becomes material again. This ghostly touch appears in Hardy’s “The Withered Arm” and Wilkie Collins’s “Mrs. Zant and the Ghost.” In the fifth and final chapter I elucidate several types of touch in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, to in turn argue that there are many hands at work in the novel. Ultimately my dissertation reinforces the importance of tactility in mid to late-Victorian literature as a way to address embodiment within a society obsessed with methods of negotiation.

Keywords

Touch, Victorian literature, Contagious Diseases Act, Rossetti, Meredith, Swinburne, Bell, Robins, Michael Field, Ruskin, Edward Carpenter, Teleny, Hardy, Wilkie Collins, Braddon.

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Introduction

In the mid to late-Victorian period, literature became a site where the ethics of intersubjective interaction was found through the representation of tactility in novels, short stories, poems, and plays. My research demonstrates that following the discussion, and the enacting of the Contagious Diseases Acts (from 1860 onward), there was a shift in literature -- instances of depicted tactility increased in prominence, creating a motif with discursive weight and having socio-cultural ethical repercussions. Even following the repeal of the acts in 1886, the depiction of tactility remains a preoccupation in literature, for touch allows for the interpretation and representation of socio-cultural phenomena, especially in relation to gendered embodiment. I propose that in texts written in England from 1860-1900, touch functions as a discourse of embodied subjectivity, a way to communicate how bodies interact with themselves and their environment. As I demonstrate, touch as a discourse in Victorian literature highlights concepts that have been most recently addressed and contextualized within postmodernist feminist ethics. Feminist ethics are highlighted through the narration of tactility that demonstrates the ability or inability to ethically negotiate space and place, the ethics of care (how we provide and receive care through the body), as well as the ethics of embodiment (how corporeality is described/inscribed). Touch is a particularly useful sensation in terms of the analysis of space and embodiment, for it is the only sensation which is not limited to one specific sensory valence. Touch can be used to describe the function and use of the other four sensations: sight, hearing, smell, and taste. In essence we can touch others through our vision, the sense of taste requires a touching upon the tongue, hearing occurs with a touching of sound waves upon the eardrum, and similarly we recognize smell

when scent molecules reach and stimulate our olfactory receptors and neurons. Thus, a complete sensory and bodily experience can be described through touch.

The reference to tactility in literature also has the ability to reclaim the female body from the margins of discourse. In the period that is the main focus of this dissertation, the female body is no longer lost or intentionally buried within the narration; the female body is not distilled and depicted solely in terms of occupation. In fact the female body now emerges and is described in instances outside of the depiction of women's occupations.[1] Through the depiction and use of touch and tactility the female characters are no longer simply a prostitute, a cook, a maid. Tactility allows the female characters to maintain a subjectivity that is not objectified through their employment. It is a movement which positions the female body not only within the domestic sphere but also within the public sphere. More importantly, by going beyond the objectification seen in an emphasis on employment, the female body is also socio-culturally repositioned in order to complicate a direct relation to the economic sphere. Therefore, by blurring the relation to consumption and economics, touch allows the female character and female embodiment to be defined beyond visual clues within the narration, beyond the necessary voyeuristic interpretation found within the marketplace. Touch allows narrative descriptions to move away from a preoccupation with sight and the eye in the marketplace.

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[1] In these occupations the texts emphasize the work mainly done by/from the body, including manual labour. The most common somatic occupation found in representations of women from 1860-1900 is prostitution. The Contagious Diseases Acts were put in place to stop the spread of disease due to prostitution. However, other occupations that become linked to the body and female embodiment are those that place emphasis on the domestic: housekeeper, nursemaid, etc.

Because of the preoccupation with the visual, the female body that emerges within Victorian literature and culture is often interpreted as dismembered, disassociated, and ultimately broken into constituent parts; touch allows these parts to be brought together as a cohesive whole. As Deirdre d'Albertis demonstrates in *Dissembling Fictions*, Elizabeth Gaskell is just one of many mid and late-Victorian writers who wrote in a dissembling style: a way of writing about topics that subverts the power dynamic and repositions the female as character and writer.[2] However, as I will show, the emergence of a preoccupation with tactility within literature following the Contagious Diseases Acts, became a way of creating an embodied whole, a cohesive understanding of the female body. Touch emerges as a way to reveal and address embodiment.

Embodied subjectivity becomes difficult to ascertain in texts where the female form is often reduced to a parade of bodiless faces or arms, for in these instances the complete contour of the body is disrupted, an intact corporeality is denied. If the body of the female character is described in early Victorian texts, it is often as a brief step towards the description of the face. Gaskell's *Ruth* (1858) is an example of narration of embodiment in terms of parts instead of the whole. We are told that Ruth is "such a credit to the house, with her waving outline of figure, her striking face, with dark eyebrows and dark lashes, combined with auburn hair and a fair complexion" (Gaskell 41). This type of narration is also an example of the dark/fair binary that underscores most Victorian literature. Ruth's darker (i.e. not golden) hair signals and foreshadows her position as the

---

[2] In *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text*, Deidre D'Albertis explains how Gaskell's dissembled literary style highlights a way hiding things in plain sight, complicating the need to disguise a female character within the narration. As I show tactility allows for a similar hiding in plain sight.

fallen woman which is to be understood in opposition to the angel archetype made famous by Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House* (1854). At the same time, Ruth is simply an "outline," her figure being filled in by archetypical depictions in order to speak to larger socio-cultural issues. As I will demonstrate, the ethics of gendered embodiment displayed through tactility was a way of directly questioning these archetypes following the enactment of The Contagious Diseases Acts. The Acts caused the female body to become the site of tactile interaction, and brought about a need to reconceptualize the boundaries of touch, and ethical tactile interactions.

1.1 The Contagious Diseases Acts

The Contagious Diseases Acts changed the way that touch was socio-culturally understood. Enacted as a response to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among military men in port towns, the first Contagious Diseases Act was passed in 1864. The official name of the 1864 Act and the subsequent amendments to the Act in 1866 and 1869 is the Contagious Disease Prevention Act. The third provision of the Act had the most influence on tactility and intersubjective interaction:

> [P]ower is given to the superintendent of police to bring up before a justice any common prostitute resident in any place to which the Act applies, or if resident within five miles of such place, who shall have been within its limits for the purpose of prostitution; and such justice is empowered to order her to be subject to a periodical examination by the visiting surgeon for a year. (Ker 331)

This provision reinforced the Acts as a preventative measure; this was legislation required to contain and prevent the spread of disease through contact, in this case sexual

contact in port towns and army towns. Previous cases of contagious diseases, such as the plague, were scientifically theorized using miasmic theory. As Allan Conrad Christensen states in his book *Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Contagion:*

> The concern to understand the mechanisms of contagion prompted a widely engrossing debate between the proponents of germs and the infectionists or 'miasmists'. The traditional, widely-accepted contagionist paradigm lost ground after 1832 to what R.J. Morris calls 'miasmic thinking', which attained the 'high noon' of its ascendency in the summer of 1849. It then began to give way to the eventually victorious theories involving germs or bacilli. (4)

These germs or bacilli were understood as being transmitted through direct physical contact, which runs counter to the miasmic theory of transmission which suggests that all disease is airborne. Venereal disease was not scientifically understood as being airborne; it did not travel in a cloud and settle upon a house or a person. Venereal disease required tactile contact to be spread, and it is this sexual tactile contact that became problematic and necessitated a change in both the legislation and the socio-cultural understanding of intersubjective interaction.

Through these Acts, the ethics of touch within Victorian England went from emphasizing that the nation could only be maintained if tactility was kept at a distance (an absence of touch), to a belief in the need to contain the nation through proximity (touch being necessary in order to inspect, to police). The ethics of touch as it will be used throughout my research will primarily refer to how intersubjective interactions are conducted through tactility as well as how these interactions are represented, depicted,

and contextualized. The Contagious Diseases Acts and the discourse of touch seen in literature become inextricably connected, for the literature reflected the changes in the socio-cultural understanding and legislation of touch. The socio-cultural understanding of tactility, and the relation of touch to proximity, remained even after the Acts were repealed. The movement of tactility from being essentially socially absent (at least ideally) to being perpetually present could not be reversed simply by retracting legislation. The Acts legally sanctioned tactile interaction; physical inspections of women using hands and/or a speculum became a preventative measure and comprehensive means of protecting the male military body. Because touch was understood as the way that disease was spread, larger issues of containment, tactility, disease, desire, and embodiment that were raised in the passing of the Acts were worked out within the narration of the literature published after the Acts were passed. These issues continued to be current even after the Acts were repealed. As Judith Walkowitz states in *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women*, *Class, and the State*: "the repeal campaign does not end triumphantly with the removal of the C.D. acts from the statute books in 1886, but more ominously, with the rise of social purity crusades and with police crackdowns on streetwalkers and brothel keepers" (7). Tactility in literature gives currency to the discussion surrounding ideas of embodiment and contamination within society, and thus serves as a marker for the socio-cultural understanding of sex, intersubjective relations, and issues of purity/contamination in general, even after the repeal. Tactility was a way of counteracting the "conspiracy of silence" in the press about rising support in favour of the repeal of the acts (Walkowitz 97), and once they were repealed, touch in literature continues to make reference to issues of embodiment.

The Acts marked an acknowledgement of the commercialization of sex, which at the same time suggested the necessary transgression of decorum, of traditionally accepted sensory and bodily interaction. The Acts were passed despite the knowledge that "any system of medical inspection, if enforced against the wish of the women, would prove delusive" (Fisher 80). However, Sir John Liddell, the director-general of the medical department of the Royal Navy at the time the first Act was passed, was of the opinion that these Acts were still not enough to curb the spread of disease, with or without enforced inspection. Liddell felt that the Commission into Sanitary Conditions of the Army had "in these timid recommendations not touched the source of the disease" (Fisher 81), which makes Liddell one of the first to suggest that the Contagious Diseases Acts should involve *touching* the disease at the source, in the broadest sense of the word. Newspapers and journal articles that discuss the Acts in 1864 suggest that the people of England believed the Acts to be merely an extension of inspection laws already in place and a necessary legislation. An article from *The Lancet*, dated March 19, 1864, relates the concept of inspection in relation to medical discourse and everyday consumption: "if the butchers' shop may be occasionally visited and inspected for diseased meat, why should the brothel be exempted?"(Fisher 81). It is this discourse, the portrayal of female prostitutes as "diseased meat" and the emphasis on the human body as consumable, that made the transgression of somatic boundaries prescribed in the Acts culturally acceptable.

William Acton kept the most detailed records of the examination of women suspected of having venereal disease in Lock Hospital in his book, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspect, in London and other large cities*

and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Attendant Evils (2nd Edition, 1870). In a long passage from this work, Acton describes the doctor's examination of many prostitutes by means of a speculum, as assisted by the head nurse.

> The women are introduced one at a time from the wards by one nurse into a special room, containing a properly-raised bed, with feet, similar to the one in use on the Continent. The patient ascends the steps placed by the side of the bed, lays down, places her feet in the slippers arranged for the purpose, and the house surgeon separates the labia to see if there are any sores. If no suspicion of these exists, and if the female is suffering from discharge, the speculum is at once employed. In this institution several sizes are used, and they are silvered and covered with India-rubber. The head nurse after each examination washes the speculum in a solution of permanganate of potash, then wipes it carefully, oils it ready for the next examination, so that the surgeon loses no time, and the examinations are conducted with great rapidity. In the course of one hour and three quarters I assisted in the thorough examination of 58 women with the speculum. (Acton 85)

Acton has a favorable view of this type of examination, yet the rapidity of these examinations tends to suggest that there is a great chance of contamination through instruments despite the potassium permanganate. Contamination could cause the infection of healthy women with the very disease that the government apparently attempted to eradicate through the Acts. This quotation from Acton not only gives the specifics of the medical exam but also reinforces how separate physical spaces are

required for these exams. The concept of containment seems to move from the body itself to the "special" hospital room. Before the Acts, the female body, was the one that was to be isolated, and touch was to be avoided at all costs within social environments. Now, within the confines of the hospital room, tactility becomes acceptable, in fact necessary, in order to contain the spread of disease.

Since the Acts were specifically established to target the spread of venereal disease in the male military body, the Acts inherently caused gendered body divisions. As Harold Smith states, "the acts did not require that men be examined, thus implying that women were solely responsible for spreading venereal disease" (5). At the same time, popular support was gained for the Acts through governmental releases which emphasized that "the diseases associated with prostitution are very widely spread throughout this country, and that they are producing a profoundly degenerative influence on the physical life of the British people" as a whole ("Prostitution: How to Deal with It" (1870) 477). It was the fear of having a military physically incapable of defending the Empire that made the Contagious Diseases Acts such a pressing issue to the health of the British Empire. The random inspection of women who were "supposed" or "assumed" to have a sexually transmitted diseases caused "the self-respect of the women [to be] sacrificed in order that the self-respect of the men may be saved" ("Prostitution: How to Deal with It" (1870) 508), for here the welfare of the Empire always trumped gender inequities.

The Acts were set out as a preventative measure against the spread of the disease by sexual touch, but were upheld with a medical examination by means of touching the female genitals with a speculum or the medical attendant's fingers. It is a touch which

can be interpreted not only medically but has also been interpreted in terms of sexual assault. According to Walkowitz in *City of Dreadful Delight*, there were tales of "instrumental rape" (92), which further complicates the position of these examinations in medical and social discourse. This "instrumental rape" introduces the possibility of bodily violence within the medico-scientific context. The inspections done within the legislation of the Acts violated the bodies of those assumed to have venereal disease. These inspections perpetuated a cycle of violence directed solely on the female body as well as highlighted the depiction of female embodiment as permeable. Couching this violation and bodily violence within the confines of scientific and legal discourse silenced the horror of the inspections. As stated previously, the scientific discourse surrounding syphilis in particular differed greatly from the miasmic theories of disease. In this case, diseases which were causing the degeneration of British society were understood as being caused not by bad air but by bad touch. Ironically this same bad touch was being perpetuated in the inspection process. The scientific discourse of touch (which included how touch could spread disease) and the ethics of touch seen in etiquette manuals of the time were seemingly in conflict especially in relation to the depiction/definition of tactility. The scientific discourse of touch emphasizes that touch is part of an epistemological system; it brings necessary knowledge -- sometimes unwillingly. On the other hand, as I will demonstrate, etiquette manuals emphasized that touch was socio-culturally inappropriate, that this tactile knowledge was not appropriate. Etiquette manuals and the Acts seemed to come together to insist that touch brings disease and immorality. Eventually, the "medical lust of handling and dominating women" (Walkowitz 108) was rejected in favour of a preference to keep one's distance,

says Walkowitz in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*. Touch became understood as an epistemological device that needed to be regulated both in relation to the spread of disease but also in relation to legislated disease prevention.

A specific nineteenth-century understanding of the function and the mechanics of touch was reiterated in 1837 by Sir Charles Bell in *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design*. As a professor of surgery at the University of Edinburgh, Sir Charles Bell's understanding of the hand and touch as a sensation remains squarely within the confines of physiology. At the same time, Bell continues a tradition of understanding touch and tactility in relation to epistemology. The most important aspect of his work is to provide insight into how touch was understood in the early Victorian period in relation to the other senses. He states, "it has been said that accompanying the exercise of touch, there is a desire of obtaining knowledge; in other words, a determination of the will towards the organ of the sense" (Bell 116). Thus, touch is to be understood as a way of gaining and distributing knowledge. Through the experience of the tactile something is comprehended. Bell suggests a primacy and detachment of the sense of touch in relation to the other senses: "distinct from the others, it is the most important of any [sense]; for it is through it alone that some animals possess the consciousness of existence" (Bell 137). Bell's comment suggests that even within a scientific framework touch has its own discourse. Bell's treatise summarizes the understanding of the hand and the skin as organs of touch as it relates to nineteenth-century scientific discourse. It is this theorizing of touch as a distinct, primary epistemological device that increased in prevalence in Victorian literature after the enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

1.2 The Etiquette and Ethics of Touch

Throughout the Victorian period, etiquette books and conduct manuals provided an explicit taxonomy of touch within a socio-cultural framework. Etiquette books outlined the proper decorum for every type of interaction. As Count Alfred D'Orsay states in his 1843 book entitled *Etiquette; or, a Guide to the Usages of Society*, "Etiquette is the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offences the 'law' cannot touch- it is a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper and the vulgar" (D'Orsay 3). Etiquette thus functions both as an explicit moral code (in the sense of applied ethics) and as a way to legislate beyond legislation. Etiquette also reinforces spatial constructions within society that I argue also have architectural importance. As positioned within the broader confines of architecture, etiquette does not refer to the building of buildings, but rather to the building of interpersonal, intersubjective, and material dynamics within those buildings and structures. In essence, etiquette transcribes and reinforces propriety within certain spaces.

What remains constant within these rules of etiquette is that instances of touch must be performed properly. The understanding of touch in etiquette manuals is often opposite to the epistemological valence touch has in the scientific discourse of the sensory. Too much touch is frowned upon in etiquette manuals. In fact, if/when touch becomes absolutely necessary it is important that one follows the "rules" or ethics of touch. For example, one of the uses of touch D'Orsay's text highlights is how a man must touch a lady during a waltz. The discourse and rhetoric of the two most important rules about touch within a waltz suggests violence upon the lady's body if the touch is not performed correctly:

> Lead the lady through the quadrille; do not *drag* her, nor clasp her hand as if it were made of wood, lest she not unjustly think you a boor. (D'Orsay 28)

> If a lady waltz with you, beware not to press her waist; you must only lightly touch it with the open palm of your hand, lest you leave a disagreeable impression not only on her *ceinture*, but on her mind. (D'Orsay 29)

In a waltz the touch must be light, not a clasp, nor a hold, to make sure that no impression is made on the clothing or on the body. The touch and the most often-used medium for touch, the hand, are frequently described using terms such as lightness and frigidity in etiquette manuals. For example, the proper decorum for shaking hands is similar to what is described for the waltz; one must "never, indeed, offer your hand, unless well assured that it is in a presentable state of frigidity; for the touch of a tepid hand chills the warmest feelings" (D'Orsay 46). In no case must touch be informed by an emotional state or unwanted advances. Touch is understood as a necessity in these instances, and it must be performed without ulterior motives.

Forty years later, the same ethics of touch are explicitly set out in another conduct book. Oliver Bunce's 1884 text, aptly entitled, *Don't: A Manual of Mistakes and Impropriety More Or Less Prevalent in Conduct and Speech*, provides direction for touch within social situations. "Don't touch people when you have occasion to address them," says Bunce; "catching people by the arms or the shoulders, or nudging them to attract their attention, is a violation of good breeding" (Bunce 40-41). In this quotation Bunce implies that touch does not have a place in social interactions. Bunce goes on to suggest

the importance of maintaining personal space, and not infringing on the other's space. These applied tactile ethics were mostly acted out in public spaces, but they applied to interactions in private spaces as well. Between the publication of D'Orsay's and Bunce's work, it became increasingly common in literature to incorporate and depict tactile interactions and their ethicality. These depictions of tactility allowed for an exploration of larger ethical issues in the tension between public and private.

Nowhere was this tension between public and private more pertinent than in the enacting of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The enacting of the Contagious Diseases Acts allowed proto-feminists (such as Josephine Butler) to advocate specifically against the infringement of personal space within the public sphere by the police or doctors who, like the politicians behind the Acts, seemingly had only the interests of Empire in mind. Butler and others argued that the required and legislated random examinations were violent. Ultimately, these examinations did not take into account female embodiment or subjectivity. The literature produced from the 1860s and later began to reflect and literally incorporate tactility more often within the narration, as a way to highlight embodiment as it relates to lived space and social environment. The incorporation of tactility seems motivated by a need to highlight the struggle between a belief in the necessity of personal space and the desire to police boundaries within intersubjective relations in a socio-cultural context. Understanding space and boundaries frames the definition of ethical touch, of ethical tactile interaction. As I have indicated above, ethical touch must be light, non-violent, and more importantly it must not infringe on understood spatial confines. The maintenance or erasure of space is fundamental to understanding the

different types of tactility used in Victorian literature and how each of these tactile interactions advances and questions a particular ethical positioning.

1.3 Keywords and Categories of Touch

The discourse of touch seen in literature after 1860 does not necessarily reflect the explicit taxonomy we find in etiquette manuals. Rather, an implicit taxonomy of touch is given within the narration of the text, where intersubjective relations suggest a particular embodiment of space. Touch is a discourse of embodiment in Victorian texts, and it is a discourse that relies on numerous keywords that are synonymous with or related to the word "touch." In this work I will analyze many synonyms for touch and the function of touch through mediative devices. Examples of the keywords that inform my analysis are:[3] touch, tactile, hand, contact, tap, finger, stroke, fondle, and strike. I will also look at instances of the word "ethics" found within the texts as it relates to the negotiation of physical space through tactile interaction.

The keywords above will fall into four main categorizations of touch: reciprocal touch, self-touch, touch that creates/maintains/negotiates architecture or space, and finally, touch at a distance or more specifically telepathic touch. These types of tactile interactions have been chosen because they take into account all types of embodiment through intersubjective interaction and how bodies create their own confines and space through touch. In instances of reciprocal and self-touch the embodied subjectivities of the characters are created textually through the use of touch within the narration which invokes concepts of proximity and care. In these instances touches outline bodily

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[3] This list is far from exhaustive and is meant to give examples of the types of terms that my study will discuss and analyze.

contours and delineate bodily spaces. Touch that creates/maintains/negotiates architecture provides the space for embodied subjectivity within the narration. Here the touch not only refers to the character but also to the placement of the character in time/space within the text – a haptic architecture that allows for a reaction and embodiment of space. In instances of touch at a distance, embodied subjectivity is often created textually through a link to the visual. Telepathic touch is a type of touch at a distance, which is the focus of Chapter Four. In telepathic touch the narration uses visual confirmation or textual witnessing to acknowledge that the character has been touched. Through these four different types of touch we discover how mid to late-Victorian literature becomes the site of touch. The literature not only contains references to touch but also positions the function of touch as a way to question the embodied subjectivity of its characters.

If touch functions as moral discourse within Victorian literature, if the way touches are described and contextualized speak to larger issues, then the choice of the type of touch constructed in the narration, or the elision of touch altogether, has ethical implications. Touch is a mode of communication that modifies and creates embodied subjectivity within textual confines. Also, as I demonstrate, some late-Victorian plays place instances of tactility off-stage, which complicates the understanding of embodiment as well as the ethics of the tactility involved. What touches did or did not occur? Characters can become lovers, victims, heroes, or move between these subject positions, all through the use of touch. Each type of touch speaks to a particular ethos and gives examples of how touch can be understood epistemologically. In Victorian literature touches write, touches teach, and touches give knowledge. Each chapter in this work is informed by a framework that emphasizes the type of tactility seen in the texts I analyze.

1.4 Reciprocal Touch

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory and framework is often used by feminist theorists and philosophers as an advantageous way to explore women's lived experience. Merleau-Ponty's theories are also particularly useful for the analysis and recovery of bodily experience within the text. Though, as James Hatley suggests, "Merleau-Ponty's philosophy fails to raise the issue of ethics explicitly," he does "implicitly advance a profound and full notion of ethical engagement in the world" (Hatley 4). The Victorian texts that are analyzed in the following four chapters point to this implicit ethical engagement through the use of touch.

Reciprocal touch can be understood as a quintessential Merleau-Pontian concept that "allows us to articulate the touching-touched, the chiasmic intertwining of the flesh" (Chanter 225-226). The reciprocation (or chiasmic) understanding of tactility blurs the active/passive boundaries of this sensation, and makes the ethics of each tactile interaction an important concept to address. Because touch is reciprocal, we need to be aware that when one touches, one is also touched back. As Merleau-Ponty states in *The Visible and the Invisible,* between "my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things" (123). Touch is never one sided; in fact, as Elizabeth Grosz states in *Volatile Bodies*, "[t]ouch may well prove to be the most difficult and complex of all the senses to analyze because it is composed of so many interacting dimensions of sensitivity, involving a number of different functions" (Grosz 98). Ultimately, Chapter One explores the chiasmic relation innate in touch, and the construction/depiction of an ethics of touch. Instances of skin touching skin or hands touching hands are the most

common types of reciprocal touching seen in the texts in this chapter. The ethics behind the reciprocal nature of touch in texts published after 1860 can be understood in relation to what we now call a postmodern feminist ethic of care.

Feminist care ethics is an applied branch of ethics that reinforces the gendered and embodied work done in the act of caring. Maurice Hamington suggests subcategories of care ethics which I believe can be related to the specific types of reciprocal touches found within the Victorian texts I analyze. As Hamington states, "care flows from the knowledge manifested in the body" (Hamington 39) and these texts demonstrate that in reciprocal touching, embodied knowledge is passed on through the touching of skin and the movement of sensation from one body to another. Reciprocal touch in the poetry that I analyze in Chapter One highlights an embodied ethic of care as well as the importance of the redemptive power of touch.

However, the reciprocal nature of touch makes it difficult to delineate where care is being placed, for the line between touched and toucher is blurred. It is also important to realize that there is always a liminal space, a remainder to every touch that belongs to neither subject nor object but rather to the touch itself.[4] Reciprocal touches leave one to question where the toucher's surface ends and the touched surface begins. There is a chiasmic understanding that creates tension between subject/object, where the touch itself resides somewhere in between these two, and therefore there is always a sense of mediation involved. As Merleau-Ponty states in *The Visible and the Invisible,* a veritable touching of the touch occurs, "when my right hand touches my left hand while it is

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[4] As I will explain later, this tactile remainder is often described and can be understood as memory. For every touch there is always a remembrance of the touch -- whether the memory is actively remembered or immediately forgotten.

palpating the things, where the ‘touching subject’ passes over the rank of the touched, descends into things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things” (133-134). Touch thus resides in the liminal space: in the middle of the tactile contact. Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty suggests “[t]here is a circle of touched and touching, the touched takes hold of the touching” (143). Care ethics must transcend the liminal nature of tactility to focus on the ability to maintain closeness and proximity in order to heal, cure, or soothe. It is an attempt to achieve a reversal of what tactility is by definition that motivates the ethics of care. In other words, one needs to be acutely aware of the boundaries (or lack thereof) in tactility, in order to respect and care effectively. To care effectively a connection must be created. This type of caring touch necessarily maintains Merleau-Ponty’s theory of tactile reversibility:

> [I]t is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over the rank of 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* - my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147-148)

Touch provides care because the body that is being cared for has a tactile persistence (usually in terms of tactile memory) that will perpetually maintain the chiasmic relation between the touched and toucher. This chiasmic relation, which is emphasized by

Merleau-Ponty as well as by Luce Irigaray in her work, becomes the foundation for the three other types of touches explored in this work.

1.5 Touch that Creates Space and Architecture

The second category of touch that I define is "touch that creates space or architecture." The definition of touch in this category is inspired by contemporary feminist architectural theory, such as the work of Deborah Fausch and Patricia Morton, as well as theories of haptic architecture seen specifically in Juhani Pallasmaa's work. Within the texts that I analyze in Chapter Two, touch speaks to the importance of the ethics of space in the negotiation of material objects that create and are part of architectural confines. Architectural theory and the staging of theatre as a performative architecture are points of departure for this category of touch. By performative architecture I mean that specific place/space that each performance enacts: be it literally a textually staged space or by interacting with everyday lived environments. Here touch allows us to understand spaces as gendered, and emphasizes how space can function in relation to gender. Tactility allows us to go beyond the confines of domestic, economic, public, and private to see the nuances involved in the creation of space, and how these spaces are in turn marked through gender. As Peggy Phelan states, "performance uses the body to frame" (Phelan 151) and I suggest that touch is also a performance that frames embodied space within texts.

Touch functions as a way to create or emphasize the gendered space that the characters embody in Victorian literature. How does a space traditionally gendered female, such as the kitchen or the dressing room, compare to one that is traditionally gendered male, such as the smoking room? Both of these spaces involve a large amount

of tactile interaction in order to be negotiated. However, in late Victorian literature, we encounter representations of tactile negotiation where touches create, represent, and can often in fact define or re-define spaces. Drawing rooms are described in terms of how couches "feel"; outdoor public gathering places become enclosed by touching a bench, a tree, etc. Touch is utilized as either the creator or destroyer of spatial boundaries within Victorian texts. The gendered contexts of these spaces are reinforced through emphasis on what is being touched and how. Through touch, the ethics of space, which includes the unethical infringement of space, becomes an important narrative development in the text. As I demonstrate, issues of space are not only essential to interpersonal relations, but also serve to highlight socio-cultural concepts of gender. Certain bodies become contained or can be barred from spaces based on the descriptions of tactility that reinforce gender inclusive or exclusive spaces.

1.6 Self-Touch

Self-touch can be seen as an extension of the aforementioned reciprocal touch. However, in self-touch the touch usually originates and terminates in/on the same body. This touch further complicates the notions of active and passive innate in every touch. The reciprocal nature of touch suggests and incorporates a heightened sense of intimacy, for there needs to be proximity for one to touch another and vice versa. The intimacy of this touch that touches back can be seen as a movement from the inside to the outside. I demonstrate the intimacy innate in self-touch through the use of a specific quotation from Luce Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, for the quotation highlights a movement from the inside to the outside of the body. In Irigaray's work we are presented with an

intimate touch, which opens up a space that can be understood as either masturbatory or homosexual (literally a touching of the self-same).

What is seen in Irigaray's work as well as in the texts that I analyze in Chapter Three is a movement from hands gently touching hands, to a doubling and symmetrical touch applied to lips touching lips, or lips resting on lips. These touching lips, the ability to self-touch without necessarily initiating touch, can be understood as being due to the physiology of the body. The use of self-touch, in late Victorian literature, was especially useful in the depiction of relationships where direct or reciprocal sexual/sensual contact could not be explicitly described. This type of direct touch needed to be discrete and mostly muted within the social realm. Self-touch is thus often a metaphor for the way the character wished to touch others but could not.

Self-touch can also explicitly refer to masturbatory practices. The scientific discourse surrounding masturbation during the Victorian period often refers to masturbation as a type of bad touch or unethical touch. The narration of the masturbatory touch in the Victorian literature I study also often implicitly if not explicitly suggests a discourse[5] that deems homosexual touch as another type of "bad touch." Regardless of the unethical valences seen in scientific interpretation, self-touch in the texts that I analyze tends to evoke an ethics of care.[6] The ethics of care demonstrated in self-touch is similar to the care shown through reciprocal touch, for both are based on the necessity of knowing and having knowledge of the body to which you are giving care.

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[5] The type of discourse I refer to here can be either scientific or social.

[6] This ethics of care has many valences and can be demonstrated through depictions of desire, lust, or love.

1.7 Telepathic Touch

Telepathic touch is a type of touch at a distance most often characterized as a ghost's touch. Telepathic touch therefore becomes increasingly common within supernatural tales of the late nineteenth century, reflecting a societal preoccupation with being able to negotiate one's environment without the mediation of one's body. Touch as seen in this category has a complicated relationship with corporeality. As a Victorian preoccupation, telepathy was believed to be "the most disembodied method of contact, [which could] lead […] to an almost unbearably collapsed physicality" (Thurschwell 35). The collapse in physicality is signaled through telepathic touch in Victorian literature as a break in corporal boundaries. The inability of the characters to maintain somatic integrity is similar to the female "leaky body" seen in Elizabeth Grosz's work. As Elizabeth Grosz states in *Volatile Bodies*, "women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage" (Grosz 203), and the female body can thus be seen as both leaking and permeable. This concept of leakiness and fluidity is appropriate to the analysis of telepathic touch for not only does a telepathic touch suggest fluidity, an ethereal transgression of boundaries, but it is often the female body that is either producing or receiving a telepathic touch in these texts. Feminist ethics of embodiment, not unlike telepathic touch, operates not within a closed system but rather suggests a constant state of renegotiating spaces and relations to proximity.

The fluidity of female embodiment plays a large role in this renegotiation, for as recent research into telepathic phenomena and séances in the late nineteenth century suggests, the conjurer in these instances was almost always female (Thurschwell 90). I suggest that these female conjurers further emphasize the fluidity of embodiment and the

ability of tactility to go beyond the physical form. According to Lisa Brocklebank, psychic reading was “a means of rending fluid and permeable the borders of individual consciousness and of exploring alternative and subliminal states” (234). Brocklebank goes on to suggest that mind reading was “a means of producing one’s subjectivity” (234) for it was not only a way to experience others’ thoughts but rather a way to experience one’s own thoughts. Though Brocklebank’s argument mainly deals with the act of reading as a psychic activity, her article serves as a point of departure for a discussion of the relation of subjectivity to psychic activity and telepathy. Because telepathy allows for the ability to modify and shape subjectivity, female psychic conjurers become a threat to society and social norms. Through telepathy the conjurers could read others’ thoughts, change their minds, and even cause physical harm. Though telepathy and séances had great entertainment value, conjurers simultaneously highlighted the instability of the human and material form. In essence, by being able to move or touch something or someone telepathically, conjurers could be placed within the larger discourse of contagion. Since most of the conjurers were female, this further complicated the relationship of the female body to contagion and tactility. The female conjurers had the ability to move through people’s bodies from afar, affecting them or infecting them. This ability caused fear and demonstrated that enclosure and marginalization would not contain the spread of disease or infection. Once again the female, and specifically the female body, becomes a possible source of contamination and infection. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, the literature of the time actively, yet unsuccessfully, attempts to marginalize these female conjurers, as a way to protect the other characters from the harm that telepathic touch could cause. Thus, telepathic touch by its very nature, as a

touch from a distance, cannot be contained, much like the female characters who conjure or experience this touch.

1.8 Analyzing the Literature

This work is divided into four main chapters according to the four types of touch described above. Chapter One outlines reciprocal touch as it is understood in phenomenological theory. An analysis of reciprocal touch in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" will reinforce the prevalence of this type of tactility within literature published after 1860. "Goblin Market" also suggests the healing power of touch, or touch as demonstrating an ethics of care, which is also seen in George Meredith's "Modern Love." "Modern Love" moves beyond care to show how reciprocal touch can demonstrate passion, love, and betrayal. Meredith's long poem, written as a series of sixteen-line sonnets, was one of the first Victorian poems to sustain a depiction of love in relation to the physical as opposed to the emotional. Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Leper" is the final text of the chapter and my analysis demonstrates how the focus on reciprocal touch can echo contamination and the spread of disease. This poem, as well as the others in this chapter, can be understood as a sustained commentary on contagious diseases, which emphasizes how tactility could spread not only physical but also moral contagion.

Chapter Two looks at touch as creating/maintaining/sustaining architecture. This chapter explores how touch can construct borders as well as tear them down. Haptic perception in this chapter will also look at space in terms of figurative and literal performance. This chapter interprets John Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust* as a play text for the narrative is structured in a way that emphasizes the creation of a performance space. Ruskin uses this text as a platform to reinforce the belief that an absence of touch

is necessary in order to maintain the confines of the public space. Chapter Two also focuses on the dramatic space in Bell and Robins's play *Alan's Wife*, a play which deals with an infanticide positioned off-stage which in turn functions as a commentary on female embodiment and the concealing of violence. Finally, this chapter also looks at Victoria Cross's short story "Theodora: A Fragment" as a text that directly speaks to the ethics of space through touch, and gives specific reference to touch as inculcating private space.

The third chapter explores self-touch, which includes masturbation as well as homosexual and homosocial touching. Selections from Michael Field's poetry serve to demonstrate that homosexual touching reinforces an ethic of care as well as love. Edward Carpenter's poem "By the Shore" also highlights the intersection of tactility and sexualized depictions of embodiment. Self-touch is also seen in George Egerton's short story "Gone Under," a story which suggests a homosocial ethic of care that verges on the homosexual. Finally, homosexual touching will also be analyzed in *Teleny,* which represents many instances of same-sex touch coupled with the type of telepathic touching seen in the fourth chapter of this work. *Teleny* becomes a text that can effectively bridge chapters three and four, because it does not speak to homosexual touching or telepathic touching as two separately contained concepts, but rather blends both types of touching to effectively demonstrate how each type of touch can inform the other.

The fourth chapter addresses the phenomenon of telepathic touch. First I analyze Thomas Hardy's "The Withered Arm," a revenge narrative with a twist, which highlights the ability to physically maim through dreams. Telepathic touch here functions as a larger representation of the dangers of evil thoughts leading to evil deeds. However,

many instances of telepathic touch can coincide with an ethics of care and demonstrations of love, which are not simply a way to enact malevolence from the beyond. Wilkie Collins's short story "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost" shows how telepathic touch can be a way to offer protection and care.

Chapter Five, serving as the last digit of the *Manus Ex Machina*, examines Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret. Lady Audley's Secret* is a text that serves to revisit and effectively tie together the touches I mention in this thesis: reciprocal touch, touch that reinforces architecture, homosocial touch, and finally telepathic touch. These touches demonstrate how tactility becomes a preoccupation and is representative of a larger mood in the mid to late Victorian era. Ultimately, the various touches found in Victorian literature at this time reposition female characters in relation to social confines and domestic spaces, while simultaneously reinforcing gendered embodiment. This focus on tactility can also be understood as the beginning of our modern preoccupation with touch. From technology to personal interactions, touch is ever-present in our society today and has in some ways taken over from the visual as the principal way in which we explore our relation to material objects.

2 Touching Me: Touching You

Mid-Victorian sensibilities about contamination and contagion were brought to the fore with the discussion and eventual enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Prostitution and the plight of prostitutes were frequently discussed in relation to contamination in essays and articles in *Punch* ("The Great Social Evil" [1857]) and literature such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1858) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "Jenny" (1870). This chapter will focus on how reciprocal touch is related to contamination, contagion, and care in three representative mid-Victorian poems. Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), George Meredith's "Modern Love" (1862), and Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Leper" (1866) not only make reference to contamination and the perils of prostitution through the use of reciprocal touch, but the authors also demonstrate a socio-cultural investment in the issues surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Christina Rossetti's work in the Magdalene Hospitals has been well documented. Lona Packer's *Christina Rossetti* is an in-depth biographical study of Rossetti that provides details of her life at The St. Mary Magdalene House. The St. Mary Magdalene House was a place of refuge for former prostitutes and Rossetti volunteered there from 1860-1870 (Packer 35). Scholars have attributed her time there as an inspiration for the themes of temptation and sisterhood in "Goblin Market." Though she does not explicitly refer to prostitution in the poem, the idea that "prostitution was increasingly perceived as a dangerously contaminating form of sexual activity" (Carpenter 416) is visible in her use of fruit as bringing disease and desire to the female body. The fruit is temptation not only

in the overt biblical sense, but it also works on a socio-economic level as consumption, specifically the consumption of flesh, within the marketplace. As Marie-Louise Luxemburg states: “ironically, Christina Rossetti, who as a child had been sheltered from everything that was not ‘pure or high-minded’ and even as an adult had to contend with her brother Dante’s censorship, empathised with the prostitute as her brother from his beguiled viewpoint could not” (Luxemberg). Christina Rossetti demonstrates this empathy with the plight of prostitutes through her description of the sisters and the working out of the main conflict in “Goblin Market.” Female embodiment becomes key in her text, and the representation of embodiment is given through the emphasis on the sensory, specifically the tactile.

