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Literature and Feminine Singularity: 1850–90

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of

Philosophy in English

by

Ronjaunee Chatterjee

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Literature and Feminine Singularity: 1850–90

by

Ronjaunee Chatterjee

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Joseph E. Bristow, Chair

"Literature and Feminine Singularity: 1850–90" argues for the emergence of a mathematically-defined and serially-oriented vision of femininity that is singular in nineteenth-century literary texts. My project calls attention to feminine singularity as irreducible and not beholden to the structures of liberalism, capitalism, and bourgeois patriarchy that typically frame gender in binary oppositional terms. Singularity has been part of the language of philosophy, physics, and mathematics since Kant's aesthetic theories. In nineteenth-century literature, singularity vitalizes the political urgency of femininity beyond the limited agenda of suffrage movements. The works I analyze—Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, Christina Rossetti's poetry and short fiction, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, and Charles Baudelaire's poetry and prose—imagine a form of feminine radicalism that is an explicit counterpoint to emerging Continental

theories of liberal individualism and the modern citizen-subject. My project thus concentrates on the ways in which lateral affiliations of likeness (such as the minimal, non-reproductive difference between sisters) and numerical lines of thinking generate feminine singularity. In participating in alternative conceptions of counting a "one," or conceiving of the many, these works consider femininity outside the oscillation between particulars and universals that has been the defining paradigm for understanding the self and the other.

Drawing on the work of feminist political theorists such as Bonnie Honig and Linda Zerilli, and literary historians of liberalism such as Elaine Hadley, my dissertation observes that femininity is on the outer limit of nineteenth-century democratic thought. But as the literary imaginary attests, femininity is also capable of articulating a different vision of human freedom. My first chapter begins by discussing a photograph of Alice Liddell that appears in Carroll's manuscript bracketed by the hand-drawn symbol for infinity. I argue in this chapter that the *Alice* stories imagine her girlhood as a number in a series moving toward infinity, rather than an uneasy precursor to Victorian womanhood. My second and third chapters, on Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* and *Goblin Market*, and Collins' *The Woman in White*, respectively, propose that relationships between sisters generate forms of likeness that bypass restrictive notions of gender difference. For my fourth chapter, I consider how counting produces femininity in Baudelaire's prose and poetry. I argue that counting – in a manner that recognizes the limitations of nineteenth-century ideas of the individual – requires Baudelaire to dissolve the masculine poetic self and engage in a poetics of feminine singularity.

The dissertation of Ronjaunee Chatterjee is approved.

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Giulia Sissa

Joseph E. Bristow, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Acknowledgments

Many years spent laboring over singularity—the topic of this dissertation—has yielded in practice what I finally arrived at in theory: that thinking the singular is more than just being alone or being solitary; rather, it has everything to do with communities, affiliations, and relations that sustain such thinking. With this in mind, I extend my deepest gratitude to Joseph Bristow, who encouraged the seeds of this project and saw it through to the finish line, as well as to Jonathan Grossman and Kenneth Reinhard for their kindness and invaluable mentorship. Many thanks also go out to Giulia Sissa, Helen Deutsch, Eleanor Kaufman, Rachel Ablow, and Louise Hornby for their encouragement with this project.

Early versions of Chapter 1 were presented at UCLA's Nineteenth-Century Group, and I thank the members and organizers for their insight. A version of Chapter 4 is forthcoming in the journal *French Studies*, and I am grateful to the editors for their rigorous and helpful commentary.

Numerous colleagues and friends deserve my heartfelt thanks for years of conversation and camaraderie: Jacquelyn Ardam, Christina Richieri Griffin, Renee Hudson, Amy Wong, Ilana Papir, and Ethan Pack. My sister Ranita Chatterjee, has been an exceptional interlocutor, friend, and mentor. Thanks to my brother Rupak Chatterjee, and my brother-in-law Tomo Hattori.

Imaginative freedom—coupled with the assurance that I could take risks and be supported—are what carried this project forward, and for that I thank my parents, Ratna and Ramananda Chatterjee.

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Selected Other Publications
- Book Review: *A Life with Mary Shelley* by Barbara Johnson. *The New Inquiry*, 14 October, 2014.
- "The Sins of the Fathers: Élisabeth Roudinesco's *Lacan in Spite of Everything*." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 1 June 2014.
- "Alain Badiou in Southern California: A Politics of the Impossible." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 6 February 2014.
- "Hitting on Infinity: Mari Ruti's *The Singularity of Being*." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 27 August 2013.
- Book Review: *Calcutta* by Amit Chaudhuri. *The Rumpus*, 25 April 2013.

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- "'Golden Head by Golden Head': Sisterhood and Singularity in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" Spring Atheneum, UCLA, May 2013

Presentations
- "Christina Rossetti and the Form of Likeness." British Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle Conference, CUNY Graduate Center, June 2015
- "Engendering Singularity in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations and Little Dorrit*." North American Victorian Studies Association, "Victorian Networks," University of Wisconsin-Madison, September 2012
- "Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books and the Ones and Twos of Femininity." UCLA Nineteenth-Century Group, February 2012
- "Constructing the 4W syllabus." UCLA Department of English, February 2012
- "Alice Meynell and the Oblivion of Lyric." The Institute of English Studies, "Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle International Conference," University of London, June 2010
- "Competing Ideologies of Imperial Modernity in Elizabeth Hamilton's *Translations of the Letters of Hindoo Rajah*." North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, "Romanticism and Modernity," Duke University, May 2009

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"Narratives of Resistance"
This course introduces incoming first-year students from historically underrepresented communities to writing and composition at the university level. This class focuses on the writing process by having students produce written work every week, and by concentrating on grammar and organization in addition to argument and analysis. Students explore a number of texts that consider how stories about oneself critique, engage with, or conform to a wider public sphere, such as excerpts from Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

Honors Introduction to English Literature (English 4HW, Spring 2012)
"Evil"
My honors introduction to literary analysis is designed to foster independent thought and help students develop insightful arguments about texts through close reading. While students refine their skills in writing and interpretation, they also reflect on the enduring problem of evil in works such as Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange,* and excerpts from Freud's "The Uncanny."

Introduction to Literature (English 4W, Fall 2009, Winter 2013)
"The Gothic"
This course in critical reading and writing introduces students to literary analysis through frequent writing assignments and short papers, with an emphasis on editing and revising drafts. Works included Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find.

Literature and Feminine Singularity: 1850--90

Introduction

In *Antigones*, his classic study of the philosophical afterlives of Sophocles'

Antigone, George Steiner observes a structural shift in Continental human life in the

nineteenth century: "between the 1790's and the start of the twentieth century, the radical

lines of kinship run horizontally, as between brothers and sisters. In the Freudian

construct they run vertically, as between children and parents. The Oedipus complex is

one of inescapable verticality. The shift is momentous; with it Oedipus replaces

Antigone."[1] Steiner makes a bold claim for the organization of subjectivity in this

historical period under the classical discursive paradigm of Antigone: a figure for

political resistance, radical transgression, but most important, a form of femininity that

refuses categorization. For Steiner, Antigone's singular act—the unrepeatable gesture of

honoring a brother-sister relationship—marks a fundamental ontological difference that

supersedes the "inescapable verticality" of gendered subjects within a phallic or patriarchal

order. Literary history, then, according to Steiner, must be rethought in terms of the grounds

(ontological and discursive) for gendered difference. Vitally, his argument imagines femininity

as the locus of his analysis of uncategorizable difference within distinctly nineteenth-century

structures of kinship and affiliation.

This dissertation revisits canonical representations of femininity in the writings of Lewis

Carroll, Christina Rossetti, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Baudelaire. What brings together this

seemingly disparate group of writers in Britain and in France is an engagement with femininity

on terms that are radically distinct from the conventional language of binaries, oppositions, and

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[1] George Steiner, *Antigones* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 18.

in certain cases, dialectic thought. Femininity in the works I discuss crystallizes in different forms: as part of a series, for example, or within lateral kinship relations—such as the ones we find between siblings—that connote difference as irreducible. In participating in alternative conceptions of counting a "one," or conceiving of the many, these literary works from the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s consider femininity outside the oscillation between particulars and universals that, within modern theoretical frameworks, has been the defining paradigm for understanding relations between the self and the other.

The larger scope of this study addresses how mid nineteenth-century literature encounters the same question that recent generations of feminists and philosophers have repeatedly taken to task: Namely, how can we describe sexual difference without generating new and more coercive antinomies, or collapsing into, on the one hand, a form of essentialized difference, or on the other hand, essentialized sameness? In exploring the conditions of emergence for these questions (which reach one point of culmination in psychoanalysis) my project uncovers feminine singularity—or the way in which femininity escapes particularity—as the touchstone for larger nineteenth-century reconfigurations of relations between part and whole.

This basic labor of making part and whole collide, or rather, correspond with one another, is a conceptual problem that extends along the ontological, formal, and political realms. Its poetic iteration is the synecdoche; its political one might be the relationship of a subject as a citizen to the state or nation. In philosophical terms, such relationships involve investing forms of particularity with something great than themselves into which they comfortably collapse or integrate.[2] Yet part and whole have never sat well together in the history of Western thought: an

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[2] For a study in particularity in Victorian literature see Carol T. Christ's *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetics of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1975).

unease permeates both Plato's and Aristotle's account of life circumscribed by the Athenian *polis*, and the life that lies outside of it, for instance. In this schema, of course, women (along with minors, slaves, and foreigners) represent a kind of constitutive exception.[3] Yet Antigone—who buries her brother, Polyneices, despite his role as a traitor to the city and knowing full well her death will ensue—does not represent the role of the exception, but is instead a kind of exception to the exception: a singularity.[4]

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[3] See the definition of *polis* in *The Dictionary of Untranslatables*, eds. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014). It is worth noting that in the *polis* "the freedom of the individual is gauged not by his independence with regard to the state but by the collectivity's dependence with regard to him, that is, to his participation in the *polis*" (801–02).

[4] In recent years *Antigone* has been the subject of important feminist scholarship in gender, politics, and social formations. Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013) is an important recent example. Two other anthologies have compiled these writings: Fanny Sodernack's *Feminist Readings of Antigone (*Albany: SUNY Press, 2010) and S.E. Wilmer and Audrone Zukauskaite's *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010). Gerard Joseph's article, "The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew Arnold, Hegel, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Drabble" (*PMLA* 96.1 [1981]: 22–35), sheds light on the importance of *Antigone* for nineteenth-century writers. For more sustained discussions of *Antigone* in particular, and feminist readings of myths in general, see Cecilia Sjöholm's *The Antigone Complex: Ethics and the Invention of Feminine Desire* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard's *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), and Rachel Bowlby's *Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007).

This set of concerns might initially appear to be at a remove from the mid-nineteenth century, which forms the historical boundaries of this project. But the conceptual problems introduced by Antigone—likeness, horizontality, a singularity that exceeds the exception— reoccur throughout the poetry and narrative fiction that I have chosen to focus on here.[5] One of the basic grounds for this dissertation is that is it impossible to separate the historical from the conceptual: moments in time generate specific modes of thinking and conditions for the emergence of problems, but history itself is rather untimely, as the great theorist of the nineteenth century, Walter Benjamin, was at pains to point out throughout his work.[6] Recently, John Bowen has suggested, in "Time for Victorian Studies?" that a more theoretical approach to the act of historicizing itself—one put forth by a post-structuralist thinker like Jacques Derrida— might allow for a more wide ranging sense of the nineteenth century and its manifold problems. Bowen examines Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities* (1859) to assert: "virtue also rests in the novel's reiterated figures of secrecy, sacrifice and death (epitomized by Carton's gift of his death

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[5] In her work *Siblings* (London: Polity, 2003), Juliet Mitchell discusses how gender can emerge outside of vertical structures of descent, and wonders what happens when "[i]nstead of Oedipus Rex we will have Antigone: murderous brothers, a sister, Antigone, who knows the meaning of death, and one, Ismene, who doesn't" (128). Other scholars who take interest in lateral relationships included Cecilia Sjöholm, Stefani Engelstein, Griselda Pollock, and Miriam Leonard.

[6] See Benjamin's oft-quoted set of theses "On the Philosophy of History" (composed in 1940). Here Benjamin contrasts a kind of vanishing point of the now—merely a subset of "empty, homogenous time,"—with a now that might actually bear the weight of change and decision: *jetztzeit,* loosely translated as "the time filled by the presence of the now" (Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken Books, 1968], 261).

to Darnay) and in the apprehension, as here, of time as radically, inexorably disjoint: it is only in this way, it appears, that we can glimpse the possibility of historical being."[7] While I am not suggesting that this is the only way to read *A Tale of Two Cities*, Bowen's insight reminds us that nineteenth-century literature's consciousness of what exceeds empirical reality, but is nevertheless constitutive of it, is crucial to acknowledge.

We might say that a basic disruption of particulars and universals haunts all representation that deals with time in the first place. This perspective allows for a thinking of singularity and its relevance for femininity, whose relationship to the individual as historical being is one of the core problems of nineteenth-century literature and culture.[8] To begin with, for the Victorians no category stands for so much or so little as femininity. The moralized, domestic guardian "Angel in the House," formalized by Coventry Patmore's poems from the late 1850s, occupies one end of this spectrum.[9] A counter-type emerges from anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton's "Girl of the Period" (1868), which characterizes the ill repute of the modern, liberal

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[7] John Bowen, "Time for Victorian Studies?" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 14.2 (2009): 290.

[8] The canonical account of this problem in the literary realm comes from Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987). Armstrong argues that the novel registers the development of the modern subject as a feminine subject with interiority: "the modern individual was first and foremost a woman" (13). The novel became a technology for the hegemony of the middle class, by demarcating so-called "private" life as a site of political power in its own right. Armstrong's account, of course, does not dispute a teleology (the frequently used term "rise" is a good example of this) of history nor of political power.

[9] See Patmore's long narrative poem, *The Angel in the House* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863).

young woman, or the "wild woman" of the mid-nineteenth century.[10] Critical literature has thoroughly investigated these types as well as the "femme fatale," a hyper-sexualized and dangerous figure, central to sensation fiction and fin-de-siècle aestheticism. Another less circulated, but nonetheless culturally relevant example is Charlotte M. Yonge's caricatural list of wives in her autobiography, *Womankind* (1877): "the cowed woman, the dead-weight, the maitresse femme, and the helpmeet."[11] There is also the alarming "redundant" or "superfluous" woman, a term coined by politician W.R. Greg in response to the high numbers of unmarried women identified by the 1851 Census in Britain.[12] Finally, by the end of the century scholars begin to focus on the New Woman, the bicycle-riding, social reformer who emerges out of a number of novels in the 1880s and 1890s and gains considerable satirical representation in the periodical press. These types are all fairly familiar in the critical discourse. In spite of this utter surplus of meaning surrounding these definitions of "woman," however, the term subsequently seems to possess no meaning at all.

It is worth dwelling on the epistemological drive behind the nineteenth century's taxonomies of femininity, because it points immediately to the distinct lack of stability from representations of an individual woman to women as a group: from part to whole, in other words. This fascination with collection and classification corresponds to a sharp increase in statistics

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[10] From "The Girl of the Period," "The Wild Women: as Politicians," "The Wild Women: as Social Insurgents," in *Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors*, ed. Susan Hamilton (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1995).

[11] Charlotte M. Yonge, *Womankind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 179.

[12] See W. R. Greg's periodical article, "Why Are Women Redundant?" *National Review* 14 (1862): 434–60, reprinted in Greg, *Literary and Social Judgments* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873).

and figures about women's general nature and social status from the 1850s onward. After the 1851 Census identified 500,000 unmarried women over the age of 25 in Britain, Greg responded to the presumed "Surplus Women" problem by calculating that mass emigration to the colonies would rectify this "number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong." Sending this number of women overseas, Greg calculated, would take 10,000 ships.[13]

The surplus woman issue additionally focused attention on the growing number of women involved in independent work and labor; as the pamphlet *Industrial and Social Position of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks* (1857) observes: "the number of women returned as engaged in independent industry has increased in the far greater ration of 3 to 4."[14] The series of Reform bills after 1832, which granted franchise to property owning males but excluded women from political enfranchisement, lead suffragist groups to petition for women's inclusion in the franchise every year from 1870 to 1878, unsuccessfully, despite being backed by 1,499 signatories, including feminists Barbara Bodichon and the patron saint of nineteenth-century liberalism, John Stuart Mill.