As Elizabeth Campbell states in “Of Mothers and Merchants: Female Economics in Christina Rossetti's ‘Goblin Market’,” the publication of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* “led the way for the later successes of the Pre-Raphaelite poets Morris, Swinburne, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti” (Campbell 393). Algernon Swinburne, like Christina Rossetti, demonstrated the effects of the Contagious Diseases Acts through his work. Swinburne was painted as “a radical” in the press for his support of the repeal of the Acts (*The Nation* 112). Swinburne led what can be understood as a passionate and decadent life, and his work demonstrates both of these valences. His poem “The Leper” explicitly addresses the socio-cultural understanding of contamination and disease, which have a larger metaphorical relation to the idea of bodily temptation as seen in “Goblin Market.” An emphasis on lust and embodiment is given through the description of tactility in “The Leper,” specifically in relation to the concept of necrophilia. Tactility thus functions not only to reinforce Swinburne’s beliefs in the misguided nature of the

Contagious Diseases Acts, but also allows him to discuss the nation's fear of contamination, as emphasized through descriptions of leprosy and necrophilia. Like his friend Swinburne, George Meredith spoke of the same important socio-cultural issues of temptation and embodiment through his work.

George Meredith's novel *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) emphasizes the plight of prostitutes under the Contagious Diseases Acts. As Elaine Hadley states, "*Diana of the Crossways* is not a historical biography, but a novel deeply involved in the contemporary issues of the 1880's -- the rights of women and the Irish question, to name two" (Hadley 202). The ideas and ideals that inform *Diana of the Crossways* are seen in Meredith's long poem "Modern Love," which he first published twenty years before *Diana of the Crossways*. Throughout his lifetime Meredith supported many gender rights issues especially suffrage (Holmes 524). As Hadley suggests, though Josephine Butler "was engaged in a discursive and material battle with alternative behavioral models," men like George Meredith allowed for the reification of the private subject (Hadley 6). Through his work, especially in his revisiting of "Modern Love" twenty years after it was first published, Meredith reinscribed the subjectivity and embodiment of his characters through an emphasis on the sensory, especially tactility. Meredith, Swinburne, and Rossetti all participated in the discussion surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts by publically lending their voice or their time to the debate. This debate, I contend, is ultimately found in their writing through a focus on reciprocal tactility and the ethics of intersubjective interaction.

2.1 "Goblin Market"

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) was published the same year that a committee was established to look into the spread of venereal disease among military men. The outcome of this committee was the passing of the first Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864. The influence and the importance of the sensory, especially tactility, which was highlighted in the Acts, as well as the divisions of public and private that the CDAs reinforced are also apparent throughout Rossetti's poem. Every type of sensation is present within the poem: hearing, smell, taste, sight, and especially touch. The sensory in Rossetti's poem is used to intensify the subject matter, and to make the situation more palpable, which is particularly true in the emphasis on the consumption and purchase of the "orchard fruits" (Rossetti 3) sold by the goblin men. Through the consumption and purchase of fruit in the poem, touch has two specific valences. The first is a demonstration of an ethics of care and the second is a demonstration of unethical touch which causes violence. There is an overt emphasis on the consequences of consumption and purchase within public sphere as related to the private (read domestic) sphere.

Before analyzing the use of touch within the poem, I will frame the use of touch in relation to the description and interaction of the other sensations within the poem, because touch, as stated previously, is the only sense applicable and transposable to other senses. We touch with our taste buds when we taste; sound waves touch and vibrate our eardrum when we hear; molecules touch receptors when we smell; and light waves are focused by our lenses and touch our retinas when we see. Thus touch becomes an overarching way address to the sensory.

It is ironic that a poem that focuses on the consumption of magical fruit seemingly gives primacy to sight, sound, and touch as opposed to smell and taste. In fact, taste is only explicitly used in reference to Laura's consumption of the forbidden fruit four times in the whole poem. The first such instance, "Taste them and try" (25), is part of the original solicitation by the goblin men. When Laura finally submits to tasting these magical fruits, we are told that Laura "never tasted such before, / How should it cloy with length of use?" (132-133). The use of the word "cloy" in this quotation serves to emphasize the possible outcomes of the consumption of the fruit. The fruit could serve as an obstruction to desire, but it could also just as easily satiate desire ("Cloy, v.1," def. 6 and def. 8a). As I demonstrate, the fruit functions only to briefly satiate desire on its way to obstructing Laura's path to a virtuous life. This obstruction and the ability of the fruit to harm are part of the larger metaphor for temptation, specifically sexual temptation, in the poem. This temptation originates from the body and is in turn situated within the body. The difference between being tempted and ultimately submitting to temptation is framed as the difference between tasting and touching the fruit. When Laura asks, "'Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted / For my sake the fruit forbidden?" (478-479), this is a loaded question for Lizzie has not tasted but simply touched. As a result of tasting the fruit Laura succumbs to temptation whereas for Lizzie touching the fruit (which the goblins forcefully touch to her face) does not involve taste, but rather simple touch, which ultimately allows Lizzie to provide both care and a cure for her sister.

Hearing and seeing are two senses which continue the temptation motif in "Goblin Market" by reference to the tactile ability of these senses. "Goblin Market" often presents hearing and sight as complementary to each other. The fruit is described as

being “sound to eye” (30), coupling sight and sound imagery in a synaesthetic way which speaks to the visual beauty and appeal of the fruit, and also suggests that consumption has an auditory component. Synaesthesia continues when the visual component is emphasized as being the most morally damaging, for Laura can touch and be touched through her viewing of these goblin men. The climax of the poem centers on Laura’s inability to hear or see the goblin men. This temporary and selective deafness and blindness causes Laura to lose another sensation, taste, specifically her ability to taste the fruit presented to her. Her lack of sensory ability is one of the larger consequences of consumption and the cost of being tempted in a public space.

Lizzie’s warnings to Laura about avoiding temptation are framed through reference to the visual at the beginning of the poem. The visual is used to present and repeat moral directives: to emphasize what “good” women should do, specifically in relation to the domestic sphere. Ironically it is Laura who first voices the warning about gazing or searching for the goblin men and their wares. Laura says, “‘[w]e must not look at goblin men” (42); then, a few lines later, Lizzie echoes Laura’s sentiment with a physical reaction to the warning, “[y]ou should not peep at goblin men.’ / Lizzie covered up her eyes” (49-50). This movement from the word *look* to the word *peep*, over the course of seven lines, marks a shift in urgency and also indicates a change in the interpretation of the visual in the poem. To “look” implies an observational mode, a visual assessment of one’s environment where the moral implications relate to the ability to maintain the subjectivity of what is being viewed. To “peep,” on the other hand, is a type of seeing that connotes secrecy, cloaking, wrongdoing, and ultimately voyeurism. Elizabeth Campbell mentions that “Dante Gabriel Rossetti must be credited with the

fortuitous change of the title to ‘Goblin Market’ from Christina’s ‘A Peep at the Goblins’” (394). The original title demonstrates that Christina Rossetti was acutely aware of the role of the sensory in her poem, especially the visual. The connotation of peeping can also be related to the ideology surrounding voyeurism, prostitution, and the Contagious Diseases Acts. During her time as a volunteer at the Magdalene Houses Rossetti had seen her fair share of what happens to women shunned by society: women who resided outside of the society’s collective gaze because of their employment. These were women for whom “peeping at goblins” would make a very suitable euphemism for how their work was commonly understood in print media of the time. [7] Laura enacts this peeping and consumes through the sensory within the public sphere (marketplace), whereas her sister attempts to avoid this participation at all cost.

Rossetti states that the cautious and obedient Lizzie “shut [her] eyes and ran” (68), avoiding both the sight and the site of the temptation, and thus keeping her character morally pure. Laura stays on, and her first transgression of the rules of engagement with the goblin men is again indicated through sight and sound. Laura “heard a voice like voice of doves” (77), which positions the goblin men as peaceful produce merchants. However, the fact that she “stared but did not stir” (105) suggests either that she is fearful of these goblins and senses the danger they impose or that she acknowledges her own wrongdoing in being where she is prohibited to remain. Her reluctance to move demonstrates the tension between voyeurism, purity, and sexuality in the text. Voyeurism in this context is a way to unethically touch another, for in the act of voyeurism one

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[7] The best examples of this representation of prostitutes are the many caricatures of prostitutes and prostitution seen in *Punch Magazine*.

necessarily objectifies. Here Laura sees something that she wants, but is initially reluctant to move beyond looking to purchasing. By giving in to her temptation, Laura moves from her position as voyeur (or window-shopper) to in turn become an objectified female within the marketplace. She is now herself an object available to be consumed.

After Laura has consumed the forbidden fruit, she is set in opposition to her sister in terms of visual description. Laura becomes incapable of satiating her lust, "for all her watching" (235) does not provide what she desires. It is only the virtuous Lizzie who "heard the cry alone" (254), while simultaneously refusing to give in to visual temptation. Lizzie hears "the fruit-call but […] dare not look" (243), whereas her sister has seemingly "gone deaf and blind" (259). The juxtaposition of sight and hearing in Lizzie and Laura's response to the goblin men can be interpreted in terms of cause and effect. Lizzie hears the cry but refuses to use any of her other senses which keeps her away from temptation; whereas her sister has already lost all her senses because she has fallen prey to the tempting fruit and the goblin men. As Sean Grass suggests, the "vision of the multifarious goblin fruits does overwhelm, but more important, this overwhelming of the senses can confuse moral discernment" (Grass 362). The need to "listen and look" (328) is exacerbated by the fact that Laura can now "never [spy] the goblin men" (274) and "[p]oor Laura could not hear" (309). Laura's body seemingly shuts off her sensory ability in order to protect her from further temptation, yet this lack of sensory experience simultaneously causes her more duress. Laura spends her nights and days craving and fading away because she can no longer hear, see, or taste the fruit of temptation. The emphasis on hearing and the visual is underscored by the fact that we are told the goblin men's "tones waxed loud, / [t]heir looks were evil" (396-397); however, this is something

only Lizzie can hear and see. It is not solely their looks that are evil: so is their touch, which is what connects all of the sensory imagery in the poem.

As stated previously, the use of touch in “Goblin Market” can be interpreted in two distinct ways. Touch can demonstrate an ethic of care and can be a way to heal: through touch care can be transmitted from one body to another.[8] Alternatively, touch can be unethical, which is seen in the references to Laura and the visual I have stated above. The main difference between the two interpretations of touch is achieved through a focus on reciprocation. Are touches returned? How are touches characterized, and what is the connotation of these touches? Reciprocal touch in “Goblin Market” becomes a thread that can be followed throughout the poem -- from the moment that Laura interacts with the goblin men, to the moment that Lizzie cures her. The reciprocal touch as an ethic of care in “Goblin Market” serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of temptation and contamination. This concept of maintenance and containment is central to the ideas of temptation and contamination seen in the Contagious Diseases Acts.

There has been critical work done that categorizes the relationship between Lizzie and Laura in “Goblin Market” as something more than sisterly care. These interpretations often read an incestuous Sapphic relation between Laura and Lizzie. Though the tactility of Lizzie and Laura’s relationship causes the relationship to become sexualized or literally sensualized, it is reductive to equate this to “lesbianism.”[9] As Helena Michie

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[8] This is similar to the common trope of laying on of hands — specifically the belief that the touch of the King could cure many skin diseases. This is a belief that goes as far back as Edward the Confessor (c.1000) and Queen Anne (d.1714).

[9] I use the word lesbian in quotation marks here for the term lesbian did not appear in popular discourse until after 1892, thirty years following the publication of “Goblin Market.”

states, "lesbian-feminist accounts of lesbianism […] share a dependence on tropes of sameness" (Michie 417), yet as I have demonstrated above, Laura and Lizzie are constructed throughout the poem as being in opposition to each other. Though the trope of sameness is important to address, and I will return to this in Chapter Three, the constant representation of Laura and Lizzie as characters in opposition problematizes an interpretation of "sameness" or "oneness." However, we cannot deny that there remain "erotics of sisterhood in *Goblin Market* [which] suggest something more complicated" despite the insistence of difference (Michie 417). The ethics of touch emerges within this eroticized frame and becomes part of the discourse of sisterhood. Simultaneously this eroticized frame refers to giving oneself to temptation, using the body as currency, and reflects concepts of prostitution and contamination.

The imagery and symbolism of Rossetti's poem is very erotic and it is the sensual that highlights the eroticism of the poem. As Nancy Welter states: "Goblin Market" "is often analyzed for its sexual undertones, but critics often fail to address the desire between women in the poem" (Welter 147). I suggest that this desire goes beyond the sexual to incorporate all facets of the sensual. This means the relationship between the sisters is not simply an erotic one. The poem roots out eroticism through a focus on the five senses (especially the tactile) which highlights the sensual. The term "sensual" here refers to the senses, but also to the gratification of desires through these senses. Through a sensual description, touch in "Goblin Market" highlights the ability to give and receive care through the body, and not simply to satisfy one's desire through touch.

Feminist ethical theory sees care as connected to the body. Theorists such as Maurice Hamington emphasize that care both originates and is manifested in the body.

The ethics of care is also part of a larger phenomenological theoretical framework: it refers to how we experience both tactility and care as sensory phenomena. Maurice Merleau-Ponty states in *Phenomenology of Perception* that "tactile experience […] adheres to the surface of our body" (Merleau-Ponty 369). This quotation reinforces the ethical importance of tactility, for if touch is something that will necessarily adhere to the surface of the body, care must be taken that this touch does not wound in any way. Hamington's work outlines the performative and habitual aspect of the ethics of care, providing an outline for how touch should be done so that an ethical situation is maintained. His work also emphasizes the repetitive nature of the ethics of care: an action needs to be repeated in order to be understood, and in this repetition a habit is created. It is through ritual repetition that a particular touch can be categorized as caring and ethical as opposed to uncaring and unethical:

> For the sake of my analysis, habits can be divided into three categories: acaring, noncaring, and caring. An acaring habit is a morally neutral pattern the body uses to navigate its environment […] Noncaring habits are those that harm another embodied being; examples include spousal abuse, child molestations, and acting out road rage. Caring habits are those that exhibit a regard for the growth, flourishing, and well-being of another. (Hamington 57)

As we will see, reciprocal touching that occurs between Laura and Lizzie toward the end of the poem can be categorized as caring, for touches create growth and demonstrate the desire for well-being and health. On the other hand, the violence that the goblin men act out towards Lizzie in particular is an example of a noncaring habit. Their touches are

violent, and as we will see, their touches also seem to rape much like the instrumental rape with a speculum mentioned in the introduction.[10]

Since ethical and unethical habits are defined by repetition and ritual, ethical tactility is framed within the repetition and ritualism of touch. In *Embodied Faith: Ritual, Mysticism and Performance in Christina Rossetti's Poetry and Pros*e, Debra Cumberland attributes the ritualistic facet of "Goblin Market" to the underlying religiosity in the poem (101). Cumberland goes on to argue that Rossetti embodies this faith and religiosity in the poem through a focus on the auditory and the oral. I believe that though faith and religiosity are embodied in the poem, this is accomplished through Rossetti's use and focus on the tactile and not the oral. As Cumberland states in her article, "Ritual and Performance in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'," "it is through ritual that Laura and Lizzie gain power and understanding of themselves and learn to interpret their world" (Cumberland 109). I argue that it is through repetitions of touch that an ethical frame of interpretation is created. Laura and Lizzie learn that types of touch can either cause illness and bodily decline or can be redemptive and heal the body. The ethics of care is demonstrated within "Goblin Market" through tactile repetitions on the body.

2.1.1 The Ethics of Care in "Goblin Market": Taking Care of My Sister

Laura and Lizzie are set in opposition in the poem in terms of morality and the ethical use of the sensory. In the first fifty lines of the poem it is clear that the sisters' relationship is one of intimate caring. We are given many instances where the two sisters' physical proximity is emphasized. For example, in line 36 they are "[c]rouching close

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[10] The acaring category mentioned by Hamington will be addressed in the next chapter in relation to the negotiation of space and place.

together" so as to be safe from the approaching goblin men, and again two lines later "[w]ith clasping arms and cautioning lips, / [w]ith tingling cheeks and finger tips" they "'[l]ie close'" (38-40). This proximity is continued through reference to the two sisters as pigeons in a nest: "Golden head by golden head, / [l]ike two pigeons in one nest / [f]olded in each other's wings" (184-186). Line 184 is also famous for being the subtitle and inspiration for the frontispiece of the 1862 edition of "Goblin Market." The title-page figure (figure 1) seen below is a wood etching by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and serves to

Figure 1: Golden Head by Golden Head. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1862)

reinforce how proximity and tactile interactions highlight an ethics of care in "Goblin Market."

The etching of the two sisters has a definite sensual aspect to it; however, the inset above the two sisters provides further context to this interaction. This is not simply two women in an embrace; rather it can be seen as two sisters bonding, creating strength against the goblin men who are carrying their tempting fruit in the dream bubble in the

top left corner of the etching. In *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History*, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra provides an in-depth analysis of the many illustrations that "Goblin Market" inspired. In a majority of the illustrations, tactility becomes the focus of the interaction between Lizzie, Laura, and the goblin men. This emphasis on tactility may heighten the sexual fantasy but also reinforces the care that touch may bring. I also believe that Dante Rossetti's desire "to balance a dramatic scene full of activity and narrative interest with a static or contemplative one that showed something essential about the characters" (Janzen Kooistra 72) demonstrates that an important aspect of Laura and Lizzie is their relationship. They are sisters and the illustration supports an interpretation of a caring tactile interaction. However, Dante Rossetti's title-page is one of the only illustrations that can be understood to represent an ethical tactile interaction. The other illustrations focus on the violence that is done to Lizzie in her attempt to save her sister (as I will explain shortly), or on the original interaction of Laura with the goblin men as she purchases the fruit with her "golden curl" (125). In Dante Rossetti's work, there is a definite regard for the growth of the relationship between the two sisters. The interaction represented in the etching occurs after Laura has eaten the fruit, thus the sisters' positioning as "[c]heek to cheek and breast to breast / [l]ocked together in one nest" (197-198) can be interpreted as Lizzie protecting Laura and giving her the attention she needs through holding and hugging. The positioning of their hands, gently resting on the neck and the shoulder, brings a sensuality to this tactility, yet the touch can be interpreted as protective while also being sensual. Lizzie's hands are shielding Laura from the goblins that are ever-present in the upper left hand corner of the image. Rossetti's own work at the St. Mary Magdalene House, an acknowleged source and

inspiration for this poem, should not be forgotten when looking at Dante's image. The Magdalene houses were places of refuge for former prostitutes: similarly Lizzie provides refuge and tactile care to Laura in the image. Lizzie also uses her tactility to protect herself from temptation in the poem and maintain her gendered embodiment. Lizzie strives to be a pure woman, free of temptation, keeping her body free of contamination from the goblin men and their fruit.

Lizzie uses her hands to prevent herself from hearing any tempting calls, when "[s]he thrust a dimpled finger / [i]n each ear" (67-68). Debra Cumberland reads this line as Lizzie "blocking herself off from the goblins' sensory assault that is slowly transforming her sister" (115). Lizzie attains temporary deafness by using one sensation against the other. Lizzie becomes acutely aware that her sister's temptation was caused by bodily transgression, and as a result Laura's illness is situated in her body. Thus Lizzie knows that she needs to use her body in order to cure and care for Laura, yet it is of utmost importance that she maintains her virginity and integrity while searching for the cure. After a violent ordeal with the goblin men, which I will explore next, Lizzie literally gives her body to her sister as a cure. Lizzie's ability to care and cure her sister is highly sensual; the description of Laura taking the cure from her sister is centered on hugging and kissing.

Both hugging and kissing are types of reciprocal touches. In hugging skin touches skin or clothing touches clothing, when one body is in contact with the other. Synonyms of hugging, such as squeeze or clasp, are also used in "Goblin Market," which equally emphasize the reciprocal and ethical nature of tactility. Hugging is a type of tactile interaction which demonstrates good intent, care, and affection. The OED defines

hugging as "to clasp or squeeze tightly in the arms: usually with affection" ("hug, v.," def.1a), and it is the affection demonstrated in a hug that gives this type of touch an ethical quality. When Lizzie returns, she offers her body to Laura: "Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices / Squeezed from goblin fruits for you" (468-469). Tactility becomes eroticized here, especially in reference to the residual juices that are all over Lizzie's body. As Nancy Welter states, Lizzie "freely offers her body to heal Laura, asking for nothing in exchange. In a clearly homoerotic sequence, Laura is saved by consuming Lizzie's body, or rather merely sucking the juices on her skin" (Welter 140). Kissing and the use of the mouth therefore become the focus of consumption and the source of Laura's cure. Here kissing is equated to consumption, and in the space of seven lines, the word "kiss" is used five separate times:

> She clung about her sister,
>
> Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
>
> […]
>
> She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth. (485-492)

The focus on kissing and hunger suggests the desire to eat and an intimacy within consumption. Laura kissed Lizzie "with a hungry mouth" which melds both Laura's need for sensuality after being incapable of "feeling" anything and her need for nourishment to cure her illness. It is only after she has been cured that Laura can be allowed to have any other truly meaningful tactile interaction with anyone.

There is touching and holding of hands in the poem, but this occurs only after Laura has seemingly been cured of her "illness," after her temptation has been eradicated. Handholding is explicitly referred to in relation to the children Lizzie and Laura have in the future. As a way of reinforcing the necessity of proximity to demonstrate care, the

sisters would retell the story about the "antidote" that Lizzie brought by "joining [their children's'] hands to little hands" and then "[w]ould bid them cling together" (559-561). Debra Cumberland reads this handholding as "a ritualistic celebration of female power in community," that a "creation of a circle forms sacred space and conjoined power" (124). What Cumberland is pointing to is the ending of "Goblin Market" as a feminist utopian vision, where a female positive space is created and reinforced through the tactile interaction of the children. It is a way to reconcile and redeem the unethical tactility of the attack on Lizzie in her attempt to attain the cure for her sister. It is this unethical tactility that I explore next.

2.1.2 Unethical Touch, Goblin Rape, and Bodily Sacrifice in "Goblin Market"

Touch and tactility also have the ability to demonstrate and create the inverse of care. This unethical tactility is usually caused when touch is accompanied with a disregard for embodied subjectivity, either intentional or accidental. The best example of this disregard of embodied subjectivity is in the objectification of a body as something to be consumed, or disregarded. This objectification happens when the space and place that a person inhabits is infringed upon, when bodily boundaries are transgressed instead of ethically maintained through tactility. Tactility that causes unethical movements towards violence and fear of bodily infringement can cause more than bodily violence but also cause violence to the psyche as well -- what affects the body does not have to be maintained upon the body. For example, rape as a sexually and physically violent act has not only physical residue but can also cause long lasting mental and spiritual trauma.

Rape and physically violent tactility are the sources of the majority of unethical, noncaring touches in "Goblin Market."

Lizzie's interaction with the goblin men as she attempts to save Laura from temptation and illness is laden with sexually violent imagery. More importantly this interaction is couched in tactility. Here the goblin men touch and attack Lizzie as they try to make her succumb to the temptation of the fruit (read: sexual temptation). As Cumberland states, Lizzie "leaves herself vulnerable by placing her body in danger at the goblins' hands" (120). This bodily danger is enacted on Lizzie through different types of tactility. We are told that the goblin men "[h]ugged her and kissed her, / [s]queezed and caressed her" (348-349). I have stated previously that to hug can denote care. However, the addition of the word "squeeze" within this sequence complicates the tactile interaction. This is not a caring touch but rather a violent one. One valence of the word squeeze is "to press hard, to exert pressure, esp. with the hand" ("squeeze,v.," def. 6a). Though squeezing can have a positive valence as well, the connotation within the context of the action in the verse suggests a more violent type of tactility. The violent nature of the goblin men's touches increases as Lizzie refuses the fruit and thus simultaneously refuses to fall into temptation. The goblin men

> Elbowed and jostled her,
>
> Clawed with their nails,
>
> Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
>
> Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
>
> Twitched her hair out by the roots,
>
> Stamped upon her tender feet,

> Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
>
> Against her mouth to make her eat. (400-407)

The action verbs in this passage all refer to tactile interactions that connote noncaring habits that molest or enact rage. The squeezing of fruit against her face connotes a forced and failed consumption. Lizzie does not consume; she merely touches the fruit as she attempts to get away from the goblin men. The enjambment of lines 406 and 407 echoes the action that the verse suggests; there is a forcing action here. Lizzie does not consume -- she refuses to open her mouth, she refuses to participate in the market. The fruit touches her face, her mouth, but none of the juices enter her. Because the goblins are "[m]ad to tug her standard down" (421), and destroy her virginity, her purity, they are willing to do anything to achieve her "fall." This implicit standard that Lizzie maintains and her refusal to become a "fallen woman" like her sister demonstrate that the possibility of redemption is available from the same source as temptation. The poem suggests that women can be redeemed, their corporal integrity maintained, if they refuse the temptation to consume what is advertised to them in the marketplace. Lizzie's interaction with the goblin men is an indication that the female can enter the marketplace and exit relatively unscathed. It is the virtuous woman who can refuse the sexualized temptation present in a consumer and material culture, and who can in turn become the savior for those women marginalized as fallen by society. Thus, ultimately Laura becomes representative of those women that the Contagious Disease Acts targeted, and Lizzie represents the possibility of an alternative -- of redemption instead of inspection.

The goblins' physical attack on Lizzie is an important sequence within the poem and has been illustrated numerous times. The illustrations of this attack often reinforce its

sexualized nature. Kinuko Craft illustrated the scene in which the following happens to the defiant Lizzie:

> the goblins cuffed and caught her,
>
> Coaxed and fought her,
>
> Bullied and besought her,
>
> Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
>
> Kicked and knocked her,
>
> Mauled and mocked her (424-429)

Craft's illustration, which appeared in *Playboy* in 1973, presents the "white and golden" (408) Lizzie faced (literally) with goblin men who are holding penises to her face, jabbing them into the rest of her body.[11] Lizzie's body is draped in white; her blonde hair flows in the wind. It is Lizzie's ability to resist this tactile assault that allows her to eventually return home and cure Laura. Thus, touch in "Goblin Market" is both a source of and cure for temptation. Since, as Pamela Gilbert states, "'[s]ensation' became a thinly veiled literary euphemism for the action of disease upon the body" (80), the use of sensation and tactility here reinforces ideas of the spread of contagion. "Goblin Market" also raises mid-nineteenth century concerns that "'contagion' could be more than physical; the very morals, emotions or intelligence of one person could be temporarily transferred to another" (Vrettos 85). This type of transference echoes the fear of contagion that the Contagious Diseases Acts were enacted to prevent. The poem thus

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[11] See Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's work, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* for Craft's illustration and a detailed analysis within a specific visual arts context.

presents a complex relationship to tactility, which mimics the complex changes in the use of tactility within a mid-nineteenth-century socio-cultural context.

The use of sensation and the sensual in "Goblin Market" has been addressed by many critics. For example, Nancy Welter suggests a framework to understand the physicality of the poem as a combination of realist and Gothic narratives (Welter 139). It is the emphasis on the physical response and the realist structure that is particularly interesting to my argument. There are definite realist and Gothic elements to "Goblin Market;" however, I suggest that the realist elements are grounded and brought to life through tactility which allows the poem to emphasize an ethicality that moves from the characters in the poem to in turn highlight the necessity for socio-cultural responsibility. Tactility is especially important for it highlights the embodiment of the Acts within the female form, specifically Laura's body. Within the female body reside the contaminants capable of crippling a household, even a nation, thus these contaminants and temptations need to be resisted or cured. This contamination in "Goblin Market" is seen in the erotic desire and underlying need to consume. Also, as a poem that is based within an overarching Christian framework, the poem demonstrates how "sense failed in the mortal strife" (Rossetti 513). As Sean Grass suggests, "the way to combat this sensory overload, in Laura and Lizzie's initial view, is twofold: the sisters must remain united, and they also must close their senses entirely to the avalanche of sensory input the situation attempts to force upon them" (Grass 362). Ultimately, when sensation is reclaimed from the confines of temptation and noncaring unethical interaction, it can be used to both care for and heal the body. However, the complex relationship of tactility to care is not always

so well-defined or overtly presented. George Meredith's "Modern Love" demonstrates the working out of the tension between care, love, and temptation by means of tactility.

2.2 "Modern Love"

Like "Goblin Market," George Meredith's "Modern Love" was also published in 1862. This long poem was written as fifty separate sixteen-line sonnets, a construction that allows the poem to be read as a novel instead of a poem. As Dorothy Mermin states, "'Modern Love' is a curiosity of Victorian literature, an oddity among Victorian poems and even among Meredith's own" (100) works, not only because it is "novelistic" but because of the way Meredith chose to treat his subject. In "Modern Love," Meredith uses the sensory, especially tactility, to demonstrate intersubjective relations and emphasize breaking the bonds of intimacy. As Michael Lund suggests, "Modern Love" is "an early brilliant poetical analysis of human relations" (316), and Meredith's emphasis on tactility, especially reciprocal tactility, moves the focus from situations of care or physical violence seen in my analysis of "Goblin Market," to reciprocal touch as the basis of love, marriage, and (in)fidelity. In the introduction to the 1962 Oxford edition of *Selected Poems of George Meredith*, Graham Hough states that "Modern Love" is positioned in the "history of the liberation of sexual relations from summary and conventional judgment that has been going on from Meredith's day to our own" (7). In essence "Modern Love" is in dialogue with the larger socio-political discourse of marriage. Meredith highlights the eventual consequences of infidelity within marriage. However, it is the suggestion that infidelity is even a possibility for the wife that makes "Modern Love" truly innovative. Meredith creates this possibility by accenting the use of tactility. Meredith places emphasis on reciprocal touch between a married couple as first

a marker of care, but then as a marker of infidelity. This emphasis on the reciprocity of tactility, the blurring between the lines of subject/object, toucher/touched (and the meaning behind these touches), ultimately causes tension and breakdown in the marriage.

As we have seen previously with "Goblin Market," reciprocal touch can contaminate, but it also has the ability to demonstrate care, for care is brought to the body through the body. Reciprocal touch, or touches that touch back, can also go beyond aspects of care to demonstrate passion and love in relationships. Though it is written as a series of sonnets, the narrative aspect of "Modern Love" is presented in first person as well as in third person omniscient point of view, with the primary focus being on the husband and his actions. The relationship between husband and wife transitions throughout the poem, from one of care, respect, and love, to one of betrayal and tension. This change in the married couple's relationship can be outlined through the mediation and modification of tactility indicated in the poem. Tracing tactility throughout the poem is particularly useful because "Modern Love" lacks a linear or chronological movement. Also "Modern Love" seemingly highlights the husband's psychological breakdown which further complicates the reader's ability to discern what is being described. Therefore, touch becomes an insightful and effectual way to analyze the poem.

The poem begins with the use of tactility that demonstrates a tension in the delivery of care and concern, similar to what I examined previously with "Goblin Market." The first lines of "Modern Love" -- "By this he knew she wept with waking eyes: / That, at his hand's light quiver by her head, / The strange low sobs that shook their common bed, / Were called into her with a sharp surprise" (Meredith 1.1-4) -- demonstrate how touch can rouse someone from a previous emotional state. The reaction

of the almost touch of the husband's hand to his wife's head is not entirely clear here; he could be attempting to console but doing it poorly, or rather it could be his lack of ability to touch that causes the wife's weeping in the first place. The use of the word "quiver" in the adjectival form to describe the husband's touch, meaning "active, nimble; quick, rapid; brisk, or lively" ("quiver, adj."), also has many connotative meanings. The rapidity of the husband's touch may suggest the desire to forgo the type of consolation that the wife requires. However, the word "quiver" can also suggest an adept ability, which can also be related to sexuality and sensuality (in the sense of providing sudden strong emotion). Thus, the husband can either be demonstrating care here or in fact causing more pain. This tension between tactile possibilities is carried throughout the poem and is also representative of the tension and socio-cultural power of tactility. As Philip E. Wilson suggests, "[t]he inexplicably stifled interaction of the [couple] helps convey the tenseness of the situation. They work at avoiding physical and verbal contact: although both are awake, they remain 'stone-still' and 'move-less,' 'like sculptured effigies'" (Wilson 155). Wilson highlights how lack of physical contact, lack of touch, can create and convey tension throughout the narrative frame of the poem.

Through his depiction of the married couple, Meredith accurately describes the tension innate in intersubjective relations. The ability or desire to touch or refrain from touch becomes a meaningful somatic function. The poetic imagery and narrative style demonstrate that the couple is capable of having tactile interactions that show care and respect for each other, but only when faced with the fear of loss within the relationship. As I will explain in more detail, the wife has taken on a lover and the husband only seems to offer what can be interpreted as a caring touch, as a way to bring his wife close to him

again. In stanza XLVI the husband: "moved /toward her, and made proffer of my arm. / She took it simply, with no rude alarm" (9-11). However, this tactile interaction that demonstrates the desire to care and respect easily slips into aggression and frustration which is emphasized throughout the poem. Stanza nine describes instances of tactile love, care, and affection between the couple juxtaposed with a tactility that can be simultaneously interpreted as sensual (or sexual) yet aggressive and possibly harming. This latent aggression is seen in sonnet IX which demonstrates the husband's guilt and resentment.

> He said: 'twas dusk; she in his grasp; none near.
> She laughed: 'No, surely; am I not with you?'
> And uttering that soft starry 'you,' she leaned
> Her gentle body near him, looking up;
> And from her eyes, as from a poison-cup,
> He drank until the flittering eyelids screened.
> Devilish malignant witch! And oh, young beam
> Of heaven's circle-glory! Here thy shape
> To squeeze like an intoxicating grape—
> I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme. (IX. 7-16)

The movement from "gentle body near him" to "squeeze like an intoxicating grape" distills the relationship between the couple that plays out within the totality of the poem into one stanza. The care and affection demonstrated by gentle bodies touching and loving regards being exchanged could indicate a couple that seemingly has a strong relationship. However, line fifteen "to squeeze like an intoxicating grape" complicates

this notion of a loving relationship. The fluctuation of her gentle body in line ten to the malignant witch in line thirteen, is representative of larger issues in the marriage, and echoes the husband's psychological break down – he is not sure who his wife is or who he is. The dash at the end of line fifteen creates a pause, and also seemingly elides the end of the speaker's thought. "I might" he continues, but we are left wondering what exactly it is he might do. Because "squeeze" has both positive and negative connotations, the ellipsis at the end of the line leaves the ethicality of the touch in question. As stated previously, the negative valence of squeeze refers to the application of pressure in order to extract ("squeeze,v." def. 5b.), which suggests an applying of pressure that could be deemed violent. It is a pressure that infringes on the wife's embodiment, marking it, bruising it just as easily as a piece of fruit can be bruised. However, the positive valence of squeezing can refer to a creation of proximity that demonstrates care, such as I have discussed previously in relation to a hug. This sort of either/or framing of tactility is frequently seen in Meredith's poem, and also serves to highlight how tactility can be understood in terms of extremes. These extremes in the valence of tactility become Meredith's way of expressing "bourgeois fears about promiscuous physical contact" (Vrettos 84). The wife taking a lover becomes a symbolically loaded topic that is referred to many times in the poem. By taking a lover, the wife's promiscuity brings the fear of contact to the fore and as a result a socio-cultural double-standard comes into play. The husband is told "distraction is the panacea, Sir" (XXVII.1), suggesting that it is good for him to take a lover (i.e. find a prostitute). For the wife the opposite is true, for as soon as she breaks her marriage vows and fidelity to her husband, "[n]ext, she has fallen" (XXI. 13). She has effectively, within the socio-cultural frame, lowered her status as well

as contaminated her body. Thus, the female form, specifically the way that female body is touched, is important.

"Modern Love" also demonstrates how vision and tactility are intertwined, where touch seems to take up from where vision leaves off. In "Modern Love" the eyes become more than the windows of the soul – they are rather one of the senses used to describe the tension between husband and wife. We are told that "[h]er eyes were guilty gates" (II. 2), a metaphor that applies ethicality to vision. Positioning the site of vision as the threshold of moral assessment is similar to what is demonstrated in the ethics of tactility. The metaphor shows one can unethically see as well as unethically touch, or as an extension that the eyes or the hand can become the seat of guilt and immorality. However, the speaker of the poem suggests that the couple seems to refuse to look at each other, as well as refuse to touch each other, demonstrating the strain and distance between them. As Arline Golden states, "the Petrarchan convention which symbolized spiritual union through the meeting of lovers' eyes has been reversed to show this couple's lack of union" (273). Therefore, not only is the couple engaging in a tactility that can be read as having nebulous ethical connotations, but also the lack of visual connection seems to carry the same ambiguous connection to ethics.

These extremes in the valence of tactility and the definition of the female body are also seen in the symbolism and imagery used in the poem. In stanza thirteen, the image of Mother Nature is presented as both the creator and destroyer of life. We are told her "hands bear, here, a seed-bag – there, an urn" (XIII.9). The seed-bag represents the beginning, the growth of humanity, and the urn represents the final resting place of humanity, to which we must all return. Mother Nature holds these symbolic pieces in her

hands, for it is implied in this passage that hands help create and can also help destroy. The creative ability of hands is revisited in stanza XV, when the speaker compares his wife's "waking infant stare / [g]rows woman to the burden my hands bear" to "[h]er own handwriting to me when no curb / [w]as left on Passion's tongue" (XV. 10-13). In these verses the wife becomes representative of all women, a burden to be carried in his hands. Simultaneously line ten refers to the burdens that all women must bear. Much more than a reference to the original sin, the burden evoked here is exacerbated by the objectification of women, highlighting a body that is often written upon politically and socio-culturally. The wife in this section is moved from being represented by her body to being represented through her handwriting, what she has written. Not only must woman be contained within the boundaries of what legislation has presented (her legal position/duty as a wife) but rather here Meredith gives her the ability to move beyond this position through her own words/writing and ultimately through her thoughts and actions. Her handwriting is all that remains of the love and passion between the married couple. This description becomes a reference to the power of the written word to not only legislate, contain, confine, and reinscribe the body, but to also free the body by documenting what is occurring beyond the confines of the body.

Stanza XXXV demonstrates the importance that all the sensations and the use of the sensory have to the depiction of relationships in "Modern Love." Lines two and three of stanza XXXV describe the wife as "[s]ecretive, sensitive, she takes a wound / [d]eep to her soul, as if the sense had swooned," where the use of "sensitive" and "sense" underscores how the wife's embodiment is given in the poem through an overall relation to the sensory, especially tactility. The husband's lover is also literally

incorporated/embodied in terms of all the senses in stanza XXXIX, creating a description of her body in much more detail than what we see with the wife:

> She yields: My Lady in her noblest mood
>
> Has yielded: she, my golden-crowned rose!
>
> The bride of every *sense* more *sweet* than those
>
> Who breathes the violet breath of maidenhood.
>
> O visage of still music in the sky!
>
> Soft moon! I feel thy song, my fairest friend!
>
> True harmony within can apprehend
>
> Dumb harmony without, And hark! 'tis nigh!
>
> Belief has struck the note of *sound* a gleam
>
> Of living silver shows me where she shook
>
> Her *long white fingers* down the shadowy brook,
>
> That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.
>
> What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?
>
> A man is one: the woman bears my name,
>
> And honour. Their hands *touch*! Am I still tame?
>
> God, what a dancing spectre, seems the moon!
>
> (XXXIX.1-16, emphasis added)

This detailed sensory description highlights the sensual nature of the husband's relationships. Framed within the voyeurism of the husband, stanza thirty-nine describes his lover as "the bride of every sense" (3), and then goes on to refer to her in terms of those senses ("more sweet") culminating in line twelve where they are interrupted by his

wife and her lover ("what two come here"). The enjambment of lines nine and ten serve to create a synaesthetic metaphor where sound is described in terms of sight, seen in the use of "a gleam." The site of his lover's tactility, her fingers, is used in line eleven to encapsulate her complete embodiment through a sense of movement through the brook. However, when tactility reappears in line fifteen, it is through the wife's touches which produce "the only other piece of material evidence" (Fletcher 91) of infidelity.[12]

The confirmation of tactility serves as a confirmation of guilt and deceit. It is a point of climax similar to what Eve Sedgwick mentioned in *Touching Feeling*: "[t]hink of all the Victorian novels whose sexual plot climaxes, not in the moment of adultery, but in the moment when the proscenium arch of the marriage is, however excruciatingly, displaced"(73). The visual confirmation of tactility here causes the displacement of the arch over the marriage. As I show in Chapter Four, tactility at times requires visual confirmation in order to determine whether the tactile habit is unethical/noncaring or ethical/caring. In "Modern Love" the touching of hands demonstrates comfort and an ease with proximity between the wife and the other unnamed man, her lover. This comfort, ease, and proximity is in contrast to "[h]er long moist hand [which] clings mortally to" her husband's (XXI.16). The mediation of dampness upon the hand shows her fear and lack of comfort with her husband. As John Holmes suggests, in stanza XX and XXI "the husband, and Meredith through him, affirms the equivalence of male and female sexual indiscretion in the face of the notorious double-standard of Victorian sexual morality, personified in the doctor who prescribes prostitutes as a tonic for a

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[12] The first piece of material evidence of infidelity is seen in stanza 25 where the husband finds a love letter from his wife to her lover. He contemplates how similar the letter is to letters she used to write him: "I show another letter lately sent. / The words are very like: the name is new" (XV.15-16).

married man" (Holmes 532). Touch here demonstrates that guilt does not necessarily reside in one specific gender, upon one specific skin. As I have indicated above, the gender bias within the Contagious Diseases Act placed guilt upon the female body; the source of contagion is gendered female and embodied in the female form, which tends to disregard the reciprocity of tactility within contagion. "Modern Love" demonstrates how touch truly is reciprocal and both the toucher and the touched are accountable in the act of touch.

One of the other times where hand to hand reciprocal touching occurs in the poem can be seen as symbolizing prayer or meditation. However, hand to hand touching has other more cutting connotative valences. For example, in stanza nineteen the speaker refers to his distrust of his wife in terms of a simile: " 'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by, / still rubs his hands before him, like a fly / In a queer sort of meditative mirth" (XIX.15-16). This is a loaded image, for not only is it evocative of putting hands together in prayer, but also flies rub their legs together in order to clean them and so that they can ultimately hear better. The image that is invoked with the rubbing of the hands creates a mixing of the sensory with utilitarian purposes. The need to clean and remove contamination seen on the part of the fly can also be brought back to the need for containment and the fear of the spread of disease through tactile interaction which is brought into the relationship by the wife. Therefore, since it is given from the husband's point of view, this verse is also suggesting that the wife is diseased, and that ultimately her love for her husband has been contaminated by her love for another. Insects in particular evoke "diseases transmitted through the air in the synchronic dimension, the

infection in the blood […] spread contagiously" (Christensen 34). Everything must remain clean in order to stop the spread of these diseases.

The senses, especially tactility, have a relation to contagion that is also ultimately related to epistemology: touches bring knowledge in "Modern Love." As Kenneth Crowell states, "it is Victorian language, epistemology, and mores -- which Meredith was actively resisting and satirizing" (Crowell 554). For example, stanza seventeen contains the following lines which simultaneously speak of contagion and knowledge gained through the sensory: "It is in truth a most contagious game: / *Hiding the Skeleton*, shall be its name" (6-7). As Pauline Fletcher states, Meredith "is aware of the skull beneath the skin, but that awareness makes for a fuller and more compassionate portrait of the woman" (95). The juxtaposition of the concept of contagion and the reference to "hiding" seen in the title of the game reinforces the understanding of contagion and disease as something that is hidden and cannot be seen by the naked eye. This line also refers to the necessity of the couple to hide any indiscretions in their relationship.

It is disease and the source of this contagion that is echoed in stanza XXXIII, where the speaker of the poem muses upon his lady: "*While mind is mastering clay, / Gross clay invades it*" (14-15). Dorothy Mermin sees this "grossness and shapelessness" as an "unvisualizable image" (106). However, the image of clay, as a malleable material, something that can be shaped with hands, can be related back to the belief that touch can ultimately shape our bodies. The social echo of "[h]ow rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel" (XLI. 8) also speaks to the reluctance to "feel"—both emotionally and physically, to be in touch with our bodies. Feelings often necessarily go beyond the emotional aspect to directly refer to the sense that allows for "feeling" -- touch. As Golden states, "[o]ther

sequences may have indirectly revealed the mores of their time, but that was never their chief aim […] [o]nly in Meredith's sequence are the problems of the lovers related so explicitly to the problems of the age" (284). Meredith presents a time when "marriage was expected to last for life, and was the only licit arena for sexual activity" (Roberts 130). Fluctuations in the depictions and representation of female embodiment in relation to the "death do us part" aspect of marriage are explicitly related through the knowledge the sensory provides. If marriage was to last for life, there should not be any excessive tactility or sensual understandings outside of the confines of the marriage.

In the second to last stanza, Meredith solidifies the role of the sensory within knowledge and embodiment, particularly female embodiment as it relates to women's preconceived role within society/relationships. "Their sense is with their senses all mixed in" (XLVIII.1), says the speaker about women in general, which in turn implies that overall understanding is the culmination of a mixture of the senses. However, as Mermin suggests, "[s]ense and senses may be wrongly mixed, subtlety may lead to sin and error, but an unmixed nature is in humans impossible" (106). Thus, "Modern Love" reinforces that the ethics of tactility is dependent on the proper use and mixing of the senses. This suggests a synaesthesia where the mid-Victorian understanding of the self and embodiment is shown through a "bundle or collection of different perceptions" (Faas 59). The speaker's apostrophe in the middle of stanza forty-seven, "O this agony of flesh" (10) is both a lament about the human condition as a collection of different senses but also a direct address to the skin as the sense that "feels."

Meredith also seems to also point to negotiations of our environment through touch, a concept that I will expand upon in Chapter Two. The wife's ability to both claim

as well as navigate her household is given through touch: "She has desires of touch, as if to feel / That all the household things are things she knew" (XXII.5-6). The fact that these lines present the wife's tactility as a simile is interesting. What the simile does is suggest that the wife could not feel, that she was anesthetic because she has "desires of touch" which may or may not be actualized. However, the fact that this feeling and tactility are linked to her household things wants to grounds her identity to the household and the material elements within the household. Lines five and six also demonstrate a distance of the wife from the domestic space and thus emphasize the need for her to return to the confines of marriage. It is only when she is brought to the domestic sphere through tactility that the resolution of the poem can be suggested. When "[s]he took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed / [t]he wife he sought" (XLIX. 5-6), the wife's gesture is one of reconciliation and it is an act of reconciliation done using the same gesture which demonstrated her betrayal and infidelity. Meredith is underscoring how tactility and touching bring knowledge and reinforce embodiment that is informed by the socio-cultural understanding of the body. Meredith's poem is a sharp portrayal of Victorian intersubjective relations, especially in the need to highlight what happens when one moves outside of their social position.

As Alan P. Barr suggest, "[i]n 1862, the poem irked and even scandalized reviewers for its disturbing tastelessness and for what seemed its vulgar, amoral undressing of marital relations" (283). By using the marital relationship as the centre of the exploration of "Modern Love," Meredith can not only speak to the tensions between a Victorian couple but also can address the tensions within intersubjective relations in general. In 1892, Meredith reissued his poem with some small revisions. He also included

a companion poem entitled "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady." As John Holmes suggests, reissuing the poem with the companion poem reinforces "the political implications of *Modern Love* itself, tying the sexual reform proposed in the earlier poem to the wider political program of women's emancipation embodied in the honest lady" (Holmes 538). The reissue allowed for a revisiting of ideas and ideologies that continued to be present thirty years following the original publication. The publication history of "Modern Love" thus loosely bookends the enacting and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, all the while indicating that this is modern love with all its complexity in terms of emotional and sexual relations.

George Meredith's friend, Algernon Charles Swinburne, also published a "scandalous" poem four years after Meredith had first published "Modern Love." Swinburne's poem further represents the fear of contagion and the socio-cultural importance and fear of tactility. Swinburne, like Meredith, symbolizes this fear of contagion through reciprocal touching, but he does so by associating this contagion with the spread of leprosy.

2.3 "The Leper"

Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Leper" was published in 1866, but it has an interesting composition history. Leprosy was not the original topic of Swinburne's "The Leper." Clyde K. Hyder tells us that "The Leper" was originally a poem called "A Vigil" which "contains no mention of leprosy or of anything else horrible" (1281). We also know that "The Leper" was completed by 1862 (Greenberg 101) but only published four years later, which suggests that something occurred to make Swinburne modify the topic of the poem. Leprosy in this poem not only highlights the anxiety around between

disease, contagion, and illness as moral punishment, but also speaks to larger mid-Victorian socio-cultural/socio-political issues. As Rod Edmond states, "by the second half of the nineteenth century, leprosy was perceived as an imperial problem" (Edmond 508). Thus, leprosy undermined the ability of the Empire to grow, specifically to grow as a healthy body. Leprosy can therefore be interpreted and understood as analogous to the sexually transmitted diseases that the Contagious Diseases Acts addressed, for in both cases "the Government wanted to know about its causation, transmission, inherent character, and spread" (Edmond 508). Both leprosy and sexually transmitted diseases caused government reaction where committees were formed to discover and address the cause and spread of these diseases.

Swinburne addresses these ideas of contagion, spread, and morality in "The Leper" specifically through the representations of kisses and also through the use of tactility, which reinforce embodiment and the complex relationship of the body to containment. It has been noted that "Swinburne's outrageous acts and radical sympathies made him *the* symbol of social, political, and religious revolt in Victorian Britain" (Damrosch 1766). Thus, it is only fitting that he would change his poem "The Vigil," a title which connotes a focus on the visual, on watching and waiting, to "The Leper," wherein this observational mode can be directly applicable to socio-cultural issues of embodiment, disease, containment, and tactility. "The Leper" was also originally accompanied by a note attributing the source of the poem to a sixteenth-century French story in which a clerk who was a servant to a woman with leprosy "delighted in kissing her foul and leprous mouth and in caressing her gently with his loving hands. And he also died of this same abominable disease" (Damrosch 1767). This back story to the poem

focuses the contagion squarely within the confines of tactility; here kisses and touches raise questions of ethics, embodiment, and sexuality. Christensen states, "the atmosphere in which the Contagious Diseases Acts were debated naturally informs many literary works of the 1860s and 1870s" (5), and I suggest the tactility in the poem can be seen as a way to create and maintain a dialogue with this debate. James Eli Adams explains that the Acts "represented a newly specific intervention of state authority in sexual conduct, which entailed not only intensified forms of police surveillance, but also increasingly precise typologies of sexual deviance" (133). In "The Leper" tactile interaction serves to typify the clerk as sexually deviant for he willingly (sexually and sensually) touches the source of disease and contagion.

Throughout "The Leper" the image of the clerk embracing the leprous Lady is revisited. As a dramatic monologue, the poem focuses this image of the leprous Lady through the eyes of the clerk as speaker. This "combining [of] passionate love and leprosy […] aroused indignation" (Hyder 1287), because leprosy was not to be depicted in relation to passion. The repetition of the kissing, a tactile placement, a touch through the lips, evokes the story of Judas, where the treachery in the kiss seemingly betrays the woman as one who is diseased. The eyes are continually the focus of the kiss, the touch: "He that had held her by the hour, / With kissing lips blinding her eyes" (56-57). Each time the kiss gives temporary blindness, until death provides permanent blindness.

The kisses are referred to as the source of contamination: "Her fervent body leapt or lay, / Stained with sharp kisses red and white, / Found her plague to spurn away" (66-68). The kisses are sharp; they leave stains on her body, marking the whiteness of her body with a redness that indicates the violence being done to her body. The poem then

suggests, like Robert Browning's "Porphyria's Lover," that the clerk is still touching and kissing her body after she has died. The Lady's body is desecrated after her death as the ethical, caring touches and kisses move to an unethical, at times disturbing portrayal of necrophilia. The speaker says, "[h]er hair, half grey half ruined gold, / [t]hrills me and burns me in kissing it" (103-104), as the Lady's seemingly pure and virginal state, reinforced by the reference to her golden hair, is marred by the post-mortem kisses.

The portrayal of the Lady is a departure from the focus on individual body parts in the representation of leprosy. Here we are presented a woman who is a complete embodiment of a diseased body -- she is not simply described in terms of pale skin or golden hair, but rather a woman cared for by the clerk. As Dennis Denisoff states in *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940*, "Swinburne thereby undermines moral convention's usual monopoly - its disembodied privilege - over the diseased woman and her lover" (23), which is provided through a focus on tactility that brings the attention back to the Lady and her body, though not always her disease. "The reader is constantly reminded of the 'fleshly body'"(Denisoff 23) but though the body is represented as more than simply a body, but actually a woman with subjectivity, there are instances throughout the poem that speak to isolation and containment of the body as an object. Thus, though the woman is ethically presented as a person and not an objectified body for the most part, she nonetheless needs to be contained within a specific place. In the end her subjectivity and embodiment are negated when she becomes an object that is used/consumed after death.

This focus on containment is also a larger social commentary on the positioning of the female body, concepts of subjecthood, and intersubjective relations during a time

when the role of touch within contagion discourse was being questioned and legislated. As Robert Greenberg states, "[t]he poet himself never shows his hand, allowing the historical event that [Swinburne] reconstitutes, and the voice that he gives to it, to carry his meaning" (102). Here political and social commentary is given through the representation of leprosy as the metaphor for contagion and containment which can in turn be related to the discussion surrounding the enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts. As Stallybrass and White suggest, "writing, then, made the grotesque *visible*" (139), and this is done by playing with the confines of what would be an acceptable distance from what is understood as grotesque. Since in the mid-nineteenth century acceptable distance is "*untouchable* distance" (Stallybrass and White 139), Swinburne balks at this convention when he has the hand of the clerk seemingly continually encompass and envelope the lady. "Both feet could lie into my hand" (34), says the clerk and "inside [his] grasp all night, / her fervent body leapt or lay" (65-66). The lady is contained by the clerk, and her existence is given through a relation to his proximity. Even after her death, he still holds on to her body in the same way he did before: "six months, and I sit still and hold / [i]n two cold palms her cold two feet" (101-102). The description of both the clerk's hands and the Lady's cold feet connects them through their reciprocal tactility. However, in this poem the reciprocal touch is complicated because the touch that touches back is inanimate, a concept that I will explore in Chapter Four.

The Lady's embodiment and description in relation to subjectivity seems constant except in the reference provided in the middle of the poem, which speaks to the way that the disease has affected her body: "Changed with disease her body sweet, / The body of love wherein she abides" (47-48). These lines not only align the changes in her body as it

is afflicted with leprosy with the sense of taste, in that the body is "sweet," but also frames her body as a place which houses love. Her body as housing love is specifically seen in the use of the word "abide," which connotes dwelling or remaining in a place. It is one instance when "the integrity of the body, and its importance as an expression of cherished, fundamental distinctions and categories, is challenged and undermined by the clerk's pleasure in the Lady's imperfections" (Edmond 511). The transgression of boundaries and the questioning of containment are concepts I will revisit in Chapter Two when addressing the depiction of space and architecture through tactility.

The final image in "The Leper" is of the movement from sight towards touch as epistemological: "It may be now she hath in sight / Some better knowledge, still there clings / The old question. Will not God do right?" (138-140). The use of the word "clings" gives a tactile connotation to where knowledge is to be found; it attaches itself, it is found on the body. Hyder suggests that evoking God at the end of the poem is a "triumph of mind over matter, of affection over loathing, [it is] spiritual and not animal" (1280). I believe that the matter and form in the poem given through tactility is an effective way to address questions of morality and, as Edmond states, is a way to "consciously exploit the uncertainty around definition and diagnoses" (516). "The Leper" allows the female body to be outlined and defined through tactility despite the nature of the dramatic monologue giving privilege to the speaker's description. The poem addresses issues of contagion and containment through the larger topic of leprosy, which can be interpreted in a similar manner as the sexual transmission of disease and the enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Like "Goblin Market" and "Modern Love," "The Leper" demonstrates how touches that touch back create a complex relation to

embodiment, and containment, highlighting gender divisions and the tension within intersubjective relations.

2.4 Reciprocal Touching: Questioning the Liminal

In all the instances of reciprocal touching discussed above, the function of the liminal, though implied, seems blurred. Touches always require an active toucher and an active or passive touched. However, between the toucher and the touched there is always a space, an undeterminable limit, where touch "actually" exists. The boundary between toucher and touched is often where ethics and ethical embodiment lie, for it is in the recognition of the liminal space that caring habits as well as violent tactility can be transmitted through intersubjective interactions.

In "Goblin Market," for example, the goblins' attack on Lizzie is unethical precisely because the space between the goblins' and Lizzie's embodiment becomes almost claustrophobic. There is no respect for personal space, and Lizzie's bodily confines are infringed upon and violently attacked.[13] In "Modern Love" the relationship between a married couple is questioned through the exploration of how reciprocal touches can simultaneously demonstrate care, but also quantify guilt. Through reciprocal touch husband and wife can show their love and affection for each other, as the liminal space between toucher and touched is intentionally blurred and can be erased as they become one body under the eyes of God. However, that same touch can in turn betray infidelity and solidify proximity, dissolving the space where well maintained boundaries should have existed. "The Leper" summarizes instances that demonstrate proximity while

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[13] I compare this to the modern concept of the "personal space bubble" that we encounter in public surroundings in the conclusion.

also reinforcing containment, literally providing social commentary on contagious diseases while providing ethical representations of female embodiment that surpass disease. Here the female is a subject only until she becomes objectified as a diseased body after death.

This questioning of liminal spaces is also seen in the use of tactility as a way to negotiate one's environment, as seen with the wife of "Modern Love" and the inscribing of the Lady within a particular space/place in "The Leper." Literature after 1860 uses tactile interaction as a way to describe and depict the navigation and interaction of a body within space -- urban and/or domestic. This ability to negotiate or the inability to navigate one's environment, as I address in Chapter Two, is a direct commentary on the precedence that tactility took within a socio-cultural frame especially following the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts. What we witness is a type of haptic perception, where characters use touch to see where they are going and in turn even create the space that they inhabit through interaction with material objects. In these instances of haptic architecture and perception, touch can become entangled with the concept of performance or performativity, reinforcing how one should ideally behave/act within the public or private sphere.

3 Tactile Architecture: Embodying Performance

In the previous chapter I explored examples of touch as a liminal construct, demonstrating an implicit ethics of intersubjectivity within mid to late-Victorian literature. Touch has both a positive and a negative valence in these instances, and can be seen as being caring or noncaring. Noncaring touch is often seen and described as violent. This chapter will focus on what is termed an "acaring" construct of touch, that is to say, touch that does not necessarily have a particular positive or negative valence (it is neither good nor bad) but rather goes beyond these binary divisions. The concept of "acaring" habits comes from Maurice Hamington who defines "an acaring habit [as] a morally neutral pattern the body uses to navigate its environment" (57). Hamington gives an example of screws and screwdrivers in relation to acaring habits, as a way to demonstrate how acaring habits work. Hamington suggests that the work done by screwdrivers does not have any moral valance but rather assists in the construction of the built environment. He does go on to say that this particular example is "morally uninteresting" (57), but I feel that this type of tactile work has a larger importance, because the work done by touch can help build and define our environment.

Keeping Hamington's work in mind, I will extend his definition of an acaring tactile habit as one that helps negotiate space. I argue that acaring tactile habits are inextricably connected to architectural constructs/confines and to how one uses touch to negotiate space and place, public or private. In essence these types of acaring tactile habits assist in the construction, narration, and performance of the confines of the built environment found in mid to late-Victorian literature. This acaring tactility can be seen as

a type of haptic perception. Acaring touches work in two distinct ways in the literature that I analyze: first, these touches allow the character to understand and ultimately perform her or his subjectivity within a specific built environment; and second, these touches can describe, relate, and delineate a space in which the character works or performs. Through these acaring touches the characters can break through confines, readdress borders, and focus on the liminality of space. Thus this is a "touch that creates/maintains/destroys architecture," as I have named it in the introduction.

My use of the term "architecture" is specific in this analysis. The OED defines architecture as "the art or science of building or constructing edifices of any kind for human use" ("architecture, n.," def. 1) as well as "construction or structure generally" ("architecture, n.," def. 5). My use of the term architecture, as is seen in this chapter and in this dissertation as a whole, reflects this second definition. Touch here constructs or reinforces structure generally. As Juhani Pallasmaa suggests, understanding the architecture that surrounds us through touch "enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and time" (71). Touch allows for the negotiation of the material elements that make up our world and in turn the architectural and spatial confines that contain these material elements.

My definition of architecture is informed by feminist architectural theory as well as by Juhani Pallasmaa's work in *The Eyes of the Skin*. As Deborah Fausch suggests, "[feminist] architecture can, by offering experiences that correspond to, provide modes for, the experience of the body, give validity to a sense of the self as bodily" (Fausch 427). I argue that this link between architecture and embodiment is inextricably tied to

the idea of containment and confinement. It is the experience of space through touch that allows the body to position itself in relation to the world. Looking at architecture through the use of tactility in order to negotiate the space and materiality of the environment allows touch to “propose new relationships between form and content” (Fausch 430).

As I have mentioned above, this type of touch can be understood as a type of haptic perception. For Laura Marks, “haptic *perception* is usually defined as the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies” (2). Through haptic perception we can experience architecture but also experience how architectural confines relate to the body. As Pallasmaa suggests, “architecture is communication from the body of the architect directly to the body of the person who encounters the work” (67), and I take this one step further to suggest that this communication is a performance of sorts, a way to live and be within a certain space. Understanding space through touch allows for self-legislation if you will. For example, one knows how to negotiate a kitchen once the space is recognized through tactility and visuality as being a kitchen. The utilitarian function of a kitchen as a space where, traditionally, meals are created thus suggests that a kitchen would not necessarily be the place where you would play Twister. Whether we are conscious of it or not, the space we encounter dictates how we use the space or how we perform in the space. Certain spaces are for certain activities, thus the confinement of activities and the performance of these activities to a certain space is very much like the concepts of spatial and bodily confinement and containment as seen in the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Therefore, a type of performance necessarily occurs when one negotiates one's environment through tactility. This chapter will address how tactility can not only define a space but in turn dictates the performance appropriate to certain spatial confines. Performance and performativity have been brought to the fore notably by Judith Butler. Butler emphasizes how "iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production" (Butler 95). My work moves from Butler's emphasis to suggest that touch brings about and emphasizes this ritualized production. Post-modern feminist performance theorists such as Peggy Phelan and Elin Diamond, among others, provide a secondary framework for my analysis of performance and performativity as seen through tactile understanding of space and architecture.

My discussion of performance will not be solely based on how one performs within a public or private space but will also look at the concept of performativity as it relates to the spaces created (or elided) upon the stage. Concepts of performance and performativity become increasingly modified throughout the Victorian period. As Daphne Brooks states, "[w]ith ever-increasing technological advances, Victorian performance culture produced narratives of bodily transfiguration and instability" (23). Performance culture in the Victorian era highlights changes in concepts of embodiment through the advancement in performance and staging techniques which echoed the audiences desire to feel as though they were really part of the drama unrolling on stage. This feeling was achieved through the development of realistic props and better background scenery, such as a movement from painted canvas to three-dimensional features on stage (Jackson 53). Late Victorian theatrical texts, especially those written by women, demonstrate how the "New Women were variously engaged […] in trying to

create, to name, and to 'author' new theatrical and social identities for women" (Marshall 166). Thus, how women are positioned as social subjects can be understood as being at the complex intersection of: architecture (where the subject is in space/place, public/private) performance (how the subject acts or performs within that space) and tactility (how the subject understands/knows where s/he is positioned in that particular space/place).

As stated previously, the main focus of this chapter will be the acaring habits of touch. These acaring habits do not necessarily have a specific good/bad dichotomy but instead these habits provide general "rules of conduct recognized in certain associations or departments of human life" ("ethics, adj. and n.," def. 3c). This connotative understanding of ethics is especially highlighted in John Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust*. In Ruskin's work ethics refers to ethical dilemmas and dynamics as well as ethics in terms of general rules of conduct and negotiations within society without the overarching binary confines of good and evil. *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) is a text that blurs genres by literally exploring the performance of architecture through tactility. Through this play / philosophical treatise / series of transcribed lectures, Ruskin addresses how the understanding of tactility can intersect with our ability to create architectural confines. Ruskin also suggests how architectural confines play an important role in the staging of performance.

This chapter will also refer to one of the few nineteenth-century dramatic pieces written by female playwrights, Bell and Robins's *Alan's Wife* (1893), to address the creation of and the movement beyond performance space. *Alan's Wife* highlights how instances of tactility that are placed on the periphery of the stage can complicate the

understanding of bodily violence as well as redefine the theatrical space. The larger moral question in *Alan's Wife* is one that functions behind spatial enclosures, in a touch contained behind closed doors and beyond representation – namely, is infanticide justified? What if it is performed beyond the enclosure of the stage?

The concept of enclosure and containment is also seen in Victoria Cross's "Theodora: A Fragment." Cross's work explicitly explores the ethics of domestic spaces by using the word "ethics" when describing the negotiating of sitting rooms and the material objects that make up that space. Cross uses the materiality of the space much like a theatrical representation, where the props in her narrative serve can further enforce the concepts of gendered space and embodiment. Ultimately, through an analysis of these three texts, this chapter will demonstrate that tactility is part of a performance that can both create and destroy architecture. Touch can highlight the transgression of physical boundaries, and signal a change in intersubjective relations.

3.1 *The Ethics of the Dust*

John Ruskin is the quintessential Victorian polymath. Architect, artist, philosopher, critic, Ruskin worked closely with many who were involved in the mid-Victorian reform movements. One of the most defining friendships in Ruskin's life was his friendship with Octavia Hill. Octavia Hill is best known for her philanthropic work, which looked to advance the availability of social housing and highlight the necessity of hygiene in these spaces. As Peter Clayton states, "Behind the simple day-to-day humanity of [Hill's] work lay an ethical strategy. Octavia Hill was influenced by John Ruskin, the English art critic and philosopher. Ruskin held that a root cause of society's malaise was the absence of routine personal contact between classes. The poor lived their lives in

obscure, impenetrable corners of cities" (Clayton). Ruskin highlights the need to illuminate these obscure corners of life in his work, *The Ethics of the Dust*. Yet in this text Ruskin also seems to reinforce that there are nevertheless restrictions that need to be upheld in this "routine personal contact." By highlighting and reinforcing the necessity for the regulation of tactile contact, Ruskin constructs a social commentary on the issues prevalent in the Contagious Diseases Acts. Ruskin's commentary emphasizes the importance and the necessity of boundaries. However, his philanthropic gesture as a financial sponsor for Octavia Hill's housing project seemingly complicates his position as social critic. As I will argue, a text like *The Ethics of the Dust* seems to espouse the necessity for the maintenance of proper socio-cultural boundaries within intersubjective tactile relations, yet by financing social housing Ruskin participates in a complex dialogue which explores the need for divisions.[14]

Throughout the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts Ruskin was in correspondence with Josephine Butler and her husband, which further suggests that Ruskin was interested in maintaining currency with those who were supporting social reform.[15] In 1866 Ruskin would publish a text that literally incorporates theories of architecture, art, and tactile contact, while simultaneously bringing concepts of embodiment and intersubjectivity to the fore. By being many things at once, *The Ethics of the Dust* seemingly performs John Ruskin's eccentricity. *The Ethics of the Dust* actively

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[14] It is important to note that Ruskin was notoriously against female suffrage and had other views that seem to run counter to concepts of gender equality. He was for universal education, but he did not approve of women working in similar positions to men.

[15] See the Josephine Butler Letters Collection Online at the University of Liverpool for a sample of the correspondence between Butler and Ruskin.

refuses to be positioned and categorized within a single genre. As I will demonstrate, *The Ethics of the Dust* can be conceptualized as a series of thematic circles which slightly overlap but are also concentric at times. Because of the overlapping of ideas and thematic confines, I argue that the resolution of the text seems to reside at the centre of a Venn diagram which emphasizes that the personal is a performance space.

Ruskin is well known as a writer who has the ability to combine and develop numerous concepts while advancing a single argument. For example, *The Stones of Venice* is often studied in nineteenth-century literature survey classes, where Ruskin's intersection of art, architecture, and morality facilitates a classroom discussion of the aesthetic and of writers who share Ruskin's aesthetic eye, such as William Morris. Unlike *The Stones of Venice,* on the surface *The Ethics of the Dust* seemingly has nothing to do with architecture. However, the frames and structures presented in *The Ethics of the Dust* suggest that the creation of architecture informs the text.

The Ethics of the Dust was first published in 1866, with the subtitle, "Ten Lectures to Little Housewives on the Elements of Crystallization." The subtitle effectively gives the context and alludes to the audience of the work. *The Ethics of the Dust* is the result of a series of lectures that Ruskin gave in the early 1860s at the Winnington Academy, a girls' school in Cheshire. Though Ruskin states in the preface that his work has "absence of all reference to many important principles of structure" (202), it is in fact overwhelmingly decided by structure. I contend that ultimately there are three structural elements that work independently throughout the text to combine at the end of the series of lectures in order to provide the overarching moral of the text. The three organizing structures at work in *The Ethics of the Dust* are genre, crystallography,

and architecture.[16] Ultimately, these three structures allow Ruskin to emphasize the underlying performative aspect of the work. Through the play-like performance and positioning of crystals (as embodied by the schoolgirls), spatial confines are created, reinforced, maintained or destroyed. What is highlighted in the schoolgirls' performance as crystals are the ethics of intersubjective relations within society as a whole. The schoolgirls embody socio-cultural mores; they enact and react based on the Old Lecturer's direction. The Old Lecturer's direction in turn reflects the expected manner in which women should negotiate the public sphere, and functions as a social commentary on the creation and maintenance of boundaries.

The first organizing structure of *The Ethics of the Dust* is genre. As a series of Socratic dialogues, Ruskin's text is positioned as a work that will necessarily interrogate a moral problem. However, I argue that his moral or ethical treatise is hedged within the overarching performative aspect of the text. This is not simply a philosophical text laid out as a dialogue between speakers; it is organized very much like a play. As Francis O'Gorman states, "*The Ethics of the Dust* seems to be Ruskin's most obviously audience-specific work" (563). In fact *The Ethics of the Dust* can be understood as Ruskin's only play. Ruskin is better known for his lectures and longer prose pieces, and the subtitle to this work specifies that this is in fact ten lectures to little housewives. Yet, the theatrical elements of *The Ethics of the* Dust cannot be ignored.

The inclusion of a "dramatis personae" is one of the theatrical elements present in the text. The "dramatis personae" outlines the speakers as "an Old Lecturer (of

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[16] Mythology also features prominently in the text but as I will argue later, Ruskin's use of mythology in the text sets up further resistance to classification of the text based on genre.

incalculable age)" as well as his ten students, the housewives of the subtitle, listed in order of age. The condescending labeling of the students as "little housewives" serves to distance the students from their teacher, and firmly positions the Old Lecturer as the stage director. Simultaneously the belittling use of "little housewives" indicates that the students are in need of education that relates to their domestic position.

Continuing with theatrical elements as textually presented, the table of contents outlines the names of each lecture, which function as the different acts of a play. In addition, each lecture is accompanied with a stage setting and direction before the lines of dialogue. For example, the first lecture is called "The Valley of the Diamonds" and is followed by "a very idle talk, by the dining-room fire, after raisin-and-almond time" (209). Lecture four, entitled "The Crystal Orders," is followed by "a working Lecture, in the large School-room; with experimental Interludes. The great bell has rung unexpectedly" (246). This is not simply placing the lecture in a specific pedagogical space; this is stage direction, right down to the audio cues. The final lecture's direction even speaks to the props and their positioning: "The Crystal Rest. Evening. The fireside. L's arm-chair in the comfortablest corner" (340).

The dialogue of the lectures (or as I have suggested -- the play) starts with the name of each speaker, and often we are given the stage direction and positioning for each of the speakers in bracketed italics. For example: "Florrie (*putting her head round from behind L's sofacushion*)" (209), situates Florrie not only in relation to the classroom space but in relation to her peers and the Old Lecturer. The presence of and insistence on these directions allows the readers to know when one student disappears from or reappears on the invisible stage that Ruskin creates. The directions and the dialogue

provided suggest that *The Ethics of the Dust* is not simply a lecture, or a series of Socratic dialogues, or even a theatrical piece, but rather it is a simultaneous mixture of all of these genres. Like Ruskin himself, *The Ethics of the Dust* refuses to be pinned down. The fluid nature of the text allows for the larger social and cultural definitions of gender and space the text alludes to be interpreted in different ways. Moreover, Ruskin's use of mythology within the text, as I will describe later, adds another layer to the complex genre of *The Ethics of the Dust.* Ruskin's playing with genres is just one way that he reinforces the structure and performativity of the overall text. The text not only narrates a performance but becomes a performance in itself. As Diana Taylor states in a recent article in *PMLA*:

> Performance as a genre allows for alternative mappings, providing a set of strategies and conventions that allow scholars to see practices that narrative, poetry, or even drama as a scripted genre might occlude. Like other genres, performance encompasses a broad range of modes and categories. (1417)

Ruskin's text creates fluidity of genre and allows for this "alternative mapping." *The Ethics of the Dust* includes characteristics of performance which allow the text to be mapped along many lines and even exist within liminal spaces between genres. Each character, be it the Lecturer or the schoolgirls, performs many identities at once. By structuring the text as dramatic, Ruskin effectively reinforces the concept of performance at the heart of society. Every day there are roles that need to be taken on and performed and what Ruskin stresses here is that there is a right and wrong role or way to perform.

Though better known for his critique of art and architecture, Ruskin also had a love for the theatre, and as Sharon Weltman states in *Performing the Victorian*, Ruskin is more theatrephiliac than theaterphobic (76). "By presenting education as performance," as he does in *The Ethics of the Dust*, "Ruskin hints that the roles the girls learn to play both in their classroom theatre and in life are malleable" (Weltman14). This malleability is highlighted when the Old Lecturer equates the schoolgirls to crystals in the lectures. Despite the malleability of the characters and the text itself, what Ruskin makes sure to reinforce, in the preface, is that this text is not a scientific tract on geology or mineralogy. Ruskin specifically states that these "lectures are not intended for an introduction to mineralogy" (201). Therefore, despite the genre-bending that the text accomplishes, it is a text which actively refuses to cross into the sub-genre of science textbook. Emphasizing the performative aspect of the lectures seems to almost occlude the possibility of *The Ethics of the Dust* being categorized as science text. This is ironic because, as O'Gorman points out, "Ruskin cared deeply about science. He had done so from his youth -- his first publication in prose was chemical" (565), in the *Magazine of Natural History*. What Ruskin does with *The Ethics of the Dust* is use his interest in and knowledge of natural history and science to suggest a manner of educating students that has the performance of the architecture of chemical structures at its core. As Ruskin states, "I have always held the stage quite among the best and most necessary means of education" (qtd. in Weltman 63). He seems invested in making the stage a place of moral education in this text, for "no science can be learned in play; but it is often possible, in play, to bring good fruit out of past labour" (201-202). Ruskin's use of the word "play" on several occasions in the preface and throughout the lectures reinforces the carefree manner of the "little"

housewives and also suggests that he is keeping an eye to the theatrical by staging his text as a piece of moral education.

Paul Sawyer suggests in *Ruskin's Poetic Argument* that, "[t]rue natural science is a moral science and therefore the basis of all moral education -- and that is precisely the program of *The Ethics of the Dust*" (244). But what about this natural science, what about the crystallography that the subtitle references? What is its function in the text as a whole, and how does touch factor into the use of crystals? We have seen on the structural level of genre that this is a text that refuses to be pinned down. Like its characters, it is a text in constant movement. This constant movement is also applicable to the understanding and placement of touch. The liminal nature of tactility is held together in this play/lecture/philosophical treatise by crystals, specifically the gendering of crystals. In "Mythic Language and Gender Subversion: The Case of Ruskin's Athena," Sharon Weltman has specifically addressed the larger issue of Ruskin's feminization of *The Ethics of the Dust*, both in terms of education and in terms of what Weltman calls "feminizing architectonics" (350). Architectonics has two valences; according to the Oxford English Dictionary, "architectonic" is an adjective that refers to " the science of architecture" ("architectonic, adj.," def. 1) while "architectonics" is a noun meaning "the systematic arrangement of knowledge specifically in relation to metaphysics" ("architectonics, n.," def. b). In Ruskin's work we see the intersection of education and architecture, where both definitions of architectonics are embodied. The architecture/structure and the arrangement of knowledge are achieved through tactility:

how the little housewives touch each other is Ruskin's inscription of ethical social codes of intersubjective relations. [17]

In Lecture Two, entitled "The Pyramid Builders," the Old Lecturer addresses crystallization specifically in terms of both mineralogy as well as chemistry. He does so by objectifying the students/the girls as crystals. The Lecturer states, "[w]hen you ran in from the garden, and against one another in the passages, you were in what mineralogists would call a state of solution [...] when you got seated in those orderly rows, each in her proper place, you became crystalline" (221). The students in their state of solution perform exactly in the same way atoms would in any liquid. In any solution, atoms would rub up against each other, bump into each other, and then subsequently move into other directions. Atoms in solution have much more room to move and interact than atoms in a solid which are in rigid structures (crystalline) that are predetermined by the chemical properties of the constituent elements (usually the number of electrons in the outer most valence shells).

The demonstration and comparison of the girls to atoms in solution or in solid has a larger social relevance, a morality attached to it, an ethics of intersubjective relations. The Old Lecturer reinforces the socio-cultural importance of tactility and intersubjectivity when he says: "'How do they know their places?' you asked, or should have asked. Yes, and they have to do much more than know them: they have to find their way to them, and

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[17] It is interesting to note here the intersection of touch and intersubjective relations in Ruskin's personal life as well. Ruskin was in love with a girl named Rose La Touche. As Paul Sawyer states, "Rose enters Ruskin's books of the 1860s and 1870s and is inseparable from them as their radiating center. She is the center, that is, of a mythopoeic construction of the world that mediates between the energies of nature and the persistence of the desired, human other — a construction also of a language capable of interpreting all things as a continuous code of emblems" (See Sawyer "Currency of Meaning"). The importance of her last name, (La Touche=The (feminized) Touch) whether conscientiously embodied or not, becomes a preoccupation that is reflected in *The Ethics of the Dust* and Ruskin's other texts of the time.

that quietly and at once, without running against each other" (222). So the atoms, or the women who represent the atoms in his example, must interact in this prescribed way. There must be no running against each other, no touching, brushing or any tactile contact in order for crystals to form. This is the moral lesson and seemingly a social commentary on intersubjective tactile interactions in Victorian society. There should be a respect of personal space; there should be no unnecessary or intentional touching: people need to know their places "quietly and at once." The space in which the lesson takes place also informs the commentary.