In his landmark text, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill is quick to note that the proliferating statistical ethnographies of women's social status can never substitute for an impoverished knowledge of women as potentially political subjects:

When we further consider that to understand one woman is not necessarily to

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[13] Greg, "Why Are Women Redundant?" 276.

[14] *Industrial and Social Position of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks* (Chapman and Hall, 1857), 219.

understand any other woman; that even if he could study many women of one rank, or of one country, he would not thereby understand women of other ranks or countries; and even if he did, they are still only the women of a single period of history; we may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and always will be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.[15]

As Mill ponders here, femininity remains untheorizable within the political schema of a common "Humanity," despite its overrepresentation within the social world of function and progress. The mere acknowledgement of quantifiable types of "difference," social, regional, or economic, according to Mill, still does not solve the problem of epistemic closure, or what is required for a logical extension of democratic rights to a well-defined subordinate group (women). This bedrock is not unlike the one that Immanuel Kant—one of the most influential philosophical voices for the nineteenth century—repeatedly encounters when attempting to move beyond categorical imperatives in his works.

Even though Mill still stands as one of the most important campaigners for women's suffrage in Britain, the logic of his essay eventually resorts to negative skepticism. In the classic vein of laissez-faire liberalism, Mill proposes that a form of social Darwinism will reveal women's "true" character, since "whatever women's services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducements for them to undertake."[16] Despite Mill's

[15] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women,* ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Norton, 1997), 152.

[16] Mill, *Subjection*, 154.

astute observation of femininity's political enigma, the *Subjection* ultimately addresses the problem by turning to women's capacity for usefulness and "service" in order to articulate what cannot seem to be quantified about their status as enfranchised subjects. This contradictory phenomenon lead nineteenth-century feminist Frances Power Cobbe to ask the following question: "shall we say [femininity] resembles the botanical scheme of the governess who informed her pupils that 'plants are divided into Monandria, Bulbous roots, and Weeds?"[17] As Cobbe suggests, not only is the legal system that produces individual citizens deeply flawed, but also, and crucially, is the epistemology (the example of a governess "informing" her pupils is most revealing in this regard) behind the logic of classification and individuation.

The status of women in France develops somewhat differently. The First and Second Republics witnessed the growth of a robust and often radical feminist movement. As my chapter on Baudelaire begins to suggest, the nuances of political turmoil in the mid nineteenth century created a rich landscape for thinking about femininity and social change. However, rapid regime shifts, coupled with increasing fractures in the polity, quickly dissipated the force of suffrage in France. By the fin de siècle, while it was fighting declining population numbers, France found itself in a similar position to that of England's Woman Question, depositing a host of anxieties onto taxonomies of femininity like the *femme nouvelle*.[18]

The modern critical literature that discusses Cobbe's and Mill's works ties up the large and diverse "Woman Question" with its own logic of classification, repeating, though in more

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[17] Frances Power Cobbe, "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors," in *"Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors": Victorian Writing by Women on Women*, ed. Susan Hamilton (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1995), 127.

[18] See Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the 19th Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984).

progressive terms, what Cobbe laments in her essay "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors." Since the 1970s, several monumental works have appeared that have dealt with and directly shaped the ways in which modern criticism has taken up the "Woman Question." Such interventions include Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and Martha Vicinus' *Suffer and Be Still* (1972) and *Independent Women* (1985). Following Elaine Showalter's influential *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Gilbert and Gubar's study echoes Harold Bloom in arguing that nineteenth-century women writers experience an "anxiety of authorship," shaped by patriarchal repression, which leads women authors to underwrite narratives of domesticity and stability with images of confinement and monstrosity. This anxiety "ensures that even the makers of a text, when she is a woman, may feel 'imprisoned' within texts."[19] Shifting the focus to literary history, Vicinus' early works share an interest with feminists such as Gilbert and Gubar in reassessing Victorian women's conflicted negotiations with middle-class domestic ideals. In *Independent Women*, Vicinus examines the "surplus women" problem as a clue to the larger anxieties Victorian culture felt towards the position of women. She ultimately suggests that single women did not reject taxonomies of femininity, but rather turned celibacy into a "vital and empowering ideal" through their participation in communities organized around professional aims and social service.[20]

 Feminist literary critics have largely read nineteenth-century ideological concepts such as the "doctrine of separate spheres" to promote what Mary Poovey calls a fundamental

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[19] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1975; repr., New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 51–52.

[20] Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.

"ontological polarity" of sexual difference.[21] Taxonomies of femininity (as I have discussed earlier) create contained modes of difference among women that always stand in some kind of oppositional relationship to another collectivity. Feminine types in the Victorian period, as Poovey writes, circulate and promote the domestication and depoliticization of the status of women, in which "the contradiction between the sexless, moralized angel and an aggressive, carnal Magdalene was therefore written into the domestic ideal as one of its constitutive characteristics."[22] Of course these ideologies are never fixed, and the conceptualization of gender "was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations."[23] As Linda Shires observes, "the Victorian example illustrates that even those in the dominant group are not wholeheartedly committed to dominant ideologies."[24]

While thinking about ideology as a fluid process helps to shed light on the variety of literary representations of femininity in the nineteenth century, it does not address the normalizing function of "opposition" that even multifarious expressions of gender threaten to fall back upon. Relying on the polarity of sexual difference as homologous with gender eventually produces femininity as sameness rather than difference: the possibility for endless contamination and reproduction. Teresa De Lauretis points out that polarities and exceptionalities in nineteenth-

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[21] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 6.

[22] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 11.

[23] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 3.

[24] *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender,* ed. Linda M. Shires (1992; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 185.

century gender ideology are always of the order of mimesis because they are "either different embodiments of some archetypal essence of woman, or more or less sophisticated impersonations of a metaphysical-discursive femininity."[25] Furthermore, while these critical texts have been fundamental in drawing attention to the multifaceted force of Victorian gender ideology, influential early work by feminists on forms of patriarchal repression do not push beyond certain epistemological boundaries, and have been subsequently caught up in the same problematic as their precursors. In *Sexuality and Subordination* (1989), for example, Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall matter-of-factly state that in the mid nineteenth century

> [t]he move from woman as whore to woman as angel was paralleled by, and not unconnected with, the growth of scientific rationalism, which involved the division of the world into mind and matter, and the recognition of the possibilities of human control of nature via the essential inertness of matter. Crudely put, a move was made from the belief that the world was a strange, mysterious, uncontrollable collection of supernatural forces and divine or demonic interventions, to the belief that the world was composed of inert stuff whose operations were governed by scientifically discoverable and regular laws of nature.[26]

Mendus' and Rendall's observation forms the basis for a now canonical argument about the suppression and disavowal of feminine sexuality in nineteenth-century discourses. This argument links sexual innocence with political disenfranchisement, suggesting that femininity can only

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[25] Teresa DeLauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 2.

[26] Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, eds., *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Routledge, 1989), 8.

have a subversive agency vis-à-vis sexuality, either undermining or confirming norms of masculine power. Mendus and Rendall ultimately claims: "that equation, of sexual experience and of knowledge, through which the full subjecthood of the adult may be attained, is one which pervades nineteenth-century discourses of gender."[27]

Denise Riley pulls together this line of argumentation in the following terms: "Women" become a social category in the modern sense when their place as newly mapped entities is established among the other collectivities which the nineteenth century human sciences demand. "Men" as a group do not of course undergo parallel realignments. Yet "the social" comes to rely on 'man' but this time as its opposite which secures its own existence and balance. The couplet man/society, and the ensuing riddle of their relationship, becomes the stuff of anthropology, sociology, social psychology—the problem of how the individual is in the world. But if the social which partly encapsulates "women" is then set against "man" or the individual in this way, then the alignments of the sexes in "society" are conceptualized as askew. It is not so much that "women" are omitted as that they are too thoroughly included. They are not the submerged opposite of 'man,' but something else.[28]

The issue that Riley quite astutely summarizes here involves a thoroughly modern paradox. Pioneering technologies of social classification and measurement (such as the census, medical data, photography, the ballot, and even the burgeoning spread of print culture) allow for the increasing particularity of the individual, rendering visible its contours. Yet this steep increase in

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[27] Mendus and Rendall, introduction to *Sexuality and Subordination*, 7.

[28] Denise Riley, "Does Sex Have a History? 'Women' and Feminism," *New Formations* 1 (1987): 43.

available ways to see and think particularity create serious conceptual problems for imagining femininity as neither the exception nor the rule.

This point is one that transcends the boundaries of the "Woman Question," as it is a frustration shared by social reformers like Cobbe who campaigned for suffrage, and so-called anti-feminists like the prolific novelist and essayist Margaret Oliphant, who observed in 1858:

> There is, however, in almost all public discussions upon the social position of women, an odd peculiarity which betrays itself here with great distinctness; it is, that writers on the subject invariably treat this half of humankind as a distinct creation rather that as a portion of a general race—not as human creatures primarily, and women in the second place, but as women, and nothing but women—a distinct sphere of being, a separate globe of existence, to which different rules, different motives, an altogether distinct economy, belong.[29]

Oliphant's rather perceptive claim about the nature of difference as a form of containment punctures the neat historical trajectory of women's emancipation in modernity.

This is a history that, according to Julia Kristeva in "Is There a Feminine Genius?" (2004) proceeds in three stages: "first, the demand for political rights led by the suffragettes; second, the affirmation of an ontological equality with men (as against the idea that women are equal but different), which led Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), to demonstrate the existence and predict the realization of a 'fraternity' between men and women, a fraternity that goes beyond their particular natural differences; and, finally, in the wake of May '68 and of

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[29] Margaret Oliphant, "The Condition of Women," *Blackwood Edinburgh's Magazine* 83 (February 1858): 137–154, reprinted in *"Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors,"* Hamilton, ed., 216.

psychoanalysis, the search for the difference between men and women."[30] Kristeva puts forth

this history in order to think beyond the totalities it has generated for contemporary feminism

(characteristic of much of her work) and concentrate on the uniqueness of three women: Hannah

Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Colette.

In searching for a specific way to characterize such uniqueness, my work in this

dissertation is proximate to Kristeva's project, as well as to the work of feminist thinkers Linda

Zerilli, Adriana Caverero, Juliet Flower McCannell, and, more recently, Catherine Malabou.[31]

This constellation of feminist thought, largely in philosophy and political theory, looks for a way

to theorize femininity outside the entrenched vocabulary of liberal individualism. However, I use

the term singularity to explore what I think is a deeper unpacking of these three stages of

femininity's social, political, and cultural freedom. A nineteenth-century critic like Oliphant

makes clear that exploring the foundations of sameness and difference, of particularity and

universality, appears alongside the more material consequences of suffrage, rather than as a

consequence of it. Thinking singularity— a powerful term that releases femininity from the

deadlock that results from grounding its difference within the twin poles of universality and

particularity—thus becomes vital to energizing the history of feminist thought as well as the

question of feminism's futures.

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[30] Julia Kristeva, "Is There a Feminine Genius?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 494.

[31] These works include Linda Zerilli's *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2005); Adriana Caverero's *Stately Bodies: Literature, Philosophy, and the Question of

Gender* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Juliet Flower McCannell's *The Hysteric's Guide

to the Future Female Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Catherine

Malabou's *Changing Difference*, trans. Carol P.T. Shread (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

The term singularity is certainly a difficult one to take up, since it appears throughout science, philosophy, and, to a lesser extent, literary criticism with varying degrees of precision. Here, however, I attempt to map out a few of the most relevant (and compelling) instances of its use. Kant provides an important starting point: While the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) discusses how determinative judgments construct the relationship between universals and particulars in an epistemological correlation, the *Critique of Judgment*'s (1790) defense of the aesthetic functions differently. The aesthetic for Kant is the strongest example of a reflexive judgment, in which the particular cannot be invoked in the name of a general concept or principle. The aesthetic therefore introduces the larger problem of a crack in the universal, something that occupies an "otherwise" to normative thought.[32] This strand of thinking "otherwise" to full conceptualization persists in the philosophical tradition after Kant. In *Fear and Trembling* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard discusses an ethical situation not unlike that of Antigone: Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Isaac. This act necessitates a leap of faith, one that exceeds the boundaries of universality.[33]

Twentieth-century Continental philosophy contends with the legacy of German idealism and its critics in very different ways, but singularity appears crucial for many divergent thinkers. It is a key term, for instance, in the work of Gilles Deleuze, especially the groundbreaking work *Difference and Repetition* (1968). In Deleuze's ontology of the virtual, singularities are points,

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[32] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment.* ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000).

[33] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1986).

zones of potentiality in a relation of forces.[34] A philosopher whose work is quite distinct from Deleuze's, but who nevertheless maintains a thought of the singular, is Alain Badiou, whose idea of the truth-event as something that cannot be anticipated, but initiates a break with a given system or totality, is of the order of singularity.[35] Both of these philosophies, I think, share a proximity to the way singularity is defined in physics and mathematics, which is at once "[a] region in spacetime at which matter is infinitely dense" and "a point at which a function takes an infinite value."[36] Specifically, black holes constitute singularities. What the collision between mathematics and philosophy does here is introduce a productive relationship between singularity and infinity that I explore in my chapters. Singularity in these instances also asks us, quite simply, to *count differently.*

Yet present-day culture usually associates singularity with an A.I. phenomenon in which computers will eventually exceed all human intelligence and comprehension, an idea popularized by Raymond Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near* (2005). In "The Aesthetics of Singularity" (2015), Fredric Jameson suggests that contemporary finance capital in the form of the derivative is a singularity, a kind of dehistoricized "perpetual present" that, because of the differential nature of global currencies, is unrepeatable, but clearly maintains itself through infinite

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[34] See the definition of "singularity" in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005): "singularity allows the subject to perceive the world in both ways, infitesimally and infinitely" (255).

[35] Any number of works bears out Badiou's notion of a truth event. See *Logic of Worlds (Being and Event II)*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Continuum 2009).

[36] "singularity, n." OED Online, March 2015, Oxford UP, accessed April 23, 2012. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180179?redirectedFrom=singularity

expansion.[37] Both of these forms of singularity share a strong sense of, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's words, the "bad surprise,"[38] ones that rely on a technocratic infinity of endless accumulation. Because singularity in all of these cases demarcates something that, by its very definition, resists the full powers of conceptualization, it hovers on the edge of a risk. Therefore, for Jameson, singularity can slide easily into the perpetual present of the derivative: a form of the numerical gone sour in its non-human machinations.

There is one further area of critical inquiry that has grappled with singularity. I want to spend a moment discussing the relationship between singularity and psychoanalysis. As a discourse, psychoanalysis informs much of this project's rethinking of the grounds of gendered individuation. Freudian psychoanalysis introduces terms for human beings as otherwise to themselves: the unconscious, the drives, and fundamental fantasies. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* Freud crucially drives a wedge between ideas of part and whole by claiming that identification, a fundamental process by which subjectivity comes into being, is partial: it relies on what Freud calls a "single trait."[39] For Jacques Lacan, this is a point that comes to bear on sexual difference, which for him is fundamentally asymmetrical, but formally and ontologically necessary. In the symbolic order, subjects are constituted with respect to either a masculine or feminine sexuality. However, this is a divided and always incomplete

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[37] Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," *New Left Review* 92 (March–April 2015): 101–32.

[38] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 123–51.

[39] See "Identification" in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1959), 46–53.

identification (within itself and with another), since the organization of Lacanian "sexuation" by phallic division creates a bedrock, rather than promoting unity in complementarity. Lacan's claim is that in this schema, femininity is the "not-all," and he therefore assigns singularity (without reference to a universal "all") a place on the side of the woman. According to Jacqueline Rose: "only the concept of a subjectivity at odds with itself gives back to women the right to an impasse at the point of sexual identity, with no nostalgia whatsoever for its possible or future integration into a norm." Further, Rose stresses that "this is the force of Lacan's account—his insistence that femininity can only be understood in terms of its own construction."[40]

Lacan's insistence on the asymmetrical nature of sexual difference invites an inquiry into singularity as a mode for envisioning femininity. But alternative modes have arguably always been available in literature—likeness, seriality, even counting—to create other possibilities. This uniqueness on the part of literature has been a contemporary focus of scholarship on singularity. Certain works that either deal with singularity and literature explicitly or implicitly include J. Hillis Miller's *Black Holes,* Peggy Kamuf's *Division of Literature: Or the University in Deconstruction*, Rodolphe Gasché's *Wild Card of Reading: On Paul de Man,* and Derek Attridge's *Singularity of Literature* and *The Work of Literature*.[41] As we can see, most of this scholarship—which focuses on the ethical practice of reading—arises at a moment when

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[40] Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), 15, 53.