In Lecture Three, entitled "The Crystal Life," we are given the following stage direction: "A very dull Lecture, willfully brought upon themselves by the elder children. Some of the young ones have, however, managed to get in by mistake" (233). This setting of the scene is very deliberate for it outlines the target audience for the Old Lecturer's lesson. This moral lesson is directed to the older students and in lecture three the Lecturer puts on his other hat as stage director and makes his students, his atoms, perform and create a crystalline structure/ architecture:

> L. However, the best--out and out the best--way of understanding the thing, is crystallize yourselves.
>
> The Audience. Ourselves!
>
> L. Yes; not merely as you did the other day, carelessly on the schoolroom forms; but carefully and finely, out in the playground. You can play at crystallization there as much as you please.
>
> Kathleen and Jessie. Oh! how? – how?

L. First, you must put yourselves together, as close as you can, in the middle of the grass, and form, for first practice, any figure you like.

Jessie. Any dancing figure, do you mean?

L. No; I mean a square, or a cross, or a diamond. Any figure you like, standing close together. You had better outline it first on the turf, with sticks, or pebbles, so as to see that it is rightly drawn; then get into it and enlarge or diminish it at one side, till you are all quite in it, and no empty space left.

Dora. Crinoline and all?

L. The crinoline may stand eventually for the rough crystalline surface, unless you pin it in; and then you may make a polished crystal yourselves.

Lily. Oh we'll pin it in -- we'll pin it in!

L. Then, when you are all in the figure, let every one note her place, and who is next on each side; and let the outsiders count how many paces they stand from the corners.

Kathleen. Yes, yes, -- and then?

L. Then you must scatter all over the playground – right over it from side to side, end to end; and put yourselves all at equal distances from each other everywhere. You needn't mind doing it very accurately, but as to be nearly equidistant; not less than three yards apart from each other, on every side.

Jessie. We can easily cut pieces of string of equal length, to hold. And then?

> L. Then at the given signal, let everybody walk, at the same rate, toward the outlined figure in the middle. You had better sing as you walk; that will keep you in good time. And as you close in towards it, let each take her place, and the next comers fit themselves beside the first ones, till you are all a figure again.
>
> Kathleen. Oh! how we shall run against each other! What fun it shall be!
>
> L. No no Miss Katie; I can't allow any running against each other. The atoms never do that, whatever human creatures do. You must all know your places, and find your way without jostling. (235-236)

This passage literally enacts Ruskin's statement about architecture from his famous work *The Stones of Venice*: "[architectural abstractions] are expressions of the mind of manhood by the hands of childhood" (11). The passage cited above from *The Ethics of the Dust* relates the performance of crystalline architecture, expressed by the "mind of manhood," The Old Lecturer (given as L. in the above quotation), and created by "the hands of childhood," the little housewives. The Old Lecturer points out in this demonstration that the students must make sure not to "allow any running against each other. The atoms never do that, whatever human creatures do" (236). It is a lesson given within the confines of the classroom but intended to be acted out or practiced within the playground. The outdoor (public) space will be the stage for these lessons. As the Old Lecturer suggests, atoms never run against each other or touch each other, and human creatures should reflect this distance within the public sphere. The passage reflects societal understandings of tactile interactions as they relate to space and place, meaning that touching should be avoided or kept at a minimum, especially when one is in public.

The girls are performing an architecture here; they are atoms that come together to create a crystal. The crystal has a defined structure with “no empty space left” (235), and the coming together must be done in an orderly manner, “carefully and finely,” evoking the fine motor skills within tactile performance. As Sawyer states in his book, “the girls are themselves crystals, the ultimate subjects of their own lessons and the apex of the natural world” (246), and by extension the apex of the moral world as well. This performative architecture and meta-pedagogical moment speaks to the ethics of touch in mid to late-Victorian England. An ethical intersubjective interaction would be one in which boundaries are respected and space is negotiated, and not infringed upon. Even the crinoline must be pinned in, so that it does not accidently touch. By performing this crystalline structure Ruskin is creating a movement from rough to polished surfaces and demonstrating that “architecture is the most moralistic of artistic enterprises” (Gilmour 231). By pinning in the crinoline, by avoiding touch, one avoids contagion, and this informs the teaching of morality present in the lectures.

As I have stated previously, the particular ethics of touch seen in the Contagious Diseases Acts was a departure from miasmic theory, in that now concern was placed on tactile proximity in the spreading of disease. The Lecturer directly refers to miasma in *The Ethics of the Dust*, which he relates to covetousness: “covetousness must be excited by a special cause, as a given disease, by a given miasma” (218). It is not coincidental that issues of miasma are seen in a text that overtly emphasizes the importance of not running against one another, of not touching each other. Ruskin’s implied moral here is that covetousness is a sin that can be likened to disease, something that settles upon the surface of the body.

By directing the students to become crystal, to form crystals, the Old Lecturer simultaneously addresses performative issues, architectural issues, and societal tactile interactions. As Elizabeth Grosz states in *Space, Time, and Perversion*, the "subject's relation with others (the domain of ethics), and its place in a socio-natural world (the domain of politics), may be better understood in corporeal rather than conscious terms […] if bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their *matter and form* be rethought, but so too must their environment and *spatio-temporal location*" (84). What Ruskin is doing here is a mid-nineteenth-century positioning of the female body, in much the same way as Grosz would theorize a century later. He is meshing the ethical and the socio-political valences of the female bodies by directly referring to space and time constructs. Here the "women become the living representatives of corporeality" (Grosz 122) and due to the respect that Ruskin has for architecture he in turn gives life to architectural structures (specifically crystals) through the women.

Well-known architectural structures found in London become guiding structures in *The Ethics of the Dust*. The Crystal Palace, built for the great exhibition of 1851, becomes the symbol for a "new style of architecture" (243). Ruskin had very strong feelings about the Crystal Palace, stating "the great result, the admirable and long-expected conclusion is, that in the center of the 19th century, we suppose ourselves to have invented a new style of architecture, when we have magnified a conservatory!" (*On the Old Road* 255)[18]. Furthermore, in his lecture "Traffic" Ruskin declares that "all good

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[18] Ruskin's feelings about the Crystal Palace are given through the voice of the Old Lecturer, in *The Ethics of the Dust*. We are given the following as a description and reaction to the Palace: "he turned all the canvas into panes of glass, and put it up on his iron cross-poles; and made all the little booths into one great booth; -- and people said it was very fine, a new style of architecture; and Mr. Dickens said nothing was ever like it in Fairy-Land "(63).

architecture is the expression of national life and character; and it is produced by the prevalent and eager national taste, or desire for beauty […] taste is not only a part and an index of morality; -- it is the ONLY morality" ("Traffic" 434). It is important to remember that as Pallasmaa would later theorize, "[a]rchitectural meaning derives from archaic responses and reactions remembered by the body and the senses" (Pallasmaa 60). Therefore, the crystal that is created through the Old Lecturer's direction represents the embodied reaction of each participating student.

The relation between the students as crystals, and the way that they are to interact through touch within the structure they create, is explicitly given by the Old Lecturer through a passage on the moral virtues of crystals:

> I can tell you, you shall hear of the highest crystalline merits that I can think of to-day: and I wish there were more of them; but crystals have a limited, though a stern, code of morals; and their essential virtues are but two; - the first is to be pure, and the second to be well shaped. (261)

This is clearly a moral code for the students who embody the crystals. These women are to be pure and well shaped; this is all that is required of them. To be pure they must not touch or be touched; if this single rule is obeyed then they are sure to keep their shape, their status, their position, their architecture. The Old Lecturer emphasizes, "crystal points are as sharp as javelins; their edges will cut glass with a touch" (263). Thus touch is dangerous: the outlines of their structure are capable of destruction and even corporeal violence. As Sawyer states, "*The Ethics of the Dust* simply repeats, for the children, the official morality of Womanhood" (248). It is acceptable to perform and move within a confined architecture, but tactile interactions within this space are problematic: this

becomes Ruskin's ethical tactile theory. It is an explicit theory that is given through performance of intersubjective relations. As Ruskin mentions on numerous occasions in the text, if there is too much rubbing, moving against one another, the atoms in a crystal will dissolve and turn to liquid again, a problematic change in form.[19] Unlike Rossetti who saw the possibility of redemption in tactility, Ruskin sees touch as bringing evil and requiring legislation.

The incorporation of mythology in *The Ethics of the Dust* not only further complicates the classification of the text according to genre, but it also helps reinforce the relationship of tactility, architecture, performance, and morality within the text. Paul Sawyer's comment that as "Ruskin's first complete book on mythology, [*The Ethics of the Dust*] aims at several audiences and as a result has had none" (242), was rather truthful until recent scholarship brought the rich imagery and symbolism of this text to the attention of Victorianists. As a text that fluidly crosses genre boundaries and which is literally supported by the performative architecture that the students create, the use of myth in *The Ethics of the Dust* is an aspect that informs the overall moral tone of the text.

The use of mythology in *The Ethics of the Dust* can be seen as a continuation of Ruskin's preoccupation with mythology in such texts as "Of Queen's Gardens." Bringing in mythology seems to be a way for Ruskin to counteract the fear of only getting to "the skins of the texts" (275), as the Old Lecturer states. The mythology used and evoked by the Old Lecturer is a way of understanding Scripture and reinforces the morality of the text. The Old Lecturer states, "your hedgehoggy readers roll themselves over and over

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[19] As Sharon Weltman points out in *Performing the Victorian*: "because it is the result of performance, identity for Ruskin is a fundamentally social phenomenon. Identity built through performance requires an audience to reify it as well as other performers to model it" (11).

their Bibles, and declare that whatever sticks to their own spines is Scripture; and that nothing else is. But you can only get at the skins of the texts that way" (275). What is required and necessary is delving deeper into the text, an understanding of the larger educational merits of Scripture and its moral applications. This required inter-texuality is achieved through mythology. As O'Gorman states, "The Elements of Crystallization [are] a way of teaching lessons about obedience, harmonious disposition, and the presence of a life force in the organic world. Ruskin insisted on a relationship between science and reverence" (571). Ruskin reinforces this aspect of reverence through mythology.

Two specific passages in the text in relation to mythology demonstrate how the mythological structure is one that rests at the core of the lectures. While creating elaborate metaphors for the function of structure and architecture, the Old Lecturer often refers to Egyptian and Greek mythology; positioning mythological gods as originator, architect, or creator. Mythology is used as the foundation of *The Ethics of the Dust*, in order to contrast the ethic of the creator (Pthah) to that of the destroyer (mankind).

> 'I am the lower Pthah; and I have power over fire. I can wither the strong things, and strengthen the weak: and everything that is great I can make small and everything that is little I can make great.' Then he turned to the angle of the pyramid and limped towards it. And the pyramid grew deep purple; and then red like blood, and then pale rose-colour, like fire. And I saw that it glowed like fire from within. And the lower Pthah touched it with the hand that held the pincers; and it sank down like the sand in an hour-glass, - then drew itself together, and sank, still, and became nothing,

> it seemed to me; but the armed dwarf stooped down, and took it into his hand, and brought it to me saying, 'Everything that is great I can make this pyramid; and give it into men's hands to destroy.' And I saw that he had a little pyramid in his hand, with as many courses in it as the large one; and built like that, -- only so small. And because it glowed still, I was afraid to touch it; but Pthah said, 'Touch it – for I have bound the fire within it, so it cannot burn.' So I touched it, and took it into my own hand; and it was cold. (230)

Here Pthah is positioned as architect, a creator who can change the colours and substance of structures and vary their dimensions through touch. Pthah is an Egyptian god who is representative of the Principle of Light and Life through which "creation," or rather evolution takes place (Cooper 435). The etymology of the word "architect" is from the Greek meaning builder or craftsman ("architect, n."); thus, it is fitting that Pthah is positioned as this architect and builder in the text. Mankind is placed in opposition to Pthah for people use their "hands to destroy," again speaking to the tension innate in tactility as a means to destroy yet also having the ability to create. This tension is demonstrated in the little housewives' performance of architecture; when they become like crystals.

It is interesting, however, that most of the architectural or creative metaphors given to mythology in the text are underpinned by Athena. As Weltman suggests, Athena is the force behind crystallization and architecture in the text: she brings things together (Weltman 351). This mythology is part of the larger feminization of education, architecture, and morality in *The Ethics of the Dust*. Ruskin uses female students and

female mythological characters to embody and perform architecture. In turn through this performance, the space allocated to the body within the understood public and private sphere is given. Whether it is within the classroom or in the yard, there are ways to act, especially if you are female.

So what are we left with in this very eclectic text? In a work called *The Ethics of the Dust*, the text seemingly invites the question, what is the moral of the story? We have seen how morality works with tactility specifically in relation to how the atoms or women come together, but there is more to this. The key to interpreting the text seems to rest in the final lecture when the Lecturer explains the three characteristics of deities: they have a physical character, an ethical character, and a personal character (347-348). Though the Old Lecturer is specifically dealing with the concept of God interacting with man -- how God's power is seen in objects or in mythologies -- I argue that Ruskin is most interested in how these characteristics are reflected in ourselves, in humanity. By emphasizing these characteristics, the physical, the ethical, and the personal, he is reinforcing the morals and the values that are perpetually present through the performance of tactile interaction seen in the text. In essence he is creating a diagram for the performance of socio-cultural tactile interactions, a diagram that outlines the various facets of intersubjectivity within the social sphere. This diagram is the ever-present omniscient hand guiding the performance and interaction within the text. As O'Gorman states, Ruskin "wanted his readers to recognize a divine hand, certainly a moral power that could be associated with a human personality" (571). Within each of the students, and thus within each woman that the students represent, rests the moral power to know what is appropriate and not appropriate – especially if you follow the words of the Old Lecturer.

Many of the lectures centre on performance within social environments. The students need to perform in society as good little housewives and their physical interaction with society needs to be informed by an ethical understanding of space that should be learned/taught and reinforced. As I have mentioned, Weltman suggests that the schoolgirls' "education as performance" demonstrates that their roles in "their classroom theatre and in life are malleable" (14). The girls perform their education and they simultaneously learn their performance in society. Their complex sense of identity resides in the intersection between the social (seen in their performance and interaction), the ethical (seen in the explicit morality emphasized in their performance), and the physical (seen in the sense of awareness of boundaries and the perils of infringing these boundaries).[20] I envision a Venn diagram which maps out these different interactions. The final lecture brings three phases together in this symbolic Venn diagram to demonstrate that in the overlap of the physical and the ethical and the social you will always find the personal (see figure 2 below).[21]

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[20] Note, the physical, ethical, and social, are all highlighted in the Contagious Diseases Acts: the physical (touch) causing both ethical and social repercussions.

[21] These diagrams were conceptualized by John Venn at the same time of the publication of *The Ethics of the Dust* (1860s). Venn and his diagrams would go on to become famous and influential through other nineteenth-century authors such as Lewis Carroll. For more about the influence of Venn diagrams on Lewis Carroll see Lewis Carroll's *Symbolic Logic*.

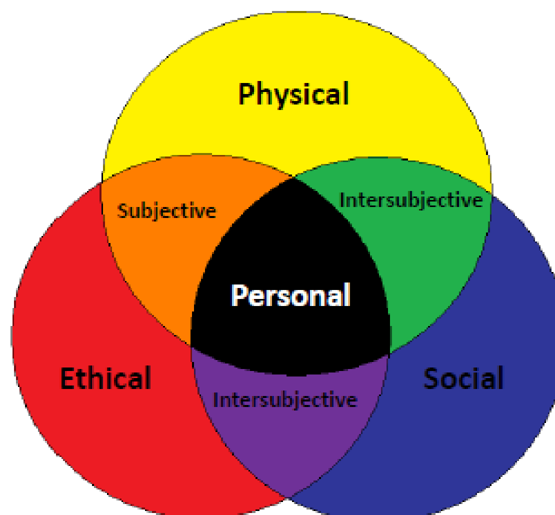

Figure 2: Venn Diagram of *The Ethics of the Dust*

As this diagram demonstrates, it is ultimately up to the individual to create and map out a clear ethical space within a social space which also maintains a personal space. This is done through the physical, through the tactile. The diagram symbolizes the lessons that the Old Lecturer has given through the text and they are lessons that constantly emphasize the domain of the physical within the social. Touch for Ruskin has a level of wickedness, and in order for the students to have ethical intersubjective interactions in the social sphere, touch needs to be kept at a minimum. *The Ethics of the Dust*, like Ruskin's other works, creates many levels of meaning in order to provide social commentary and emphasize the concepts of proximity within the confines of the public sphere. Keep your distance, says the Old Lecturer, or you shall all turn to solution and lose your form, your embodiment.

Carlyle referred to *The Ethics of the Dust* as Ruskin's "shining performance" (Weltman 75), and in a text where each individual part seems to lead back to an aspect of performativity it is hard to dispute this assessment. It is a shining performance that speaks to structure and creates its own ethical architecture, both literally as seen in the text, and

graphically through the overall understanding of the text. The use of hands and tactility is a focus in a majority of Ruskin's work: from an emphasis on using one's hands to create original and beautiful crafts, to the use of hands in building structures and spaces. "When we build," says Ruskin in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture, "*let it be such a work as our descendents will thank us for, and let us think as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them" (233). The emphasis on tactility as something sacred in *The Ethics of the Dust* transcends religion to apply to morality. Ruskin's reference to hands, touch, and the use of tactility in creating crafts and buildings describes how intersubjective interactions are morally, socially, and physically charged and legislated. It is this legislation of the social, physical, and moral valence of tactility that is seen in the Contagious Diseases Acts. I contend that the Venn diagram suggested by *The Ethics of the Dust* is Ruskin's way of explicitly mapping out morality, demonstrating that in Victorian society everyone needs to be aware that they necessarily reside where the three circles touch.

3.2 *Alan's Wife*

I have defined the ethics of touch as they relate to architecture and performance above as the principles represented and described textually in the negotiation and creation of space through tactility. As I have shown with Ruskin, and through my discussion of the Contagious Diseases Acts, an ethical touch in this period is one that does not allow for spatial or corporeal infringement. Within a theatrical environment, the ethics of tactility become necessarily coupled with sight and the gaze, for now touches are not simply described in the play text but they are also performed on stage. In *Alan's Wife* by

Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins, the presence of tactility within the play text allows Jean Creyke to explore her position as mother, wife, and woman, and allows the actor playing her to complicate these positions on stage. For Jean Creyke, touch (or the absence of touch), both on the stage and in the play text, attempts to free her from an ethically complex representation and identification as murderess. The discourse of absence created by the elision of the representation of tactility highlights the larger question present in the play: are there instances where infanticide can be ethical? The ethics bound up in the refusal or omission of the representation of touch upon the stage and within the play text addresses how the negotiation of space on the late-nineteenth-century stage is socio-cultural commentary.

The Contagious Diseases Acts highlighted the negotiation of space, specifically what happens when spatial confines become legislated. As an actress and a writer, Elizabeth Robins was preoccupied with the representation, negotiation, and performance of spatial confines. Robins was very involved in social causes, and she articulated her passion for social causes both verbally and theatrically. Elizabeth Robins wrote of suffrage, social housing issues, as well as the outcome of legislation such as the Contagious Diseases Acts. Robins often emphasized the lack of preventative measures that would take into account the needs of society as a whole, instead of focusing on measures that seemingly segregated a specific part of society based on class or gender. As she states, “the one and only aim that could have brought the Woman's Movement to its present proportions is protection of the home. It is woman's discovery […] that the most obvious objection to armies and navies is that they do not, and cannot, ‘defend the home’ from any of the worser evils” (Robins 328). Defending the domestic space is not

simply a reference to house and home, but a reference to the complex understanding that one's country is a home as well. What Robins is arguing is for the role of women as protectors and defenders to become socially viable. It is not simply in protecting naval officers from venereal diseases that the home, the domestic (read: mother England) will be defended. Women need to play a larger role in this defense, and not be seen as those who perpetuate the threat. Elizabeth Robins's role within the women's movement also influenced other authors to write texts that were informed by Robins's engagement in social issues. As Angela John suggests in her book, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life*,

> [John Masefield] burned a novel he had been writing […] It concerns a beautiful American southerner called Val (the name of the heroine in Elizabeth's *The Open Question).* She leaves her husband and two children for a more stimulating life in New York then London. She becomes a writer, and like many early feminists in Britain, a passionate opponent of the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s which regulated prostitution, humiliating and punishing women but exculpating men. She rediscovers her daughter Lisa in America but it is her relationship with John who had run away to sea, been exposed to vice, deserted, and become ill which is crucial. […] John's wife is pained by her exclusion from their closeness and this leads to their pledge to make their spiritual life paramount, to give to the cause of women 'all the passion which life denies in themselves.' The real-life John claimed that Elizabeth made him vow that all his work henceforth would be done for the cause of women. (184)

Masefield's response demonstrates the influence that Elizabeth Robins had on her friends and the literature that they wrote. Robins's own work also indicates how, even after the repeal of the Acts in 1886, the legislation still played an important role in the representation of female embodiment, contamination, containment, and women's rights in general within literature. Robins attempted to rectify the lack of voice that women had in the issues that affected them most, such as suffrage, social housing, and health care. As Gail Marshall suggests, "through one woman's destruction of a mute, impotent image, another woman is born into identity. That identity is conferred through the act of writing, which at this time was being harnessed to very particular ends by the so-called New Woman writers of the 1890s" (Marshall 166). I will be discussing George Egerton's contribution to the creation of this new woman in the next chapter, but Elizabeth Robins and Florence Bell also fall within this category of New Woman writers for they complicate the relation between the mute woman and a new female identity in their work. Bell and Robins's play *Alan's Wife* emphasizes the lack of voice that women have in order to address the theatrical difficulty of embodying the complexity of the female, as individual, mother, and wife.

Alan's Wife demonstrates how tactility is problematized theatrically, similarly to how eighteenth-century theatre problematized the role of vision.[22] As Rivka Swenson argues, "in eighteenth-century theories of vision […] the object of the gaze […] is not the one who is seen but instead the one who gazes" (Swenson 5). I contend that the ethics of tactility in the nineteenth century reinforces the fact that the object of touch can be the

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[22] For more about the role of vision in eighteenth century theatre see the work of my colleague Sarah R. Creel, "A Fabulous Maternity: [Re]envisioning Haywood's Drama and Fiction Through the Language of the Body," publication forthcoming.

one who touches and not necessarily the one being touched. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White state, "as a remedy for the ambivalence of the gaze […] there was an increased regulation of *touch*" (135); thus, there was a marked movement from one sense to the other between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. This is especially true in theatrical theory and representation. I focus on the protagonist of *Alan's Wife*, Jean Creyke, to demonstrate how as object and origin of touch, Jean's character reinforces a proto-feminist ethics despite the absence of explicit representation of touch on stage. In this play, touch is often positioned off-stage or muted, which can ultimately lead to an elision of embodiment: bodies disappear, people die, and explanation is left to the interpretation of the audience. It is a relationship to touch and space that complicates what I have suggested in *The Ethics of the Dust*. In *Alan's Wife* it is in the refusal of performance that ethics of tactility are related, whereas in *The Ethics of the Dust* the ethics of tactility requires a performance in order to be understood.

Alan's Wife was published and first performed in 1893, at the Independent Theatre in London. The Independent Theatre was "run on a private, subscription basis to bypass the Lord Chamberlain's prohibition of what he deemed offensive material" (Wiley 443). The peripheral nature of the Independent Theatre reinforces the performance of *Alan's Wife* as *hors bordures*, a play that effectively plays with boundaries. It is a play in three acts set in a village in the north of England. Jean's husband Alan is killed in a work accident, and seven months later her son, whom she names after her husband, is born with deformities. Though her son's specific deformities are not named, the original story that informed Bell and Robins's plot had the "baby missing an arm and two legs" (Kelly 543). As Jill Ehnenn points out in *Women's Literary*

Collaboration, *Alan's Wife* was "based upon Elin Ameen's Swedish story *Befraid*, which means released" (Ehnenn 108). The original title of Bell and Robins's play was "Set Free," which can refer to the freeing of the child from his deformities when Jean commits infanticide. However, I also see the title as being a reference to Jean, specifically to how she is seemingly freed from the stage and freed from having to perform. The presence of the infanticide in the play text was the reason *Alan's Wife* was originally staged at the Independent Theatre, for the violent subject matter could be deemed offensive and could be censored. The censorship and concealment of the infanticide highlights the role of the audience in terms of interpretation and representation. As I will demonstrate, visualizing tactility, specifically violent tactility, has an ethical importance in relation to the play itself.

In *Alan's Wife* Jean is constantly positioned in relation to tactility, especially by her mother Mrs. Holroyd. Mrs. Holroyd emphasizes how it is necessary for Jean to keep busy, stating she should keep "a bit of work in [her] hands till [her husband] comes" (12). Jean also sees her environment and society as a space to be negotiated through touch and tactility. Her description of schoolchildren walking --"if they didn't take hold of each other's hands they'd be tumbling down" (15) -- seems to emphasize a belief that many aspects of society are necessarily bound up in tactility. The description of schoolchildren needing to hold hands and negotiate society through touch is very similar to what is seen with the schoolgirls in Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust*. The pedagogical importance of tactility as an educational tool is re-emphasized here and in other texts such as "Theodora: a Fragment," which I will discuss next.

Jean's ability to negotiate and learn from her surroundings through touch is cast into relief with Jamie Warren, who becomes the representative of mental work and the ability to negotiate one's surroundings through intelligence and book learning instead of through tactility and manual labour. There is an emphasis on reading in *Alan's Wife* as a means to differentiate between the intellectual and the practical. Jean's mother states, "Eh, lass, it isn't the strongest in the arm that's the best at the books!"(14), which reemphasizes the distinction between strength of body and strength of mind. This contrast between body and mind is given throughout the first scene, where Jean and her mother provide conflicting depictions of what qualities are important in a husband. Mrs. Holroyd states that Jamie would have been a better match because "he had read all about the flowers and plants in his book, and could tell you the names of every one of them" (9). The mother sees this skill as both intelligent and romantic. Jean insists that she is happy with Alan for she wants "a husband that is brave and strong" (9), finding comfort in tactile ability, awareness, and stereotypical masculine traits. Because of the overt emphasis on Alan as a hard worker, someone who works with his hands and uses his body, Alan is seen as a provider in a way that Jamie could not be. Jean goes on to say that she admires Alan because "with those strong arms of his he can hold a baby" as well as (16) her mother could. In fact, Jean constantly separates herself from reading and learning in favour of the manual and tactile dexterity. Jean also reinforces her dislike of reading and books stating, "when [Jamie] had a book in [his] hand [she'd] snatch it […] and throw it" (13). It is important to note that reading is one activity which requires both sight and touch; one needs to see the words, and needs hands to hold the book, or flip the

pages.[23] As we will see, Jean's disconnect with reading and educational pursuits quickly translates into her inability to negotiate her environment.

Following Alan's death, Jean's frame of reference focuses solely on her ability to negotiate her surroundings effectively in order to manage her grief. However, Jean's ability to navigate ethically using morally neutral patterns of the body (Hamington's acaring habit) seems compromised. In fact, Alan's death is the echo and the metaphor for the corporeal difficulty in navigating one's environment. Alan's body is deformed and destroyed by the very machinery in the factory that was his means of providing for his family. Similarly, his son is equally deformed and is constantly referred to as "not rightly formed" (32) nor "straight." As Eleanor Stewart suggests, because of her son's deformity Jean stays as far away from the crib as she can, while still remaining on stage and in scene (Stewart).[24] Thus, the strategic distancing Jean performs at the beginning of Scene Two foreshadows her ability to finally free herself from the stage (from the audience's visual field) and textual representation at the end of the play. This is especially true in terms of the textual and tactile distancing the play suggests in relation to motherhood.

Jean actively tries to distance herself from the role of mother, and she does this through tactility that can be interpreted as violent and unethical. Katherine Kelly sees this distancing as necessary as Jean "plots an ethical strategy to set [her son] free" (546).

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[23] As technological advancements threaten to make physical books obsolete, it is interesting to note that even within new forms of book production and distribution, like the Kindle, tactility and visuality still interact. One must use fingers, thumbs etc. to press the keys or the touch pads that advance the simulated pages.

[24] The original article is in French; the translation is mine. See Stewart, Eleanor. "Infanticide et émancipation féminine dans *Alan's Wife* d'Elizabeth Robins et de Florence Bell."

Jean's baby's sensory ability is maimed; his "body replicates the spectacle of his father's [dead body]" (Kelly 545). The baby is incapable of touching properly because its limbs are deformed. Jean in turn seems to replicate her son's deformity -- she is no longer capable nor desirous of negotiating her surroundings through touch or even touching her son. As Kelly suggests, both Jean and her son suffer from "a physically disadvantaged relation to the environment" (Kelly 545). Neither of them have access to the complete range of the tactile sensory relations: Jean does not want to go near or touch anything or anyone, and her son literally can't touch because of his deformities. In fact the only tactile interaction Jean has in scene two is with Jamie when the stage direction states, she "*seizes Warren by the arm*" (32) in response to the thought of the baby living longer than them all. This is a thought that is as abhorrent to Jean as the sight of her deformed son.

The representation of the infanticide (or the lack thereof) at the end of Scene Two, which is foreshadowed by Mrs. Ridley's warning, "ye'll fair smother the bairn with all yon clothes" (22), is contested, problematic, and subsequently highlights the tension between the play text and the performance. The beginning of Scene Two frames the representation of the baby in relation to touch, by focusing on the holding of a quilt. In the space of one page the following stage directions for Mrs. Ridley and Mrs. Holroyd foreshadow Jean's actions at end of the scene:

(Takes it off and stands with it in her hand)

(Puts the quilt on again)

(Takes off quilt)

(Stands looking doubtfully at the cradle)

(her arms folded as she holds the quilt, shaking her head and looking compassionately at the baby) (22)

The focus on the one particular prop, shared between the characters and which is a part of the nursery room, highlights how we can negotiate our environment through material objects. The material objects present in spaces help to emphasize the utility of rooms but also allow for the efficient negotiation of these spaces. For example, in the dark, without visual cues, we can recognize the difference of our sitting room as opposed to any another because of the feel of the throw on the couch, the carpet on our feet, and so on. Similarly, Mrs. Holroyd, Mrs. Ridley, and ultimately Jean, navigate the room with the quilt in their hand. The quilt becomes something familiar, something comforting in a place of discomfort. As Judith Butler states, "language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency" (Butler 69). The chiasmic interdependency of material aspects of the room and the text is furthered through performance. The material objects that make up the space, seen here through emphasis on the quilt, define the boundaries and utility of the space and in turn define how the body interacts with this space.

Mrs. Holroyd and Mrs. Ridley also explore the architecture, the space of the nursery through their hands, through touch. The play text states:

(Mrs. Holroyd puts her hand down to the ground near the cradle)

Mrs. Holroyd.

I thought I felt a bit of a draught here, near the cradle head.

Mrs. Ridley.

(putting her hand to the ground with an anxious look)

No, no ! There's no draught; it's just yourself that's made it, whisking round with your petticoats.

Mrs. Holroyd.

Well, happen you're right. (*Holds her skirts carefully together then feels for the draught again*) Na, na, there's no draught here. (23-24)

This exchange is very similar to what we saw previously in Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust*, with the housewives' petticoats. Clothing and hands all need to be tucked in; there should be no accidental brushing or touching. By holding in her petticoat Mrs. Holroyd is capable of interpreting the situation more accurately. What the exchange between Mrs. Ridley and Mrs. Holroyd demonstrates is that although tactility allows us to be acutely aware of our environment, it can sometimes cause us to be too aware. We can become so attuned to our environment that negotiation becomes impossible, we become paralyzed, fearful of wrong movements.

Reviews of *Alan's Wife* provide conflicting reports as to whether the infanticide was represented on the stage. Following Jean's three-page soliloquy that ends Scene Two, the stage direction is as follows, "*the eider quilt hugged to her breast as the*" and then ten lines down the direction "CURTAIN FALLS" (37). The space between the hugging of the quilt and the direction for the curtain falling is the space within which the apparent infanticide takes place. This is similar to the ellipsis in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* which represents the possible rape or seduction. Though "the play text's existence […] inhabits, but does not fully define, the performance" (Wiley 445), most critics focus on how Jean's voice is silenced in the remainder of the play, and not on how Jean's body seems to be silenced at that moment as well: she no longer touches and

seems to shirk away from any attempt at touch. Jean is pushed to the margins of the stage, literally and figuratively, which underscores the emphasis on the lack of representation of tactility that seemingly ends scene two. At the end of the second scene, the lack of specific stage direction makes Jean suffer from apraxia; she loses the ability to do purposeful movements. Jean is thus also physically distanced from the audience and its ability to visually interpret the scene. However, this might have been a strategic decision on the part of Bell and Robins. The language of touch in *Alan's Wife* cannot be seen, or the performance of killing risks becoming too real; the theatrical fourth wall would be broken. Because of the ethical weight of infanticide a performance would force the question beyond one of dilemma; a performance would sway the issue on one side or the other.

So what is involved with representations of the infanticide, and how does this alter or reconstitute the ethicality of the play? More importantly, how do the performative voids translate in relation to tactility and the use of the tactile within the performance space? As Ehnenn states, "in *Alan's Wife*, silences are never passive silences; they are performative events" (120); thus there is still action in what is seemingly inaction. These performative events apply to both Jean's bodily silence as well as to her verbal silence. This verbal silence is emphasized in Scene Three when she is interrogated about the death of her child.

Because of the moral and ethical weight of infanticide, Jean and her body become the site of ethical dispute. By placing touch off-stage, Bell and Robins complicate the body language of the actor. Infanticide can be interpreted as unethical, for it is a maiming or hurting of the body. However, there is also a possibility for an ethical

interpretation to her action for she could be demonstrating care for her child by freeing him from suffering. This debate has larger socio-cultural importance, for it highlights the ethical tension between touching in order to protect the body and the bodily violence touching can give. It is a dilemma that is also acted out in the Contagious Disease Acts. In *The Ethics of the Dust*, the lectures reinforce how touching should be avoided at all costs so that this ethical dilemma can be averted. In *Alan's Wife* Bell and Robins face this tension through silence and the refusal of representation upon the stage.

In *Alan's Wife*, the tension between innocence or guilt seems to rest in visual confirmation, especially in relation to the audience.[25] Without being able to see the act, without the presence of the act on stage, the ability to empathize, sympathize or solve this ethical dilemma is lost. Here the bodies, both Jean and her son's, lack representation, they are silent figures placed off-stage or marginalized. Without visual confirmation of the performance of this touch we cannot know as spectators what has happened. The interpretive frame remains in the elided space.

There is a gap inherent between the play text and the performance of the text. Further, as Wiley states, "Jean's silence after she has committed the unthinkable, indeed, unspeakable […] invisible-act of infanticide, can be read then as [Bell] and Robins's rejection of discourse" (445). However, it not simply a lack of verbal discourse but rather a muting of the tactile discourse. In scene three, Jean's dialogue is muted; all we are given are the one line responses to the questions that she is asked, which are all given with a stage direction "(*silent*)," meaning that these are thoughts and not verbal

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[25] For more information about the relationship of the theatrical audience to visuality in the play see Elin Diamond's "Realism's Hysteria" in *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater*.

utterances. It is an interrogation sequence seemingly devoid of tactility or movement, and one that would be rather difficult to stage for how would the actor relate Jean's thoughts without speaking? The one attempt at tactile interaction present in the scene is when the stage directions state Jean "(*silent-puts her hand out to her mother*)" (43), but this attempt at connection is not reciprocated by her mother. Instead, later, "(*Jean clasps her hands with a look of relief, almost of gladness*)" (44), reinforcing that not only can she no longer negotiate her environment through tactility, but she can only touch herself, she only has herself for comfort. More than this, her whole sensory system seems to break down, she "*seems not to hear*" (44-45), she can't touch, she won't speak, and her head hangs low so she can only see her shoes.

The rejection of both verbal and tactile discourse "underscores [Jean's] legal and ethical isolation" (Kelly 543). It is a case, as Kerry Powell states in *Women and Victorian Theatre,* of "women playwrights devis[ing] morally ambiguous scenarios" (136). It is difficult to situate Jean within the context of the stage and the play because of the lack of physical/visual representation. Because tactility and the performance of the tactile are so integral to theatre, by creating a performative void, Bell and Robins disrupt the play's referential frame; there is no signifier of the possibility of infanticide, except possibly the quilt. [26] The first word uttered aloud by Jean in the third scene is "when?" (45); a movement towards the need for knowledge of time as opposed to knowledge of space or place. This is a small attempt at establishing a referential frame in a space that is devoid of representative action.

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[26] For more about the use of signifiers in relation to the performative see Elin Diamond's work.

As Peggy Phelan states, “performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies” (Phelan 148). What happens, however, when these bodies are no longer present on stage; what happens when the tactility of murder is complicated and pushed offstage? Elin Diamond observes, “Bell and Robins have given the body axiological (truth-telling) status but have made it impossible for that body to tell the truth” (378). If the infanticide were staged, it would problematize the audience’s reaction to Jean and her actions. By setting the death offstage, Bell and Robins also maintain the distancing mechanism within the language of touch, a distancing mechanism that is put in place at the beginning of scene two with the birth of her deformed child. The lack of representation of the act, and the inability for the body to tell the truth, are concepts that directly relate to both the enacting and the eventual repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In the legislation of the Acts the body of the prostitute was left to speak the truth, to tell a tale. However, as we have seen, a body that is marginalized tells a tale poorly; the bodily discourse requires contextualization. Bodies without words are objectified and erase subjectivity.

The fact that Jean has very few lines in scene three, though she is corporeally present on stage throughout the whole of the scene, has been read as a rejection of discourse in favour of bodily representation (Wiley 445). However, I take this a step further to suggest her silence reinforces the invisible, and is a way of maintaining her innocence, for the tactile and corporeal as a theatrical language do not corroborate or incriminate her. In a discourse of absence there are no words, but more importantly, there are no touches. Placing the infanticidal touch beyond the stage and beyond the play text disrupts conventions, frees Jean from being understood and represented as a murderess in

terms of the audience's interpretive frame, and could rather position her as a caring mother who simply wanted to free her child from pain. The silence creates a powerful void which avoids overt expression of guilt or emotional expressions of grief.

The ethical discourse of touch in nineteenth-century theatre speaks to the ability for females to create a space for themselves both on stage and within the public sphere. As Gail Marshall suggests, "Robins self-consciously interrogates the range of roles which were open to her as a woman at that time" (174). In *Alan's Wife* the role of wife, mother, and woman are interrogated via an emphasis on silence. What ensues is a viable space that disrupts normative ideological codes and gives ethical power back to women by reinforcing the sensory as a discourse that is able to move beyond the text. As Ehnenn states, "plays like *Alan's Wife* […] enable women playwrights, actresses, and characters to highlight the often problematic intersections between the sex/gender system, complex moral issues and […] theatrical practices" (107). The fact that Robins played the role of Jean in the performance demonstrates that she was physically invested in the conscious choices made not only in the play text but also in the theatrical representation. Robins becomes, in essence, a resistant player of her own performance text.[27] The theatrical practices chosen to represent the play text that she co-authored underscore and emphasize how important tactility is in the staging and creation of theatre.

The play was produced after the Contagious Diseases Acts had been enforced and repealed, yet the conscientious decision to withhold tactile representation in performance can still be read socio-politically as echoing the tension innate in the position and

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[27] I take this interpretation as an extension of Jill Dolan's explanation of the "resistant reader" in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*

representation of the female body in late-nineteenth-century England. How tactility is used and represented not only in intersubjective interactions (as seen in Chapter One) but also in the ways we negotiate our environment is a constant preoccupation of nineteenth-century texts. Bell and Robins highlight the interdependence of the visual and the tactile, especially within the confines of performance and performativity. The Acts reinforce the unseen (subtle) touch as being the cause of contagion, and sanctioned touch as pointing toward a cure or at least a means of policing contagion. As Athena Vrettos reminds us, "sympathy and contagion are, according to Doane,[28] aligned with female spectatorship as an essential part of the cultural model of femininity" (98) -- contagion is often feminized and placed within the context of the female body. But what happens when there are no spectators/no witnesses to the contagion/contamination? What happens when the audience is not given the ability to create sympathy for the character on stage, simply because the main events are positioned off-stage? Bell and Robins complicate sympathy by removing the audience's ability to be a spectator to the infanticide, leaving them to contemplate the importance of tactility within the theatrical space and how tactility creates the space of representation (even if that representation is physically lacking). I see *Alan's Wife* as a direct commentary on speculative judgment and the importance of tactility within theatrical and ultimately social confines. As I will show with the final text of this chapter, Victoria Cross's "Theodora: A Fragment," touch evolves in nineteenth-century literature to explicitly address the ethics of the negotiation of space as well as intersubjective interactions.

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[28] See Mary Anne Doane's *The Desire to Desire.*

3.3 “Theodora: A Fragment”

3.3.1 Types of Touch in “Theodora: A Fragment”

Touch functions as a discourse in “Theodora: A Fragment,” as a way of both outlining the body but also positioning the body within a spatial or architectural frame. There are three specific types of touch in the short story. The first type of touch seen in “Theodora” is reciprocal touch, which as I have stated in Chapter One is an encounter that demonstrates the ethics of proximity and the complex liminality of skin. More important to the narration of “Theodora: A Fragment” is the second type of touch, touch which creates and reinforces space, both public and private, as analyzed above with *The Ethics of the Dust* and *Alan’s Wife.* Touch in this instance is tied to concepts of architecture, demonstrating how touch can help us outline, and especially negotiate, our environment.

The third and final category of touch found in “Theodora: A Fragment” is touch at a distance, which I define as a type of touch that does not require direct contact, proximity, nor is it necessarily mediated through active tactile interaction. This type of touch will be revisited in my fourth chapter as often being represented through telepathic tactility. Touch at a distance in “Theodora: A Fragment” also suggests and seems to anticipate Elizabeth Grosz’s belief seen in *Volatile Bodies* that “women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage” (203); the female body is seen as leaky, with fluid and permeable boundaries. The female leaky body becomes “the very ground for a postmodern feminist ethic” (Shildrick 12), a highly contested space that is negotiated and defined through touch in “Theodora: A Fragment.”

3.3.2 Theodora as a Fragment of *Six Chapters*

"Theodora: A Fragment" appeared in the *Yellow Book* in 1895 and was the first literary publication for Annie Sophie Cory, who wrote under the pseudonym Victoria Cross.[29] The fragment would later be used as a majority of the third chapter of her novel *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* published in 1903. "Theodora: A Fragment" relates a burgeoning relationship between Cecil and Theodora. Cecil is a world traveler who has collected many souvenirs of his travels, and Theodora is a wealthy woman with a heightened sense of adventure.

Annie Sophie Cory was well known for her fiction because it dealt with issues of sex and sexuality, which was deemed very provocative at the time ("Cross(e), Victoria"). She was involved in the anti-vivisection movement and campaigned against any medical experimentation of any kind. According to Charlotte Mitchell, "like many feminists of her generation Cory was a keen anti-vivisectionist (being a patron of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection), and she opposed conventional medicine, denouncing the pernicious effects not only of vaccination but also of appendectomy" (Mitchell). Though the Contagious Diseases Acts had been abolished for nine years by the time Cross's first work, "Theodora: A Fragment," was published, issues related to medical inspection and female embodiment still play an important role in her work. That work "often focuses on the disabling effects of gender roles in a way that is startling for its

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[29] The Victoria Cross was introduced in 1856 by Queen Victoria for valour in the face of the enemy. This was/is the highest military honour available. The fact that Cory took this as her pseudonym can be directly related to her writing which brought social issues to the fore in the time of the New Woman.

date" (Mitchell), and Cross's work is interpreted as a social critique of gender, race, and class issues.

Theodora and Cecil's courtship, which becomes the central plot of "Theodora: A Fragment," takes place within the space of the drawing room, but includes props and material objects that serve as reminders from Cecil's world voyages. It is this space which reinforces the concept of empire and empire building. Racial tension underscores the short story: Cecil is an Egyptologist and Theodora is often racialized and exoticized. She is understood as something that needs to be conquered in Cecil's eyes, and this conquering is done in a space that is filled with remnants of the "Other." It is important to note that Annie Sophie Cory grew up in India (her father was a general stationed in Lahore) and her time in India is a strong influence in her fiction (Mitchell).

Reference to *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* is necessary in order to contextualize the complex gender play within "Theodora: A Fragment." Reciprocal tactility and the fluidity of gender are shown in an interesting sartorial scene within "Theodora: A Fragment," which Cross then fully developed within *Six Chapters of a Man's Life*. The scene constructs a gendered body through the discourse of touch, highlighting the liminal and fluid nature of embodied experience. This sartorial scene appears shortly after Cecil's first description of Theodora in Chapter Two of *Six Chapters of a Man's Life.* The complexity of Theodora's gender position is described thus: "a peculiar half-male character invested the whole countenance, that [Cecil] felt violently attracted to it from its peculiarity" (*Six Chapters* 20). Cecil refers to Theodora here in terms of investing, a putting on, and the use of "it" as a pronoun reference, instead of a gender specific

pronoun, points directly to Theodora's ability to go beyond gender confines: she prides herself in her androgyny.

One of the final scenes in Chapter Two in *Six Chapters of a Man's Life*[30] highlights reciprocal touch. The scene demonstrates how touch operates as a discourse within the text and indicates the role touch plays in the ethics of intersubjective relations. Cecil and Theodora are sitting and talking alone during a party, physically separated from the other guests. Cecil narrates:

> We both got up, and I took her hand as we stood by the statue of the god of licence and clasped it hard. It was a very curious hand, so extremely soft that as my fingers closed tighter and tighter over it, it seemed to yield and yield and collapse more and more like a piece of velvet within one's grasp. Where were its own bones and muscles, its own strength and will? (*Six Chapters* 34)

Cecil's hard clasping of Theodora's hand is at once violent and passionate; however, it is the reciprocal touch or lack thereof that describes and positions Theodora's body. Cecil's touch seems to receive no resistance, his touches collapse, which runs counter to the epistemology of touch. With tactile contact one never knows that one is touching something unless we feel something back. As I have stated previously in Chapter One, Merleau-Ponty conceptualized reciprocal touch as a chiasmic relation in which there is a blurring of the line between giving and receiving, toucher and touched. Theodora's embodiment, however, is yielding and collapsing; she is a body seemingly

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[30] This final scene leads into the third chapter which marks the beginning of "Theodora: A Fragment."

without bones, without muscles, but perhaps more importantly, without will. Theodora's bodily structure is represented as fluid and liminal, where the placement of touch is unknown and resides between the toucher and the touched. Cecil often takes tactile liberties with Theodora, and as we will see, often expresses dominance over her body through an unethical forceful touch, compromising and infringing on her bodily space.

Later Cecil asks what can be interpreted as the underlying question of both *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* and "Theodora: A Fragment": "Was not the hand an index to the whole form?" (*Six Chapters* 34). The hand and touch in "Theodora: A Fragment" becomes a way of negotiating and outlining a form, as we see in Cecil's description of Theodora herself. Through his touches, Cecil comes to understand the outlines of Theodora,[31] and the spatial boundaries that enclose them. The discourse of touch in "Theodora: A Fragment" can be understood as creating a cartography of the body (Grosz 33). Further, the architecture that surrounds them "reinforces particular gendered identities. As such, it can also pose a threat to certain identities" (Domrosh 480) -- a threat that is brought to a conclusion in *Six Chapters of a Man's Life.*

3.3.3 Bodily Architecture/Tactile Cartography

The liminal and necessarily reciprocal nature of touch is expressed in terms of borders. As both a phenomenon and a separate discourse in the text, touch is a place where

> [D]esires and passions [...] spring from that border-land between mind and sense, and are nourished by the suggestions of the one and the

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[31] It is important to remember that the outlines and bodily confines of Theodora are constantly defined as fluid and liminal, especially in terms of gender identity.

> stimulus of the other, have a stronger grip upon our organization, because they offer an acuter pleasure, than those simple and purely physical ones in the which Nature is striving after her own ends. ("Theodora" 80)

This quotation points to the implicit ethics of touch as it functions as narrative discourse in "Theodora." Touch in "Theodora" involves an awareness of tactile borders and how a transgression of these borders can allow for movement beyond prescribed roles. Through the specific types of touches related in the text, embodiment, borders, and architecture of space are reinforced. Touch is a physical phenomenon which organizes and embodies experience. How Nature organizes and creates natural architecture is often evoked by Cecil, in much the same way as the Old Lecturer does in *The Ethics of the Dust*. Cecil often equates "excessive physical desire [to] some vast, actual hand, the Hand of Nature" (*Six Chapters* 260), but the discourse of touch in the text goes beyond physical desire to emphasize an acute understanding of borders, the ethics of space, as well as a reaffirmation of boundaries/bodies. This reaffirmation of boundaries/bodies and an understanding of the ethics of space (especially bodily confines) is what the Contagious Diseases Acts attempted to re-establish, yet ultimately failed to do, for the Acts in fact legislated unethical bodily infringement. Through the Acts female embodiment was infringed upon in order to contain and maintain the empire as embodied in male naval officers. Gender roles and the role of those in uniform are highlighted through Theodora's performance in the text.

From the beginning of the story Theodora is described in terms of her outline, and her silhouette functions as a reaffirmation of her position in relation to the space that she negotiates. One of the first descriptions we are given of Theodora is through Cecil

looking at her: “[s]he was very simply dressed in some dark stuff that fitted closely on her and let me see the harmonious lines of her figure as she came up to me” (73). Later we are told that she is wearing a “velvet jacket, that fitted her as its skin fit the grape” (81). Here her clothes literally become her skin and serve as a contrast to her sister’s (Mrs. Long’s) fluidity of dress. When she is described in reference to her clothing, Theodora’s embodiment becomes more rigid. She is no longer the collapsing figure that Cecil first met. Theodora has the ability to fluctuate, to emphasize fluidity because “Theodora differed so much from the ordinary feminine type” (77). In fact her “type” is often given in terms of “masculine” or “manly” traits; for example she has a “curious masculine shade upon the upper lip” (83). In fact when Theodora does dress in a more feminine manner, the material elements of the salon infringe on her ability to freely negotiate her environment. “The castor of your chair has come upon my dress. Will you move it back a little, please?” (74), she says to Cecil. Again this interaction of chair with crinoline is similar to what we have seen previously in *The Ethics of the Dust* and *Alan’s Wife*. Dresses and borders of skirts must be held in; there must be no unnecessary tactility within the social environment, because if there is movement becomes impeded.

Theodora’s gender play, as suggested by her “masculine shade,” culminates in her trying on the uniform of the French Zouave that Cecil has kept as a souvenir from one of his trips.[32] The lines produced by Theodora’s appearance in the uniform exhibit the same manly outline as the soldier who traditionally wore the outfit. In fact, her sister, Mrs. Long, says that she is “[q]uite passable, really” (87). Theodora’s cross-dressing, and the

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[32] Zouaves were members of a French infantry unit, originally composed of Algerian recruits, characterized by colourful uniforms and precision drilling. The role of one in uniform becomes an underlying image in the story.

ease with which she is able to switch between gender roles and cross gender boundaries, complicate the instances of touch between her and Cecil in the story. In *Six Chapters of a Man's Life*, Theodora, who is called Theo for short, decides to go with Cecil on his trip to the East but she does so dressed as a man. Theodora states, "I suppose my parents noticed I was very like a boy, and so with admirable forethought gave me a name that would do for either!" (*Six Chapters* 127), emphasizing how nomenclature has the ability to influence embodiment.

Cecil and Theo's romance is highlighted and narrated through touch in the text. Theo passing as a man and having a romantic relationship with Cecil suggests and opens up a space for homosexual intersubjective interactions – a type of self-touch. As I will explain in Chapter Three, self-touch is a special type of reciprocal touch that includes masturbation, for example, but it can also be extended to a homosexual touch where bodies that are described in a similar fashion in the text touch each other. So far the representation of touch in this text demonstrates that Theodora is a character who can freely live within gender flux, a body without resistance. On the one hand her subjectivity is compromised by Cecil's inability to recognize her returning touch, yet on the other hand this malleable embodiment and duality gives Theodora access to situations that she would not have had previously. It is a complex situation, one in which Cross does not seem quite sure where to lay the line in the sand, and refuses to do so until the very end of *Six Chapters of a Man's Life.* Within "Theodora: A Fragment," however, we are given an investigation of morality and a way of situating or positioning Theodora, despite that fact that she is difficult to situate and is in all aspects a liminal figure.

In “Theodora: A Fragment” Theodora’s moral positioning evolves simultaneously with her relationship with Cecil. Cecil is attracted by her very moral ambiguity: “this girl, […] in whom there was a dash of virility, a hint of dissipation, a suggestion of a certain decorous looseness of morals and fastness of manners-could stimulate me with a keen sense of pleasure” (“Theodora” 74). The “decorous looseness of morals” is also coupled with the ability to speak words that are “ethically true” (“Theodora” 84). Here ethics are literally inscribed within the narration through the use of the term “ethics” in various contexts. The most interesting use of ethics in the story occurs in relation to the ability to negotiate one’s environment. Theodora explains to Cecil the difficulty that she has when deciding whether to lie on the couch or on the floor:

> Theodora went on jestingly: “Now, these are the ethics of the couch and the floor […].” She spoke lightly, and with a smile, and I listened with one. But her eyes told me that these ethics of the couch and floor covered the ethics of life. (“Theodora” 76)

Cecil is fully aware that the way Theodora chooses to negotiate the couch and the floor is indicative of a larger ethos that envelops her life. Theodora’s trepidation at making a decision about whether to sleep on the floor, since it is non-conducive to sleep, or on the couch, where she risks falling off onto the floor, speaks to her sensitivity about the consequences of negotiating space. The way Theodora uses the furniture is a reflection of Victorian norms of negotiation which relate to the material elements within the specific architecture of domestic spaces. As Mona Domrosh reminds us, “often the furniture itself tells us about these norms. In Victorian times, it was common for parlors to be equipped with a matching suite of furnishings: a ‘father’s’ chair, a less grand side

chair for the mother, and the couch for visitors and children" (Domrosh 480). The couch as something that is used for visitors and children further complicates Theodora's position within this space. By being on the couch, she becomes a visitor in her own space; by being on the floor she creates a whole new relation to the space she is negotiating. Women do not lie or sit on floors; they use chairs. In fact, we can say that Theodora is creating her own post-modern feminist architecture here via a practice of negotiating space that echoes "the 'social' aspect of feminist architectural practice, […] focused on women's experience of the built environment, […] and the creation of alternative, feminist design methods" (Morton 277). Though the couch is an important part of the material elements that inform the architectural ethics of the room, its placement functions much like the quilt in *Alan's Wife*: it is a prop that needs to be negotiated and understood in relation to embodied gender practices.

The focus on ethics as a way to negotiate and frame space relates to the function of touch as a discourse which frames the narrative of "Theodora: A Fragment." Touch frames the narrative of the story through the depiction of various types of tactile interactions that move from the ethical caress of a lover to the violent desire to control and objectify through touch. Throughout the story Cecil describes his fledgling relationship with Theodora in terms of touch: "I felt inclined to throw my arm round that supple-looking waist-- and it was close to me" (78). His description of touch also highlights Theodora's form and bodily confines. His wish for proximity to Theodora suggests his desire to show her the love and affection that he feels for her; it is a touch that supports an ethics of care.

Theodora's careful removal of her rings when they are about to hold hands also suggests her desire to negotiate her environment ethically, to make the right choices, and to demonstrate care. As Cecil narrates:

> Now this was the moment I had been expecting, practically, ever since her hand had left mine last night, the moment when it should *touch* it again. I do not mean consciously, but there are a million *slight*, vague physical experience and *sensations* within us of which the mind remains unconscious. Theodora's white right hand rested on her hip, […] and I noted that all the rings had been stripped from it; her left was crowded with them […] I coloured violently for the minute as I recollected my last night's *pressure*, and the idea flashed upon me at once that she had removed them expressly to avoid the pain of having them ground into her flesh. (78, emphasis added)

Theodora does not want to be hurt by Cecil's touch, nor does she want her rings to hurt him, which points to how touch as a sensation functions in degrees, and the degree of touch also reflects the ethicality of the touch. There is a difference between applying pressure and the gentle holding of someone's hand; one can suggest fear or anger, the other love and affection.

As Theodora and Cecil's relationship grows more intimate, so too does the description of touch as a caressing and embracing movement through which their gestures create a dialogue between embodied subjects: "'So I should like to hold and embrace you;' and she, 'So, I should like to be held and embraced'" (79). However, Cecil's desire intensifies to such an extent that he moves from the role of the embracing

lover into the realm of the unethical through his desire to possess Theodora as an object: "at one moment she seemed wil-less [sic], deliciously weak, a thing only made to be taken in one's arms and kissed" (86). Theodora's embodiment is compromised by her depiction as "wil-less" and "weak." Cecil's desire to enact unethical touches on Theodora is further demonstrated by the words uses to describe his desire.

> [T]hen all these were lost again in the eddying torrent of an overwhelming desire to take her in my arms and hold her, *control* her, *assert my will* over hers, this exasperating *object* who has been pleasing and seducing every sense for the last three hours, as now was leaving them all *unsatisfied.* That impulse towards some physical demonstration, that *craving for physical contact*, which attacks us suddenly with its terrific impetus, and *chokes* and *stifles* us, ourselves, beneath it, blinding us to all except itself. ("Theodora" 89, emphasis added)

The uncaring desires seen in the word choice in this quotation are the product of a craving for physical contact that is unsatisfied. He objectifies her, indicating his unsatisfied cravings, which both choke and stifle.

Cecil also provides his own narrative of the morality of his touch: "I put my arm around her waist and drew her violently against me. It was not an affectionate action" (*Six Chapters* 187). We see here that Cecil is aware of the ethics of his touch, that he knows that he is possibly causing harm to Theodora. This focus on ethics is also repeated in *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* so that it becomes inextricable from the narrative prevalence of touch. Cecil describes an encounter with Theodora, "clothed in the actual, *tangible, visible*, desirable beauty of the flesh, demanding *nothing but that I should take*

and enjoy it, within reach of my hand" (*Six Chapters* 103, emphasis added). The intersection of tangibility and visibility in this quotation, her divesting of manly attire for that of flesh, is something that I explore in Chapter Four in relation to telepathic tactility. However, the emphasis on taking and objectifying for enjoyment falls under the same categories of control and asserting dominance that I have maintained in these two chapters. The importance of ethics as it relates to one's actions is reinforced in the text by Cecil often hedging his assertions of will and physical power with moments of intense introspection. For example, just after his taking and enjoying of Theodora's body he states: "the great unwritten laws of Self and the Other, seemed like some huge hand that kept me from her" (103). Again this quotation demonstrates an implicit ethics of touch, the separation between self and other, and the seeming impossibility of locating touch as being somewhere between the two. Cecil eventually comes to the realization that touch has a reciprocating factor, that in touching one is also touched.

Touch not only creates a cartography of the body, outlining Theodora's body, which is in constant gender flux, but also leaves a imprint on her body. The importance of touch is explained by the "million slight, vague physical experiences and sensations within us of which the mind remains unconscious" ("Theodora" 78). It is these vague physical experiences that leave a memory of impression, so that one can know who is touching you. As Cecil says, "That touch! Could I ever fail to recognize it!" (*Six Chapters* 100). The memory of tangibility is what makes the exploration of the ethics of touch so important. The memory of unethical touch can be embodied and carried within us as a literal tactile memory. This is also why proto-feminists actively protested the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts: because it was seen as an infringement of the

bodily space enacted through physical examinations, especially with the speculum. These inspections created a touch that had physical and bodily memory. The specular rape that is often mentioned in Walkowitz's work, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, has the same ethical weight as Cecil's tactile exploration of Theodora.

This infringement of bodily space is echoed by Cecil when he states that he believes Theodora has the ability to pierce his body with her gaze. His explanation of her look is representative of the function of touch at a distance: "a flash in her eye, directed upon me--yes, me-- as if she read down into my inner soul, and it sent the blood to my face" ("Theodora" 86), which causes him to reassess his tactile relation to her. The ability for vision to touch at a distance suggests a telepathic touch through which the tactile sensation can be enacted and felt beyond the physical. Touch here has a leaky component; if one can touch through vision then one does not need to be close to transmit not only tactile sensation but also emotion and morality. This fear of transmission of moral contagion underscores the upper-class belief in the need for the Contagious Diseases Acts. The various instances and types of touch in "Theodora: A Fragment" ultimately demonstrate how tactility is the underlying framework of the story. Touch in Cross's work highlights embodied subjectivity and allows for the negotiation of built environments and spaces through material objects.

Touch in "Theodora: A Fragment" works much like Cecil's sketch book; it is a "diary in cipher" (88). We are told that, "[i]n my touch, in my eyes […] she must have read all and been satisfied" (*Six Chapters* 110), which emphasizes the intersection of vision and tactility in the process of reading. It seems appropriate that there is an emphasis on reading in texts that also emphasize the negotiation of the built environment

through tactility, for reading itself is an architecture of epistemology: reading gives structure to knowledge. Reading is where knowledge is related and found. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, this knowledge can also be found when we read our own bodies. When we touch ourselves and acknowledge bodies that are like our own, a true dialogue of embodied tactility can develop.

4 Homosocial, Homosexual: Touching the Self

In Chapter One I explored how reciprocal touch can emphasize an ethic of care in which one character can demonstrate care for another through the description and narration of ethical tactile intersubjective relations. Chapter Two discussed how tactility can go beyond simply touching others, in order to interact and negotiate surroundings. In this chapter I will revisit the concept of reciprocal touching and how it can intersect with the ability to create space. This chapter asks the question: What happens when one touches herself/himself and what types of spaces does this self-touch create or become relegated to? Tangentially, I am interested in how self-touch relates to homosocial[33] and homosexual tactility. As we will see, because of the ethical, moral, and legal issues surrounding the narration and definition of homosexuality, authors found interesting ways to speak of "the love that dare not speak its name."

Tactility allows a text to "speak verbosely of its own silence" and thus the text can "relate in detail the things it does not say," or could not say (Foucault 8). Through the poetry of Lord Alfred Douglas, Michael Field, and Edward Carpenter, this chapter will explore the ethics of self-touch and in turn the ethics of touching one who is like the self. I propose that self-touch is not necessarily relegated to masturbation, but is also used in relation to homosexual/homosocial touching, for authors choose to depict this touch as a type of touching of the self. By this I mean authors describe and reinforce

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[33] See Eve Sedgwick's "A Poem is Being Written" in *Tendencies*. I will be using Sedgwick's definition of homosocial here: "the male homosocial structure, whereby men's 'heterosexual desire' for women serves a more or less perfunctory detour on the way to a closer, but homophobically proscribed, bonding with another man" (201).

homosexual/homosocial touching as touching or interactions between two bodies which are either of the same gender or sex. This chapter will also look at the homosocial/homosexual tension present in George Egerton's short story "Gone Under," which relates this tension through various types of tactility. Finally *Teleny*, which is thought to have been authored by Oscar Wilde, will serve as a text that literally bridges the gap between the concept of self-touch (masturbatory and homosexual) and the telepathic touching which is the focus of Chapter Four.

4.1 Self-Touch/Homo-Touch

In a chapter that addresses concepts and terminology as they were just being understood and defined, it is important to outline the terms that will be used and their origins as they relate to tactility and self-touch. The term "homosexual" appeared for the first time in English in 1892 in C.G Chaddock's translation of Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The term homosexual is defined as: "involving, related to, or characterized by a sexual propensity for one's own sex; of or involving sexual activity with a member of one's own sex, or between individuals of the same sex" ("homosexual, adj."). Before this time homosexuality was known as "sexual inversion." Self-touching is necessarily understood and used as being synonymous to the act of masturbation, and this is one of the valences that I will use in this chapter. The etymology of the term masturbation comes from the Latin derivation for "manus (hand) + stuprāre (to defile,) remodelled after turbāre (to disturb)" ("masturbation, n."). Therefore, masturbation incorporates literally the concept of tactile disruption or defiling. The term "Onanism" was commonly used from the 1850s to describe someone who was addicted to masturbation. This term was used in reference to males, and refers to the Biblical story of

Onan, who wasted seed ("onanism, n."). The idea of wasted seed later became a euphemism for ejaculation specifically outside the context of procreation.

The quintessential theoretical point of departure for an analysis of female self-touching is Luce Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. The description of self-touch has been important in recent feminist phenomenological scholarship which focuses on the relations among the sensory, knowledge, and the corporeal. Irigaray's work in turn created a place for Merleau-Ponty's theory within a feminist theoretical sphere. Irigaray's quotation likens hands in prayer to lips touching:

> The hand joined, palms together, fingers outstretched, constitute a very particular touching. A gesture often reserved for women (at least in the West) and which evokes, doubles, *the touching of the lips* silently applied upon one another. A touching more intimate than that of one hand taking hold of the other. A phenomenology of the passage between interior and exterior. (Irigaray 161)

Irigaray suggests that the touching of lips is a much more intimate gesture than hands touching in a reciprocal manner. The knowledge provided by the touch of lips highlights the liminal and doubling nature of tactility. As I have demonstrated previously, the space between toucher and touched is a complex one. This complexity is heightened in instances where the touch takes place within a single body, when there is touching of the self.

The touching of lips, and the doubling of this touch in terms of labia majora and labia minora (or even the labia oris), is a touch that occurs without the necessity of intent. Lips touching lips within a single body can in fact be seen as a specific type of self-touch

that exists due to anatomy. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz states how "[t]ouch may well prove to be the most difficult and complex of all the senses to analyze because it is composed of so many interacting dimensions of sensitivity, involving a number of different functions" (98). In the case of lips touching (majora, minora, etc.), the sensitivity is so light that the touch is almost indistinguishable and lacks particular sensory weight. Two types of touches are occurring simultaneously in the case of lips: a reciprocal touch which is also a type of self-touch and vice versa. As I have suggested previously, it is the chiasmic and reciprocal relation innate in touch that allows for an ethics of touch to be constructed, and this is true even when touching the self. The reciprocal nature of touch makes the site of touch difficult to delineate for the line between touched and toucher is blurred. In self-touch the touched and toucher are often one and the same or depicted in that manner. The self-touch innate to the female anatomy is even more important within the context of the purity movements that came after the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the late 1880s. Within the purity movement was a focus on stopping sexual acts that were considered immoral -- mainly prostitution. However, the purity movement was also interested in stopping masturbation or the act of self-defiling.

Masturbation created a large level of social anxiety within Victorian England. In fact at the time not only were children indoctrinated from a young age about the perils of "touching oneself" but the mid century saw the development of many anti-masturbatory devices. As Jean Stengers states in *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror:* "The anti-masturbatory belts were quite expensive, but a couple of bandages solid enough to imprison the hands could be cheaply fashioned" (Stengers 16). Preventing masturbation

was, at its core, about preventing tactility, specifically preventing self-touch. Thus, even the binding of hands is significant and sufficient to prevent tactility. It is interesting to note that chastity belts and anti-masturbatory belts were mainly aimed at males and not necessarily females. However, as Alan Hunt states, "female masturbation was also [eventually] targeted. While the early medicinal tracts, full of dire warnings about the consequences of self-abuse, made only occasional reference to females, they received more attention when the purity movements came into prominence" (Hunt 576). As a result of the purity movement there was a renewed focus on preventing not only prostitution but also female masturbation. Though male masturbation or self-abuse (which could become Onanism) was directly related to England as an empire, female masturbation seemingly had less of a political valence and more of a social valence. Male masturbation was seen as leading to a metaphorical weakening of the state, especially among those who were responsible for policing the state (both physically and socially). Female masturbation on the other hand was socially symbolic and representative of the fallen woman. A woman who was caught masturbating was a woman of loose morals capable of contaminating society with her actions. The ability to contaminate, reinforced by scientific discourse of the time, was the main reason behind the Contagious Diseases Acts. At the same time this scientific discourse of contamination was used to inform the understanding of homosexuality and homosexual relations (or sexual inversion as it was known before 1892).

In the 1860s-1880s there was a rise and a tension occurring between two competing yet seemingly intertwined movements: the Contagious Diseases Acts (and their repeal which produced the purity acts), and the reformation of homosexuality laws.

As Richard Dellamora reminds us, attempts to bring about homosexual law reform in England in the nineteenth century saw the death penalty for sodomy reduced to life imprisonment in 1861 (Dellamora 12). In 1885 the purity movement succeeded in amending the law in order to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16. The Labouchère amendment[34] (also known as Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885) made all "gross indecencies" punishable by imprisonment. The concept of "gross indecencies" was interpreted as referring to same-sex relations, even if consensual (Neumann).[35] The Labouchère amendment demonstrates that prostitution and homosexuality were socially theorized as spreading disease, thus they both needed to be contained and/or secreted to the margins. At the same time, male homosexuality was often equated with Onanism. Onanism could also lead to spermatorrhea, which continues the larger metaphor of an impotent empire. As Ellen Rosenman states, spermatorrhea is "excessive discharge of sperm caused by illicit or excessive sexual activity, especially masturbation, the disease was understood to cause anxiety [...] impotence, and in its advanced stages, insanity, and death" (Rosenman 365). The difference between spermatorrhea and the venereal diseases that the Contagious Diseases Acts were enacted to legislate is that "first, only men could contract [spermatorrhea], and second, it was not contagious. In other words, while unclean women could be blamed for syphilis and gonorrhea, spermatorrhea came from within, the result of male corporeality rather than female pollution" (Rosenman 370). The fear of something that comes from within in

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[34] The Labouchère Amendment was named after Henry Labouchère, M. P. who added it to the Criminal Law Amendment Act at the last minute,

[35] Oscar Wilde notoriously spent two years in prison because of the Labouchère amendment. We will revisit Wilde's relation to the Labouchère Amendment and the purity movement later in the chapter.

order to contaminate motivates the prevention of excessive sexual activity and self-touching. By touching themselves men risked spermatorrhea, and by touching others women risked spreading disease. Thus, ultimately, whether women touched themselves or touched others, they still risked damaging their purity, socially and corporeally.

As Ellen Rosenman explains there were many double standards and social contradictions that were deep seated within mid-Victorian England:

> Prohibitions on pleasure for both genders and all classes may have projected the stigma of sex onto "othered" social groups as groups (the rationale that drove the Contagious Diseases Acts and the Anatomy Act rested on such stereotyping), but it did not exempt middle-class men from sexual policing. On the contrary; middle-class men were caught in a contradiction: the double standard and the semi-tolerant regulation of prostitution offered the privilege of sexual experience, but such experience was tightly constrained if not forbidden by the ideal of self-discipline. (Rosenman 367)

The double standard is embodied within the male social body: he is allowed to have sex with prostitutes (the Contagious Diseases Acts states it is the female body that is diseased and should be contained), however, self-touch affects the morality of the middle-class male (he is to be at all times proper and maintain a sense of decorum).[36] Masturbation was a social ill that necessarily needed to be policed in order to maintain the purity of society.

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[36] See my discussion of etiquette manuals in the introduction.

Masturbation was seen as a social evil in many caricatures and cartoon depictions in the mid-nineteenth century. Cartoons depicted and suggested the perils of self-touch and emphasized that touch was an evil that carried disease and the threat of death.[37] In these cartoon depictions, as with the Contagious Diseases Acts, touch – even self-touch -- was understood as something that should be contained. At the same time literary caricatures were also written, emphasizing the pleasures as opposed to the perils of self-touch. The rise in pornographic texts narrated overtly sexualized heterosexual relations which were not always consensual. Steven Marcus suggests in *The Other Victorians*, that pornographic texts such as "*My Secret Life* provide us with a good deal of information about how part of sexual life in Victorian England was organized and institutionalized" (Marcus 99). The institutionalization and organization of sexuality is socially contextualized within the legislation regulating sexuality. Because "[p]ornography is connected with the growth of cities within an urban society" (Marcus 282), the rise in pornography is also directly related to policing and regulations within urban society. The modern definition of pornography as "[t]he explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this" ("pornography, n.," def. 1a), was the current and commonly understood definition from 1842 onward. This definition frames pornography as a lower order art. However, there is a second, now obsolete definition of pornography that was used in the mid-nineteenth century: "A study of prostitution" ("pornography, n.," def. 2). The 1857 edition of

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[37] In my discussion of Ruskin's *The Ethics of the Dust* in chapter two, I demonstrate that he also emphasized that touch is evil.

Dunglison's medical lexicon states that pornography is: "a description of prostitutes or of prostitution, as a matter of public hygiene" (Dunglison). As we can see from this definition, pornography was linked to the ideas of containment and disease that were common in the 1860s.

Pornography also echoed a mid-Victorian fascination with whipping or flagellation. Flagellation further reinforces the complex nature of tactility within mid-Victorian society. Pornographic texts like *A Man with a Maid* and *My Secret Life* commonly make reference to whipping as a means of arousal. As Marianna Beck suggests, "[t]he possible reasons for this consuming interest in the pleasure of whipping reflect the eroticization of a social reality. Corporal punishment had been an integral part of English culture for hundreds of years, and was more or less institutionalized in schools, the military and the penal system" (Beck). Thus, flagellation was a way of revisiting institutionalized eroticism, especially in relation to the educational and the military systems and was seen in many magazines and literary works. An example of flagellation is cited by Sharon Marcus in her work *Between Women*:

> I put out my hands, which she fastened together with a cord by the wrists. Then making me lie down across the foot of the bed, face downwards, she very quietly and deliberately, putting her left hand around my waist, gave me a shower of smart slaps with her open right hand…[R]aising the birch, I could hear it whiz in the air, and oh, how terrible it felt as it came down. (138)

The use of tactility within the context of flagellation goes further than simply the feel of the birch on the skin, but rather tactility emphasizes the constraint of the hands in order

for the flagellant to be powerless to move. Restraint was often also seen as a source of pleasure in the act of flagellation. The tying of hands is also reminiscent of the binding of hands in order to prevent the self-touch of masturbation as I have described above.

Specifically, pornographic depictions of flagellation were found in magazines that were marketed to women in mid-Victorian England but these magazines had to remain covert in their intent following the Hicklin rule. The overtly sexualized nature of flagellation and masturbation in literature lead to the passing of what is known as the Hicklin Rule. The Hicklin Rule had domestic and public importance :

> [In] one significant case (*Regina* v. *Hicklin,* 1868) the test of literary morality was put as what a father could read aloud in his own home. While there were many successful prosecutions for outright pornography, the law was also invoked against works of literary merit and works with a social or moral purpose. ("Regina v. Hicklin")

The Hicklin Rule was cited in many obscenity cases up until the early 1900s. It also went on to influence censorship and indecency laws in America as well. Though put in place to curb the rise of texts that were deemed pornographic, the Hicklin Rule also put many works of literary merit on the censure list. The effect of the Hicklin Rule was widespread and as Celia Marshik states, even Dante "Rossetti's fears of private (and perhaps government) censorship lead to a self-censorship that radically changed the shape of the poem he published: 'Jenny' became self-reflexive in ways that anticipate modernist responses to the censorship dialectic" (558). Thus, the Hicklin Rule not only affected the

dissemination of publications, but also influenced the writing of literary works in order to circumvent the law.

Pornographic and erotic texts were an important part of mid to late-Victorian society, where these texts went on to suggest the possibility of same-sex relations, even though it was done in a sensationalized manner. The use of tactility within the narration of these pornographic texts makes explicit the sexualized nature of intersubjective relations. The use of tactility then became a larger discourse that non-pornographic texts used to speak of same-sex relations without having to explicitly engage in a description or narration of these relationships. Lord Alfred Douglas's poem "Two Loves" became the touchstone, if you will, of homosexual literature. His poem, which was used as evidence in the Wilde trials, describes homosexuality through the use of tactility without overtly speaking of what it does not name.

Douglas's poem, published in 1894, became intricately connected to the enforcement of the Labouchère Amendment and the Oscar Wilde trials. As Norah Carlin states, "the Labouchère Amendment of 1885 happened almost incidentally in the course of a much broader campaign to control sexuality. Both the Contagious Diseases Acts (from 1864) and the opposition to them had a place in this movement" (Carlin). Lord Alfred Douglas was Oscar Wilde's lover; they met in 1891 and their relationship lasted until Wilde's death in 1900 (Damrosch 2085). Douglas came from an aristocratic family, and it has been well documented that his family did not approve of his decadent lifestyle, for Douglas "explored the dangerous pleasures of all kinds of sexuality" (Damrosch 2086). His two contributions to *The Chameleon* in 1894, "an Oxford magazine with a distinctly homoerotic slant," "Two Loves" and "In Praise of Shame" were read by the

prosecution at Wilde's trial "in an effort to make Wilde appear guilty by association" (Damrosch 2086). The last line of "Two Loves" is the famous euphemism for homosexuality: "I am the love that dare not speak its name" (74). The poem retells a dream vision wherein the speaker encounters many male characters wandering in a "waste garden" (3). The use of tactility and emphasis on hands that hold symbolic objects suggest the homosexual theme of the poem without necessarily explicitly relating overt sexuality.