[41] J. Hillis Miller, *Black Holes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999); Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature: Or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Rodolphe Gasché, *The Wild Card of Reading: On Paul de Man* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998); Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2004) and *The Work of Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2015).

deconstruction began to wane in appeal, forcing some of its most prominent practitioners to consider its legacy.[42] Our current intellectual climate has moved toward different approaches to reading and treating our aesthetic objects.[43] But many of the questions opened up by post-structuralism remain, and they can help us understand more than simply the opacity of language. This dissertation therefore owes a great deal to the work of Derrida, and one of his closest contemporary readers, Samuel Weber. Much of Weber's work develops the notion of "iterability" from Derrida's observation of the mark in "Signature, Event, Context." Here Derrida writes: "this spacing is not the simple negativity of a lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark. It does not remain, however, as the labor of the negative in the service of meaning, of the living concept, of the *telos*, supersedable and reducible in the *Aufhebung* of dialectic."[44] The distinction between the negativity of a Hegelian system and one oriented toward structural possibility is important; it opens up a thinking of difference as likeness, as spacing, that might contain more than simply the resolution of tensions within a universal. Weber's many accounts of iterability, singularity, and an adjacent term, theatricality, not only develop a thought of alternative horizons to the particular, but also serve as a strong counterpoint to critiques of

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[42] Timothy Clark writes that for this group of scholars, a certain radicalization of the Kantian aesthetic first and foremost translates into the singularity of the literary text where "particulars mean more than themselves but cannot be understood or determined under some pregiven rule of identification," (*The Poetics of Singularity*: *The Counter-Culturalist Turn in late Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot, and the Later Gadamer* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005], 7).

[43] See "The Way We Read Now," Special Issue of *Representations* 108 (2009).

[44] Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," 1972. Reprinted in *Limited Inc.,* ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), 10.

deconstruction as unconcerned with politics and history.[45]

The four chapters that follow trace a genealogy of nineteenth-century literary works in Britain and in France that explore feminine singularity in different registers. My intention is to produce a new perspective on what is, for the most part, familiar and canonical material. I therefore use the term genealogy in a deliberate Foucauldian sense to indicate that, while these works fall within a condensed span of time (the 1850s, 1860s, and the 1870s, with a conclusion that looks forward to the 1890s), they indicate a more complex relationship to a history that unfolds.[46] In my first chapter, I begin with the representation of girlhood in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. Victorian literature for children typically offers a rich landscape for thinking about issues of gender and sexuality. Yet the Alice books—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871)—are doing something quite different from the conventional nineteenth-century modes for representing girlhood

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[45] See Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004); "Between Part and Whole: Benjamin and the Single Trait," *Paragraph* 32:3 (2009): 382–399; "Derrida, Iterability and the Uncanny in Freud," Lecture at European Graduate School, January 8, 2010 http://www.egs.edu/faculty/samuel-weber/videos/derrida-iterability-the-uncanny-in-freud/.

[46] See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," originally published in *Hommages à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1971), 145–72, trans. Donald F. Bouchard in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 139–64. Here he remarks: "genealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history-in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles" (39–140).

femininity, which usually involved didactic ideas about purity and a teleological insistence on future womanhood. In the *Alice* books, I argue, mathematics, specifically counting to infinity, offers Alice a way to imagine her own subjectivity in Wonderland as singular, beginning with the regrounding of herself as "one." As a professional mathematician, Carroll, or Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, was intimately familiar with different ways of perceiving and articulating the world. My argument in this chapter is that counting ones and twos is not merely a simple act of enumerating objects, but a potentially radical act that can recalibrate the basic unit for imagining individuality.

My second chapter discusses the work of Christina Rossetti. Her grim 1874 children's tale, *Speaking Likenesses,* has usually been read by literary scholars as a dystopic response to the *Alice* books. Rossetti and Carroll enjoyed a thirty-year amicable correspondence, but critics have rarely attended to the radicalization of being a "one" that is a problem shared by the works of both of these authors. "Goblin Market" (1862)*,* Rossetti's most celebrated poem, casts the question of counting ones and twos onto the framework of the sororal. For Rossetti, sisterhood allows for nuanced ideas of differentiation—how to be a one within a two, for instance—that escape the conventional heterosexual binary of difference she evidently abhorred. Drawing on the work of Juliet Mitchell and Jean-Luc Nancy, I move from *Speaking Likenesses* to "Goblin Market" in this chapter in order to explore the relationship between likeness and singularity that sisterhood—a lateral mode of kinship that depends on similarity as much as it depends on minimal forms of difference—articulates in her writing.[47]

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[47] My research departs from readings of sisterhood and other forms of female same-sex relationships such as the ones we find in Sharon Marcus' *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007). This work argues that female relationships were not excluded

My first two chapters find that minimal difference appears as a persistent index of feminine singularity in the literature of the mid-nineteenth century. My third chapter shifts to investigate the wider implications of horizontal likeness in Wilkie Collins' celebrated work of sensation fiction, *The Woman in White* (1859–1860). The novel revolves around an identity exchange between two women who look very much alike (and are half-sisters), but are markedly not the same. At the same time, a revolutionary plot involving a secret Italian society named "The Brotherhood" shadows the main identity exchange in Collins' work. This plot's integration

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from normative gender roles and plots but that "mainstream femininity was not secretly lesbian, but openly homoerotic" and further "in Victorian England, female marriage, gender mobility, and women's erotic fantasies about women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses" (13). While useful in dismantling the critical notion of female eroticism as subversive, inaccessible and hidden, Marcus' claims do not ultimately address the dualities between normativity/subversion, subject/object, or male/female that support Victorian ideologies of gender, even though Marcus makes these dualities the subject of her work. By focusing on "female marriages," mother daughter relationships, and other forms of partnerships between women, she contests "women's status as relative creatures, defined by their difference from and subordination to men" (1), and echoes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in examining homosocial bonds as ideologically central to gendered and sexed relationships of power. Marcus is interested in how these dualities are flexible and seemingly interdependent (such that the opposition man/woman does not unilaterally qualify all types of "difference"), but she is not concerned with forms of singularity that align with "the kind of radical ruptures that yield completely new forms" (5). Because she brackets off the politics of the new with respect to femininity's agency, relations of likeness ultimately become an enabling mechanism for the growth of liberal individualism, and even the development of the couple in its heterosexual form.

of a horizontal axis—in the politicized form of fraternity—puts into question a conventional organization of gendered difference that typically grounds bourgeois political formations. This chapter therefore investigates the relationship between emerging ideals of liberalism that crystallize in England (but that also dominate the Continent in various guises), and ideas about gendered individualism that chafe against these foundations.

Republican Paris ghosts much of Collins' novel, to where I turn for my fourth chapter on Charles Baudelaire. While a variety of feminine figures abound in Baudelaire's oeuvre, most critical readings of the poet have largely concentrated on the tendency toward objectification, and even denigration, in his portrayal of women. By contrast, this chapter's first sections read his famous poem on the city from *Les Fleurs du mal*, "À une passante," in conjunction with Baudelaire's observations from *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, *Fusées*, and *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, suggesting that a form of feminine singularity crystallizes in his work that refuses collectivization under the broader tenets of urban capital and political liberalism. The second section discusses "Les Sept Vieillards" and "Les Petites Vieilles," in order to claim for a redrawing of gendered individuation in *Tableaux Parisiens*. Both of these poems approach gender ironically, using a grotesque mode of serialization to dissolve a conventional understanding of sexual difference predicated on binaries, reproduction, and heterosexual desire.

My conclusion on hysteria and Jean-Martin Charcot's work at the Salpêtrière points to the horizon of several questions raised by my chapters. I discuss the prominence of two figures, the New Woman and the hysteric, in the visual culture of the end of the nineteenth century. Both forms of femininity might be looked at as singular, but upon further examination, I suggest that the New Woman is more exemplary of a certain kind of liberal individualism. Yet the New Woman opens up a conceptual field of thinking about what might actually constitute the "new."

Here I take inspiration from Daniel W. Smith's *Essays on Deleuze,* in which Smith suggests that when we consider the difference between novelty as transformative and novelty as merely combinatorial, we enter into a "profound shift in philosophy away from the eternal to the new, from the universal to the singular."[48] Despite being an ancient illness, hysteria encounters increasing visibility in the nineteenth century in a unique form: that of the photographic series taken at the Salpêtrière, the notorious women's hospice in Paris where Charcot began to diagnose traumatic hysteria. Feminine singularity made apparent in this photographic series consequently occupies a threshold between formal, historical, and theoretical margins. But in doing so, it becomes ones of the most compelling instances for examining what unites the concerns of each field, and what might be shared at their limits.

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[48] Daniel W. Smith, "The New," in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012), 235.

Chapter One

Lewis Carroll's *Alice* Books and the Ones and Twos of Femininity

> "But answer came there none –
>
> And this was scarcely odd, because
>
> They'd eaten every one."
>
> — "The Walrus and the Carpenter"[49]

Anyone who has studied mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), knows that these books were both inspired by and originally written for Alice Liddell: the daughter of Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and one of Dodgson's closest colleagues.[50] John Tenniel's celebrated illustrations of the fictional Alice famously bear no

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[49]Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & through the Looking-Glass, The Definitive Edition*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Norton, 2000), 187. Subsequent references to this work will be made in parentheses in the main text.

[50] The prefatory poem to *Wonderland* begins "All in the golden afternoon" (7) with an allusion, as Martin Gardner observes, to Carroll's rowing trip with the three Liddell sisters and a friend in 1862, when "Alice's Adventure's Underground" began to take shape. The poem traces the evolution of the Alice stories from "a tale of breath too weak / To stir the tiniest feather!" to "a childish story" the narrative voice implores Alice to "lay…where Childhood's dreams are twined / In Memory's mystic band" (8). Instead of proper names, the "cruel Three" who engender the story are enumerated with the epitaphs "Prima," Secunda" and "Tertia." Each girl contributes to the movement and growth of the story, and "[t]hus grew the tale of Wonderland: / Thus slowly, one by one." The poem seems to suggest that the

physical resemblance to Dodgson's muse. The contrast between Tenniel's Alice and the girl who Dodgson adored therefore is striking, since Dodgson—better remembered in the literary world as Lewis Carroll—focused considerable attention on recording Alice Liddell's image in detail. As a highly skilled amateur photographer, he took a remarkable number of photographs of her between ages five and eighteen. Together with "Xie" Kitchin, Alice Liddell was the child model he photographed most extensively.[51] Given his devotion to her, it is not in any way remarkable to discover that a photograph of the seven-year-old Alice Liddell appears at the conclusion of the manuscript version of *Wonderland*, "Alice's Adventures Underground" (Figure 1). Yet what is unusual about this image is the design that Dodgson employed to frame it. The hand-drawn border that brackets this photograph, as U. C. Knoepflmacher notes, intriguingly resembles "the mathematical symbol for infinity," one ostensibly framing "a face that cannot age."[52] To many of Dodgson's most attentive readers, such as Catherine Robson, the image and its border disclose a need in his writing and photography to fix "the image of the lovely girl, fully real yet fully lost"

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multiple voices of these enumerated sisters, and the growth of each episode in the story, are finally intertwined in the single figure of Alice.

[51] Douglas Nickel writes that these photos were taken at the onset of a particularly active period for Carroll's writing and his photography: "Dodgson created almost a thousand negatives between 1857 and 1862," (Douglas R. Nickel, Lewis Carroll, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Dreaming in Pictures: The Photography of Lewis Carroll* [San Francisco and New Haven: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Yale UP, 2002], 17).

[52] U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 68.

in a fantasized form of eternity.[53] In other words, the mathematical symbol for infinity

accentuates what has often proved to be one of the most controversial areas of criticism about

Dodgson's art: it reveals that he had a perverse fascination with immortalizing little girls, most

probably because he maintained an erotic desire for them.

Figure 1: Lewis Carroll, photograph of Alice Liddell from the manuscript of *Alice's Adventure's*

Underground. 1863, The British Library Board.

Instead of addressing the widely circulated perspective about his erotic interests in his

girl subjects, the present chapter reads the *Alice* stories with Dodgson's career as a

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[53] Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton,

N.J.: Princeton UP, 2001), 141.

mathematician in mind.[54] The critical neglect of Dodgson's academic knowledge has ultimately

eclipsed an understanding of the close relationship between mathematics and girl femininity in

both of the *Alice* stories. Here I argue that the symbol for infinity framing the photograph of

Alice Liddell allows us to consider the fictional Alice's relationship to her surroundings as a

mathematical problem. This is a problem that organizes her subjectivity along the lines of

singularities and infinities, rather than particulars and universals, or binary forms of difference. I

begin with the claim that the *Alice* stories, instead of situating Victorian girlhood within familiar

trajectories of growth and development, think of the girl through the lens of sequencing and

numbering. In both *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass,* it is Alice's preoccupation with her status as

a *number* that frames the central question about her subjectivity: "who am I?" This pressing

inquiry, as Nina Auerbach has astutely remarked, is also an exceedingly rare one in nineteenth-

century fantasy literature about children:

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[54] Carroll's mathematical works were largely ignored for their academic value until the latter half of the

twentieth century, including the 1886 *Game of Logic* and the 1895 *Symbolic Logic.* They exemplify his

period's interest in Euclidean geometry, and a rather conventional approach to mathematical ideas. But

mathematical logic seems to have influenced Carroll's way of understanding literary selves. Between

1880 and 1885, he published a series of short stories collectively entitled *A Tangled Tale* in the *Monthly

Packet* magazine (the full title of the magazine is the *Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger

Members of the English Church,* and it was published from 1851 to 1899. The magazine, one of the first

periodicals specifically for young readers, was edited by Charlotte M. Yonge). Each story, or "knot," was

framed as a mathematical logic problem that Carroll would provide an answer to in a later issue of the

magazine. The obvious link here between narrative and mathematical enigmas suggests a proximity in

Carroll's imagination between the logic of narrative and the logic of mathematics.

Other little girls traveling through fantasy countries, such as George Macdonald's

Princess Irene and Frank L. Baum's Dorothy Gale, ask repeatedly "*where* am I?"

rather than "*who* am I." Only Alice turns her eyes inward from the beginning,

sensing that the mystery of her surroundings is the mystery of her identity.[55]

I further contend that all of Alice's subsequent questions about her subjectivity depend on seeing

herself as part of a world that conceptualizes difference numerically: what does it mean to be a

one and not a two? What does it mean to be girl and not simply part of a group of children? Or a

third queen when a chessboard only allows two? Recast in a mathematical frame, these questions

turn on its head the relationship of a girl (a nascent but highly fraught feminine subject for most

nineteenth-century readers) with forms of authority that exceed her (the patriarchal family, the

nation, the law and pedagogy, which are all real-world systems that Wonderland heavily

satirizes). We ultimately find that Alice's growing and shrinking in both *Wonderland* and

Looking-Glass correspond less to Victorian normative trajectories about growing up, and more to

an obvious resistance to teleology. Mathematics, therefore, generates Alice's understanding of

her subjectivity as what I am calling *feminine singularity.* Alice is not singular because she is

physically alone, but singular because her femininity emerges as part of a structure that counting

and mathematics inaugurate.

In what follows, I elaborate on Alice's questioning of "who she is" as not only an

exceptionally rare question, but also, as I see it, an inescapably gendered one. The proximity of

Alice's thinking to a serious inquiry into femininity as structure, rather than anatomy or

ideology, becomes clear when we make a basic observation: Carroll's stories represent a set of

insights that are formalized in the twentieth century in two major areas of philosophical thought:

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[55] Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," *Victorian Studies* 17 (1973): 33.

first, by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and secondly by Gilles Deleuze. For Freud, the little

girl's curiosity about "who she is" is the pivot around which the very question of sexual

difference turns, and which prompts, for him, a difficult rethinking of unconscious structures. In

"Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1925), Freud

observes that the little girl apprehends the genitalia not of a mother or father but of "a brother or

playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions."[56] This moment calls attention to the

visibility of gender asymmetry in what Joan Copjec, for important reasons, has called "the

exclusive province of the girl."[57] This is because "the girl's distinct form of sexual inquiry"[58]

reveals sexual difference as de-universalized—as the problem of the *two*, rather than the *one*.