The first character that the speaker encounters functions as his guide. He is "a youth; one hand he raised / To shield him from the sun, his wind-tossed hair / Was twined with flowers, and in his hand he bore / A purple bunch of bursting grapes" (25-28). The alliterative "purple bunch of bursting grapes," not only adds to the overall imagery of the poem but emphasizes the erotic nature of the poem. The grapes that have burst, signaling temptation that has overflowed its boundaries, are similar to the goblin fruit in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. The fruit that the guide holds in his hand foreshadows other temptations to come and they are fruit that may have burst from the clenched fist of the guide himself. The speaker then continues: "he came near me, with his lips uncurled / And kind, and caught my hand and kissed my mouth, / And gave me grapes to eat" (33-35). The speaker partakes of the fruit after he is literally touched and kissed by the guide. The temptation is related not simply through taste but through touch as well. His touch is "kind" and the grapes he gives for food are symbolic of exoticism and also directly refer to wine and the god of wine, Bacchus. Bacchus is the god of wine and revelry, and the bursting grapes, which will make wine, inform what occurs in this garden. Not to be

overlooked is the globe-like shape of the grapes which mimic the testes and in turn the touch of the grapes takes on a sexualized and erotized meaning.

The speaker then continues on his journey and encounters two other males in the grass. We are told of one: “In his hand he held an ivory lute / With strings of gold that were as maidens’ hair” (47-48). The symbolism of the lute is rich and complex. The word lute comes from the Arabic word “al ud,” which means the wooden one (Goodwin). The lute was also one of the first string instruments to be played with fingers instead of a quill. The lute is often depicted as being in the hands of angels symbolizing “the beauties of heaven” (Goodwin). In ancient times the lute symbolized “youth and love” (Goodwin). The tactility related to the lute and playing the lute, coupled with the design of the lute as contrasted with the maiden’s hair, highlights the sensuality of the lute player. His companion is described as having “his hands […] clenched tight / And yet again unclenched “(57-58). The motion and movement of the hands, clenching and unclenching, suggests a type of self-touch. The masturbatory allusion of the repetitive motion of clenching and unclenching cannot be over looked. The definition and etymology of clench, “[t]o grasp firmly, grip, clutch; to hold firmly in one's grasp” (“clench, v1.,” def. 3), is derived from the word to “cling” and suggests that man is holding on and waiting. The fact that there is no object in his hand and that he is simply clenching and unclenching his own hand further suggests the masturbatory nature of the description.

The speaker questions the youths showing him these sensory pleasures, asking to whom he owes these great feelings. One is called Love, the other Shame, and we are told that Love was alone until Shame joined him and as a result, Shame becomes “the love the

dare not speak its name" (73). This personification of love and shame demonstrates the difficulty of relating homosexual relations or sexualized relations within the public sphere. The euphemism becomes a necessity, yet the tactility depicted in the poem reveals much more than the euphemistic ending. Lord Alfred's work was not singular in its use and reference to tactility in order to explore eroticism, especially same-sex erotic relations. Sapphic poets, writers and social activists, Michael Field used classical images and imagery coupled with tactility to propose sensuality in many of their poems.

4.2 Michael Field: Touching Sappho

Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper wrote under the pseudonym Michael Field. Both Bradley and Cooper were very involved and interested in social issues that affected women at the time. Bradley and Cooper "were involved with the early suffragists supporting Josephine Butler's work against the Contagious Diseases Acts" (*The Michaelian*). Though often referred to as lesbian poets the Fields wrote at a time when the term lesbian did not have the currency it has today. As Terry Castle states in *The Apparitional Lesbian,* "to try to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility" (Castle 28). As a result, as Martha Vicinus states in *Intimate Friends*, Michael Field have become the default for "many historians [who] have been over concerned with finding that invisible moment in the past when 'the modern lesbian identity' came into being" (Vicinus xxi). Though as Virginia Blain states, their letters "provide a very rare instance of direct evidence of a Victorian lesbian relationship" (Blain 241), it is anachronistic to suggest that they were lesbian.

Many recent works, from Martha Vicinus's *Intimate Friends* to Sharon Marcus's *Between Women*, have traced the intimate relationships between nineteenth-century women. The constant in these relationships is the inability to group them into one singular category, namely lesbian. The intimate relationships between women in the nineteenth century varied from close friendships to erotic and sexualized relationships. As Vicinus suggests, these relationships also used tactility in order to invoke the sense of intimacy. Women "exchanged jewelry as love tokens so that when apart each would feel the touch of the other" (Vicinus xx). As Vicinus continues in "Normalizing Female Friendship," these "unspoken intensities, and delicate touching, become erotic" in Michael Field's work(Vicinus 84).

In their first collection of poetry, entitled *Long Ago* (1889), Michael Field invokes Sappho and a Sapphic lyrical style. As Yopie Prins suggests, "Sappho represents different ideas of Victorian womanhood, and like the Queen she becomes a 'representative' woman who embodies the very possibility of such representations"(Prins 15). In line sixteen of lyric III in *Long Ago* Michael Field makes direct reference to "Sappho's senses." Sappho's senses are all senses which do not become diffuse, they "may not steep" (16). This is an example of what Prins calls the "merging external appearance and internal sensation, Sappho's sensual description appeals to all senses simultaneously" (98).

The juxtaposition of XXXV and XXXVI and the hand and touch in both of these lyrics are very symbolic. In XXXV the main focus is on the marriage ring and how this ring "becomes thy shapely hand" (8). The description of "[t]hose fairest hands—doth thou forget / [t]heir power to thrill and cling?" (13-14) suggests and relates eroticism

through tactility. The fair hand has the power to thrill, and in addition, the hand and the memory of touch cling to the body. Here this touch is not necessarily self-touch but it is a touch that arouses. Lyric XXXVI contrasts this arousal by evoking death's touch, a touch which cannot kill love. The idea of the "finger of decay" (12), the last line in XXXVI, creates a tension between love and immortality, and highlights how touch becomes complicated in death. However, this lyric also brings to light how Michael Field tends to avoid overtly physical representations of love. As Laird suggests, "the 'vagueness' of their treatment of physical manifestations of lesbianism -- especially of Sappho" (Laird 119) is due to the fact that their love is contextually different from what is understood as lesbianism today. Historically contextualizing the Michael Field's relationship in terms of appropriate language and Sappho's lyrical organization demonstrates that, like Sappho, they were very selective in their use of tactility and tactile representations.

Self-touch as seen in pornographic texts is not overtly prevalent in Michael Field's work. However, in LVII their selective use of tactility displays care and what happens when care is denied. LVII equates loss of maidenhood to lack of tactility. The poem starts with "two arms [which] strive to reach" (12) which "clasp thy child" (15), arms that demonstrate care for a child. The final stanza gives a nondescript "they" subject pronoun, and this "they" embraces a violent tactility, as opposed to the care demonstrated at the beginning of the poem:

They love the hands that smite
The full-stringed barbiton
That we man never touch again aright:
No living created may we more delight;

Our maidenhood, our maidenhood is gone. (52-56)

The praise and delight in the loss of maidenhood, the end of solitude, can also be related to the maidenhead, or loss of virginity. The ability to no longer "touch again aright," where the adverbial definition of aright as "in a right way or manner; rightly, justly, correctly, properly" ("aright, adv.," def. 1), suggests that there is a right and a wrong way to touch. Touching is not only caring and soothing but touch can also smite, maim, and destroy. Touch can kill and thus it needs to be carefully regulated.

Michael Field's second published collection of poetry, *Sight and Song* (1892), reaffirms the importance of the sensory in their work. As a collection of poems about paintings they have seen, the poetry of *Sight and Song* meshes the visual with the literary. The poem "Saint Sebastian," in reference to Correggio's painting of the same name, emphasizes the tension between sight and tactility.[38] Saint Sebastian was "a Roman martyr. In the nineteenth century many associated him with masculinity, masochism, and homosexuality" (Thain 94). As Jill Ehnnen suggests in "Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's *Sight and Song*," the collection "celebrate [s] women's autoeroticism and homoerotic bonds; [...] and codes both male and female homoerotic love through the figure of Saint Sebastian" (214). The first line of Saint Sebastian echoes the tension present within the senses and Saint Sebastian's position as martyr, especially his relation to homosexuality in nineteenth-century England:[39] "Bound

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[38] It is interesting to note that Correggio also painted a representation of the famous Biblical "Noli Me Tangere" (Do Not Touch Me.)

[39] As Richard Kaye reminds us, "Oscar Wilde, who adopted the pseudonym 'Sebastian Melmoth' on his release from prison, invokes Sebastian in his 1881 poem to Keats, 'The Grave of Keats,' whom he describes as 'fair Sebastian, and as foully slain'." For Wilde, the Roman martyr becomes a self-consciously deployed subcultural emblem. (Kaye)

by thy hands, but with respect unto thine eyes how / Free –“(1). This line suggests that ability to bind is related to tactility as opposed to the visual. The visual is the free sense, whereas the tactile, being the dangerous sense, must be bound. Michael Field is writing against this concept by reinforcing that even if hands are bound that the vision is a freeing sensation that allows us to experience the world.

The ability to represent self-touch both visually and textually is seen in Field’s poem “The Sleeping Venus.” Based on Giorgione’s painting, this poem demonstrates the “conflict and stress in Field’s work [...] between inward imagination, and outward social morality” (Laird 114). Michael Field creates an apt portrait of self-touch within the confines of late-Victorian morality. As Ehnenn states, “Michael Field daringly creates for their readers what is perhaps the only positive contemporary description of female masturbation” (228). The fifth stanza relates the instance of self-touch. The “delicious womanhood” (70) that the hand enjoys is just one of the many references to the touching of female lips. “The red lips shut in / [g]racious secrets that begin” (83-84) and it is touch that tells us these secrets. The “fold by fold” (86) of the drapery in the poem and the portrait mimics the labia as does the “mantle’s ruddy pomegranate” (87). Line after line makes reference to the vagina and the placement of Venus’s touch: “this hillock’s outer leaves / [o]ne small bush defiles its leaves” (93-94). The eroticized depiction continues with reference to how her resting-place is spread “in deep or greener-lighted brown” (99-100). The euphemisms that appear in their description of the painting highlight the eroticism of the poem, and the sensuality of self-touch.

The erotic overtones of tactility, especially self-touch, not only in terms of Venus touching herself, but also the possibility of Michael Field touching each other in many

ways as they composed the poem, suggests the importance of tactility and the need to free the tactile from constraints and containment. "The Sleeping Venus" is possibly Michael Field's most overtly sexualized poem and yet this sexuality and sensuality is done through a detailed description of an eroticized painting. Michael Field's ability to describe the painting in such a vivid manner also echoes their vision of the painting as homosexually suggestive. By using the painting as a way to mediate their depiction of tactility, the eroticism that could have been placed upon them as poets, can now be deflected onto a painting to some extent. Bradley and Cooper were not the only writers to effectively relate homosexual themes or intimacy between two people of the same sex. For writers like Edward Carpenter, the use of tactility becomes a way to address and advocate for rights while exploring the complex valances of relationships between those of the same sex.

4.3 Edward Carpenter: Social Crusader and Author

Socialist and advocate for homosexual rights, Edward Carpenter was influential in many social movements in England which are present today, such as vegetarianism, environmental protection, and animal rights. In 1883 Carpenter published *Towards Democracy,* a collection of epic poems. As Philip Taylor suggests, this work "became his most well known work, and his first contact with the nascent Socialist movement. Throughout the rest of his life, Carpenter supported a broad Socialist movement without ever being committed to a parliamentary political party or any narrow doctrine" (Taylor). Lesley Hall also suggests that Carpenter and other members of the Socialist movement were "at some level (if not explicitly) strongly influenced by the debates about the state

and health generated by the successful campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts" (Hall).

Carpenter's poem "By the Shore" from *Towards Democracy* functions as an extended personification of the shore and the sea. The speaker states, "I am a bit of the shore: the waves feed upon me, they / come pasturing over me" (8-9). The relationship between shore and water intensifies through a focus on tactility. Tactility in "By the Shore" goes from reciprocal touch to an insistence that touch is infinite and spreads outward. Touch has the ability to exchange and modify the role of the speaker. In line eleven there is a movement from the speaker being the shore to: "I am a little arm of the sea: the same tumbling / swooning dreams goes on—I feel the waves all around me, / I spread myself through them" (11-13). Of course, the larger metaphor of water, waves, and the spreading of oneself through water is very erotic and sensual. Water is seen as the giver of life, not only through the relationship to nature, but this also transposed into religious practice in the form of water baptism. Water thus becomes the seed of life, very similar to how semen also symbolizes the seed of life. The speaker continues to spread through the water and to incorporate his body fully in the water:

> How delicious! I spread and spread. The waves
> tumble through and over me--they dash through my face
> and hair.
> The night is dark overhead: I do not see them, but
> I touch them and hear their gurgling laughter. (14-18)

The waves become invisible at night and it is only through tactility that the knowledge that there are waves is known and felt. The delicious nature of the touch of water and the

emphasis on spreading further complicates the notion that this poem is not simply about nature, but about sex.

The speaker then becomes “the Ocean itself” (21). We are told that the speaker is entangled with the wind and the waves:

> I am in love with the wind--I reach my lips to its kisses.
>
> How delicious! all night and ages and ages long to spread myself to the gliding wind!
>
> But now (and ever) it maddens me with its touch,
> I arise and whirl in my bed, and sweep my arms madly along the shores. (23-29)

The deep-seated metaphor of the poem now becomes clear. The speaker is in bed being maddened by the touch of the wind. This is not simply a production of waves through wind, but a building up of sexual excitement. He “glides in and out” (32) not knowing if his experience is “pain or joy?” (40).

In the eighth stanza, suddenly the sensory and tactile imagery of the poem becomes detached: “I do not know; my sense numbs; a trance is on me / -- I am becoming detached!” (42-43). The detachment of sense is not a complete cutting off of the sensory, but rather a sensory overload. Touch is now all encompassing and creates embodiment; “[t]he waves feed upon me, they pasture all over me, / my feeling is strangely concentrated at every point where / they touch me” (45-47). Touch is felt acutely, for the speaker feels “[t]he pain, the acute clinging desire, is over--I feel / beings like myself all around me, I spread myself through / and through them, I am merged in a sea of contact”

(51-53). This sea of touch, sea of contact, brings to light the notion that "[f]reedom and equality are a fact" (54). The spread of touch is given the utmost importance. It is essential, "that [he] may touch it and be with it everywhere. / There is no end. But ever and anon it maddens [him] / with its touch" (62-64).

The speaker seems to expand his corporeality, his reach, so that there are no bounds. The touch that touches him comes from within him. He expresses care, desire, and the sensual reaction that comes from self-touch. Carpenter's work, like the poetry of Michael Field, has the ability to express and complicate touching oneself sexually through the sensual and the tactile. The speaker's immersion into the water and the concept of spreading and simultaneously being everywhere is repeated and reinforced through the concept of tactility. The water becomes the other that caresses the body; touches are everywhere and nowhere all at once. This focus on the complexity of tactility becomes even more important in George Egerton's short story "Gone Under," in which the definition of the relationship between two women who reside in close quarters is up for interpretation.

4.4 "Framing it with her hands": George Egerton's "Gone Under"

George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne) was active in social movements in the late nineteenth century. Egerton is often cited, alongside Sarah Grand, and others as being informed and influenced by the movement to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts and later the social purity movement. As John Kucich suggests:

> The issue of syphilis was a pressing one among 1890s feminists, as fears that syphilis had become rampant drove feminist calls for male chastity and for the public availability of information about

> the disease. Even though Grand's formulation of the problem sometimes confined itself to earlier frameworks of debate associated with the Contagious Diseases Acts (abolished in 1886), her novels, along with notorious works by Emma Frances Brooke and George Egerton which followed *The Heavenly Twins*, fuelled the "social purity" movement so interwoven with suffrage a decade later. (Kucich 253)

Egerton brings to light many issues important to the proto-feminist movement, such as prostitution, the fallen woman, suffrage, marriage, and divorce. However, it is her short stories that are possibility the most pertinent for they relate many of the issues that women faced in the 1890s. Her first book of short stories, *Keynotes*, which was published in 1893, made Egerton a household name. As Ann-Barbara Graff suggests, "*Keynotes* was considered a ground-breaking book that took steps to advance the cause of women" (Graff), but often her work and her personal beliefs conflicted. [40]

This section will explore how various types of touch relate to the depiction and construction of the embodied subject in "Gone Under." Egerton's story explores self-touching or touching of the self-same. It is a touch that complicates the borders of the homosocial, which as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states, is predicated on the lack of direct contact. Egerton's story also includes instances of telepathic touch, which I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Four.

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[40] Egerton had a much contested relationship to the "feminist movement." For more about this see Ann-Barbara Graff's *Darwin's Sirens.*

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty states, “it may be said in more general terms that we can…touch an object with parts of our body which have never actually been in contact with it” (369), and he suggests that this non-touch is possibly a more ethically viable choice since it does not valorize the tactile or infringe on spatial boundaries. In Egerton’s story, however, the gaze seems to act in an opposite manner, in that the gaze leads to unethical and stereotypical characterizations of the embodied subject. Egerton is one of the most modern of the Victorian writers, and this is not solely due to her work being written and published towards the end of the Victorian period. Her short stories demonstrate modernist strategies both through her narrative style and in her subject matter. She seems to anticipate Jean-Luc Nancy and the singular plural, when she states that the city is a place where one is “necessarily lonely” (196). In “Gone Under,” the main female protagonist, who remains nameless throughout the story, and is only referred to as “the girl,” is about to undertake a trans-Atlantic voyage by steamer. Egerton’s interest in representations of gender is shown in her careful word choice when describing certain things about the city of New York. For example, the narration states that in New York “foreign literature is emasculated” (196), and “the women [here] are the most consciously sexless, and unconsciously selfish, on the face of the globe” (196).

In these opening scenes all is given and described through the girl’s gaze. She “wonders vaguely in what relationship [she will] stand to one” (196) particular other female traveler on this voyage. The other female traveler sparks her interest initially through the gown that the woman is wearing. The girl’s gaze allows her to articulate the differences she sees between herself and the jewelry-adorned flesh of the other woman

traveler.[41] The girl describes herself as "not feminine enough" and says that "she has had very little experience of men -- she does not get on with them very well" (197). The woman traveler on the other hand becomes an object of fascination, an almost disembodied figure, reduced to what she is wearing and how she is wearing it; the woman becomes simply know as the "red bodice." Reducing the woman to a piece of clothing reinforces Merleau-Ponty's statement from *Phenomenology of Perception* about how the "visual experience, pushes objectification further than does tactile experience" (369). The girl's gaze objectifies the woman to such an extent that she becomes a stereotype for all New York women, her body lost underneath cloth. We are told "[i]t amuses [the girl] to watch people, it is almost like a play in which she is the sole audience" (198). The girl as feminist spectator highlights the performativity of the woman in the red bodice. The woman becomes a mere actor in the girl's play, and she serves to demonstrate how the gaze can be understood as a touch that does not necessarily touch.

The ethics of depiction and description turn after this point. We are told that "[t]he girl, endowed as she is with the passionate worship of beauty and the imagination that belong to Celtic ancestry, feels attracted to [the woman in the red bodice], and yet repelled" (197- 198). This attraction coupled with the girl's previous self-proclaimed identification as a spectator, is the first narrative realization of the woman traveler as an embodied subject and not merely an object within the short story. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion, a pull towards and yet away from the woman, demonstrates a type of identification on the part of the girl. As Maurice Hamington states, the "flesh is a

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[41] As mentioned previously the link between jewelry as a way of touching an intimate friend even when travelling is explored by Martha Vincinus in *Intimate Friends*.

powerful nexus between what it is to be other and what it is to be me" (53), and an "articulation of differences […] is where moral debate begins" (149). In *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray explains that "ethics is understood as the problematic of identity or place" (166), and in Egerton's story these larger ethical issues of identity, specifically gender and sexual identity, are brought to light through touch.

We eventually find out that the woman in the red bodice is named Mrs. Grey. The girl hears Mrs. Grey's cries one evening when the water is particularly choppy and many of the travelers are becoming sick. The girl goes to Mrs. Grey's cabin to find her ill, and the stewardesses are ignoring Mrs. Grey's pleas for help because they believe her to be drunk. The girl takes care of Mrs. Grey, calms her down, and manages to get her to rest. Eventually "the woman fell asleep holding the girl's hand" (201) and though the girl "is cramped by her crouching position […] it never occurs to her to leave her post" (201). This devotion to her position as caregiver demonstrates a similar ethic of care seen with Lizzie and Laura in "Goblin Market." Here the girl will help and care for Mrs. Grey, even if it causes the girl bodily pain or harm.

The girl takes care of Mrs. Grey the best way she knows how, and this is necessarily formed through knowledge of what it is to care for someone, which is reinforced by habit. We must remember that in touch there is what Elizabeth Grosz calls "the double sensation" (100), in that when one touches, one is touched back. Therefore, as the girl touches Mrs. Grey, Mrs. Grey necessarily touches the girl. They hold hands all night as the girl attempts to comfort Mrs. Grey in her time of need. In the morning Mrs. Grey awakens, and the girl brushes and braids Mrs. Grey's hair as a continuation of care she demonstrated in keeping vigil the night before. Here the balance of attraction and

repulsion that the girl formerly described seems to tip towards attraction, where the girl describes Mrs. Grey as “a priestess of passion” (201). Interestingly, the girl continues to narrate and describe Mrs. Grey in terms of her body, which indicates a heightened interest in the woman, yet the girl says that she eventually “unclasps the hand that prisons hers” (201). The description of Mrs. Grey’s touch as a prison suggests that Mrs. Grey’s touch is oppressive, or at best foreign. We must question the dynamics of the touching in this section, for the characterization of both the girl and Mrs. Grey are given through the narration of touch.

We come to understand that both women in this situation require or desire something similar, someone to confide in, someone to be close to, and it is through contact that this desire is satisfied. The girl “has been so alone that she has acquired a habit of observing closely things that happier women barely understand” (201). This observational mode on the part of the girl creates a sympathetic bond between the two women. After Mrs. Grey awakes from a nap, she takes the girl’s “hand, kisses it closely and holds it to her cheek” (201-202). Here we have numerous types of touch, between skin of hands, between hand and lips, between hand and cheek. These various touches act not only to reinforce a reciprocal ethic of care, but the holding action of hand to cheek also suggests a desire for something more. Mrs. Grey is grateful for the girl’s attentive care and companionship and by holding the moment of touch she expresses to the girl that she wishes for their time together to continue.

The homosocial within cultural confines is complicated further when it is seen in a relationship between those who are gendered or identify as female. Are these touches a demonstration of friendship or gratefulness, or is it something more? What does it mean

that the girl seems to be gendered male in the beginning of the story, whereas Mrs. Grey is stereotypically gendered female? How does touch allow us to negotiate this tension? The answer seems to lie here in the performance of the touch, and the effects that this touch produces on the audience. In the absence or elision of a locutionary force, where things are said and left for interpretation, one must look to the perlocutionary or the effect that touch produces as a substitute here for verbal expression. For example, after Mrs. Grey has tenderly kissed and caressed the girl's hand, we are witness to a conversation that again points to the desire for something more. The boundaries of their friendship and homosocial relationship are reinforced in the conversation but confounded and complicated by Mrs. Grey's constant ellipsis:

> 'You are better now, I can leave you, I am very tired,' says the girl.
>
> 'Yes,' letting go her hand; then with an impulse: 'Will you –?'
>
> 'Yes?' A silence
>
> 'Will I-?'
>
> 'Will you? - ah, no matter- thank you- I guess you'd best go-,'
>
> and she turns her face to the wall. (202)

This exchange is laden with tentative and impulsive imagery, which when coupled with the previous actions of touch, seems to suggest that Mrs. Grey has connected with the girl on a deeper level. We never find out what it is that Mrs. Grey wants of the girl. The silences and the fluctuation between holding and letting go of the girl's hand as they speak suggest that Mrs. Grey is still working out what she desires of the girl and whether it is acceptable.

The performativity of care through the repetition of touch is shown as the story continues:

> [Mrs. Grey] rests her hand on the girl's shoulder, and then her head, and rocks her shoulders as if in pain. The girl smoothes her hair silently.
>
> 'Why are you so good to me?' she asks suddenly.
>
> 'I don't know, because you are a woman, I suppose,
>
> as I am-'. (203-204)

Here touch seems to suggest a maternal instinct to be exposed later in the story, as is seen in this repetition of the girl either smoothing or combing Mrs. Grey's hair. Hamington states: "if one is exposed to this model of caring *repeatedly*, one will likely employ this habit when confronted with similar circumstances" (57). This quotation emphasizes the performativity of the ethics of care. The girl's repeated touching of Mrs. Grey's hair is in fact an instance of this repeated model of care. However, this care is also motivated by identification, "you are a woman […] as I am" says the girl, and this is enough for her to want to take care of her.

The girl's explanation and reason behind her actions towards Mrs. Grey highlights a theory of self-touching. She is good to Mrs. Grey simply because she is a woman. The instances where the narration relates, creates, and depicts the girl as almost masculine demonstrates how she does not perform her femininity like or to the extent to which Mrs. Grey does. The acts of touching seem to erase divisions created by gender identification at the beginning of the story. The narration also queries the meaning of the relationship between the two women by stating that the girl "has been conscious of a difference in her

treatment for some days, a shrinking on the part of the women, a touch of insolence in the glance of the men. It hurts her a little" (204). The other passengers on the steamer look to the relationship between the two women as possibly something that verges on the inappropriate. The passengers' body language points to the constant necessity to avoid touch or shirk away from any contact with the girl and Mrs. Grey. The way that the other passengers react to the girl, both in the way that they look at her but also in the way that they react to her presence, highlights a larger socio-cultural tension innate in the relationship between the two women. The description of the passengers' reactions to the girl can be a commentary on social norms and boundaries when it comes to female friendships/relationships. As I have mentioned previously, there is a need to maintain distance from that which can be understood as possibly contaminating. The relationship between the girl and Mrs. Grey is something that needs to be contained within a specific private space and not be enacted in public. However, the description of the passengers' reactions could also be a type of projection on the part of the girl because she is worried that the way they touch each other above deck is only a small indication of how they could be touching each other below deck (in all senses of the word).

Mrs. Grey confides in the girl and tells her the story of her pregnancy and the subsequent death of her baby at the hands of a mysterious Madame Rachelle. Mrs. Grey calls Madame Rachelle a "she-devil" (206), who killed her child in a move orchestrated by the man who impregnated her, a man who was not her husband. The spectre of prostitution lingers in Mrs. Grey's story, and again her story can be understood as a larger socio-cultural commentary. Those who have children out of wedlock do not get to keep their children. In retelling her story to the girl, Mrs. Grey demonstrates the use of tactility

similar to what I suggested in Chapter Two, a touch that is literally used to negotiate one's environment: "I got up quickly, and by holding to things I managed to crawl to that room. *I had a feeling it was there*" (207), where the "it" in this instance is her baby. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Maurice Hamington refers to this type of touching material elements as "acaring" or a "morally neutral pattern the body uses to navigate one's environment" (57). This acaring touch moves to a caring one in her story where as she describes her reaction to her discovery of her baby's corpse:

> I couldn't believe it was dead. I kissed it and tried to warm it, and I put it inside my nightgown between my breasts; and then I heard voices, and I rushed out and down the stairs. A nurse met me and tried to stop me, but I screamed and bit her hand. Then more came, and I felt everything grow black around me, and my little one melted like a lump of ice on my heart, and I knew no more. (207)

This is Mrs. Grey's limit of corporeal knowledge; when she is incapable of reviving her child through tactile means, she passes out and loses control of her "senses."

The memory of the dead child as retold by Mrs. Grey points to another instance of touch, telepathic touch. This is the touch that allows the dead to speak to us through the body. Mrs. Grey says that following her child's death, she "could feel it at night groping about for me, and the chill of its poor little hands clung to me, and I used to drink to get warm again and forget it" (207-208). She later refers to her child as a "moral educator" (208), suggesting that the deathly cold touch of her child's ghost would or could allow her to be a better woman, to learn from her past mistakes and transgressions.

The girl is visibly moved by Mrs. Grey's story. The girl provides advice to Mrs. Grey about contacting her estranged lover. The advice that she provides is informed by the relationship and the bond that the two women have nurtured and shared during the voyage.

> "Let him see the real woman, as you have let me!"
> Her words have a startling effect; the woman's face changes, a look of terror and the remembrance of something momentarily forgotten gathers upon it; she hides her face, and rocks impatiently with moaning cries. (208-209)

Clearly, Mrs. Grey is disturbed by something or regrets something that may have transpired. We cannot be sure if this regret has something to do with her relationship with the girl; however, it is Mrs. Grey who constantly requests and desires a tactile intimacy with the girl and then shirks away from it. This desire for intimacy, and pulling away, is again exemplified when they arrive at their destination and Mrs. Grey must go toward uncertain destiny and punishment for her past sexual indiscretions with numerous male lovers. The girl has demonstrated through episodes of touch time and again in the story that she is willing and able to care for Mrs. Grey, no matter what skeletons she has in her past, if she will let her. Despite the girl's willingness and openness to the continuation of their friendship/relationship, their last tactile encounter transpires as follows:

> "I am as ready to help you now as before, if I only can-"
> "You say that but," - lifting her head and searching with grave white face- "would you kiss me?"

> The girl bends her head, but the woman drops to the floor with a sharp "No, no," and hides her face in the girl's gown. (211)

A page later their final goodbye is narrated as:

> The woman takes her face, and framing it with her hands says: "Forget me, little sister, good, kind, little sister, except when you pray. And now kiss me goodbye."
>
> They kiss one another, the girl with tears drenching her face, and the woman goes up… and never looks back once. (213)

Mrs. Grey sends many mixed messages, in which the perlocution of her touching actions does not equate or is not allowed to equate with the locution provided by the narration. It is interesting that she wishes to be remembered when the girl prays, which looks forward to Irigaray's image of two hands touching as though in prayer: "a touching more intimate […] a phenomenology of the passage between interior and exterior" (Irigaray 161).

The fact that Mrs. Grey never looks back is important to the conclusion of the story. The girl has waited months to hear word from Mrs. Grey but none arrived; then one day as she is walking in London she sees a woman who looks like her, but she is dirty and in tattered clothes. Mrs. Grey realizes who is following her and runs away as fast as she can:

> The woman looks up and sees her; she pauses for the space of a second with a vivid brightening of her dull eyes, as when one strikes a light in a darkened room, then as the eager, "Edith, sister!" reaches her, she flings up one arm wildly to hide her

> face, thrusts out the other to ward the girl off and sobs out, “Oh, oh no not that!” with a wailing moan. (216)

In the process of running away Edith (Mrs. Grey) loses her shoe, and the final image we are given in the story is the girl holding the shoe up to her breast, crying. All the girl has left of Mrs. Grey at the end is a mediated touch; the only way she can touch Mrs. Grey is through her shoe. This is a movement back towards an objectification of the Mrs.Grey as was seen in the beginning of the story. Mrs. Grey is no longer Edith, or the red bodice, but a mud-encrusted shoe, a disjointed remnant of a once fully embodied subject. In “Gone Under” the shoe is a synedoche: the part has to stand for the whole. Mrs. Grey comes to be represented through her shoe, a nod to her past and future as a prostitute. It is a heart-wrenching portrait of possibility that indicates that even if one is willing to help and to care for those in need, the one who needs the help has to meet the caregiver too.

“Gone Under” is literally framed by touch, highlighting instances of the possible transgression of the homosocial, the unethical objectification created by the gaze, as well as suggesting another type of touch that does not touch, the telepathic touch of the dead child. The exploration of Victorian texts such as these incorporates a concept of witnessing similar to what is seen in Kelly Oliver’s work. The texts become witnesses to encounters of contact and non-contact. “Gone Under” speaks of the perils of the life of prostitution, yet also indicates that there exists a possibility for redemption. The same tension between the visual, the tactile, and the homosocial found in “Gone Under” is also seen in *Teleny*. *Teleny* also speaks to how the possibility of the redemptive nature of touch can be interrupted. *Teleny* is a text that literally bridges the gap between self-touch and telepathic touch.

4.5 Ghosting Touch, Queering Tactility, and Renegotiating Sexuality within the Spiritualism of *Teleny*

Ghost touches, like the "luminous" or detached hands seen in séances, became the centre of much scientific inquiry within the Spiritualist movement. As I will discuss in much more detail in the next chapter, within a literary frame, ghost hands create a ghosting of the tactile which not only queers the narrative, but also allows queer characters to emerge from marginalized positions and reclaim material presence. By focusing on *Teleny* (a work often attributed to Oscar Wilde), I will demonstrate how telepathic touch ultimately allows the narrative to highlight and explore queer relationships within a socio-cultural frame.

In this particular situation telepathic touch as a spatial subversion in the text also allows for a queer space to be created and renegotiated within the narration. Spiritualist beliefs, such as specific references to mesmerism and trances, become the key to the creation and maintenance of queer relationships within the text. My use of the word "queer" here is a tad anachronistic, for queer was not commonly used in reference to homosexuality, specifically male homosexuality, until a decade after the publication of *Teleny.*[42] However, I use the term queer here also to highlight the word as an adjective; as something odd, and questionable, which the texts themselves attribute to their complex telepathic/ghostly interaction, an interaction that seemingly has no explanation. These

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[42] The adjectival form of queer as "Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious" ("queer, adj.1," def. 1a) has had currency since the 1500s. The use of queer within homosexual context as a colloquial term defined as "of a person: homosexual. Hence: of or relating to homosexuals or homosexuality," ("queer,adj.1," def. 3) dates from the 1910s in the United States (OED).

ghost hands and their ghostly touch in turn highlight the complex interaction necessary to negotiate nineteenth-century society.

4.5.1 Telepathy and the Victorians

"Telepathy" within a Victorian context was used to describe "all cases of impression received at a distance" (Luckhurst 60). Telepathy in Victorian literature becomes metaphorically depicted as a substitute for touch. *Teleny* also makes specific reference to mesmerism as it relates to tactility. It is important to note that most mesmeric performers of the nineteenth century came from the tradition of lay healers or touch healers. The sensory was very important to mesmerism; in fact as Alison Winter states: "in certain states of mind, one's sensory functions became displaced from their normal organs and relocated to a different part of the body" (53-54). This transposition of senses is similar to the connection we will see between the visual and the tactile in *Teleny.* As Winter states, there is a possibility of "a community of sensation between mesmeriser and the subject, the imperceptible transmission and simultaneous experience of touch, taste, smell" (85). Ultimately, mesmerism is a useful way to analyze embodiment in Victorian literature, for "[m]esmerism also suggested connections between people that ran contrary to the stereotyped images we have of Victorian bodies as self-contained" (Winter 117). Lisa Brocklebank suggests that this "capacity to extend and redefine the boundaries of the self" (234) is also true of telepathy. It is this difference in the conceptualizing of embodiment that touch brings to light. It is this complex touch, a queer tactility reinforced by telepathy, which highlights a renegotiation of embodiment and sexuality in *Teleny.* This tactile negotiation also relates to the complex history of authorship and composition of the text.

4.5.2 *Teleny* and Wilde

As I have mentioned previously, Oscar Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas and the subsequent trials brought concepts of homosexuality and containment to the fore. As Sally Ledger states: "[w]hilst a desire for any such criminalization had not been the original impetus behind the Anti-Contagious Diseases campaigns and, later, the social purity movement, it was none the less arguably the logical result of, or at least consistent with, the ideology of male continence and chastity that inspired the social purity campaigns from which [the Labouchère Amendment] emerged" (Ledger 112). Following Wilde's conviction, Josephine Butler is said to have felt pity for Wilde, and wished that the amendment was not used to convict someone who had been so important and vocal in the campaign for social rights.

Telepathic touch as discourse in *Teleny* conveys the sensual and the erotic, and is, as I stated earlier, a way to queer an already queer text. *Teleny* is often attributed to Oscar Wilde, but according to Robert Gray and Christopher Keep, the actual manuscript was made by various hands (194). Though containing elements of Wilde's aesthetic style, it is now understood (though debate continues) that *Teleny* was created by the passing of the manuscript from one author to another through the mediation of a bookstore. Each author would finish a section and then let another continue from where the previous author had stopped. Thus, the ghost hands in *Teleny* are not only reserved for touch within the text but are also present in the actual creation and writing of the text. Though the actual author or authors of *Teleny* is still in debate, whether it was written by Wilde or numerous unmentioned authors, there still remains a ghostly and undetermined nature to its composition history. This section will refer to Wilde as one of the authors of the text

but I acknowledge that this requires textual evidence that is beyond the scope of this dissertation to prove.

The tension between superstition and Spiritualism is highlighted from the start of *Teleny*. The main plot of *Teleny* is the story of a budding romance between René Teleny and Camille Des Grieux. Positioned squarely as a homosexual male pornographic text, *Teleny* depicts many instances of orgies, and homosexual sex acts. The framing of *Teleny* as a homosexual text is seen from the start. In reference to his first encounter with Teleny, Camille Des Grieux states:

> 'he was only very superstitious'
>
> 'As all artists, I believe'
>
> 'Or, rather, all persons like -- well, like ourselves,
>
> for nothing renders people so superstitious as vice.' (2)

This quotation brings to mind the relationship of "psychical anomalies" (Mason 81) to sexual inversion seen in Krafft-Ebbing's work. Here Camille admits that he and Teleny share vice and that they are alike though he falls short of explicitly stating how they are alike due to the elision in the line. As Des Grieux's reflection on their encounter continues it becomes clear that they are similar in that they share a love of men. This he relates as being a "vice." Through his interactions with Teleny, Camille comes to understand their relationship as being "bound to one another by a secret affinity" (44) rather than vice.

A focus on the sensory in the text starts with vision and sight, which later morphs to focus on telepathic tactility. Des Grieux speaks of Teleny's hypnotizing eyes; his vision is said to be penetrating. Vision also plays an important role in how Des Grieux

reacts to Teleny's music. Camille sees elaborate visions as Teleny plays, visions that are informed by classical and mythological imagery. The visual action of the gaze is transformed into a tactility over distance, an ability to touch each other without physical proximity. *Teleny* is a text that fluctuates from being categorized as pornography, erotic literature, or a ghost tale; as Ed Cohen suggests, the "unsanctioned (and hence uncanonized) genre could provide positive articulations of marginalized sexual practices and desires" (803). Thus, it seems only fitting that the first example of telepathic touch is an erotic one: "suddenly a heavy hand seemed to be laid upon my lap, something that was bent and clasped and grasped, which made me faint with lust"(5). Not only is Teleny seemingly telepathically masturbating Camille, but this telepathic touch also causes a type of sensory transposition. His hearing, sight and touch are all displaced and we are told later that Camille's "senses were blunted" (122) for a short time.

The concept of becoming senseless, literally being without sense, is a constant in *Teleny*. We are told that Teleny had "supple, mesmeric, pleasure-giving fluid in his fingers" (73), and that Camille often falls in a "mesmeric trance" (122). Conversely, there is an emphasis placed on the need to come to one's senses afterwards, to snap out of the trance. The senses are given primacy in this relationship, and in this text, for we are told that the heart yearns for "the senses [to be] satiated and the desire blunted" (124). Camille and Teleny satiate this desire telepathically. As Diane Mason suggests, "what is, perhaps, particularly striking in the relationship between Teleny and Des Grieux is their seemingly psychic linkage" (84), and it is this psychic link that becomes the focus and locus of tactility.