Lacan further conceptualizes this moment in terms of mathematical logic by invoking what

Carroll's stories seem to have seized on already: the possibility of infinity. According to Lacan,

the gender asymmetry that Freud reluctantly describes is articulated within two very different

relations to the unconscious for men and for women, respectively. Whereas masculinity relates to

a universal (or a set of all men delimited by the phallic signifier), femininity enters into gendered

identity one by one, in a metonymic logic that does not relate to an "all," and that can only relate

to infinity. In Seminar XX, *Encore,* Lacan observes: "From the moment there are names, one can

make a list of women and count them. If there are a *mile a tré* [three thousand] of them, it's clear

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[56] Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes,"

1925, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 19 vols, ed. James

Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) 19: 252.

[57] Joan Copjec, "The Fable of the Stork and Other False Sexual Theories," *Differences: A Journal of

Feminist Cultural Studies* 21 (2010): 68.

[58] Copjec, "The Fable of the Stork," 72.

that one can take them one by one—that is what is essential. That is entirely different from the One of universal function."[59] For Lacan, thinking about how the "one" may operate as part of a counting sequence, rather than as a function of a totalizing force, is central to his radicalization of Freud's initial ideas about femininity.

Deleuze also reads the figure of Alice with the question of infinity in mind when he suggests, in *The Logic of Sense* (1969), that Alice represents the "paradox of infinite identity."[60] This is a slightly different conceptualization of infinity than the one I develop in my readings, since for Deleuze, infinity in Wonderland represents the absolute equivalence of all ways of "pure becoming."[61] The point I would like to make here, however, is that infinity in the *Alice* stories is more than simply a stand-in for the eternity of sexual fetishism in which Alice (the "real" and fictional figure) may be enclosed. Rather, infinity represents the exact opposite for those philosophers for whom Alice remains an irreplaceable touchstone. What we find in Carroll's stories is a theorization of the girl's relationship to infinity, rather than universality, beginning with Alice's relentless need to *count* herself.

The following sections of this chapter discuss nineteenth-century Cantorian set theory and its rearticulation of the concept of infinity. Cantor's proofs help us understand Wonderland as a world that manifests a strain of mathematical innovation, in which Alice's understanding of herself can only be singular. I then turn to an analysis of *Looking-Glass*, in which Alice's

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[59] Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998), 10.

[60] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* ed. Constantine V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), 2.

[61] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense,* 2–3.

mathematical reasoning gets put to work in a several thought-provoking contexts: the meaning of being a Queen (which Victorian readers would readily grasp); the meaning of counting a pair (such as Tweedledum and Tweedledee); and whether the logic of counting could correspond to the logic of naming (which I suggest is a dominant question for another one of Alice's theoretical readers, Luce Irigaray). I then look briefly at Lacan's lecture "Of Structure as an Inmixing of Otherness" (1966), which contains a short but significant mention of "The Walrus and the Carpenter," a poem from *Looking-Glass*. Lacan's insight into counting reminds us that the count is never just a question of math, but also a question of a subject's position within language. For Lacan, both are an attempt at arriving at subjectivity (and indeed gender) through a purely structural set of relations.

By examining how mathematics and counting bear on the basic notions of being a "one" or an individual, as opposed to the many, this chapter seeks to understand and bring together two related trajectories that the *Alice* stories forecast. The first is the taxonomizing of the modern individual in legal, political, and cultural terms, whose vanishing point I trace back to the figure of the girl in the Victorian period, and the fixation around her sexuality and psychic development. The second is the long philosophical afterlife of Alice, of which Lacan, Deleuze and Irigaray remain near-mesmerized readers. One of the overarching questions I pose here is how a discourse of limitation and containment—the one that Victorian culture constructed around girl femininity—ruptures in the figure of Alice, revealing instead a discourse of potential freedom. I ask what this tension might suggest about nineteenth-century ideas about the subject, one who is ostensibly "grown up."

I. Beginning with Infinity: A One and Two

Mathematical singularity is broadly defined as "a point at which a function takes an infinite value."[62] This definition from the 1890s points to a shift in the later half of the nineteenth century in which infinity begins to take on a complex significance in mathematical discourse. In the years following the publication of *Looking-Glass*, German mathematician George Cantor founded a concept of infinity in what is now modern set theory. In Cantor's groundbreaking work, dating back to the 1850s when Dodgson first conceived of the *Alice* stories, infinity appears to be a plural concept, embedded within a set of points lying on a single line segment. By removing the middle third of a line, then removing the middle third of the resulting two lines, *ad infinitum*, Cantor discovered that multiple infinities are created: a set of infinite points, as well as a set of infinite no-points.

It is important to remember that infinity has a long history in mathematical and philosophical discourse; the separation between the two fields being a relatively recent development from the early twentieth-century. Aristotle addresses infinity (*apeiron*) in Book III of the *Physics,* concluding that infinity can only have a potential existence, rather than an actual one: "The infinite is that for which it is always possible to take something outside."[63] While Aristotle claims that the universe must be finite, the infinite in his thought might stand for any magnitude for which another step in the series of expansion, addition, or subtraction and reduction is possible. When we move to philosophical texts from modernity, we find, for example, that for Descartes, an account of mathematics contains no mention of infinity. But Descartes nevertheless proposes—largely in the third *Meditation* on the existence of God—that

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[62] "singularity, n." OED Online. March 2015. Oxford UP.

http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180179?redirectedFrom=singularity (accessed April 23, 2012).

[63] Aristotle, *A New Aristotle Reader*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1987), 119.

infinity cannot be conceived in the empiricist frame as a lack or negation of finitude.[64] Spinoza

follows from this rejection of empiricism in the *Ethics* by claiming that infinity names what is

all-encompassing (a totality),[65] and in the Romantic period, Edmund Burke, in *On the Sublime

and Beautiful*, writes that "[i]nfinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful

horror."[66] Finally, for Hegel in the nineteenth century (as I discuss more specifically in relation

to Charles Baudelaire) there is a "good" as well as a "bad" infinity.

This brief summary of infinity's philosophical roots reveals its centrality to Western

thinking about the human subject and the community, and consequently places Cantor's proofs

within a burgeoning tradition in the post-Enlightenment era. Contemporary scholars such as

Andrea Henderson and Rachel Feder have discussed the importance of mathematical thought in

general and infinity in particular to the Victorians' conceptions of themselves.[67] But Cantor's

proofs do more than simply advance philosophical meditations on the existence of infinity. What

is crucial about this set of infinite points left after repeatedly removing the middle third of each

line—commonly referred to as a Cantor set—is the intricate relationship it establishes between

part and whole. In this set, the multiple infinities of the parts of a line (including the set of all

points in the Cantor set) appear greater than a neat, unified whole. The model of a Cantor set

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[64] See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*,
ed. John Cottingham, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2013).

[65] See Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley et
al. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2002).

[66] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful,* 1757 (Reprint: London and
New York: Routledge Classics, 2008), 73.

[67] See Andrea Henderson, "Math for Math's Sake: Non-Euclidean Geometry, Aestheticism, and Flatland,"
PMLA 124 (2009): 455–71.

radically disturbs a clean metaphysical nesting of interior within exterior, part within whole, or small within large, by introducing infinity as a product of the system, rather than something that merely transcends it.[68]

This radical model of infinity as a multiple concept in set theory, and by extension in Wonderland, can be put another way. Cantor's proofs demonstrate that there are infinities of different sizes that emerge when we compare the set of real numbers, for instance, with the set of positive integers, in a one-to-one correspondence.[69] This isomorphism between numbers that can be part of another set of numbers drastically alters the premise of finite sequences that pertain to a closed "all." Instead, sequences of numbers and counting, when paired, can generate forms of infinity. Therefore, in addition to engendering a shift in part-whole relationships, Cantorian theory reconfigures the grounds for oneness. Rather than propping up or positing unity, a "one" becomes singular by virtue of its relationship to infinity, rather than by reflecting the more readily understood paradigm of particularity.

Near the beginning of Wonderland, Alice starts to count, or think of herself numerically, in terms of a "one" or a "two," where twos follow ones in a sequence rather than mirroring or opposing one another. This early episode immediately evokes a powerful strain of unboundedness, and not least the conceptual possibility of infinity. Witness an early passage

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[68] I. Grattan-Guinness, *The Search for Mathematical Roots, 1870–1940: Logics, Set Theories and the Foundations of Mathematics from Cantor through Russell to Gödel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2000), 124.

[69] Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou's Minimalist Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008), 53–54.

from "A Pool of Tears" in *Wonderland,* in which Alice, having grown enormously tall from eating a piece of cake, wonders where to go next in the frustratingly changeable fantasy realm:

"I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!" And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them.

"I'm sure I'm not Ada," she said, "for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I ca'n't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh, she knows such a very little! Besides *she's* she, and *I'm* I, and—oh dear, how puzzling it all is! I'll try if I know all the things I used to know. Let me see: four times five is twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is—oh dear! I shall never get to twenty at this rate!" (123)

Here, we encounter the first serious attempt on Alice's part to unpack the question of "who she is" in her own way. In order to work out this "I," Alice never sees herself in relation to the usual figures of authority—parents, teachers, even other hostile creatures in Wonderland—but thinks laterally, in terms of other girls her own age. This preoccupation is explicitly not just about trying to differentiate oneself from others, but inferring about what it means to be a girl.

This excerpt takes a longer form in the manuscript version, where it renders Alice's radical way of understanding her relation to others much clear, as we can see when she goes on to note:

"Now I've made up my mind about it: if I'm Florence, I'll stay down here! It'll be no use their putting their heads down and saying 'come up, dear!' I shall only

look up and say 'who am I, then? Answer me that first, and then, if I like being

that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else.'[70]

In this monologue, Alice enacts a separation between the vertical reality above her in which the

parent cries out, "come up, dear!" that fixes identities under clearly delimited structures of

authority, and the fantasy world underground, where identities have the potential to proliferate

and enable her to become "someone else." It is not hard to grasp how important this moment is

for Alice's individuality in the story, since the parental world that literally recedes above her no

longer to asserts a hold upon her in Wonderland. Notably, this moment also involves Alice's

recognition of lateral relationships rather than the classic vertical axis on which the Oedipal

figure of the parent rests. Alice thus remains a compelling subject herself for many reasons, not

least because she recognizes this basic notion of difference in ways that do not constitute an easy

polarity.

When we shift back from the manuscript to the published version, we can see that instead

of evoking the clear difference between herself and other Wonderland creatures (the White

Rabbit, the Cheshire Cat), members of another gender (which at this point in the story do not

exist), or other adults (implied but always unseen), Alice rethinks her subjectivity in terms of

both similarity to and difference from other girls. But this approach to similarity and difference,

which ends with Alice's calculation of sums, is pointedly neither sentimental nor customary.

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[70] Lewis Carroll et al., *Alice's Adventures under Ground: After Lewis Carroll's Original Manuscript Which Later Became Alice in Wonderland: The Original Manuscript of "Alice's Adventures Underground," upon Which "Alice in Wonderland" Was Based, Was Written and Illustrated by Lewis Carroll ... at Present the Original Manuscript Is in the British Museum* (New York: Panda Prints, 1953), 15–16.

This uncommon sort of thinking bears little resemblance to the idealized relationships that for Deborah Gorham characterize Victorian girlhood: "the image of the ideal daughter at home was most often presented through a portrayal of a girl's relationship to other members of the ideal family."[71] This is precisely the kind of domestic ideology that Alice has blatantly left behind.

Instead of comparing herself to traditional figures of patriarchal authority, Alice thinks sequentially. Not being "Ada" or "Mabel," who know "very little," does not offer Alice strict categories, ones predicated on the hierarchies of Gorham's account of the ideal Victorian family, from which to consider what it means to be a girl. The story represents Alice as entirely singular and unconcerned with her progress into such an adult world, because she realizes she cannot be changed out for any other girl, or indeed, any other person. This outcome quickly becomes apparent in early episodes: Alice's many physical changes, from "shutting up like a telescope" (17) to taking over the White Rabbit's house due to her sheer size, merely ironize this possibility of growing up. Such transformations ensure that growth and diminishment start to seem less opposed to one another than they might at first appear, and this proves rather exhilarating, as Alice notes: "'Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!'" (20). This point is particularly true of the tautological phrase, "'*she's* she, and *I'm* I,'" in the passage I have cited, which draws attention to its inverse effect: the singularity of each pronoun. In repeating these pronouns, Alice realizes that though they can be reiterated, they cannot be substituted for one another.

In Alice's consideration of who she might be—same or different—two problems of likeness unfurl. The first is on a vertical axis—the axis of memory and nostalgia—in which she wonders if selves stay the same over time, whether they possess an essence that is iterable, and

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[71] Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982), 38.

can be identified by what they know and recall. This is a line of thought that ends with her

calculation of sums, and with her frustration at the fact that these calculations won't take her

anywhere, won't "get her to twenty." The second arena of likeness is notably a horizontal one, in

which Alice has to effectively theorize avenues of similarity between herself and other girl

children, wondering whether she has been transformed for Ada or Mabel who are ostensibly like

her, but either "know very little" or wear their hair differently. Both forms of hypothetical

likeness converge in the tautological phrase "She's she and I'm I." Notably, no parents or other

figures of authority exist in this moment, in which Alice seems to be musing not only over who

she is, but also the very idea of repetition. But it is clear that such a phrase ("She's she and I'm

I") in which Alice recognizes her singularity, is not about a purely obsessive reoccurrence in the

vein of, for example, Adorno's *Immergleiche* (the ever-the-same). Alice's consideration of her

hypothetical substitution for another girl is invariably not about replacement and nor is it about

sameness. Rather, it is about the dislocation of difference within repetition. Alice's realization

that "I'm I" then doesn't occur as part of a dialectic movement culminating in her self-presence,

but achieves singularity in a form of repetition that is futural, disrupting the memory of who she

was, and subsequently, a movement of history.

Alice's final strategy of counting out loud reinforces her thinking in terms of a sequence

in order to solve the dilemma of who she is. What she ultimately seems to have realized is that

neither she nor others preexist the counting and enumeration of themselves as discrete identities.

We therefore find that Alice has further exceeded normative forms of identification, in the way

that Susan Stewart has examined: "When one counts for counting's sake, the classification and

hierarchies of the everyday lifeworld are flattened into a line of infinite possibility."[72] At this point in the story, it is as if Alice has discovered that an "all" cannot exist for little girls, that in the world of numbers, and consequently in Wonderland, infinity comes first: any number is a function of it, rather than part of a closed universe of hierarchical relationships. She has chosen to represent herself in a realm of possibility that this sequence of friends and playmates perfectly encapsulates, rendering her status as a "one" among them not on the level of unity or wholeness. This operation resembles what Alain Badiou has discussed as the destitution of the "one." By this Badiou means to dislodge the "one" from a position of philosophical primacy, and to see the integer simply as the effect of counting a multiplicity.[73] Alice's counting therefore renders herself absolutely singular, because she is, within such formal structures, utterly contingent but simultaneously irreplaceable. In order to think the singular, beginning with the iteration of "one" as a number rather than a particularity, we must understand it in relation to a different kind of universe: a universe that is infinite, rather than universal.

This model of infinity as a condition not only of mathematical possibility but also of metaphysical reinvention (formalized by Cantor and set theory) informs the structuring condition of Carroll's Wonderland, in which rules, though present, can be invented at whim, and never correspond to anything outside themselves, and where the boundaries between the interior of the fantasy world and its exterior are fluid and shifting. In "It's My Own Invention," from *Looking-Glass*, Alice recalls exactly this problem, when she is reminded of the twins Tweedledum and

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[72] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), 134.

[73] See Alain Badiou, "The Scene of the Two," trans. Barbara Fulks, *lacanian ink* 21 (Fall 2003), accessed August 12, 2012, http://www.lacan.com/frameXXI3.htm.