“Who [does not know] the manifold feelings produced by the touch of a hand?” (7) says Des Grieux, when having what can be described as his first tactile interaction with Teleny. The electricity of attraction is described as “the magnetic hand, which seems to have a secret affinity for your own; its simple touch thrills your whole nervous system, and fills you with delight” (7). This concept of the magnetic hand sets the stage for the telepathic transmission of thoughts, feelings, and sensations between René Teleny and Camille Des Grieux throughout the narration. It is a sensual and erotic telepathic touch that bonds the two men, that allows their relationship to play out beyond the realm of the physical, and that allows Des Grieux to become increasingly more comfortable in his attraction to Teleny and in his attraction to men. Camille starts to “believe in the transmission of thought, of sensations” (11), and the sensory allows their relationship to develop.

Teleny, his ghost hands, and his telepathic touch come to haunt Camille: “the touch of his soft hand was still on mine [...] the hallucination was so strong in me that soon I fancied I could feel his body on my own” (18). This touch is in an invisible touch (92); it is not a sensation available to the eye, but it is a very real tactile sensation. In order for Camille to be close to Teleny even when they are apart, he throws himself “into a kind of trance and [has the] most vivid hallucination, which, strange as it might appear, coincided with all that my friend did and felt” (36). They share sexual experiences through these telepathic touches.

The strength of the lovers’ relationship in *Teleny* is based on the maintenance and creation of a “phantasmagoric bubble” (178), a spatially subverted space. The interpersonal relationship between Camille Des Grieux and René Teleny is strengthened

yet possibly undermined by telepathic touch as they work out their relationship within a phantasmagoric space. It is a space that allows Camille to take on Teleny's thoughts and sensations (46), to displace himself into another body. In fact, they often become and are described as one body; for example, "a most peculiar sensation came over me at this moment. As my hands wandered over his head, his neck, his shoulders, his arms, I could not feel him at all; in fact, it seemed to me as if I were touching my own body" (69). This is a space where homosexual touch, telepathic touch, and self-touch seem all seem to intersect. The skin as a liminal space, a boundary, seemingly dissolves to create a queer tactility in all senses of the word.

Ghosting touches allows for intersubjective relationships that do not have to work themselves out in the eye of society. Because touch is the only sensation which is not limited to one specific sensory valence, it can also be used to describe the function and use of the other four sensations: sight, hearing, smell, and taste, and this is particularly useful in the context of the sensual and the erotic. It is a case of a touch that dare not speak its name, a telepathic touch that maintains a phantasmagoric bubble which envelops Teleny and Des Grieux's relationship. Robin Chamberlain states: "physical connection in *Teleny* trumps linguistic communication" (Chamberlain). However, I want to take her point further to say that physical connection here *becomes* linguistic communication. Thus as Cohen states, *Teleny* "offers one of the most articulate defenses of same-sex love to be found in late Victorian fiction" (805), even if it is maintained telepathically.

4.5.3 Queer Bodies....Queer Conclusions

The use of telepathic touch in *Teleny* as it relates to a queer tactility speaks to larger socio-cultural issues of homosexuality and embodiment. Pamela Thurschwell's book outlines this larger set of fears that pervade the general public once it was informed of the study of telepathy as a scientific possibility: "The ethical consequences of telepathy would mean that the rich would have to think about the poor and the poor could telepathically share the privileges of the rich" (25). This fear of transgressed boundaries is one of the reasons why telepathic touch is particularly useful in a discussion of homosexuality, embodiment, and contagion in late-nineteenth- century literature.

Telepathic touch is a movement towards an understanding of touch as both phenomenon, and discourse. Telepathic touch is particularly important to the study of Victorian literature because it is a fairly common occurrence seen within the narrative of texts published in the late-Victorian period, thus emphasizing the socio-cultural fear of the transgression of spaces or bodies. Telepathy, as we will see, was an important scientific phenomenon, studied on both sides of the Atlantic. The study of telepathic touch within Victorian literature allows us to discover a new voice in the text. This type of touch provides an insightful way to reclaim bodies from the margins, as well as to explore the Spiritualist movement as a whole.

5 Telepathic Touch

The word "telepathy" was coined in 1882 by Frederic Myers, who was a member of the Society for Psychical Research, a group formed to study paranormal phenomena in a scientific manner. As stated previously, "telepathy" was used to describe "all cases of impression received at a distance" (Luckhurst 60). Six years after the word "telepathy" was coined, Thomas Hardy's short story, "The Withered Arm," appeared in *Blackwood's* and was subsequently published in *Wessex Tales*. It is a story that focuses on telepathic touch, the ability to send and receive impressions at a distance, but it also demonstrates the possibility of creating harm at a distance.

Telepathy has its origins in the concept of thought transference, and has culturally retained its occult status as a way to explain the unexplainable, while other Victorian pseudo-sciences like phrenology have been discredited. The popularity of telepathy is linked to a fascination with being able to negotiate our environment beyond the mediation and confines of our bodies. This ability to negotiate our surroundings without necessarily relying on a physical corporeality is the same motivation behind the proliferation of "cyber lives" experienced today through instant messaging programs, and networking sites like Facebook, which I will return to shortly in the Conclusion. Telepathy in Victorian literature becomes metaphorically depicted as a substitute for touch. The intersection of telepathy with touch and hands was seen in the 1880s through the 1920s as conjurers, like the Italian-born Eusapia Palladino, travelled across the continent conducting séances that were said to produce spirit hands or "luminous hands," and conjured spirits were said to use touch to certify their presence (Warner 305).

Palladino's séances were such an object of scientific discovery and exploration that they were even reported in American newspapers. The "luminous hands" reported during these séances are an example of detached hands:[43] hands that do not necessarily have bodily or corporeal reference.

Functioning at the surface as an example of a supernatural tale or a story of the occult commonly found in Victorian literature, "The Withered Arm" also speaks to the ethics of intersubjective relations between characters and classes, which is accomplished through the use of telepathic touch. As James Scott states, "Hardy's ability to domesticate the occult by giving it a realistic backdrop is effectively illustrated in 'The Withered Arm'" (Scott 371). Therefore, the focus of the criticism of the short story is often shifted from the occult nature of the touch to the tension that exists between the two women rivals. Though examples of telepathic touch are found in other Victorian texts, such as Catherine's supposed tapping at the window in *Wuthering Heights*, Hardy's use of telepathic touch has ethical implications; here the touch wounds. Telepathic touch in "The Withered Arm" can be seen as an example of touch as theorized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty states, "it may be said in more general terms that we can…touch an object with parts of our body which have never actually been in contact" (369), and he suggests that this touching at a distance is possible notably through vision. Merleau-Ponty also points to how touch at a distance complicates the ethicality of touch, since it does not valorize the tactile or infringe on spatial boundaries. Hardy's short story demonstrates that touching at a distance can, in

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[43] As discussed by Hillis Miller in "Hardy and Hands" (Paper presented at Hardy at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, June 14, 2007).

certain situations, have larger ethical repercussions than tactile touches, that the disregarding of boundaries can be accomplished telepathically. It is this disregard of both social and physical boundaries that ultimately leads to the tragic conclusion of the short story.

5.1 Hardy, Telepathy, Theory

The emphasis placed on social and physical boundaries in the story serves as Hardy's commentary on the arbitrary construction and maintenance of boundaries through the scientific, medical, and ethical discourse that arose in relation to the Contagious Diseases Acts. Thomas Hardy was a vocal supporter of women's rights. He supported suffrage, and his work in turn demonstrates his belief in the necessity for a discussion of gender as the intersection of the physical and social body. Hardy's writing both contributed to and was informed by the discussion of embodiment within the social realm, and nowhere is this seen more than in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where Tess becomes the poster child for the discussion of the female body and bodily control. As Louise Henson explores:

> In 1890 a number of writers, including Sarah Grand, Thomas Hardy, Max Nordau, and Israel Zangwill, contributed to an article in the *New Review* on 'Candour in English Fiction' discussing how frank fiction should be in its treatment of sex. [...] The perceived need to educate the young in matters of sex was informed by the late nineteenth-century professionalization of health as well as by the growing eugenic belief in the need to promote socially responsible sexual choice; it also intersected with social purity

> campaigns to end the sexual double standard ratified by the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s. (Henson 276)

Thomas Hardy's interest in education and social responsibility is often hedged with a level of caution. Hardy uses the interaction between the senses and between characters to point to how embodied subjectivity can be either ethically or unethically created in the text through instances of touch. An unethical touch will be understood here as referring to a touch that causes violence in all senses of the word. It is the same as Maurice Hamington's noncaring habit, which I defined previously as: "those that harm another embodied being; examples include spousal abuse, child molestations, and acting-out road rage" (Hamington 57). Similarly the narratological absence or elision of touches can in turn erase the concept of responsibility in the text; however this does not erase the ethicality of the situation. The best example of this elision of tactility in Victorian literature is in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is structured around an absent touch, notably the elision of Tess's rape, which modifies the responsibility within the text and Tess's embodied subjectivity, later as mother, as wife, as murderess.

In *On Touching--Jean-Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida states that "the question of touch fully belongs to the history of the body"(137); this in turn suggests that by looking at the various types of touches present in literature we can assess the historically and culturally created embodiments within the texts. The ethical repercussions of and necessity for this cultural assessment is best described by Moira Gatens in her book, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, when she emphasizes the need "to explore the ways in which our (cultural) understanding of bodies affects the way those bodies are treated ethically" (39). As I have stated previously, it is the understanding of

bodies as culturally created and inscribed that is largely seen in Merleau-Ponty's work and later in Judith Butler's analysis of the Merleau-Pontian body in *Bodies that Matter*. Though Merleau-Ponty's theory resides mostly in his exploration of touch as double sensation, or the touch that touches back, in *The Visible and the Invisible* his description of two bodies touching is not only couched in the tactile double sensation, but also suggests the ability of touch to move through bodies. As seen in the Introduction, Merleau-Ponty theorized that between "my body touched and my body touching, there is an overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that things pass into us as well as we into things" (123). This movement through bodies highlights the telepathic ability that is to be associated even with tactile touch. There is a limit that is never to be delineated in the act of touch, and the liminal space between the surfaces of the toucher and that touched remains a complicated one.

5.1.1 Hardy's Ethics of Touch: Telepathic Touch in "The Withered Arm" and "Haunting Fingers"

In his theoretical framework, Merleau-Ponty also sets up a chiasmic relation between touch and vision, which becomes very important in "The Withered Arm." In fact, vision seems to have two roles in Hardy's story: first as a substitute for touch, and then as a confirmation of touch. When Mrs. Gertrude Lodge first arrives at Holmstoke, Rhoda Brook instructs her son to observe whether Gertrude "shows the marks of the lady on her" (71), a foreboding and loaded statement that questions Rhoda's relationship to the characterization of "lady," and points to Gertrude's body as one to be written upon. We will come to understand later that Gertrude's body is indeed to be marked and written upon through touch.

Romey Keys speaks to the role of vision in the story when he states that "sexual jealousy lies behind [Rhoda's] need to 'see' her rival without actually having to look upon her" (113). Rhoda does this seeing both through the description she receives from her son, and subsequently by the depiction she creates of her rival in her mind's eye. The first part of the short story focuses on the description of hands, indicating the importance of tactile sensation to the story, and reinforcing the relationship between hands and work. Rhoda asks her son to "notice if her hands be white" or "if they look as though she had never done housework" (71). Ultimately Rhoda is to receive no description of her hands because Gertrude Lodge is wearing gloves.

In Part Three, which is aptly entitled "A Vision," Rhoda Brook manages to create an image of Mrs. Lodge "in her mind's eye"(77). Attributing the function of vision to the cerebral is common usage in the discussion of magic, spirituality, and telepathy. Once asleep Rhoda Brook does battle with the vision in her mind's eye:

> Rhoda Brook dreamed […] that the young wife, in the pale silk dress and white bonnet, […] was sitting upon her chest as she lay. The pressure of Mrs. Lodge's person grew heavier; then the blue eyes peered cruelly into her face; mockingly, so as to make the wedding-ring it wore glitter in Rhoda's eyes. Maddened mentally, and nearly suffocated by the pressure, the sleeper struggled; the incubus, still regarding her, withdrew to the foot of the bed, only, however, to come forward by degrees, resume her seat, and flash her left hand as before.

> Gasping for breath, Rhoda, in a last desperate effort, swung out her right hand, seized the confronting spectre by its obtrusive left arm, and whirled it backward to the floor. (77-78)

This quotation provides various clues as to motivation and ethical responsibility created by acts of touch. Rhoda's apparent dream-state self-defense seems motivated by her frustration at seeing Mrs. Lodge's wedding ring, a reminder of the legitimacy that she and her son were denied. We are told on numerous occasions that Rhoda Brook can still feel the spectre's arm in her grasp after the dream. A sense of guilt coupled with responsibility seems to pervade Rhoda's thoughts about her dream, indicating a belief that she has done wrong. Rhoda has unethically touched a woman who is positioned as a rival, for Gertrude has the wedding ring and Rhoda does not.

It is when Rhoda finally meets Mrs. Lodge that the horror and possibility of having injured her telepathically is realized:

> [Mrs. Lodge] uncovered her left hand and arm; and their outline confronted Rhoda's gaze as the exact original of the limb she had beheld and seized in her dream. Upon the pink round surface of the arm were faint marks of an unhealthy colour, as if produced by a rough grasp. (80)

Later we are told that these faint marks on her arm evolve to look exactly like finger prints, in the exact formation in which Rhoda grasped Gertrude in her dream. Upon seeing the injury and the withering of Gertrude's arm, Rhoda admits and realizes that she has performed an unethical act, an unethical touching through her dream. She states, "I exercise a malignant power over people against my own will," (81) and the choice of the

word “malignant” in this quotation emphasizes the sense of responsibility for Gertrude’s ailment. The primary definition of “malignant” in 1870s-1880s in England was: “a disease, potentially fatal, extremely severe, incurable,” (“malignant, adj. and n.,” def. 3a) as well as “characterized by intense ill will” (“malignant, adj. and n.,” def. 4a). Both of these definitions describe what Rhoda Brook wished on her rival, and her dream-state desire becomes physical reality.

Rhoda Brook’s telepathic touch of Mrs. Lodge is one example of absent touch (another being the aforementioned elision of touch in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*) that Thomas Hardy continues to use in works written after “The Withered Arm.” The last stanzas of “A Trampwoman’s Tragedy” speak to metaphysical kissing, where the kiss functions as the material performance of the promissory speech act, yet the immateriality of the kiss can go on to suggest a broken promise. Victorian literature often highlights the problematic disconnect between the performance of touch and the representative speech act. As Constance Classen states, “just as we ‘do things with words,’ so, too, we act through our touches” (20), suggesting that both the word and the touch are to share an equal weight within a performative structure. In relation to one of Hardy’s later poems, memory functions to create telepathic touches through the remembrance of past tactile touches. Peggy Phelan states that “the speech act of memory and description (Austin’s constantive utterance) becomes a performative expression” (146-147), and though Phelan is speaking of museum representations in this quotation, the depiction of telepathic touch in literature functions in much the same way. Touch in literature is our artifact, our work of art, a place where “I remember” becomes “I feel their touch.”

The complication of material performance as complement to speech acts invites the question: can a speech act be betrayed by the physical performance of said act? Subsequently, how does the physical performance of said act alter the ethicality of the speech act and subsequent representations? Situations where this betrayal occurs demonstrate how the narration of touch can work as an extension of the unethical aim to be deceitful. The example of the kiss in "The Trampwoman's Tragedy" functions as a betrayal of a promise since it occurs metaphysically. Though the utterance is in essence the acting out of a promise, hence its description as a performative speech act, acting counter to the promise characterizes the utterance as an insincere promise. Performance of touches such as handshakes, hugs, kisses, etc. seem to become a type of "periperformative," borrowing a term from Eve Sedgwick, functioning on the periphery of the speech act to complicate it. Thus, a performance of touch which disrupts the act of the performative speech act functions as a queering of the speech act, instances of which are commonly found in Victorian literature.

Memory as creating the performance of telepathic touch is also highlighted in Hardy's poem "Haunting Fingers," from *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. The instruments of the museum are the speakers in this poem and attain an awareness of the telepathic touches that past players are placing on them. In the third stanza, the instruments:

> felt past handlers clutch them
>
> Though none was in the room
>
> Old players' dead fingers touch them,
>
> Shrunk in the tomb. (9-12)

This poem accurately demonstrates the role that memory plays in touch. The instruments survive their players' deaths and function as material placement of the memory of touch. Similar to the feeling of Gertrude's arm still in her grasp that Rhoda describes in "The Withered Arm," the memory of the feel or touch of objects remains with the subject, which is how we are able to negotiate our surroundings accurately. As Luce Irigaray states in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* "the tangible is the matter and memory for all of the sensible" (164), which suggests that it is through touch that we can possibly remember the most. For example, we remember what the keyboard on our computer feels like, so that when we are at a new computer and place our fingers on the keys it feels different to us. We also remember the subtle differences between the way our friends hug us so that if we were without the reliance on visual sensation to help us decipher our position, we would still be able to tell others who or what was in front of us with reasonable accuracy.

The twelfth stanza of "Haunting Fingers" describes the viol's feeling of

> apt touches on him
> From those that pressed him then;
> Who seem with their glance to con him,
> Saying "Not again!"(45-48)

This again demonstrates the memory of touches of those who touched before, but we must ask ourselves: what are the ethics behind these touches? Does the fact that this is a telepathic touch, and not an actual touch, change or modify its ethical status? Though Rhoda in "The Withered Arm" states that her malignant touch was against her own will, does that excuse her from the responsibility of her actions? Merleau-Ponty theorized non-

tactile experiences as not valorizing spatial boundaries, for "tactile experience […] adheres to the surface of our body" (369), which can in turn objectify the subject. However, telepathic touch also seems to adhere to the surface of our body, and in fact memory allows tactile touches to become telepathic ones. Therefore, telepathic touches are subject to the same ethical responsibility as tactile experiences. Rhoda Brook's ill will towards Gertrude is very apparent from the start, so though she states her touch was against her will, her telepathic touching of Gertrude is an unethical manifestation of this ill will.

The depiction of Rhoda Brook's guilt is continued in the story notably through her discomfort with the proximity to the site or sight of Mrs. Lodge's affliction: "[s]he had a strange dislike to walking on the side of her companion where hung the afflicted arm" (87). This movement away from the arm seems to function as a continuation of her need to distance herself from Mrs. Lodge, to touch at a distance, to see at a distance. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler speaks to Irigaray's argument that "ethical relations ought to be based on relations of closeness, proximity, and intimacy that reconfigure conventional notions of reciprocity and respect" (46). Rhoda's discomfort with being close to Gertrude suggests that she is aware that the ethical relations between them are strained. Margrit Shildrick, in *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self,* states that "the function of the gaze, then, is in part to arrest […] by fixing the other at a safe distance" (68), and Rhoda attempts from the beginning to place Gertrude at this safe distance, sending her son on a reconnaissance mission of sorts so that she can avoid seeing or touching Gertrude, yet through her dream-state telepathic touch she demonstrates that there is no such thing as a safe distance.

Derrida also emphasizes the function of reciprocity and non-reciprocity in touch in *On Touching -- Jean-Luc Nancy*, since touch (tactile touch) is a mediated sense, as opposed to an immediate sense such as the visual (250). Yet, spiritual touching, according to Derrida, is rightfully classified as immediate, and touching, regardless of its carnality or spirituality is always transitive (250), suggesting both the reciprocity of touch that is seen in Merleau-Ponty's work, as well as the ability of touch to pass through objects and bodies. As I have stated previously, telepathic touch in "The Withered Arm" is transitive: it passes through the body, leaving visual, psychological, and unethical marks on Gertrude.

As Gertrude's ailment becomes well known and it is said that "Mrs. Lodge's gradual loss of the use of her left arm was owing to her being 'overlooked' by Rhoda Brook" (90). Again we see the focus on visuality that is commonly seen in Hardy. The term "overlooked" can be read in three distinct ways, which complicate the ethical responsibility to be placed on Rhoda for her touch and her gaze. First, "overlooked" can mean to ignore or disregard, basically "to turn a blind eye to" ("overlooked, adj."). This is possibly the most connotatively loaded translation of what Rhoda has done to Gertrude, since the offending touch took place, if we remember, in "her mind's eye"(77). Kelly Oliver theorizes this concept of the mind's eye in relation to vision, stating that "the physical eye is merely the medium for an immaterial mind's eye through which vision (perception) becomes Vision (thought)" (171); thus it is through looking (the visual action of the gaze) that one can see (the mental recognition of perception). Though Rhoda has never looked at Gertrude, she manages to see her through the representations related to her by her son.

The second meaning of "overlooked," which is "to examine, scrutinize and inspect," ("overlook, v.," def. 3) is the exact opposite of definition number one. However, Mrs. Lodge's ailment, as we have seen, is not so much the product of Rhoda looking too much on her, but of Rhoda thinking too much of Gertrude. Finally, "overlooked" in its regional usage in England in the 1870-1880s refers to "casting an evil eye on, to bewitch" ("overlook, v.," def. 7). This definition of "overlooked" is probably the most apt usage of the term as contextualized by the short story. Nevertheless, all three definitions seem to place Rhoda in an unethical stance.

To analyze the ethics of telepathic touch in fact necessitates a visuality of sorts, especially in literature. The type of touching at a distance that Rhoda Brook achieves in her dream can only be confirmed by the visual; it is by seeing Mrs. Lodge's arm that Rhoda realizes the harm that she has caused. The reader in turn textually witnesses this unethical moment. Oliver speaks to the role of the visual in ethical witnessing, proposing that vision is both distancing, in that it creates a gap between subject and object, and linking through the gaze itself (Oliver 12). In "The Withered Arm," Hardy creates Rhoda Brook's subject position through touch and vision so that she can be the witness to her own objectification of Mrs. Lodge, to which the reader in turn bears witness.

The resolution of the story is achieved through Conjuror Trendle. At the beginning of the story, Mrs. Lodge is skeptical of this miracle performing magician, but her desperation to become beautiful again, to regain the esteem of her husband, changes her opinion. Mrs. Lodge's relationship with her husband, Farmer Lodge, is characterized after her affliction by an incapability of or shrinking away from touch. We are told that "the farmer was usually gloomy and silent: the woman whom he had wooed for her grace

and beauty was contorted and disfigured in the left limb; moreover, she has brought him no child" (91). Romey Keys points to the withered arm as symbolizing a sexual wound in the form of Farmer Lodge's impotence, and it is a wound that links both women (115). The fact that the affliction is of the left arm, the left hand, the sinister hand if you will, points to Rhoda's desire to cause this marriage to wither as well. Linda Holler states that "the same defenses we use to prevent being touched also prevent us from receiving what we need to care about ourselves and others" (176). Gertrude's ability to receive love and affection, and perhaps conceive a child by Farmer Lodge, is wrapped up in her affliction; as her arm withers away, so too does her ability to touch the world, to touch her husband. Her husband's desire to touch her also withers away; something must be done and Conjuror Trendle has the solution.

Conjuror Trendle moves the focus of touch in the short story from the telepathic to the type of double sensation I have discussed in relation to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory in Chapter One. He tells Mrs. Lodge that the only cure for her affliction lies in her touching "the limb of the neck of a man who's been hanged" (93). The ultimate purpose of this exercise is explained as the need to "turn the blood" (93), that through the mediation of touch there will be a movement of revitalizing power from the touched to the toucher. This double sensation is positioned as being just as mystical as the telepathic touch that caused the injury in the first place. As Pamela Thurschwell states in her book *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking 1880-1920*, "telepathy is useful for explaining other phenomena, but seemed to have no explanation itself" (25); similarly this touch of a dead neck is said to have cured many before her, but it does not seem to have any concrete explanation.

It is through the necessity for a cure that Mrs. Lodge in turn performs an unethical touch. Her arm becomes further objectified and is described as having a mind of its own; it throbs after the hangman's rope when she is close to it, and she must control and hold back her withered arm from touching the noose. Similarly, as much as she has been relegated through her affliction to a thing, or an object of disgust throughout the story, she does the same to the boy who is to be hanged. She asks the hangman, "where is *it* now?" (emphasis added, 103); referring to the boy, which the hangman has to correct as "he," for the accused is still alive. The boy becomes nothing more than a means to an end, an object to be used, consumed through touch and subsequently discarded. Gertrude touches the boy's neck only to find out that he is her husband's illegitimate son. After her supposed cure, Mrs. Lodge and the reader are sped towards the conclusion. She is simultaneously "cured" and then pulled and pushed against the wall by Rhoda, evoking the manner to which she whirled Gertrude to the floor in her dream. The physical and mental strain proves to be too much for Gertrude, and she dies. In "The Withered Arm" touch is thus both the reason and cure for affliction, and ultimately the cause of death.

The larger understanding of tactility in Hardy's work echoes his engagement with socio-cultural issues. He demonstrates in "The Withered Arm" that tactility is powerful and has the ability to cause harm, yet this tactility is hedged in the telepathic. Thus Hardy's commentary on tactility echoes a failure of containment, that no matter if women are inspected, placed within specific spaces, and removed from societal contact, this is not sufficient to stop the spread of harm. As I will demonstrate next, William Wilkie Collins also highlights this failure of containment through the spectral and the telepathic in his short stories.

5.2Wilkie Collins's "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost"

William Wilkie Collins also addresses the ability to make the spectral material again in his short story "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost." Collins, like Hardy, used his work to explore larger socio-cultural issues. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* was not only influential in itself but went on to influence other writers, notably Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. As Rebecca Lea McCarthy suggests, the "'Magdalene culture' was romanticized through the writings of Horace Walpole and Wilkie Collins" (McCarthy 2). Wilkie Collins was seen as being in dialogue with the discourse of prostitution and the plight of "fallen women" was reflected in his work. As an author who is deeply rooted in the tradition of the gothic Wilkie Collins expresses, or as McCarthy states "romanticizes," Magdalene life in his novels. Collins uses the same gothic tropes and valences, specifically telepathic touch, to discuss the perils women face in society.

He demonstrates that telepathic touch does not necessarily position one in an unethical situation, nor are these touches always represented as violent in Victorian literature. Wilkie Collins's short story gives examples of telepathic touch that simultaneously demonstrate an ethics of care, yet also have a violent/protective valence. As I have mentioned previously "care flows from the knowledge manifested in the body" (Hamington 39) and this concept of care is demonstrated and complicated through telepathic touch in "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost." In the short story, telepathic touch moves from *tele*-pathy (feeling [pathos] at a distance), to tele-*pathy* (as distance cure and care [pathology]).

Wilkie Collins's story focuses on a "mortal knowledge through the sense which is least easily self-deceived: the sense that feels" (678), and it is this tactile sense that outlines how the female body is positioned within the public sphere. "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost" originally appeared as "The Ghost's Touch" in 1879. The plot of the story describes "the return of a disembodied spirit to earth and leads the reader to new and strange ground" (678); it is the story of Mrs. Zant, a widow who is seemingly haunted by the spirit of her dead husband, as a protecting and caring force. Mrs. Zant befriends Mr. Rayburn and his daughter Lucy, in an attempt to make sense of the unexplained phenomenon that she seems to be experiencing. This phenomenon is "[n]either revealed by a vision, nor announced by a voice, it reaches mortal knowledge through the sense which is least easily self-deceived: the sense that feels" (678). Thus, similar to what was articulated in Charles Bell's treatise which I mentioned in the introduction, here touch gives us mortal knowledge, and is the primary sense by which knowledge is attained.

The story begins with Mr. Rayburn and Lucy enjoying the day in Kensington Gardens when they see Mrs. Zant, who acts as though they are invisible. We are told that if Mr. Rayburn "could believe his senses, her face did certainly tell him that he was invisible and inaudible to the woman who he had just addressed!" (680). There is a tension here in the narration, a moment where the reader is unsure if Mrs. Zant is a ghost herself or if she is in fact having a discussion with one. Mr. Rayburn finds out that Mrs. Zant is a widow and she is living in a boarding house. After a meeting with Mrs. Zant as well as visiting with her brother-in-law, Mr. John Zant, Mr. Rayburn remains none the wiser as to why Mrs. Zant seemed in a trance-like state when he first met her. This

inquiry is only solved following a retelling from Mrs. Zant's own hand, a manuscript,[44] in form of a letter which is delivered to Mr. Rayburn.

Mrs. Zant explains her "supernatural revelation" in the letter. It is a revelation that focuses on telepathic touch, specifically the ability for a ghostly touch to arrest those who have been touched: "At the first step forward that I took, something stopped me. It was not to be seen, and not to be heard. It stopped me" (688). Her description suggests that this touch could not be confirmed by other senses; it was neither something with visual confirmation nor something with auditory confirmation. She continues, "[i]n that dazzling light, in that fearful silence, I felt an Invisible Presence near me. It touched me gently" (688), and this invisible presence seemingly blocks the light, blocks Rayburn and Lucy from her view, like light refraction of an invisibility cloak**.** Not only does this ghost block others from view, but the touch brings memory. Similar to what is seen in Thomas Hardy's poems discussed previously, the remembrance of the feel of a specific touch is what allows the telepathic touch to have corporeality again:

> At the touch, my heart throbbed with an overwhelming joy. Exquisite pleasure thrilled through every nerve in my body. I knew him! From the unseen world – himself unseen – he had returned to me. Oh, I knew him! (688)

Without the confirmation of the other senses, Mrs. Zant remembers the touch and knows who is touching her; it is her dead husband.

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[44] The word manuscript comes from: ablative singular of *manus* hand + *scrīptus*, past participle of *scrībere* to write. ("manuscript, adj. and n.")

This ghost touch which comes to embody her dead husband also seems literally to have the power of telepathy: “the Invisible Presence read my thoughts. I felt my lips touched, as my husband’s lips used to touch them when he kissed me. And that was my answer. A thought came to me again” (688). The husband not only plants touches on her skin but also plants ideas and thoughts in her mind. The touch then becomes one of care; she relates that she “felt [herself] held in a gentle embrace, as [her] husband’s arms used to hold [her] when he pressed me to his breast”(688). Further we are told “that was my answer” (688). The repetition of “that was my answer” indicates that the telepathic touch she receives acts as an answer or response to any thought or doubt she has. Mrs. Zant is also aware that this touch, this proximity and care, will not last. She feels the distinct loss when “the touch that was like the touch of his lips, lingered and was lost: the clasp like the clasp of his arms, pressed me and fell away” (688).

After she loses the telepathic impression on her skin, Mrs. Zant attempts to reciprocate the touch, to find the touch again; she holds out her arms and waits for an answer:

> A touch answered me. It was as if a hand unseen had taken my hand -- had raised it, little by little [...] the unseen hand closed on my hand with a warning pressure: the revelation of the coming danger was near me -- I waited for it. I saw it. (689)

Here the ghost hands are again demonstrating care. The touch creates a gendered position for Mrs. Zant and does not attempt to violate her embodiment. Rather here touches support, warn, caress tenderly, and emphasize respect for her position and the danger that she is in. When the touches cease, she “knew nothing,” she “felt nothing” (689); in fact

she likens her state to one of death and being senseless. This is how she ends her manuscript, her handwritten account to Mr. Rayburn, which she hopes has "produced any other impression" (690) on him. The echo of impression as an "action involved in the pressure of one thing upon or into the surface of another" ("impression, n.," def. 1) is seen in both the telepathic touch of a hand and the memory of this touch. As well, the use of impression as an action which causes "an effect produced on the senses" ("impression, n.," def. 6a), speeds the short story to its climax and conclusion.

As mentioned previously, Mrs. Zant's recognition of the ghost/telepathic touch as her dead husband's has to do with memory. The memory of her husband's touch creates an ethic of care. Conversely, this ghost touch creates an unethical violence for John Zant, the ghost's brother. John Zant plans to imprison Mrs. Zant and force her to marry him. In the concluding scene of the story this plan is foiled by telepathic touch of a violent nature. Mrs. Zant is "touched by something. She seemed to recognize the touch: [and] was still again" (699). A few moments later John Zant screams out: "'What has got me?' 'Who is holding my hands?' Oh, the cold of it! the cold of it!'" (699).

The ghost hand causes John Zant to have a "paralytic stroke [which] spread[s] upwards to his face" (700), and he eventually dies. Mrs. Zant knows the difference in the ethicality of both of the telepathic touches in this situation; she states, "[n]o mortal hand held the hands of John Zant. The guardian spirit was with me. The promised protection was with me"(700). Mrs. Zant's dead husband and his telepathic touch ethically protects and demonstrates an embodied care for his widow, but also ensures her protection by an unethical paralyzing and subsequent death of his brother John.

5.3 And the Moral of the Story is...

Since this is an exploration of the ethics of touch it is only fitting that we ask: what is the moral of the story? The use of telepathic touch seems to speak to larger cultural and social issues. As I have mentioned previously, Pamela Thurschwell gives the possible ethical consequences of telepathy in terms of class distinctions. Because of the possibility of the rich and the poor sharing thoughts and privileges telepathically, a heightened sense of the necessity to reinforce boundaries becomes part of social discourse. The fear of transgressed boundaries is one of the reasons why telepathic touch is particularly useful within the theoretical framework of the Contagious Diseases Acts, as both focus on this fear of leaking or malleable boundaries.

Finally, telepathic touch is particularly important to the study of Victorian literature not only because it is a fairly common occurrence seen within the late-Victorian period. Telepathy was an important scientific phenomenon, which was studied in England and America. For example, Mark Twain saw telepathy as the “logical conclusion” to communication, a way of sharing experiences without a set vocabulary (Thurschwell 14). Victorian literature thus demonstrates the complex and chiasmic relation between touch and vision especially when this touch is telepathic or ghostly. The study of telepathic touch within Victorian literature allows us to re-evaluate the ethics in the texts and establish a new voice from the text. Thus, as I have suggested telepathic touch serves as a way “to speak verbosely of the silence” (Foucault 8), and provides for an interesting way to read Hardy and Wilkie Collins since hands and touch are inscribed within many of their novels, poems, and short stories.

6 *Lady Audley's Secret: Manus Ex Machina*

If there is a singular text published after 1860 that reflects an almost obsessive fascination with the implication of touch, hands, and fingers it is Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Braddon's novel, which was first serialized in 1862, demonstrates the use of all four types of tactility mentioned in the previous chapters. The novel highlights instances of reciprocal touch giving care, the use of tactility to negotiate one's environment, the theme of tactility within homosocial relationships, as well as the spectre of tactility that seemingly leads and touches from beyond the grave.

Braddon's novel, which appeared the same year as the committee met to assess the necessity for the Contagious Diseases Acts, juxtaposes issues of female subjectivity, embodiment, and containment within the context of women's rights, especially marital rights. The "radical sensationalism" (Rance 1) of both Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon suggests "the consequences of straying from the accepted moral code" (Rance 5). At the same time the themes, symbols, and plot of the sensation fiction in both Wilkie Collins and Braddon's work highlight the importance of the transmission of information and how this information maintains or destroys identity/subjectivity. As Natalie Houston states, "Sensation fiction builds suspense by focusing on questions of identity, and on the kinds of personal information that could be forged, hidden, blackmailed, or sold in the newly technological Victorian world" (Houston 18). A renewed interest in corporeality and body politics in light of the Contagious Diseases Acts is the same interest that informs sensation fiction. Further, the narratives that Braddon and other sensation novelists put forward demonstrate "that careful reading was necessary not only to puzzle

out a novel's clever plot, but also to survive in the new Victorian culture of information" (Houston 28). It was the dissemination of (mis)information that surrounded the enactment of the Contagious Diseases Acts and suggested that identity can be created based on hidden or falsely contextualized information. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, we see how the creation of false information can temporarily modify social position or identity. These new identities are eventually exposed, through touch, demonstrating how any attempt to move out of predefined social spheres has consequences.

Lady Audley's Secret highlights the use of feminine sensuality and sexuality in order to achieve personal gains. This puts sensuality at odds with morality, and the tension between the two is sustained throughout the novel. As Natalie Schroeder suggests, women readers began to reject "the prudish moral tone that characterized popular fiction of the 1850s and by devouring novels filled with crime, passion, and sensuality, Victorian women readers began in the 1860s to rebel against the establishment" (Schroeder 87). Sensation fiction allowed women readers to explore alternative subject positions and escape the pre-determined roles society provided. Richard Nemesvari states that "Lady Audley's refusal to accept the limited roles of impoverished daughter, deserted wife, and toiling governess acts as a covert critique of the narrow, unfulfilling roles available to women in general" (Nemesvari 518). Women could identify with Lady Audley's desire to create new roles and new subject positions for herself that went beyond those of wife, daughter, mother, and prostitute. "By providing a hero who is in need of some kind of moral reform" (519), says Nemesvari, Braddon creates a socio-cultural critique that touches on women's matrimonial rights, and ultimately on the rights women have to their own bodies and possessions. Braddon's

novel specifically uses reciprocal tactility to demonstrate Lady Audley's emotional state as she loses control over the situation and eventually loses control over her own body.

6.1 When I Think About You I Touch My Jewels: Reciprocal Touch in *Lady Audley's Secret*

From the beginning of the novel, when attention is placed on Lady Audley and her demeanor, the narration narrows in on how Lady Audley touches herself. The touches seem to demonstrate either guilt or deep-seated anxiety. When Sir Michael Audley is about to propose to Lucy Graham (the future Lady Audley) we are told that she "leaned her elbows on the drawing-board before her, and clasping her hands over her face, seemed for some minutes to be thinking deeply [...] she removed one of her hands from before her face, and fidgeted nervously with the ribbon, clutching at it with a half-angry gesture, and twisting it backwards and forwards between her fingers" (50). At the end of this black ribbon around her neck we are told is a "locket or a cross, or a miniature" (50). This manipulation of the ribbon, which we later find out contains her ring and license from her previous marriage, foreshadows the manipulation that is exposed in the novel. Lady Audley can seemingly make anything disappear from plain sight, or manipulate it so that it does disappear, in order to advance her plot.

The idea of manipulation is important here, for the various definitions of manipulation intersect in Lady Audley's actions. First, her touching of the ribbon is "The action or an act of manipulating something; handling" ("manipulation, n.," def. 3a), yet this touching also relates to her "act of managing or directing a person, etc., esp. in a skilful manner; the exercise of subtle, underhand, or devious influence or control over a person, organization, etc.; interference, tampering" ("manipulation, n.," def. 4).

Etymologically, “manipulation” comes from the Latin *manipulus*, which means “handful”. Interestingly, the medical connotation of the term manipulation means “manual examination or treatment of a part of the body” (“manipulation, n.” def. 3b). Thus, Lady Audley is truly manipulating in all senses of the word and in turn her actions speak to the social manipulation enacted on the female body. Lady Audley has actively attempted to move away from her original position in society, in a novel which is seemingly over determined and misogynist. Lucy is surrounded by men who ostensibly wield all the power: her father, Sir Michael, Robert Audley. Her ambitious nature leads her to the necessity of manipulation in order to forge a social position for herself and attain a sense of power (though it is a false sense of power).