Tweedledee's observation that she is only a temporary creation of the Red King, who is asleep and dreaming the entire story. If she were to wake him, claims Tweedledum, "you'd go out—bang!—just like a candle!" (189). Later on, Alice muses: "we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's *my* dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream" (233). This is a hope that never gets resolved, since the final chapter, "Which Dreamed It," ends with this interrogative address to the reader: "Which do *you* think it was?" (271). Therefore, the "reality" of the dream world in *Looking-Glass* is split between two dreamers who are not entirely opposites, since the Red King is effectively part of the dream world that Alice, or himself, has created. As a result, the nesting of one dream within another remains impossible. In these circumstances, we have an ontologically incomplete universe where either of these dreamers could go on producing more narrative in two infinities that will never complete each other. The Red King and Alice consequently have revealed that any kind of totality, or unity of worlds, is sorely lacking in Wonderland.

The stakes for Alice's subjectivity in a world organized according to lateral sequences, rather than metaphysical truths, are briefly these: Without the stable binaries of inside and outside and self and other of the "real" world, other-oriented models of gender, such as those based on the relationship between little girls and adults, no longer reflect Alice's selfhood—a singular one, as I've begun to suggest—in a satisfying way. Binaries, although these ostensibly comprise the structuring principle in *Looking-Glass,* actually cease to render anything meaningful to Alice. In the first *Alice* story, Carroll's narrator is wonderfully conscious of this lack, as we can see in the following passage:

> She generally gave herself good advice…for this curious child was very fond of
> pretending to be two people. "But it's no use now," thought poor Alice, "to

pretend to be two people! Why, there's hardly enough of me left to make *one* respectable person." (18)

Pretending to be "two people" noticeably fails in this narrative world, since the splitting of Alice's consciousness into two distinct moral voices only happens when clear forms of difference pre-exist her. Take, for example, the Cheshire Cat: the only creature in Wonderland who presumes some self-awareness, who puts this lack of categorization rather bluntly to Alice, in the chapter "Pig and Pepper":

> "We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
>
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
>
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." (66)

The Cat's definition of "madness" could encompass many things, but it certainly seems to yoke Alice to Wonderland's lack of regulating and controlling forms of difference. Being "mad" means embracing the gleeful asymmetry of the fantasy world's operations. Yet in Wonderland, Alice becomes increasingly aware of herself as the pivot for the dream world's existence. For her, this is an unsettling prospect. In a universe where her femininity is the epistemological limit, rather than the object, of understanding, Alice has to rethink her individuation in different terms. In *Wonderland,* she must find new ways of distinguishing herself as "*one* respectable person," where "oneness" has started to resemble less and less a particularity that has definite contours.

II. Carroll and the Cult of the Child

As I've begun to show, the *Alice* stories therefore share a fundamental interest in the bare numeric value of ones and twos as a potentially freeing schema from the world of adult control and containment. Yet while philosophers have focused on what numerical structures in the Alice stories might reveal about human existence, Carroll scholars, such as Martin Gardner, have

concentrated instead on patterns of quantification, logic games, and puzzles, which reoccur

throughout both books. Such an approach is not surprising, since the world of *Looking-Glass*, for

example, is based on the design of a chessboard. And when brainteasers have not been at the

center of such literary analyses, Carroll scholars have tended to concentrate on each narrative's

fascination with rules, limits, and concepts of finitude. While Stewart maintains that these forms

of play "present a condition that cannot be verified internally, since there is no measuring rod for

infinity. And they cannot be verified externally, since they only refer to themselves…they are

examples of perpetual motion set off without hope or direction or privilege,"[74] many readers of

the nonsense genre find Wonderland to be, as Elizabeth Sewell claims, "a carefully limited

world, controlled and directed by reason." Sewell observes that infinity is "dangerous" for the

genre but still curiously ubiquitous.[75] In her pioneering 1956 study of nonsense in Edward Lear's

and Carroll's writing, Sewell takes pains to bracket off infinity from a definition of nonsense:

> Nonsense as practiced by Lear and Carroll does not, even on a slight
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> acquaintance, give the impression of being something without laws and subject to
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> chance, or something without limits, tending to infinity…we are going to assume
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> that Nonsense is not merely the denial of sense, a random reversal of ordinary

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[74] Stewart, *Nonsense,* 119.

[75] In Elisabeth Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense*, she claims that the mind in nonsense uses words so that

"its tendency towards order engages its contrary tendency toward disorder, keeping the latter perpetually

in play and so in check," (*The Field of Nonsense* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1952], 48). In *The*

Philosophy of Nonsense, Jean-Jacques Lecercle calls nonsense a "conservative-revolutionary genre" in

light of this dialectic, but explores the genre's self-reflexivity as a turn toward negation, and the

consequent obliteration of the neatness of this dialectical operation. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of*

Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

experience and an escape from the limitations of everyday life into a haphazard

infinity, but is on the contrary a carefully limited world, controlled and directed

by reason, a construction subject to its own laws. [76]

Even though Sewell attempts to read nonsense as a controlled and "reasoned" genre, it is worth

pointing out the worried tenor of her comment in particular, and the entire work in general,

around the term "infinity." Despite her many efforts, Sewell appears unable to evacuate such a

charged notion from her reading of nonsense texts.

Once more, this kind of mathematical obsession has struck several literary readers as a

further sign of Dodgson's sexual predilection, rather than a structure that might illuminate

gendered identity outside normative categories of thinking. Given the place that biographically

inflected scholarship on Carroll's life and work has occupied in the critical world, infinity calls

to mind the nostalgic loop that Alice's sister enters into in the final pages of *Alice in Wonderland*

"remembering her own child-life, and happy summer days" (127). At its most benign, this

perspective has focused on Dodgson's resistance to girlhood's sexual maturation. Hence we

discover Morton Cohen's claim that "Whatever was locked in Dodgson's subconscious being, he

consciously worshipped innocence, purity, and beauty as he perceived them…but, like other

Victorians, he successfully suppressed his sexual promptings. He was a master at regulating his

life, and superhuman, surely in our terms, in controlling his impulses."[77] Drawing on the

prevalent, but outdated thesis that the Victorians essentially fine-tuned the act of repression,

Cohen here represents the culminating argument in this line of thought that Karolyn Leach has

called "The Carroll Myth." Cristopher Hollingsworth describes the prevailing image nurtured by

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[76] Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense*, 5.

[77] Morton Norton Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995), xxiii.

the "Carroll Myth" in the following terms: "[h]e was the shy and virginal clergyman who stumbled into genius through intense love of a child; the man with no life, whose transparent, barely registered existence held only one story: that of his tragic but ultimately innocent deviancy, his ultimate failure to engage with adulthood."[78]

Set in motion partially through biographies, beginning with Carroll's nephew Stuart Dodgson Collingwood's volume from 1898, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll,* the "Carroll Myth" pervades the best modern studies of the writer throughout the twentieth century. Further, to the children of the 1850s, 60s, and 70s, who recall their memories of Carroll in *Interviews and Recollections*, an idealized image of "Lewis Carroll" substitutes for the material reality of Charles Dodgson, Oxford don, clergyman, and mathematician. Recollections of Carroll from many of his child-friends, as well as other acquaintances, repeatedly portray him as a shy, vulnerable man "who above all others has understood childhood."[79] According to Cohen, one of Carroll's most important twentieth-century literary biographers, despite its outward appearance, Carroll's peculiar intimacy with the child operates on the level of saintliness.

As Cohen's wording in the description I cite above indicates, the power of the Carroll Myth revolves around a paradox between Carroll's obscure inner life and professional personae as an Oxford don. The incongruity between the two has been additionally nurtured by the expurgation of all of his diary entries from April 1858 to 1862, presumably by Carroll's relatives. Despite Carroll's well-documented friendships with prominent Victorian women, such

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[78] Cristopher Hollingsworth, introduction to *Alice beyond Wonderland: Essays for the Twenty-First Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), ix.

[79] Isa Bowman, "The inner life of a famous man," reprinted in *Lewis Carroll: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Morton Norton Cohen (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 89.

as Ellen Terry and Christina Rossetti, the overwhelming critical attention to Carroll's private life

has thus far rested on the blankness that surrounds his relationships with children. Leach has

recently noted that these diary entries may contain absolutely no evidence regarding these

relationships. The autobiographical silence that produces the Carroll Myth also, in Leach's view,

contributes to the exact opposite conjecture, that of Carroll's erotic investment in childhood

femininity. The gaps in his diary entries have been read as containing the missing details

regarding his abrupt break with the Liddell family, allegedly due to Carroll's marriage proposal

to the real Alice, that even Cohen has speculated about.[80] Developing largely out of Anthony

Goldschmidt's post-Freudian essay, " 'Alice in Wonderland Psychoanalyzed" (1933), [81] this line

of thought reaches its critical climax in James R. Kincaid's *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and*

Victorian Culture (1992). Kincaid's study probes the disturbing construction of Victorian "child-

lovers," such as Carroll, who lay the foundation for contemporary ideas and anxieties regarding

pedophilia.[82] In Kincaid's account, Alice figures as the erotized, but ultimately "fluid, shifting,

Other" in Carroll's imaginary.[83] While Kincaid argues that Alice vehemently resists the erotic

fixation of her adult male author, she also cannot seem to think outside of the scripted forms of

difference ascribed to the Victorian child: "[n]or does she learn the most important lesson of all,

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[80] Nickel traces the inception of this rumor to Florence Becker Lennon's book *Victoria through the*
Looking-Glass (*Dreaming in Pictures: The Photography of Lewis Carroll*, 24–25).

[81] Reprinted in Robert Phillips, *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics'*
Looking-Glasses, 1865–1971 (New York: Vanguard, 1971), 279.

[82] The term, importantly, is a twentieth-century etymological invention, dating back to writer and
sexologist Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia, F.A. Davis, 1914).

[83] James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge,
1992), 295.

that things do not conclude in Wonderland, that they cannot be understood in terms of goals or ends, and that new modes of seeing might be not only useful but happy substitutions."[84] These formal endpoints include the ideological binaries that set adults and children apart:

> the child is that species which is free of sexual feeling or response; the adult is that species which has crossed over into sexuality. The definitional base is erotic: our discourse insists on it by loudly denying its importance. Of course other binaries are involved too, those involving innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge, incapacity and competence, empty and full, low and high, weak and powerful.[85]

Given the wealth of speculation on his life that I have discussed here, it would seem that the literary figure of Carroll is perpetually caught within these same binaries at the expense of his extraordinarily inventive stories. But the somewhat reactionary deification (and opposing judgment) of Carroll this representative model insists on has overshadowed critical consideration of the *Alice* books, and ultimately distracts from more pressing intellectual questions regarding the possibilities for the girl-subject to think outside of these terms in the narratives themselves.

When we shift back to the stories then, we find that this constellation of ideas around adult male sexuality, nostalgia, and containment is not entirely absent from more literary readings of the *Alice* books. Auerbach's description of the opening scene in *Looking-Glass* additionally captures this critical assessment of Dodgson's perception of childhood femininity, in the arresting manner in which Carroll's narrative and Tenniel's illustration depict the protagonist: "[Alice] seems to be a beautiful child, but the position of her head makes her look like she has no face. She muses dreamily on the snowstorm raging outside, part of a series of

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[84] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 293.

[85] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 7.

circles within circles, enclosures within enclosures, suggesting the self-containment of innocence and purity."[86] On this view, Alice—in both word and image—remains contained, lacking subjectivity.

Yet again, there is a different way of reading Auerbach's suggestive comment on a "series of circles within circles." Her observation implies a potential for the infinite in these stories, but only a kind of negative infinity stemming from authorial control and circumscription. Other scholars have made similar observations that at the same time point to the possibility of understanding these "circles within circles' differently. Alice's encircling containment by her author—who, according to Anne K. Mellor, constructs a world "of which he is the sole master"—resembles the diminutive structure of a Russian doll, reducing the representation of girlhood femininity through seemingly infinite iterations.[87] In Mellor's account, mathematics, in the form of the symbol for infinity, would here stand for the purest form of control in Carroll's world, and, by implication, the ultimate escape from the chaotic arena of sexual maturation that supposedly vexed his sexuality. Yet controlling Alice is not necessarily what these Russian doll-like structures suggest. A very basic point about these stories is that the main integers of a one and a two involve Alice in complicated mathematical exercises rather than limiting forms of encirclement, and they have to do with understanding difference in an unusual way. These ones and twos in a sequence of counting bring us to a completely different method of thinking about infinity, and subsequently of sexual difference, in a manner that does not always contain or limit Alice's negotiation of these fantastical worlds.

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[86] Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," 31.

[87] Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980), 178.

Clearly, ignoring the question of sexuality in children's literature like the *Alice* books would mean fully participating in the persistence of the Carroll Myth. However, the murky contours of sexual attraction with regards to Carroll's work, and other literature about children, have masked another serious question for the *Alice* books, that of the relationship between sexuality, gender, and subject-construction. In his study, Kincaid also makes the claim that "there is reason to suppose that a century or so ago gender was of little importance in the usual sort of thinking on children, that many Victorians were comfortable in minimizing gender differences in children."[88] When we look at the ruling problem of subjectivity, and specifically the girl's signifying power as a subject in the *Alice* texts, we can see how femininity, removed from the sexual oppositions of child-loving, is an unmistakable feature of the stories, and as Robson has explored, exceeds the reach of a desiring authorial self. Discussing Carroll's photography, Robson makes a compelling observation that "[f]or Carroll, the effacement of the adult male appears to allow him to invoke the liberating fantasy of the little girl's power."[89] When examined through the narrow framework of adult male desire, it would seem as if "Alice's psychical growth remains disturbingly static," as one critic has remarked.[90] However, removing pre-given norms of sexual polarity from a reading of *Alice* reveals a potential interest in femininity as inventive, creative, and not limited to the points of view that structure oppositional relationships between men and women, and children and adults. This singular inventiveness on the part of the girl subject has been partially explored in relation to Carroll's photography (notably by Robson), but strangely enough, not in terms of the literary Alice herself.

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[88] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 15

[89] Robson, *Men in Wonderland,* 141.

[90] Susan Sherer, "Secrecy and Autonomy in Lewis Carroll," *Philosophy and Literature* 20 (1996): 1.

My overview of the critical reception of Carroll's work since *Alice'*s publication would not be complete without turning briefly to the phenomenon known as the "cult of the child," in which the *Alice* books intervene quite directly. Partially formalized by George Boas in his 1966 work *The Cult of Childhood,* this taxonomy culminates in the latter half of the nineteenth century when, according to Boas, the child's mind become emblematic of *tabula rasa*.[91] Juliet Dusinberre has additionally traced the early twentieth-century interest in the child to pre-Freudian studies by scholars such as Friedrich Froebel, the German pedagogue, on the child as a new type of species.[92] Dusinberre subsequently explores the well-known history of Froebel's invention of the "kindergarten," meaning a garden *for* children, but also a garden *of* children: a metaphor that is hardly lost on Carroll when Alice, for instance, wanders into a "garden of live flowers" in *Looking-Glass* only to confront a nasty bunch of flower-pedagogues who call her "ugly" and "stupid":

> "It's *my* opinion that you never think *at all*," the Rose said, in a rather severe tone.
>
> "I never saw anybody that looked stupider," a Violet said, so suddenly, that Alice quite jumped; for it hadn't spoken before. (159)

Such classificatory impulses around all types of potential personhood in the nineteenth-century produced typically mixed results. On one hand, growing attention to the often-grim reality of children's lives inaugurated steady legislative changes, such as the series of age-of-

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[91] See George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: Warburg Institute, 1966), and the enormously influential work by Ellen Key and Marie Franzos, *The Century of the Child* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's, 1909).

[92] See Juliet Dusinberre, *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, England and New York: Macmillan; St. Martin's Press, 1999).

consent laws—the alarming number of children sold into prostitution in Britain was gaining

visibility—that culminated in the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act.[93] But cultural and legal

attention to girl-children in particular illuminated the ways in which womanhood was framed in

similarly regressive terms. According to Gorham, the idealization of the child and the similar

elevation of ideal womanhood in nineteenth-century thought meet in the figure of girlhood:

"[t]he idea of the adult woman who possesses 'majestic childishness' reflects the contradictions

that existed at the centre of the idealised vision of true womanhood." [94] This intersection would

persist well into the twentieth century, lending weight to Carol Driscoll's argument that girls are

perpetually "defined as in transition or in process relative to dominant ideas of Womanhood.

Feminine adolescence is always retrospectively defined, always definitely prior to the Woman it

is used to explain."[95] Explosive headlines like that of anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton's 1868

Saturday Review piece, "The Girl of the Period," highlight the confusion and crisis around

formalizing the girl as distinct entity.

As Knoepflmacher has recently discussed in *Ventures into Childland,* Carroll is part of

community of mid-Victorian writers—William Thackeray, John Ruskin, Christina Rossetti, Jean

Ingelow—who reconsider the idea of femininity specifically through the figure of girlhood in

their literary works about children. But for Knoepflmacher, girlhood femininity operates

differently in literature written by male authors and works written by women. Carroll and his

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[93] The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 raised the age of consent from 13 to 16 years old.

[94] Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, 7.

[95] Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 6

male contemporaries "appropriated 'femininity' for their own ends,"[96] an appropriation that includes a nostalgic idealization of the girl as a lost "sororal self."[97] Therefore, in the Alice books, "Carroll wanted the adolescent never to forget the child-play through which a small girl and a grown-up man had erased, ever so fitfully and perhaps more in his mind than in hers, the categories of gender and age."[98] As a result, for Knoepflmacher, maturation towards adulthood can only be negatively portrayed in Wonderland, because it signals a permanent severing of the male author from a pre-gendered wholeness. The framing poems for both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* carry a nostalgic overtone that would lend credence to this reading. However, the main stories themselves sharply overturn the simplicity of the introductory verses.[99] As Jennifer Greer notes: "in the context of Alice's adventures, the frames *do* surprise. Their portrayals of her journeys through Wonderland and Looking-glass country bear so little resemblance to the journeys themselves that it is difficult to take the frames quite seriously."[100] On the contrary, in Knoepflmacher's reading, women writers like Ingelow "reasserted their belief in a child's orderly progression towards maturity within a temporal world marked by boundaries and limits."[101]

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[96] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland,* 19

[97] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 13.

[98] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, 172.

[99] Knoepflmacher, while discussing Carroll's early poetry, does concede that that these works, such as the 1856 verse "Solitude," "seem much closer to the nostalgic frame-poems of the first *Alice* books than to the ironic narratives themselves" (*Ventures into Childland*, 14).

[100] Jennifer Greer, "'All Sorts of Pitfalls and Surprises': Competing Views of Idealized Girlhood in Lewis Carroll's Alice Books," *Children's Literature* 31 (2003): 1–24.

[101] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland*, xii.

Both ends of this spectrum of attitudes toward maturation—often paradoxical, always

riddled with tension—recall the quintessential philosophical elaboration of modern childhood

and pedagogy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile or an Education* (1762). *Emile* details a highly

specific pedagogy that Rousseau claims will preserve the natural goodness of man. While

Rousseau's text largely considers the *bildung* of a young boy, its fifth section elaborates on the

education of Emile's female companion Sophie, a moment of which feminists since Mary

Wollstonecraft have not failed to take note.[102] Rousseau's treatise on Sophie is interesting

because the essay advances a conventionally misogynist view of sexual difference while

implying that the crux of such a difference may not in fact exist. We subsequently find these

simultaneous articulations in the same piece: "Thus the whole education of women ought to be

relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by

them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to council them, to console

them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them" and "except for her sex, woman is like a

man; she has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed

the same way, the pieces are the same, they work the same way, the face is similar. In whatever

way one looks at them, the difference is only one of degree."[103] While most of the chapter on

Sophie builds on the attitude of the former, the latter presents a curious abstraction that the essay

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[102] Wollstonecraft's *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* (1792)*,* as is well known, vilifies Rousseau's

account of a girl's ideal education and the role of mothers in nurturing this oppressive discourse. In

particular see Chapter V, "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects

of Pity, Bordering on Contempt," in Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: An

Authoritative Text,* ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

[103] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or, on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979),

329, 321.

leaves undeveloped. One might read these competing accounts as undoing the very naturalness that Rousseau attempts to argue for in his text, since when we try to get to the heart of sexual difference, all we apparently find is the same desiring "machine."

Yet Rousseau's account of a girl's education places mothers squarely at the center of their upbringing, as it is mothers who must prepare girls for their roles as passive companions to men. When juxtaposed with this highly influential treatise of Rousseau's, the various matriarchs (and indeed adults in general) from the *Alice* books—the Duchess, the Queen of Hearts—seem to be mere caricatures not just of mothers, but of an entire system of upbringing.[104] Further, Alice's knowledge of categories and classifications she has learnt in her real-world "lessons" clearly will not work in Wonderland, as her half-serious question reminds us: " 'I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?' (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say)" (13).

Critics have consequently wondered how much Alice really wants to grow up in the conventional way. Yet I would argue that Alice is less concerned with forms of loss than a lack of traditional and rather limiting forms of direction. Her real world experience with narrative reveals another didactic set of texts, this time from the Evangelical children's literature tradition, that Carroll viciously critiques. For example, after Alice manages to leave the house in which she

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[104] The problem with the Duchess is her relationship to the child she names "Pig!" (60), a reproductive excess that the story wants to clearly differentiate from Alice's femininity, since the Duchess conforms so closely to an ideological type that she cannot represent anything more than a two-dimensional character. In the chapter "Pig and Pepper," the narrator observes that the Duchess "began nursing her child again, singing a sort of lullaby to it as she did so, and giving it a violent shake at the end of every line" (62).

had grown in size, she encounters the Caterpillar in a forest, whose hostility and demands to

know "who she is" continue to exert pressure on her individuality. When he asks "who are *you*?"

Alice replies: "I ca'n't explain *myself,* I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you

see" (47). Further on she claims:

> "I ca'n't remember things as I used—and I don't keep the same size for
>
> ten minutes together!"
>
> "Ca'n't remember *what* things?" said the Caterpillar.
>
> "Well I've tried to say '*How doth the little busy bee*' but it all came
>
> different!" Alice replied in a very melancholy voice. (49)

The poem that Alice rehearses for the caterpillar, and then forgets, is entitled "Against Idleness

and Mischief." Didactic poems such as this Isaac Watts verse from 1715 symbolize the kind of

ideologically-driven literature favored in the early nineteenth century that appeared in conduct

manuals designed to limit children's creativity in favor of strict morals and social convention. I

want to draw attention to this kind of literature because it embodies another form of gender

construction that Carroll parodies in Alice's story. Gorham notes that "[i]t was primarily through

the rhythms of everyday life that a Victorian middle-class girl learned the significance of her

gender and of her social position. Moral precepts were inculcated through everyday experience,

but also through the medium of religious instruction and observance."[105] "How doth the busy

little bee" would thus carefully instruct little girls into the correct kinds of labor that would

eventually develop them into domestic womanhood. Drawn from a world of strict boundaries

and divisions, this form of knowledge evaporates completely in Wonderland, and while Alice

speaks in a "melancholy voice" to the caterpillar, I think the narrative forcefully affirms the loss

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[105] Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, 19.

of this knowledge. Without busy little bees, only the idea of pure story-telling remains, as Alice realizes she has to fill in the gaps with her own narrative labor, a labor that is less about production than self-perpetuation in utterly unique ways. A different form of narrative takes shape and becomes an anchoring force in *Wonderland* for Alice to negotiate her singularity, since maturity, lessons, and the social categories from the "real world" that signify the development of gender lose value.

Rousseau's main concern throughout *Emile* is a similar teleology of childhood that Evangelical literature promoted, but Rousseau is more overtly invested in pedagogy as a way to develop an ideal citizen. Thus, well before Goethe's *Wilheim Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–96), Rousseau investigated the boundary between family and polis, individuality and community, on the current of childhood and the child's entry into sexual difference and subjecthood. It is worth pausing to consider the further resonances of Rousseau's thought for the *Alice* books. The myriad of sly puns about Alice's education—religious, moral and didactic—throughout *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* not only bear on the question of a girl's ideal education. They also seem to ask whether she can ever be fully integrated into a social schema that requires a humanist subject to bolster larger technologies of the nation, or as Etienne Balibar has famously put it, "*homo nationalis* from cradle to grave."[106] The continuity between "cradle" and "grave" is more than just a nice turn of phrase, as it suggests a rigid, but entirely naturalized continuity between the biological ideas of birth and death, and a subject who is meant to serve (is effectively subjected to) larger ideas of nationhood and sovereignty.

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[106] Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 93.

Domestic, middle-class femininity in the nineteenth century, as numerous scholars have observed, embodies the "civilizing" practice necessary for British imperialism and nation-building to thrive and solidify support. Clearly, the binary logic of gendered difference could play into the binaries of cultural and racial difference quite easily in the Victorian ideological imagination. Wonderland notably drives a wedge between the sliding of these binaries into one another precisely through the world of mathematics. As Daniel Bivona has explored, Carroll turned his attention to parliamentary politics in Britain more than once in his life. And in *Wonderland,* with its caucus-races and nods to ideas of exile, travel, and unfamiliarity, "Carroll seemed to have been intrigued by the same kind of dilemma that fired the imagination of Swift, a writer with anything but a purely playful intellectual interest in political issues: what happens when one deposits a representative of English culture in a foreign land populated by beings who live by unfamiliar rules?"[107]

We understand that Wonderland, the way Alice experiences it, may be a world that has redrawn its ties to a teleology of gendered maturation, but it still maintains the traces of its political climate and that climate's worries and fears over womanhood. When Alice manages to swim out of the "pool of tears" she has cried herself into, she washes ashore with a dodo, a mouse, and several other creatures. The chapter that follows, "A Caucus-race and a Long Tale," appears to mock political proceedings by invoking the creatures' nonsensical attempts to collectively "dry off" by calling out names of earls and forming lines. In Knoepflmacher's reading of this passage, "wasting time on answerless riddles and on circular caucus races where

[107] Daniel Bivona, "Alice the Child-Imperialist and the Games of Wonderland," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41 (1986): 144. See also Nancy Armstrong, "The Occidental Alice," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 2 (1990): 3–40.

nobody wins, Carroll suggests, is preferable to progress into a world of sexual differentiation and domination."[108] Yet these realities, in some sense, are so deeply entangled in the Victorian (and indeed, modern) cultural imaginary that they would appear to be one and the same. In other words, the story's satire of political systems—British parliamentary politics in the caucus race, and aristocracy and the feudal system with the King and Queen of Hearts—is simultaneously a satire of citizenship under these systems. And this form of citizenship is explicitly gendered; or rather, founded upon a strict binary of difference, as Rousseau has begun to suggest. Growing into one, Carroll seems to suggest, involves growing into the other.

Yet Wonderland is organized quite differently, as Alice observes:

"I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what can have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one—but I'm grown up now," she added in a sorrowful tone: "at least there's no room to grow up any more here." (39)

Alice's "sorrowful tone" at not knowing how exactly to grow up starts to evaporate as makes her way through Wonderland. The consequent intersection between the potentially insidious world of political proceedings and gendered subject-formation is further put into relief when Alice accompanies the Duchess on a walk:

"Thinking again?" the Duchess asked, with another dig of her sharp little chin.

"I've a right to think," said Alice sharply, for she was beginning to feel a

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[108] Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland,* 173.

little worried. (93)

We again have Alice bumping up against forms of authority, but not only are do these figures undermine Victorian family structures, they are also a reminder of political authorities who command a certain type of subject. Alice's retort to the Duchess—"I've a right to think"—places the girl's self-consciousness about her knowledge at the interface with the notion of "rights." This is where mathematics might rupture the often violent causality that links gendered difference and the formation of ideal subjects. As Deleuze explains:

> the question of mathematics and man may thus be conceived in a new way: the question is not that of quantifying or measuring human properties, but rather, on the one hand, that of problematizing human events, and, on the other, that of developing as various human events the condition of the problem. [109]

Mathematics in the *Alice* stories allow the girl to circumvent certain basic ideological tracts, including those that are not so near the surface: that is, the relationship between girlhood, maturation and an ideal citizen of a nation. Alice thus quietly undoes the grounds of two major ideas: first, the girl reveals gender as crisis; and second, the girl probes the contours of individuality as a political category.

The penultimate chapter of *Wonderland*, "Who Stole the Tarts?" brings the intersection of numerical thought and Alice's selfhood to a self-conscious conclusion. This episode, in which she experiences her last physical change, initiates the abrupt dissolution of the fantasy world as she wakes up from her dream. In a court presided over by the King and Queen of Hearts, Alice watches the trial regarding the Queen's stolen tarts and suddenly begins to grow again. Apparently, no one seems to notice except a dormouse, who snaps: "You've no right to grow *here*" (114). Thereafter, the narrator recounts Alice's response: "'Don't talk nonsense . . . you

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[109] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense,* 55.

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know you're growing too'" (114). Seemingly emboldened by the end of story, Alice observes Wonderland's half-hearted attempts at imposing regulations in the form of trials and sentences, calling the Queen's demand for the "[s]entence first—verdict afterwards" "[s]tuff and nonsense" (124). The court scene suggests a kind of pressurized mockery of laws that govern behavior, identity, and action in the real world. But these structures are irrelevant to Alice, and therefore the court explodes when she exclaims: "Why you're nothing but a pack of cards!" (124).

In this chapter, Alice is called to the witness stand to confess what she knows regarding the "business" of the stolen tarts and their suggested thief, the Mad-Hatter. The King of Hearts questions Alice, who at this point is still physically larger than everyone in court. He begins to read a list of impromptu "rules":

> "Rule Forty-two. *All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.*"
>
> Everybody looked at Alice.
>
> "*I'm* not a mile high," said Alice.
>
> "You are," said the King.
>
> "Nearly two miles high," added the Queen.
>
> "Well, I sha'n't go, at any rate," said Alice: "besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now."
>
> "It's the oldest rule in the book," said the King.
>
> "Then it ought to be Number One," said Alice.
>
> The King turned pale, and shut his notebook hastily. (120)

It is interesting that the capitalized "Number One" strikes fear in the King's heart. This realization prompts the close of the story: the only character to occupy the position of "Number One" in Wonderland, and the narrative, may very well be Alice herself. But hers is girlhood

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unconnected with forms of authority that hand down rules about gendered behavior. Thus

becoming "Number One," as we see from *Wonderland*'s sequel, does not entirely resolve the

complex and persistent question of "who she is."

III. *Looking-Glass and* The Threat of the Two

The chessboard landscape in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*

returns the now seven-and-a-half year old Alice to Wonderland with a sharper sense of her

capabilities. According to James Kincaid, "the child seems to appear here only in a series of

goodbyes." For Kincaid, this sequel marks a forlorn transition away from the concreteness of

fantasy, and thus "gone for good is the open curiosity of the earlier figure, bouncing from

adventure to adventure."[110] Yet looking closely at this story reveals that its possible interest in

"goodbyes," distance, and severance situates Alice within mathematical and sequential structures

similar to those in *Wonderland.* Further, the stakes of Alice's femininity become even higher, as

she looks around at the fantasy world's chess game, fixating on the role of Queen: "'Oh what fun

it is!'…'How I *wish* I was one of them! I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join—

though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best'" (163).

A good place to begin exploring what becomes of Alice's singularity is the position that

the chessboard maintains in *Looking-Glass.* Wonderland chess functions less as a limiting form

of control, and more as a purely relational structure that Alice manages to transcend when, by the

end of the story, she becomes a third queen on the chessboard and the narrative actually

continues, rather than stops. Briefly, chess is a bounded game that involves two sets of pieces

competing for mastery. Chess pieces move laterally around the board, with the queens

possessing the most powerful and open range of movement. Chess, then, appears to function

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[110] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 296–97.

purely along the lines of permutations and combinations, with a limited amount of moves available to each piece. In Carroll's story, when Alice joins the game as a pawn, she completes a series of movements through the chessboard to arrive at the Eighth Square and become a "queen" in her own right. But what is important to keep in mind about *Looking-Glass* chess is its logic of individuation. For Alice, the chessboard forces her once more to think numerically, in terms of a sequence of numbers. To be a chess piece means having no fixed interiority but only a position that can (and does) change constantly.