The focus on the locket and the way Lady Audley touches the ribbon highlights the reciprocal nature of touch. Thus, even though Lady Audley is touching and manipulating this ribbon, the narration suggests that this ribbon is actually touching her back. As the situation becomes more anxiety-riddled and Sir Michael asks her if she likes him, she is described with “her hands clutching at the black ribbon about her throat, as if it had been strangling her” (52). The clutching at her jewelry becomes Lucy’s repetitive motion when she is wracked with guilt. For example, when she is about to talk to her husband about her past ill deeds, her care-giving touch is contrasted with “her convulsive fingers” (299). Lady Audley is described as having “her hands locked together upon the arm of her husband’s easy-chair. They were very restless, these slender white hands. My lady twisted the jeweled fingers in and out of each other, as she talked to her husband” (297). In these instances, the material presence of jewelry seems to be the locus of

reciprocal tactility. The touch of these jewels serves as a reminder of her situation; the jewels are representative of the marital status and social position she has acquired.

Lady Audley is not the only character who is defined through reciprocal touching in the novel. Phoebe Marks's social position is emphasized through reciprocal touching of her husband Luke. We are told that she "put one of her hands, which had grown white in her new and easy service, about his thick neck" (66). The description of Phoebe's hands as white is similar to what Hardy uses almost thirty years later in "The Withered Arm" to indicate the distinction between those who work with their hands and those who do not. Also the way Phoebe's hand is described mimics not a caring touch, but rather echoes the stranglehold that the ribbon seems to have on Lady Audley's neck. Here, Phoebe's white hand around her husband's neck foreshadows the type of hold that Phoebe and Luke will have upon the narration and the outcome of Lady Audley's plot. As their last name suggests, the Marks literally leave their mark on the narration.

One of the earliest descriptions of Luke Marks is given in relation to reciprocal touch. When Phoebe gives him entrance to Lady Audley's chambers while she is away, he focuses on the Lady's jewels and his desire to possess them. We are told: "[h]e wanted to handle the delicate jewels; to pull them about, and find their mercantile value" (70). As we can see, Lady Audley's jewels play an important role within the narration and serve as a material presence that constantly reminds the readers of the tension between class positions and gendered positions. The ethics that accompany these class positions are also highlighted through the use of reciprocal tactility. For example, when we are first introduced to Mr. Maldon, who we later discover is Lady Audley's father, he is in a "shabby dress with an affectation of foppish gentility; an eye-glass dangled over his

closely-buttoned-up waistcoat, and he carried a cane in his ungloved hand" (82). Why this emphasis on ungloved hand? As I mentioned in the introduction, a specific sense of decorum was expected from gentleman and ladies, especially in relation to intersubjective relations. Mr. Maldon's ungloved hand, and his foppish dress, necessarily positions him lower in relation to class and status. Though he is a captain, his dress suggests that he has fallen into difficult times and is having difficulty maintaining the status and position of his former employment.

Lady Audley's description is also informed and maintained through others speaking about her in terms of her hands and tactility. Alicia's description of Lady Audley to her father reinforces her use of hands: "'You think her sensitive because she has soft little white hands, and big blue eyes with long lashes, and all manner of affected, fantastical ways, which you stupid men call fascinating. Sensitive! Why, I've seen her do cruel things with those slender white fingers, and laugh at the pain she inflicted'" (136). This quotation demonstrates the ability of touch to maim or wound as well as reinforces the connotation of white hands as belonging to someone innocent and incapable of causing pain. The concept of sensitivity that this quotation emphasizes is a complex one in relation to sensation novels, especially when framed by tactility. To be sensitive, or emotionally susceptible, is related to the white hands and blue eyes of a woman of a certain class and social position. On the surface, Lady Audley seemingly fits the description of the Angel of the Hearth. However Alicia is not convinced and neither is Robert Audley. Robert often contemplates Lady Audley's hand closely: "She held out her hand; he took it loosely in his own. It seemed such a feeble little hand that he might have crushed it in his strong grasp, had he chosen to be so pitiless"(172). This quotation

demonstrates the tension between holding loosely, which indicates care and the ability to crush or cause non-ethical tactile pain. Again Lady Audley's outward appearance seems to be different from her real ability and intention. Toward the end of the novel even Dr. Mosgrave suggests that Lady Audley "could have sprung at my throat and strangled me with her little hands, as I sat talking to her just now, she would have done it" (386-387). Thus, an unethical tactility, the ability to kill, wound, or inflict pain, seemingly resides in Lady Audley and her unassuming little white hands.

We see Lady Audley's ability to create harm as framed through unethical reciprocal touch after she sets fire to the Castle Inn. Lady Audley drags Phoebe away, and we are told that with a "convulsive pressure of her right hand [she] held her companion as firmly as an iron vice could have held her" (335). This unethical touching entraps Phoebe and makes her seemingly complicit in the evil deed. Robert later accuses Lady Audley of the fire, stating a "murderous hand kindled those flames" (353). As I will demonstrate in the next section, touch becomes Lady Audley's undoing, and Robert effectively uses her own hand to entrap her.

Indeed the fire at the Castle Inn also spreads from a murderous unethical hand to the inability to reciprocate touch completely. Luke's ability to reciprocate touch is harmed by the fire.[45] We are told that "[h]e still bore the traces of the night's peril, for the dark hair had been singed upon one side of his forehead, and his left hand was red and inflamed from the effect of the scorching atmosphere, out of which he had dragged the landlord of the Castle Inn"(376). He receives tactile care from Robert later when "[t]he

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[45] This is very similar to what happens to Alan (*père et fils*) in *Alan's Wife* as demonstrated in chapter two.

young man took the coarse but shrunken hand in both his own, and pressed it cordially" (417). Luke's hand being described as coarse but shrunken is an attempt to define Luke through his touch. Not only is Luke coarse but now because of the fire he is seemingly a pale reminder of himself; he is shrunken and emotionally vulnerable. Luke appreciates the care and attention Robert gives him, which causes Luke to tell his part of the story, and ultimately causes Lady Audley's plot to unravel.

6.2 If I Could Write You a Letter...

Letters and letter writing become the thread that binds the novel together as well as causes it to unravel. The reciprocal touch inherent in letter writing is also an example of touching at a distance. Lady Audley's hand and her handwriting become proof in Robert Audley's investigation of the disappearance of George Talboys. Lady Audley's distinctive hand is described by Robert after he tells Lady Audley that he has seen letters written by George's presumed deceased wife:

> 'There are very few who write so charming and uncommon a hand as yours, Lady Audley.'
>
> 'Ah you know my hand of course.'
>
> 'Yes, I know it very well, indeed.' (171)

"The evidence of handwriting" (286) becomes part of the case Robert puts together. It is her own hand that essentially entraps her and reveals her elaborate plot. However, Lady Audley's letters are not the only handwritten notes that become part of the material evidence of Robert Audley's case. When George Talboys attempts to write a letter to Robert with his broken arm after falling in the well, the letter is said to be "not in his friend's familiar hand[...] he wrote it with his own hand; but it was his left hand, for he

couldn't use his right because of his broken arm" (424). Like Luke Marks's burnt hand, George Talboys's broken left hand is one of the novel's images of maimed hands, which highlight the inability to touch or connect. This again is very similar to what I have discussed previously in relation to the inability to touch in "The Withered Arm" and *Alan's Wife*.

The prevalence of letter writing also demonstrates an ability to touch from afar, similar to what I will explore shortly in relation to telepathic tactility in *Lady Audley's Secret*. However, these letters do not always have to demonstrate guilt; they can in fact, relate or evoke strong emotion or affection. When Robert receives a letter from Clara Talboys, we are told: "The third was addressed in a hand the young barrister knew only too well, though he had seen it but once before. His face flushed redly at the sight of the superscription, and he took the letter in his hand, carefully and tenderly, as if it has been a living thing, and sentient to his touch" (401). The sentient nature of touch is key in this novel -- even the touch of a letter can spark care and emotion. Being conscious of tactility and how the characters interact with their environment through touch also sets the scene for conflicts in the novel.

6.3 Architecture in Essex

The performative nature of *Lady Audley's Secret* is two-fold. Not only was "the novel adapted for the stage almost immediately" (Houston 9), suggesting the work's theatrical nature, but "Braddon weaves the language of performance through the novel, revealing the constructions and costumes that make up the social world"(Houston 24); and this performance is related to gender constructions, specifically the place of women in the social sphere. Braddon's theatrical background seems to have informed the

narrative and thus the performative constructs in the novel. As Natalie Houston states, Braddon "acted for seven years [...] [t]his was an unusual choice for a young middle-class woman, as actresses were often considered morally suspect because of the late hours of the theatre and the public visibility of their bodies" (Houston 12-13). The tension between publically visible bodies and the socio-cultural positioning of female bodies echoes the same sort of moral and social codes that informed the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Position is an important focus within the narration of the novel, not simply in terms of how one is positioned socially in terms of class, but also in terms of how one is positioned physically within society. The novel starts with a creation of setting where "Peace seemed to have taken up her abode, setting her soothing hand on every tree and flower" (44). It is ironic that in a novel that involves much upheaval that the initial setting of the novel would be created with the soothing hand of peace personified. However, this is just one of many spaces created through touch and tactility in the novel. Most of the architecture of these spaces is evoked using the material objects present in the space themselves. The description of material objects in the room and the negotiation of the room through these material objects in *Lady Audley's Secret* is similar to the spatial narration through material objects found in Victoria Cross's "Theodora: A Fragment" thirty years later.

George Talboys's discovery that his wife is in fact alive is narrated using touch to negotiate the environments that she embodied. When George and Robert visit Captain Maldon for the first time, George is said to have "wandered restlessly about the room, looking at and sometimes touching the knickknacks laying here and there" (79). George's

wandering about the room and tactile interaction with the material possessions that line the room is seemingly his attempt to literally reconnect with his wife and her materiality, her corporeality. The fact that what he touches are knickknacks and not substantial pieces of the room, such as the furniture or the walls, also speaks to the frivolity of the former Mrs. George Talboys; there is nothing of substance in her room. Confirmation that Lady Audley is in fact George's wife occurs because of her room and her space being trespassed and transgressed by both George and Robert. However, the plot unfolds through the use of tactility to negotiate architectural passages to her apartments. When George and Robert penetrate Lady Audley's room, it is because they "don't mind crawling upon hands and knees [...] for that very passage communicates with her dressing- room" (104). In fact because they "let [themselves] down by [their] hands into the passage" (105), George sees the painting that unmistakably resembles his "late" wife. As Elizabeth Langland suggests, the architectural penetration by George and Robert echoes the penetrability of Lady Audley. She states, "one would expect a lady's chambers to be penetrable, like her body, only by the master" (Langland 10). By being penetrable through tactile means her private space as well as her bodily architecture is laid visible. It is an instance of the "private space gendered feminine so that the woman who is most protected by the architecture is also most exposed by it" (Langland 8). Lady Audley's apartments expose the secrets of her past as well as tell the tale of her present life. When these secrets are exposed by her private space being penetrated it sets Lady Audley's downfall in motion. Her downfall is part of a larger critique which demonstrates that a woman cannot try to move up the social ladder for the boundaries between private and public cannot be sustained. Simultaneously, it is masculine

companionship and camaraderie which enact and sustain the power dynamics within the novel. It is his intense friendship with George that causes Robert to pursue George's disappearance, which occurs the day after Lady Audley's room has been viewed.

6.4 The Homosocial and the Homoerotic in *Lady Audley's Secret*

Many critics[46] have focused on the rather overt displays of affection on the part of Robert when searching for his missing friend George. *Lady Audley's Secret* creates the ideal homosocial situation in the Sedgwickian sense of the term. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, the homosocial requires the male character's "heterosexual desire" for a woman as a detour on the way to a homophobically proscribed connection to another man. In *Lady Audley's Secret,* George's own sister Clara serves as the object of Robert's displaced desire. We are told on numerous occasions within the narration that Clara resembles George, so Robert's displaced desire resonates within George's physical substitute.

Touch functions as a way to describe Robert's desire and affection for George. Even when they first meet, the way that Robert touches George resonates and demonstrates the tension between ethical and unethical tactility. When George reads about his wife's seemingly untimely demise, Robert attempts to console him in his grief: "'George,' said Robert Audley, laying his hand gently upon the young man's arms, 'you must remember that the person whose name you saw in the paper may not be your wife'" (77-78). George is not comfortable with the situation and specifically with Robert's gentle touch: "He shook off Robert's restraining hand, and rising from the bed, walked

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[46] Notably see Richard Nemesvari's "Robert Audley's Secret: Male Homosocial Desire in *Lady Audley's Secret.*"

straight to the door" (78). Here we see that there is a gap in the description of the same touch. Within Robert's contextual frame it is a gentle hand, yet in George's contextual frame, it is a restraining hand. The third person omniscient narration is capable of providing both of these positions simultaneously. With this touch we see that there is tension between the care and affection that Robert wants to give George and George's desire to be left alone with his thoughts and grief. Robert touching George at the beginning of the novel serves as an apt contrast to the way that Robert and Clara touch at the end of the novel. Before Robert proposes to Clara we are told that her "little hand was drawn away from his, but not with a sudden or angry gesture, and it rested for one moment lightly and tremulously upon his dark hair" (441). Clara too originally seems to want to shirk away from Robert's touch; however, she returns his touch in a caring, ethical manner -- touching him lightly, stroking his hair.

The care that comes from Robert and George's friendship is also solidified by George himself at the end of the novel. George admits that he "yearned for the strong grasp of your hand, Bob; the friendly touch of the hand which has guided me through the darkest passage of my life" (444). Here Robert, who is affectionately and familiarly called Bob, and his "friendly touch" are positioned as George's guide and savior. This quotation highlights the tension between caring and violent touches seen previously within the context of their friendship and via the ghostly hand that pervades the novel.

6.5 Spectre of Touch: The *Manus Ex Machina*

There is a hand within the narrative machine of *Lady Audley's Secret*. This invisible ghost hand is the touch that guides Robert to the truth about Lady Audley, and it is omnipresent within the narration of the novel. *Lady Audley's Secret* is seemingly

guided by "the hand of genius" (161). This hand of genius is one that helps Robert find George and expose Lucy Audley as a fraud. On many occasions Robert suggests that "a stonger hand than my own is pointing the way to my lost friend's unknown grave" (192). This hand is the *manus ex machina* in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Robert repeats a variation of the same phrase four times as he is searching for answers about George's disappearance. He states:

> 1) 'how pitiless I am, and how relentlessly I am carried on. It is not myself; it is the hand which is beckoning me further and further upon the dark road whose end I dare not dream of' (196);
> 2) A hand which is strong than my own beckons me on (197);
> 3) 'A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward upon the dark road' (221); and
> 4) 'A hand that is stronger than my own is beckoning me onward to the dark road that leads to my lost friend's unknown grave' (274).

Robert's obsession with this hand that is stronger than his own can be interpreted as a manifestation of the monomania of which he is frequently accused. Robert seems to be "haunted by the ghost of George Talboys" (282), and this ghost affirms its presence only through a telepathic touch, a beckoning onward.

Another well known image of a beckoning hand is also evoked when we are told that "those rugged branches hither and thither against the dark gray sky […] looked like the ghostly arms of shrunken and withered giants beckoning Robert to his uncle's house" (234). The branches as ghostly arms are reminiscent of Catherine's tapping at the window

in *Wuthering Heights,* which was published fourteen years before *Lady Audley's Secret*. The ghost hands and ghost touches also lead to ghostly impressions. The appearance of bruises on Lady Audley's wrist signals that something more sinister is at work, and this same sort of imagery is also used, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, by Thomas Hardy in his description of Rhoda Brook's arm in "The Withered Arm." Lady Audley's bruises are described as follows:

> [Robert] looked at her pretty fingers one by one; this one glittering with a ruby heart; that encoiled by an emerald serpent; and about them all a starry glitter of diamonds. From the fingers his eyes wander to the rounded wrists: the broad, flat, gold bracelet upon her right wrist dropped over her hand, as she executed a rapid passage. She stopped abruptly to rearrange it; but before she could do so, Robert Audley noticed a bruise upon her delicate skin. (122)

Her excuse for these bruises is that "'I am unfortunate in having a skin which the slightest touch bruises'" (122). Though Lady Audley attempts to explain away their appearance, her bruises are described in much the same way as the bruises are presented in Hardy's "The Withered Arm," a perfect representation of a pressure applied via a hand and fingers:

> It was not one bruise, but for slender, purple marks, such as might have been made by the four fingers of a powerful hand that had grasped the delicate wrist a shade too roughly [...] Across one of the faint purple marks there was a darker tinge, as if a ring worn by

> one of these strong and cruel fingers had been ground into the tender flesh. (123)

These bruises are a literal memory and reminder of an unethical touch; even the source of this tactility seems ghostly.

This is but one of many ghostly touches that seem to affect Lady Audley. As I have mentioned previously, even her jewelry seems to strangle and choke her with invisible tactility. However, Lady Audley is also haunted by her "mother's icy grasp upon [her] throat" (357). Lady Audley's mother is another ghostly touch within the narration of the text. Lady Audley uses her mother as her ultimate excuse for all the madness she has tried to escape, but in her attempt to escape madness, she has in fact caused more. The perpetual haunting through tactility serves as a constant reminder that Lady Audley is ultimately trapped by her past, as well as foreshadows that it will be touch that will lead to her downfall.

Elizabeth Steere takes this concept of ghostly hands and telepathic touch further by suggesting that the true ghost touch within the text is that of Phoebe Marks. Steere reminds us that "[w]hile sensation fiction does not generally include overtly occult episodes, it does use occultized images to depict crime and social evils" (Steere 302). Thus here the ghostly hand and the ghost touch are used to reinforce the immorality and criminality of what Lady Audley has done. These ghost touches also serve to reinscribe Lady Audley's position within society, indicating that this is a social structure where women cannot wield the type of power she desires. The ghost touches suggest that Lady Audley has infringed upon a space, a social sphere that was not hers, and as such she must be punished for it. However, one must question what the controlling ghostly power

is that dominates Lady Audley's rise and fall. Steere contends that the "passing of Phoebe's hands over Lady Audley's head as she brushes her mistress's hair and her victim's responsive 'jerks' reinforce the maid's image as a mesmerist" (Steere 306). Though this is definitely a plausible interpretation of the ghostly and telepathic unpinning of the narrative, it does not sufficiently explain the course of the narration as a whole. As Robert Audley suggests, "who can fail to recognize God's hand in this strange story?" (433), and one must admit that there seemingly is an unknown hand, an unknown force which drives the narration of *Lady Audley's Secret*.

6.6 Lady Audley`s Conclusion

The use of tactility in *Lady Audley's Secret* demonstrates that the sensation novel ‘‘stimulates a vulgar curiosity, weakens the established rules of right and wrong, touches, to say the least, upon things illicit, raises false and vain expectations, and draws a wholly false picture of life’’ (Steere 300). As I have shown above, touch seems to be the driving force of Braddon's novel. In fact, touch is used to both highlight instances of unethical intersubjective relations and frame the socio-cultural importance of tactility in relation to class distinctions and corporality. The use of tactility as a tool to both create and maintain barriers is even evoked by Robert when he "shaded his eyes with his hand; putting a barrier between my lady and himself; a screen which baffled her penetration and provoked her curiosity" (238). Thus the hand is useful in sustaining space and refuting unwanted contact.

One of the more overtly socio-political stances in the novel is seemingly thought and narrated by Robert, yet it seems to come from the omniscient narrator: "Better the pretty influence of the teacups and saucers gracefully wielded in a woman's hand, than

all the inappropriate power snatched at the point of the pen from the unwilling sterner sex. Imagine all the women of England elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality; superior to crinoline" (243). This statement is a direct comment on the social and political structure which over-determines women to positions of wielding teacups in their hand within the domestic space -- yet it is a structure that will not be torn down simply by "the point of the pen." What is required for women to be elevated and become more than just crinoline is that they must make "themselves agreeable; above tea tables, and that cruelly scandalous and rather satirical gossip which even strong men delight in; and what a dreary, utilitarian, ugly life the sterner sex must lead" (243). What is needed is a desire to go past the aesthetics yet avoid the dreary utilitarian nature of life. This statement suggests that women must be more than pretty objects to be looked at like Lucy Audley, and men must be more than useful objects such as Robert Audley. However, the narrative of *Lady Audley's Secret* suggests that women who try to be more than pretty objects will be punished. As a comment on gendered divisions in society, *Lady Audley's Secret* does not leave things untold. Tactility gives the narrative the ability to highlight not only aesthetics, but also the utility innate in touch in order to speak to the problematic nature of larger social and cultural divisions. Touch is present in the machine, not simply within the narration, but within mid-Victorian society as a whole.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The Bigger Question

Why touch? Why use tactility in order to speak of larger socio-cultural and socio-anxieties? In an essay entitled "Responsivity of the Body: Traces of the Other in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of Body and Flesh," Bernhard Waldenfels states that "any phenomenology of the body must become literature in order to be effective" (87). Thus in order to better understand how embodied knowledge was interpreted in Victorian England, we must turn to the literature. In the texts discussed in the chapters above, the four types of tactility that I have delineated within the narration serve to reinforce a mid to late-Victorian phenomenology of the body. As Annemie Halsema suggests, a "phenomenological account of the body could lead to a conception of embodiment as not stable or a-historical, but as a constant process of redefining one's relationship to the world and to others" (159-160) and this constant process of creating and defining one's role in relation to public and private space is emphasized through the tactile.

Though I have defined four separate types of tactility, each type of tactility builds on another. It is important to understand the reciprocal and chiasmic properties innate in tactility in order to understand how self-touch and telepathic touches complicate notions of embodiment. The three main ethical categories of tactile habits used in my analysis -- caring, noncaring, and acaring (from Maurice Hamington) -- emphasize a cartography, a way of ethically negotiating space. Representations of tactility outline an insistence on containment and a need to actively avoid close contact. However, the redemptive power and possibility of touch is also accentuated. Ultimately, touch echoes a larger mood and

preoccupation with questioning physical, social, and legal boundaries in a time where one's relation to one's lived environment was constantly in flux.

It is when one's lived environment is constantly changing that larger social anxieties appear, usually in the form of legislation. The Contagious Diseases Acts were one way that the government attempted to maintain order, especially for those who were responsible for defending the Empire's boundaries. Through the medical examination of assumed prostitutes in port towns, the threat of contamination was seemingly contained in the eyes of the law. Reciprocal touch and self-touch highlight how these concepts of temptation and contamination can be localized. Touch can adhere to the surface of the skin but there is always already a remainder or remnant to touch, even after the physical contact is gone. It is this gap innate to tactility that is the most dangerous and the most difficult to theorize.

In Chapter One I explored how concepts of temptation and contamination are seemingly interchangeable in literature. Laura's temptation by the goblin men / fruit in "Goblin Market" becomes a source of contamination; as a result her body and sensory responses become compromised. Similarly Swinburne's exploration of leprosy as a contagious disease in "The Leper" is coupled with a focus on desire and temptation of the flesh. Despite the fact that redemption can be found and salvation can become a possibility, these texts seem to circumvent a discussion /description of the real cause of fear -- tactile memory. A focus is placed on the moment of touch, and the possibility of temptation and contamination, yet implicit in this moment is what will remain after the touch. There is always a remainder to touch; whether or not one is quickly removed from the tempting situation, the touch (the temptation) will always remain as a memory on the

skin / the body. This memory can play itself out as a fatal disease (like leprosy, for example) or can be defined as an educational experience that dictates morality (as Laura discovers in "Goblin Market"). Taking Merleau-Ponty's theory that tactile interactions adhere to the skin as a starting point, I believe that the texts which focus on tactility also necessarily and implicitly incorporate tactile memory. Tactile memory further complicates an already complex relation to the locus of touch. Remember in tactility the limit is never reached, the boundary between touched and toucher is never attained; the exact position of touch is indeterminable. Thus both subject/object, touched/toucher share in the touch and the memory of the encounter. This sharing of memory means that ethical responsibility must be shared as well, underscoring the importance of ethical intersubjective relations.

Self-touch further blurs the locus and limit of touch. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Three, self-touch is not relegated to masturbation or a touching of one's own body, but rather it can also be seen and understood in instances of homosexual/homosocial touch. In these instances both bodies are described in a similar manner in texts, such as is seen in *Teleny* and "Gone Under". Rather than reduce these encounters to simply narcissistic relations, these instances of self-touch give a heightened sense of intimacy. By touching one who is like you, it allows you to know yourself better. In fact self-touch necessarily allows intimacy to be explored in much more detail than euphemism or symbolism. However, with increased intimacy comes increased temptation. This is why, as I have mentioned, hands were bound in an attempt to avoid the intimacy and temptation in masturbation. Binding and restricting touch kept the

boundaries of propriety intact especially in the private space which is difficult to legislate.

Gendered relations and concepts of space/place are tied into the performance/performativity that occurs in these places. Place is understood as localized space, and in the texts discussed in Chapter Two this localization occurs through a tactile exploration. Tactility allows for places to be gendered and allows for the reinforcement of boundaries and the types of performance permitted in these places. Gendered performance was integral to the creation and maintenance of the domestic space, especially in conjunction with the hearth and its angel. *Alan's Wife* acutely demonstrates what happens when these domestic confines, and the performance permitted within these spaces, is changed. Jean in *Alan's Wife* seemingly questions her domestic space following her husband's death, by the introduction of the possibility of infanticide. Similarly, "Theodora: A Fragment" explores the possibility of a pluralistic performance within the public space. Theodora/Theo refuses to be pinned down into one subject position or one place: she cross-dresses and she crosses boundaries in order to explore alternative roles. Ultimately, these new spaces become pedagogical places where one learns through tactility and repetitive tactile motion, as is seen in *The Ethics of the Dust*. Pedagogy becomes an embodied and gendered experience.

As I have explored in Chapter Two, architecture is often embodied and experienced through tactile interaction, through the negotiation of materiality. How we negotiate our built environment is a function of both how we interact with our space through tactile means and how gender informs the way that we touch. Le Corbusier is one of the most renowned male architects to have been reclaimed by feminist architectural

theorists, exactly because his designs focus on the gendered use and function of space and, more importantly, on how space can create gender while simultaneously allowing gender to create space. Though the domestic space is one that has often been given precedence in feminist theory, the texts that I have introduced here have demonstrated how spaces that were traditionally gendered male, like the marketplace, can be negotiated and transgressed through tactility. Tangentially related to this concept of spatial negotiation is the negotiation of the stage as a gendered space.

Performance spaces question the boundaries that society and legislation try to uphold. On stage, one could literally enact the possibility of transgressing boundaries of all kinds. The fact that *Lady Audley's Secret* was so quickly adapted for the stage following its publication is just one example of the importance of the stage as a progressive and transgressive space, while simultaneously being a space of containment and regulation. The stage becomes a way of exploring and counteracting constraints or containment of gendered embodiment. Most negotiation of space is done through ritualized memory. We understand how to negotiate not only our own personal domestic space, but also public spaces, because we come to understand through ritual what is the most effective way to move through and live in these places. The stage can echo these ritualized explorations; however, performance frees the performer from the necessity of mimicking ritualized habits. This freeing possibility is also explored and continued through the use of telepathic touch.

With the emergence of the use of telepathic touch in late Victorian texts, the underlying fear of tactility within society becomes realized. Spaces and bodies become open to infringement and no one is safe from the contaminating nature of tactility.

Telepathic touch becomes the actualization of the memory of touch. As I have mentioned previously, telepathy and telepathic touch created fear mainly because they suggest the ability of crossing over social and class boundaries. Touch has a way of achieving and creating this sense of anxiety among the population in a way that the other senses do not.

A sonnet by John Charles Earle published in 1875, entitled “Bodily Extensions,” speaks to the sense of anxiety present within late Victorian England in relation to one’s corporeal positionality:

> THE BODY is not bounded by its skin;
> Its effluence, like a gentle cloud of scent,
> Is wide into the air diffused, and, blent
> With elements unseen, its way doth win
> To ether frontiers, where take origin
> Far subtler systems, nobler regions meant
> To be the area and the instrument
> Of operations ever to begin
> Anew and never end. Thus every man
> Wears as his robe the garment of the sky—
> So close his union with the cosmic plan,
> So perfectly he pierces low and high—
> Reaching as far in space as a creature can,
> And co-extending with immensity. (Earle 66)

Earle’s poem is very spiritual and religious in tone, suggesting that our bodies do not end at the boundaries of our skin, but in fact extend beyond them. Earle suggests that bodies

connect with the sky and the cosmic plan of the universe, reaching "as far in space as a creature can" (13). The use of the word "effluence" and the evoking of "a gentle cloud of scent" (2) highlights a miasmic relationship to being. The "ether frontiers" (5) indicate the permeability of concrete boundaries, questioning the origin and the extension of embodied experience. The immensity that is suggested in Earle's poem is similar to the ability of tactility to reach beyond the confines of one's corporality as seen in Edward Carpenter's poem "By the Shore," and reinscribes the belief in the ability of touch beyond the body.

Telepathic tactility and the ability to touch beyond corporeal confines is particularly complex because the female body is usually the site of telepathic touch. Why are women the locus of telepathic tactility? Emphasing the female body as the source of telepathic touch reinforces the concept of the female body being the source of contamination. Women could harm and wound from afar and undermine the attempts to contain them physically, legally, and socially as the Contagious Diseases Acts did from 1864-1886. Telepathic tactility was a way for literature to address the new unseen threat which seemingly came from within the confines / boundaries of the country. This telepathic ability had repercussions on the way public and private spaces were theorized. Now the private could indeed become public.

In a society that increasingly saw the development of urban spaces and the modification of the public sphere, strategies for effectively negotiating crowds while making sure that one's personal space and virtue remained intact became a necessity. The effective negotiation of the public sphere, as seen in the texts above, informs how we negotiate our society today. With the advent of technology complicating notions of place

and space it is important to look back in order to frame and conceptualize interaction and negotiation within a built/social environment.

7.2 Whose Space?

Since the 1860s, an emphasis on tactility and the ways in which we engage and interact with our environment through touch have permeated various aspects of our lives. The preoccupation with touch came with the advent and push towards modernity. As populations shifted from rural to more urban environments, the concepts of crowds and crowd mentality became more common. The need for a personal space bubble, an understood distancing between yourself and others in a crowd, is one that is reinforced within the class divisions present in Victorian literature and etiquette manuals. However, this personal space bubble is increasingly under attack. From the turn of the century, in order to negotiate the urban environment, a sense of personal space was necessarily erased. It became acceptable for people to touch you, for strangers to interact with you corporally without your permission. This type of tactile interaction, even if accidental, is an instance of reciprocal touching. As Ann Cvetkovich's suggests in *An Archive of Feelings*, "the violation of bodily boundaries need not be a literal moment of penetration, but it is experienced as equivalent to invasive physical contact because it is so emphatically a visceral or sensational experience" (50). Though Cvetkovich's work elaborates on touch in relation to trauma theory, her analysis highlights how bodily boundaries are complex and can be easily violated within the public sphere. The body does not need to be literally penetrated for unethical invasion of space to occur. As I have stated previously, reciprocal tactility mystifies the boundaries and locus of touch, which is problematized further within crowds. It is this impossibility of defining a limit to

tactility which causes panic, and underscores the fear of contagion and contagious diseases.

7.3 Modern Contagion

The need for containment and the desire to isolate selected members of society based on the fear of contagion is of course a pervasive concept. The discovery of HIV in 1980s and its initial qualification as a "gay" disease, not only stigmatized those in the LGBTQ community as the source of contamination and contagion, but reinforced how tactile contact functions within the panic of contagion especially in the face of the unknown. Many authors who wrote in the 1990s spoke of the fear and panic related to touch and the spread of HIV/AIDS. For example, in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* the main male protagonist, Richard, is a writer dying of AIDS. Throughout the novel Richard's relationship to Clarissa is described and modified through their tactile interactions. Clarissa constantly balks at the need to maintain distance, yet Richard seems acutely aware of what can happen if there is too much touch, if Clarissa gets too close.

The media has also represented the fear of contagion and tactility in movies and television programs. The most recent movie by Steven Soderburgh, *Contagion*, follows the progression of a disease that is creating a worldwide epidemic, and reinforces the fear of tactility that accompanies the spread of disease. The taglines on the promotional posters for Soderburgh's movie include a montage of the main actors in the film with the line "nothing spreads like fear." Another poster depicts Matt Damon, the main lead, with his hand outstretched, seemingly blocking an approaching contaminant with the lines "Don't Talk To Anyone. Don't Touch Anyone."

In the 2009-2010 Joss Whedon series, *Dollhouse*, Whedon addressed this same panic and fear that is ever-present in a society faced with contagious and unknown diseases. Episode seven of the first season, entitled "Echoes," can be summarized as follows:

> The episode "Echoes" (1.7) centers on a drug N7316, created by the Rossum Corporation. N7316 is a memory drug that works by breaking down natural inhibitions in the hippocampus to awaken the "sleeping" parts of the brain. […] the drug supposedly acts by "attacking the inhibitory centers in the hippocampus, breaking down repressed memory blocks." This causes the user to experience a memory glitch, which is especially troubling when the Actives, particularly Echo, begin recovering their memories of lives before the Dollhouse. […] As a memory is accessed, it will lead to other memories, which will lead to still more memories, et cetera. A useful metaphor might be to think of this spreading activation as a snowball rolling down a hill. (Ginn)

This mysterious memory drug seems to bring back repressed memories in those who are affected. Those who are affected by the drug need not have ingested the drug in any way, for the transmission occurs through touch. A quarantine is created around the fictional campus, essentially to contain the spread of memories.

This *Dollhouse* episode is representative of our moment's anxieties around tactility, and these are the same anxieties previously expressed in the Victorian literature that I have addressed. The memory of touch as represented through contagion is just as

powerful and harmful as the touch itself. The theory of touch, which I will revisit shortly in relation to Walter Pater, lies in this apparent remainder as expressed through memory. *Dollhouse* is brilliantly constructed and laden with touch imagery and symbolism: the dolls have handlers, they are imprinted at the end of every episode, and the main protagonist is named Echo, a name that has larger tactile repercussions as I will demonstrate shortly. Whedon orchestrates a series that is based on tactility, in which the tension between imprint and memory advances the plot of each episode and the series in general. The idea of imprint and memory is a sustained concept which can be traced from Victorian literature through to today.

7.4 Self-Touch and Telepathic Touch in the Electronic Age

The development and popularity of Instant Messaging and social media programs since the mid 1990s such as ICQ, MSN, Yahoo chat, and more recently Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ can be seen as an extension of the telepathic tactility I have discussed previously in Chapter Four. With these programs we can in essence touch those who are not near us. We can send emoticons, one of which is a hug, which function as a "stand in" for the actual tactile intersubjective interaction we would have with our friends, our family, and our co-workers. All of our tactile interactions have seemingly gone viral, and in the cyberworld no one physically touches one another. However, the ethical repercussions of these interactions still need to be considered. With the proliferation of social media, the types of interactions that one has on the internet or via text message can still be understood as a noncaring habit, which has recently been brought to the fore with the increased awareness of cyber-bullying in schools.

The more that we seemingly move away from tactile interactions through technology, the more we are forcefully brought back to touch. For example, all recent Apple technology has been developed and continues to be promoted in terms of tactility. iPods not only emphasize the "I" culture of today, but also suggest that by the simple touch of the screen you can have access to all your music and your contacts. The emphasis on touch was continued with the first generation of the iPod Touch, which was released in 2007. The tactile interfaces of the iPhones are also contingent on touching a screen in order to make the device work.

Gaming systems, like the advent of the cellular phone and MP3 players, have also attempted to move into the realm of wireless; where the players' interactions become hands free. Within this realm the Nintendo Wii was seen a great advance because the gaming experience was positioned within a remote control. New generations of gaming platforms, such as XBOX 360 have moved gaming to the point where the player has now become the remote. In these games how we touch, how we interact, is mimicked in a virtual world where an avatar becomes the virtual recreation of corporeal subjectivity. The ethical repercussions of tactility are vast, and continue to be theorized and explored in relation to new technology. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the tactility and ethics of new technology, I feel it is important to mention these new technologies, for the literature that I have used in this dissertation speaks to the same tactile repercussions found in these technologies.

It is also interesting to point out that the foundation of this hands-on and hands-free technology is the concept of echo. In computer science echo means "displaying information sent or received on a terminal, to visually detect transmission errors. Remote

echo comes from the host computer. Local echo comes from the sender's transmission" (Graf 230). This echo is the same as the tactile residue of touch, a memory of tactility, an imprint. As you touch keys commands are executed. As you move your body while connected to the Kinect sensor on the XBOX 360 that movement is recorded and moves your avatar in the game. That touch, that movement becomes memory; it is saved in the game -- it remains on the skin.

7.5 Bodies Touching/Touching Bodies

The representations of touch that appeared in Victorian literature reflect a mood where there is a perpetual questioning of legal, physical, and social boundaries. This mood was also reflected in the enacting and eventual repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which, as I have mentioned, were attempts to reinforce boundaries. The ethics of touch and tactile interaction thus becomes an important paradigm for interpreting and exploring embodiment, contagion, and gendered constructions in Victorian England.

A recent art exhibition at The Queen's Gallery in Buckingham Palace sought to counteract the common misconception of the Victorian era and Queen Victoria specifically as prudish and devoid of sensuality. This exhibition suggests that Queen Victoria herself was very interested in the naked body and how bodies interacted. According to Jonathan Marsden, the lead curator of the exhibition, visitors would be "hugely surprised" at the new portrayal of Queen Victoria (Nikkhah). Marsden says: "The image of the buttoned up, reclusive widow clad in black has obscured the first half of Queen Victoria's story – that of a very natural, uninhibited young woman attracted to the sensuous and the physical who not only didn't mind nudity, but actually enjoyed it"(Nikkhah). Thus it becomes even more important in regards to historical accuracy and

historical preservation to look at the small clues and traces that have been left in mid to late-Victorian literature. As I suggest, touch is the active reminder of what has happening in Victorian England and these touches specifically address embodiment, gender divisions, containment, and temptation.

Another exhibit which expressed the mid to late Victorian socio-cultural preoccupation with tactility was last year's exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) entitled "Playing with Pictures: the Art of Victorian Photocollage."[47] The exhibit presented many examples of photocollage which can be seen and understood as a precursor to the photoshopping that is done electronically today. In mid-Victorian England photocollage functioned as a way to juxtapose bodies and images that would not normally be seen together. Within photocollage pictures touch other pictures in an interpretation of societal interactions. Some of these photocollages were meant to be a critique of a class system, where these collages, like the tactility that informs them, "serve as the materialization of social processes" (Cvetkovich 70). Tracing the use and depiction of tactility and touch in literature becomes one of the ways to materialize and contextualize these social processes.

I must leave the last word to Walter Pater, who was one of the most vocal advocates for the necessity of phenomenological existence and experience. In the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, published in 1868, he states:

> With this sense of the splendor of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we

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[47] See http://www.ago.net/playing-with-pictures

> shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. (237)

What I am arguing is that the literature that appeared following the enacting of the Contagious Diseases Acts highlights this "desperate effort" to see *through* touch. In essence, these texts create the implicit and explicit theories of the things we touch, for which Pater thought "we shall hardly have time."

Touch becomes the literal imprint, an enduring memory of the social and the political. As Pater states, "philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us" (237), and it is the constant presence of tactility in all its forms which makes sure that we do not forget.

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"Contesting the Liminal: Telepathic Touch in Hardy's 'The Withered Arm' and Gaskell's 'The Grey Woman'." *The Border as Fiction, 11th International Conference on the Short Story in English*. June 17, 2010.

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