We understand Alice's different, and rather unlimited way of thinking about her selfhood before she has passed through the looking-glass itself. The narrative opens with Alice talking to two of Dinah's kittens on a winter afternoon. In order to preface Alice's journey back to Wonderland, Carroll's narrator observes:

> She had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before—all because Alice had begun with "Let's pretend we're kings and queens"; and her sister, who liked being very exact, had argued that they couldn't, because there were only two of them, and Alice had been reduced at last to say "Well, *you* can be one of them, *then,* and *I'll* be all the rest." (141)

In this passage, the context of play generates several of possibilities—"all the rest"—out of "only two of them." As we know from the previous *Alice* story, the question of the "all" as a form of structuring totality loses its authority of meaning in Wonderland. What we have here, instead, are sequences of numbers that can iterate infinity, rather than merely add up or accrue to a whole. For Alice's sister at the beginning of this story, being "very exact" means conforming to the parameters of binary logic since there are only "two of them." But for Alice, her perspective depends on understanding "twos" differently, such that twos represent more than themselves,

precisely in their ability to sever oneness. This central tension, then, between the threat of a form of twoness that severs, rather than unites, and Alice's feminine singularity informs her second visit to Wonderland in *Looking-Glass*.

Twos represent a crucial number in Carroll's sequel to *Wonderland*, as we see from the story's many colorful characters: Dinah's two kittens, the Red Queen and the White Queen, and Tweedledum and Tweedledee. All are significant twosomes in the story, but unlike what the title *Looking-Glass* might imply, they represent forms of scission, and not binaries, pairing, or a dialectic. In avoiding the conventional representation of twosomes, the sequel follows *Wonderland* in questioning the logic of gendered difference, which traditionally rests on binary or oppositional thinking, rather than a structure of repeated rupturing and sequencing. Tweedledum and Tweedledee, for instance, first appear under a tree in the woods in *Looking-Glass* while Alice searches in vain for the fork in the road: a telling reminder of the "dead-end" logic of binary oppositions. Since she is the "White Queen's Pawn" (164) at the beginning of her adventure, Alice can only move diagonally along the chessboard, which is in strict opposition to the Wonderland Queens, who move at a completely different pace. In a garden of talking flowers, Alice encounters the Red Queen, who instructs her in how she may be a queen as well. A this point, the narrator notes: "just at this moment, somehow or other, they began to run" (164). The Red Queen is already set apart by her movements, which seem to operate with no fixed guidelines, as Alice notices, despite the Queen chanting "Faster! Faster!" (165):

> "Well, in *our* country," said Alice, still panting a little, you'd generally get
>
> to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, *here* you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that." (165)

The Red Queen moves at a speed that cannot be measured by a temporal scale drawn from a reality outside this fantasy world. Yet the Red Queen's speed is more than a vague, inexplicable flux, since she demonstrates a clear knowledge of the counting and sequencing that mark difference: "'At the end of two yards,' she said, putting in a peg to mark the distance, 'I shall give you your directions… at the end of *three* yards I shall repeat them—for fear of your forgetting them. At the end of *four*, I shall say goodbye. And at the end of *five*, I shall go!'" (166). The Red Queen finally instructs Alice to reach the Eighth Square while telling her that along the way: "remember who you are!" (166). The counting seems to set apart the distinctiveness of each encounter precisely by collapsing space and time, as if a continuous rupturing came between four yards and five yards. This counting disturbs Alice's assurance of being "who she is" in a stable continuum of the "latitudes and longitudes" (13) she refers to as she falls down the rabbit-hole in *Wonderland.* And yet, it is the Red Queen's act of counting that revives the question of Alice's subjectivity in the story. Counting and enumeration as acts that produce a new form of difference thus remain the dominant paradigm in this "new" Wonderland.

Both the Red Queen and the White Queen exist in separate temporal registers, as Alice discovers when she meets the White Queen later in "Wool and Water." The White Queen, frazzled and seemingly helpless, "lives backwards," which proves to be an advantage since, as she says, "one's memory works both ways" (196). In a subtle shift, the story turns the effect of living backward for the White Queen into a future orientation, since the queen remembers, and is often traumatized by, what will happen *next*, rather than what has happened *before*. The White

Queen, who is "just one hundred and one, five months and a day" (199), renders fully what the Red Queen points towards in her velocity: a questioning of teleology. When Alice responds incredulously to the White Queen's age, claiming "one *ca'n't* believe impossible things," the White Queen tells her: "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" (199). In this chess game, the queens embody a symbolic register of horizontal movement that is at a remove from the progress of time and space that characterize the reality outside it. It is worth recalling that, according to the rules of chess, the queen can move any number of squares in any direction: this ultimate freedom translates into the eccentric movements of the Red Queen and the White Queen in Wonderland.

In *Looking-Glass*, Alice's initial foray back to Wonderland brings about a set of encounters that examines Alice's complex quest to be a queen—complete with counting on the chessboard, observing odd pairings and questioning time—as an inquiry into her singular femininity. The resonances of being a queen are numerous in a nineteenth-century context. John Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865), an essay which instructs Englishwomen that "queens you must always be; queens to your lovers; queens to your husbands and your sons," establishes a restrained notion of femininity that follows from the uncertainty surrounding Queen Victoria's authority.[111] Yet again, we encounter in Ruskin, as in Rousseau, the inevitability of feminine singularity when attempting to interrogate political community and sexual difference. In his piece, Ruskin attempts to "show you what should be the place, and what the power of

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[111] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," in *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 90.

woman."[112] Probing Shakespeare and classical literature for examples of an ideal femininity that would correspond to the royal authority of "kingship," Ruskin settles on the claim that "the woman's duty, as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state."[113] While he urges women to have more opportunities in the public sphere, he also highlights the following differences between the sexes that he claims naturalize femininity's "calling":

> Now their separate characters are briefly these: The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever is just, wherever conquest is necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly judges the crown of contests. [114]

Ruskin's overall paternalism, however, is not the only explanation for his naturalizing of sexual inequality here. As Margaret Homans has suggested, a conservative discourse both of proliferation and uniqueness revolved around the term "Queen" in the 1860s in which Ruskin directly intervened, and, as she remarks: "[g]iven that it is feminist writer Bodichon who focuses on the Queen's uniqueness to highlight ordinary womens' lack of power and entitlement, figurative and multiplicative use of 'queen' might well seem linked to a conservative social

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[112] Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," 80.

[113] Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," 88.

[114] Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," 77.

agenda."[115] We find again that what is at issue with the distinctly feminine role of Queen is a problem in delimiting and accepting its singularity. Is a Queen inherently collective? Is she gendered in opposition to a King? How many Queens can we have?

When Alice declares to the White Knight, "I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be Queen" (235), her boldness is not merely play-acting. Another early example from Carroll's story responds to Ruskin's instruction to "keep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way,"[116] as Alice reads the nonsense verse, "Jabberwocky." Alice's first entry into Wonderland is through a room filled with chess pieces, including the white and red kings and queens, where she finds the poem casually "lying near [her] on the table" (148). Responding to the poem's deliberate elision of clear meaning—"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe"—Alice observes: "somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't know exactly what they are! However, *somebody* killed *something*, that's clear, at any rate—" (150). Deliberate obscurity and fantastical violence characterize "Jabberwocky," a poem that seems to not only parody moral sense and instruction, but also the "safe" quality of classic myth and literature that Ruskin approves for young girls, following on the heels of Rousseau. The casualness with which Alice notes "somebody killed something" has veered unapologetically away from the sweetness Ruskin sees as inherent in femininity. Alice's accession to queenship is figured through the realm of "ideas" instead of a "garden" where arranging and classifying are a queen's most important tasks.

Alice's intervention in this assemblage of questions about femininity and authority is subsequently on the level of structure: whether being singular and being a queen may coincide,

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[115] Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Pess, 1998), 69.

[116] Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," 55.

or represent the same thing. More specifically, given the emphasis on twos in *Looking-Glass,* the narrative and its queens prompt us to wonder if singular femininity could exist in isolation, without the combined threat and possibility of proliferation, multiplication, and severing that characterize counting in a sequence. Humpty Dumpty inaugurates this conversation, as he constantly literalizes semantic meaning, driving a wedge into any causal relationship between words and things (and by proxy, words and people, people and people, etc.). His seemingly casual approach to the meaning of "slithy," "gyre" and "gimble" from "Jabberwocky" takes on a more serious overtone when he discusses Alice's name:

> "My name is Alice, but—"
>
> "It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently.
>
> "What does it mean?
>
> "Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.
>
> "Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "my name means the shape that I am—and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost." (208)

Removing strict lines of causality and development from any potential meaning-making allows a person or entity to stand on his or her own terms, to be singular, as Alice in Wonderland suggested. Here Humpty-Dumpty has reversed the logic that Tweedledum and Tweedledee espouse by claiming that Alice is completely generalized. As Martin Gardner writes in a footnote to these lines, for Humpty Dumpty, common nouns have specific functions while proper names, like "Alice," can easily slide back into generic meaning (37).

We see Alice pondering this exact problem once more as she enters the forest in "Looking-Glass Insects" only to arrive face to face with her own possible extinction. The forest

presents no topos of original femininity: as Alice observes, the Genesis myth of receiving one's identity and one's fate by being "named" has evaporated. The story follows by building on the notion of losing one's name, the seeming marker of a person's singularity, as Alice wanders on through the woods: "This must be the wood," she said thoughtfully to herself, "where things have no names. I wonder what'll become of *my* name when I go in? I shouldn't like to lose it at all—because they'd have to give me another, and it would almost certain to be an ugly one" (176). At this moment, a Fawn appears, who seems to encapsulate the momentary oblivion of Alice's selfhood with a question that suggests exhilaration, rather than tragedy: "She stood silent for a minute, thinking: then she suddenly began again. 'Then it really *has* happened, after all! And now, who am I?" (177).

Despite the limits and restrains of the chessboard landscape, Alice has reluctantly returned to the fundamental question of her being—"who am I?"—this time in the more classical register of her name, and language. This particular moment—in which all Alice can remember is that her name begins with an "L"—has been glossed by several commentators, such as Gardner and Knoepflmacher, who attempt to unravel the meaning of this initial (most settle on the resonances of "Liddell" for "L"). But what is at stake here is more than the arbitrariness of naming "through which we signify individuation and difference."[117] Alice may be in a register of language, rather than counting and calculation, but in these woods Alice moves momentarily out of any and all symbolization, rupturing once again the rules for what is possible in Wonderland. We might say that Alice, then, confronts her own impossibility, the point of her subjectivity that cannot be named, calculated, or counted: briefly, her singularity. However, something does remain—an "L"—which is why this moment resonates for Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One*, which begins with a meditation and rewriting of this encounter in the *Looking-Glass*

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[117] Knoeplfmacher, *Ventures into Childland,* 201.

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"The Looking-Glass, from the Other Side," 9–22). Carolyn Burke has elucidated Irigaray's

reading of Alice's invocation of an "L" in the following observation:

> The rules of logic do not yet prevail, for no name-bestowing Adam is present.
>
> This is Alice's question about her identity, and her observation that "it begins
>
> with L." There is no answer other than her self-renaming. "L" is, of course,
>
> multiple in Irigaray's reading…*elle/elles*—the third person feminine, both
>
> singular and plural. To begin with *elles(s)* means to learn that the female self is
>
> multiple.[118]

Burke's discussion reminds us of an interesting convergence inaugurated by *Looking-Glass*.

First, that the logic of naming and un-naming so crucial to Irigaray's post-structuralist feminism

can be recast as counting logic: the enumeration of the third person singular (*elle*) in its plural

form (*elles*). The difference between the two is a numerical difference, not one discernable in

semantic form ("*elle*" and "*elles*" sound the same when said aloud). Of course the punning on

language in Irigaray's reading, only available in French ("*elle/elles*"), is what makes this

interpretation of Alice possible (and Irigaray's "*elles*" also shows indebtedness to Monique

Wittig's work of radical feminism, *Les guérrillères* (1969), which eschews most pronouns except

for the untranslatable pronoun "*elles*"). But this series of references illuminates the loss of

Alice's name as a productive loss: this moment displaces originary identity and

complementarity—that is, a limiting kind of oneness—and as a result, the reproductive

genealogy that engenders a conventional notion of femininity (for instance, the ghosting of the

L/elle/elles by the *il/ils,* the masculine pronouns).

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[118] Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford, *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 47.

The profound freedom of losing her name that Alice experiences gains further weight, I suggest, when we look at the chapter "The Lion and the Unicorn," in which the White King and his soldiers meet Alice in the woods. The White King stresses to Alice that he is searching for his messengers, and that he needs two of them: "'I must have *two*, you know—to come and go. One to come, and one to go'" (223). These "ones" do not accrue for the White King, but simply exist as they are; when you are with one, you are not with the other. The heart of the White King's counting is a kind of perpetual loss of a totality—of the two as a complete set.

In "Of Structure as an Inmixing of Otherness," Lacan points out something similar regarding the formation of a subject outside a predetermined unity: "The question of the two is for us the question of the subject, and here we reach a fact of psychoanalytic experience in as much as the two does not complete the one to make two, but must repeat the one to permit the one to exist."[119] In Lacan's formulation, only by severing a "one" from itself—the subject and its traumatic object—can singularity as such appear: this is the work of the unconscious, to make us repeat our unique and traumatic relationship to an unsymbolizable loss. In *Looking-Glass*, readers encounter such an unconscious impulse toward the two, but one that is marked by a return to the rupture that created a two in the first place: this is where Alice finds herself in the woods. In his lecture, Lacan continues by referring incidentally to *Looking-Glass*, and specifically the poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter":

> In my day we used to teach children that they must not add, for instance, microphones with dictionaries; but this is absolutely absurd, because we would not have addition if we were not able to add microphones with dictionaries or as

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[119] Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 191.

Lewis Carroll says, cabbages with kings. The sameness is not in things but in the

mark which makes it possible to add things with no consideration as to their

differences.[120]

Here Lacan brings together the realm of language with the structure of counting in order to

illuminate the psychoanalytic subject, in a manner that curiously follows from Alice's

adventures. For Lacan, the subject's traumatic repetitions and attempts at symbolization are

meant to capture an originary "one": hence twos, threes, cabbages and kings, all define

themselves against a missing one and institute a lack where the subject is founded. Alice must

count herself constantly in order to move forward in Wonderland, whether that is on a

chessboard or merely the fantasyland itself. But what remains significant is that her singularity is

what emerges in such acts of counting and thinking, which originate from her: they are precisely

acts, rather than symptoms of a pre-programmed notion of her femininity.

As I have discussed, twos in Wonderland do not operate along the neat oppositional lines

of a looking-glass. And it is certainly twosomes, ones that represent severing in *Looking-Glass,*

which build on the sort of profound *méconnaissance* that Alice experiences in the woods.

Tweedledum and Tweedlede— the twin boys who regale Alice with nursery rhyme poems and

seemingly pointless questions—present a logic that resonates strongly with the story's structural

interest in growing and changing as part of a different sequential order. Their catchphrase, the

adverb "contrariwise," captures the asymmetry that threatens to overtake any binary structure in

the narrative. That is, contingency, according to these twins, is the only rule for thinking about

twos: "'Contrariwise,' continued Tweedledee, 'if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it

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[120] Lacan, "Of Structure as an Inmixing of Otherness," 192.

would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic'" (181).[121] This is a rhetorical statement that refutes causality but also exceeds performativity, since it does not originate in any ground but itself. In other words, Tweedledum and Tweedledee dramatize the two as immanent rather than complementary. Humpty Dumpty, whom Alice meets in the Sixth Square, renders the idea of counting oneself even more sinister, when he discusses the perils of growing up:

> Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. "I mean," she said, "that one ca'n't help growing older."
>
> "*One* ca'n't, perhaps," said Humpty Dumpty; "but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven." (211)

The mood of the conversation turns rather grim, as Humpty Dumpty transforms the existence of ones and twos into the distinct possibility of death. The bare notion of counting is thus flipped upside down in this story. We understand that the girl's potential freedom in mathematics from limiting ideas of sexual containment does not mean fleeing from larger questions of existence and extinction. But Alice's conversation with Humpty-Dumpty also encapsulates the tenor of

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[121] The narrator of Jean Ingelow's fantasy story *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869), references Tweedledum and Tweedledee's catchphrase to explicitly delimit a fantasy realm without patriarchal authority. This statement reappears in a slightly amended form to describe fairyland:

> That that is, is,
>
> But the fairies go further than this; they say:
>
> That that is, is; and when it is, that is the reason that it is.

Mopsa the Fairy, in *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers,* ed. Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 276.

Looking-Glass, which probes the ontological underside of thinking both with and within numbers.

In Alice's final accession to the Eighth Square, she realizes that the other two queens of Wonderland still remain: "Everything was happening so oddly that she didn't feel a bit surprised at finding the Red Queen and the White Queen sitting close to her, one on each side" (250). This image literalizes the repetition that defines development and change in this narrative. Now Alice must struggle to define herself as a Queen among Queens, who do not easily accept her into their community. And just as Alice expects a form of royal exceptionality, she is once again reminded of the closeness of singular femininity to a repeatability that produces no stable continuity. The Queens hassle Alice to recite the alphabet and calculate sums, then fall asleep. Before the feast that dissolves into chaos also dissolves the dream world with it, Alice observes: "I don't think it *ever* happened before, that any one had to take care of two Queens asleep at once! No, not in all the History of England—it couldn't, you know, because there never was more than one Queen at a time" (258). Here we have returned to the original problem for readers of *Looking-Glass*: the oscillation in literary representation between the uniqueness of a queen and the threat of her proliferation, both of which exist in the same register of the sequence in Wonderland. But the Queens of Wonderland, minus Alice, only seem to invest in their own exceptional status rather than a form of singularity, such as Alice can claim, that depends on her possible place in a series of queens on the chessboard.

Like the reality to which Alice must eventually return, *Looking-Glass* cannot maintain the singularity of its queens without recourse to general chaos. But the literary Alice finds herself in a register of infinite counting and repetition that highlights alternative ways of conceptualizing her remove from the world of gender division and generational difference. In this world of

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impossibly fast queens and strange pairs, difference is conceived as the gap between things that repeat in any unpredictable sequence. She thus inhabits a near-impossible realm of signification that exceeds Kincaid's claim that the Victorian child "was a difference, but it was a difference formed by a culture and inscribed within categories of the perceivable."[122] Not only does infinity allow Alice's femininity freedom outside "recognizable bounds of otherness" that circumscribe Victorian ideological notions of childhood, it also suggests a radical rethinking of gender that takes shape outside the deceptively simple notion of ones and twos.[123]

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[122] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 65.

[123] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 65.

Chapter Two

"Golden Head by Golden Head": Christina Rossetti and The Form of Likeness

In its anonymous 1874 review of Christina Rossetti's short fantasy tale, *Speaking Likenesses*, The *Academy* notes rather hopelessly: "this will probably be one of the most popular children's books this winter. We wish we could understand it."[124] This reviewer's observation—which later dwells on the "uncomfortable feeling" generated by *Speaking Likenesses*'s images, counts as the most generous among the largely puzzled and horrified response to Rossetti's grim story about three sets of children who encounter violence and failure in their respective dystopias.[125] A few months later, Rossetti published *Annus Domini*, a benign pocketbook of daily prayers that stands in stark contrast to the darkly imaginative world of her earlier story. It would be tempting to cast *Speaking Likenesses* as a strange anomaly among Rossetti's works, which from the 1870s, beginning with *Annus Domini,* to her death in 1894, became almost exclusively dominated by devotional prose and poetry. Yet I argue that *Speaking Likenesses* becomes a pivotal marker in Rossetti's oeuvre between this later, more explicitly theological turn, on the one hand, and her earlier writing in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866), on the other hand. The story draws attention to Rossetti's widespread interest throughout her work, in the 1860s to the 1890s, in difference as the uncanny excess of likeness, and begins to situate this likeness within the kinship ties between children. This chapter traces the importance of lateral kinship relations in Rossetti's fantasy tale back to

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[124] "Current Literature: Speaking Likenesses," *Academy*, 5 December 1874: 606.

[125] John Ruskin notably wonders how Rossetti and Arthur Hughes, who illustrated the story, could "sink so low." Qtd. in *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. U.C. Knoepflmacher and Nina Auerbach (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 318.

her earlier and most well-known volume of poetry, *Goblin Market,* and its focus on sisterhood. I ultimately claim that in Rossetti's writing, the difference that marks femininity is a difference encountered in relations of likeness, such as the ones we find between sisters.

I. *Speaking Likenesses* and the Refusal of Difference

Speaking Likenesses, a story deeply suspicious of all forms of patrilineal descent, rigorously examines difference as it relates to being a feminine "one." We know from Rossetti's oft-quoted early poem, "The Lowest Room" (composed in 1856) that being a one—whether in front of one's God, one's family, or one's social world—troubled Rossetti's speakers from her poetic beginnings. "The Lowest Room" thus tells us that "some must be second and not first; / All cannot be the first of all."[126] In this poem, "first of all" connotes the integrity of a "one" in terms of a sequence of integers. This form of singularity—in which a "first" cannot resonate without a "second" or a "not first"—would hardly have been lost on Lewis Carroll, one of Rossetti's closest readers, and to whom she sets out to respond in *Speaking Likenesses.* Yet critical scholarship has not understood "first of all" in terms of the primacy of an integer, and the resonance that this "one" may have with a gendered identity. Rather, scholars have tended to interpret this striking poetic statement, that "all" cannot be "first," as a sign of Rossetti's deep resignation, particularly a form of "reserve" derived from John Keble's lectures on religion and poetics, and generally influenced by Rossetti's Tractarian beliefs and early exposure to the Oxford Movement. According to Emma Mason,

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[126] Christina Rossetti, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Rebecca W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2005), 194. Subsequent references to Rossetti's primary works from this volume will be made in parentheses in the main text.

Reserve also indicated that some of God's tenets were simply beyond all human comprehension, only to be revealed to the faithful in heaven. Reserve allowed a writer like Rossetti to adopt reticently the role of theological commentator in her writing while exempting her from accusations of vainly flaunting religious learning unsuitable for a middle-class woman.[127]

That Rossetti's poetry and prose inherits aesthetic and religious paradigms from the Tractarian poetics of Edward Pusey and John Keble is unquestionable. Diane D'Amico and David A. Kent have commented extensively on Rossetti's aesthetic debt to Keble and other early Tractarian founders, noting that, in addition to her activism and familial link to Anglican sisterhoods, Rossetti's "reading indicates her admiration for the movement's leading figures. She carefully illustrated her own copies of Keble's *Christian Year* and Isaac Williams' *The Altar.* She owned a copy of John Henry Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*, and shortly after his death in 1890, she wrote a sonnet to honor him."[128] With regards to "The Lowest Room"'s representation of femininity, however, I also see the importance of not being "first" as a rejection of the vertical structure that produces a "one" as part of a knowable "all." This rethinking of the place of a "one" in "Lowest Room" is also the strongest undercurrent in the majority of Rossetti's work. In this chapter, I begin by looking at *Speaking Likenesses*, in which feminine identity forms and reforms itself around the minimal difference between "first" and "not-first," a difference symbolized exclusively through children and lateral figures of kin. I will show that it is through

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[127] Emma Mason, "Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7 (2002): 198.

[128] Diane D'Amico and David A. Kent, "Rossetti and the Tractarians," *Victorian Poetry* 44 (2006): 93.

certain forms of likeness, such as the kind between siblings, that Rossetti allows a form of feminine singularity to emerge.

On the importance of such figures of likeness to a subject's gender formation, Juliet Mitchell has observed: "the sibling is *par excellence* someone who threatens the subject's uniqueness. The ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one place."[129] According to Sigmund Freud, unlike the mother who must always remain an imaginary whole, and a father who initiates a subject into difference through prohibition, the sibling or lateral figure of kin does not factor into a rigid schema of sexual difference. I argue that this ambivalent psychic space between laterally-affiliated selves, where minimal likeness can foreground singularity as much as it can destroy it, is primarily where Rossetti's "one" takes shape in *Speaking Likenesses.* While readings of gender in Rossetti's oeuvre abound, my argument about *Speaking Likenesses* involves the story's striking depiction of the lateral as the culmination of a troubled sense of siblinghood, and the subsequent bearing this model of gender socialization may have on a reconsideration of femininity in her work. I consider the story's focus on kinship relations outside an oedipally-driven family structure to reflect back on the motif of sisterhood in Rossetti's work, particularly her best-known poem "Goblin Market."

In *Speaking Likenesses*, being "first," or being a "one," initially seems influenced by a form of femininity Rossetti encountered in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Critics have remarked that Rossetti's story is a rather confrontational response to the "deficiencies" of the Alice stories: Rossetti wrote to her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, that *Speaking Likenesses* was a "Christmas

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[129] Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 10.

trifle, would-be in the *Alice* style."[130] A reviewer from the *Athenaeum* additionally writes "if

Alice had never been to Wonderland" the story would have been more enjoyable.[131] Certainly,

Rossetti's story contains a number of direct references to Carroll's work—notably, the young

protagonist Flora's knowledge on her birthday that, unlike Alice, "to be eight years old when last

night one was merely seven, this is pleasure."[132] Yet *Speaking Likenesses* represents in much

more lurid detail what Carroll's narratives suggest in abstract form. In both of Carroll's *Alice*

stories, the girl protagonist's age becomes a pivot around which the narratives explore girlhood's

possibilities for different forms of growth and change. In Rossetti's story, by comparison, Flora

seizes upon Humpty Dumpty's threat to Alice in *Looking-Glass* that "with proper assistance you

might have left off at seven."[133] While Carroll's Alice manages to confront death at certain

sporadic moments within the *Alice* books, Rossetti's children's tale addresses limit conditions in

a much more dangerous fashion, using child characters to explore the extremes of anarchy, pain,

isolation, violence, and failure. To be sure, all of these bleak topics seem latent in Wonderland.

But they subsequently become the only reality for girlhood in Rossetti's punishing story. U.C.

Knoeplfmacher claims that Rossetti's "emphasis on dissociation or unlikeness [with Carroll]

continued to be misread as an expression of kinship or likeness" between them.[134] This remark

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[130] William Michael Rossetti, ed. *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (New York: Scribners, 1969), 44.

[131] "Christmas Books," *Athenaeum*, 26 December 1874: 877–78.

[132] *Forbidden Journeys*, ed. Knoepflmacher and Auerbach, 326.

[133] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass, The Definitive Edition*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Norton, 2000), 211.

[134] U. C. Knoepflmacher, "Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41 (1986): 302.

suggests a polarity of dissociation and likeness that, as Rossetti shows in her story, are less removed from each other than may seem. Rather, *Speaking Likeness*es suggests a proximity to, rather than a rigid confrontation with, the potentially troubling aspects of Carroll's *Alice* stories.

Speaking Likenesses is a tripartite set of stories with three separate girl protagonists that Nina Auerbach and Knoepflmacher—the only critics to give this short work any attention—have noted was originally titled "Nowhere."[135] The first story recounts the adventures of Flora on her eighth birthday, who is made to play with other children, real and imaginary, that involve her in ghastly games such as "Hunt the Pincushion," a game that instructs children to "select the smallest and weakest player" and chase her around with pins.[136] The second story observes the failure of another girl, Edith, to boil water in a teakettle. The third story, a subtle reworking of the motif of Charles Perrault's *Red Riding Hood,* recounts the adventures of Maggie, a young girl who must deliver some Christmas tapers and encounters all manner of horrific creatures in the woods through which she travels. A clipped, unnamed Aunt narrates this set of three tales to three little girls while they practice their sewing. The labor of narrative and the utilitarian sewing task converge in a forbidden aunt figure who thwarts every attempt at idealization of adulthood, and refuses to romanticize storytelling.

She tells her girl listeners: "all eyes on occupations, not on me lest I should feel shy" (325). Later on, she comments: "I will try to be wonderful; but I cannot promise first-rate wonders on such extremely short notice" (350). The aunt narrator compels us to forget the

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[135] *Forbidden Journeys*, ed. Knoepflmacher and Auerbach, 318.

[136] Rossetti, *Speaking Likenesses* (London: Macmillan, 1874), reprinted in, *Forbidden Journeys*, ed. Knoepflmacher and Auerbach, 336. Subsequent page references will be made in parentheses in the main text.

speakers we would associate with narratives of morality and instruction. Instead of a priest, or a mother, Rossetti allocates the power of story-telling to a figure with an asymmetrical relationship to models of learning inherited from the patriarchal family, an extreme version of "all of those stern but kindly schoolmistresses and godmothers, governesses and maiden aunts" that Auerbach associates with a tradition of didactic children's literature, satirized by Carroll.[137] As frame narrator, the aunt has shifted us sideways from the patrilineal and vertical model of epistemology we might expect from a seeming cautionary tale for little girls, suppressing all aspirations toward any kind of traditional womanhood. We find ourselves instead in the realm of negation, where every seeming "lesson" encounters an opposite possibility that consequently obliterates it.

Speaking Likenesses creates a world in which, like Wonderland, girl children's primary negotiations of their identity happen in the absence of a parent, where the storytelling aunt equates a "mother's kiss" with an "unattainable gift": impossible and redundant (326). In place of these paradigms of identification based on mothers and fathers, Rossetti's set of tales draws our attention to a different axis of kinship relations, primarily based on aunts, cousins, sisters, and brothers. As if this interest was not sufficiently defamiliarizing, Rossetti brings each story's protagonist into a set of encounters with figures that suggest a "speaking likeness" of every girl. Yet each speaking likeness is hardly alike, and they simultaneously gesture to an overwhelming and uncontainable strangeness. These figures happen to always be other children. This structure of horizontal likeness, devoid of neat oppositions or complementarity, is not isolated to *Speaking Likenesses*, but appears throughout Rossetti's work primarily in the form of sisterhood in her short writings in *Commonplace,* lyrics such as "Sister Maude," "Noble Sisters," and "En Route/An 'Immurata' Sister," and finally, her best known poem, "Goblin Market."

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[137] *Forbidden Journeys*, ed. Knoepflmacher and Auerbach, 318.

It is only recently, however, that criticism has explored such potent examples of horizontal kinship as markers of a particular kind of difference. Helena Michie, for example, argues that though the depiction of sisterhood in Rossetti's work and other Victorian texts is clearly uneasy, sisterhood ultimately "acts as a protecting framework within which women can fall and recover their way, a literary convention in which female sexuality can be explored and reabsorbed within the teleology of family."[138] By comparison, Joseph Bristow writes in "'No Friend like a Sister'? Christina Rossetti's Female Kin," that contrary to a traditional perspective on sisterhood's "utopian possibilities" in Rossetti's work, "sisterhood rests on an enduring contradiction…If there is 'No friend like a sister,' there is potentially no enemy like her too."[139] In *Speaking Likenesses,* I suggest that this troubled sense of sibling relations around girlhood and femininity reaches its culmination.

In the first short tale from *Speaking Likenesses*, Flora wakes up on her eighth birthday to what seems like a rather conventional and picturesque sight: "Her mother stooping over the child's soft bed woke her with a kiss. 'Good morning, my darling, I wish you many and many happy returns of the day,' said the dear kind mother: and Flora woke up to a sense of sunshine, and of pleasure full of hope" (325). The narrator immediately undercuts this moment by telling her listeners: "yet I tell you, from the sad knowledge of my older experience, that to every one of you a day will most likely come when sunshine, hope, presents and pleasure will be worth nothing to in comparison with the unattainable gift of a mother's kiss" (326). Rhetorically, the

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[138] Helena Michie, *Sororophobia: Differences among Women in Literature and Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 18.

[139] Joseph Bristow, "'No Friend Like a Sister'?: Christina Rossetti's Female Kin," *Victorian Poetry* 33 (1995): 278.

narrator showcases the persistence of negativity over any notion of "hope" in this story, and especially a hope associated with mothers. When Flora's mother tells her that her cousins and friends have been invited and "you are to be queen of the feast, because it is your birthday; and I trust you will all be very good and happy together" (326), this sentiment sounds distinctly ironic given the ironic shadow that the Aunt figure casts. Absent mothers figure prominently in Gothic narratives, but here Rossetti has taken us beyond the boundaries of a transgressive children's tale. Instead, the comfort of the maternal does not present an originary trauma, but merely ceases to signify at all.

Rossetti's narrator observes that "Flora loved her brother and sister, her friend Emily, and her cousins Richard, George and Anne: indeed I think that with all their faults these children did really love each other….Well, we shall see" (326). We are again lead to anticipate the chaos that ensues when the children "play." Yet the narrative gives equal attention to a kind of love between children: "Love me," said Serena, throwing her arms round her small hostess and giving her a clinging kiss: "I will love you so much if you only let me love you" (327). This love, as the story makes clear a few lines later, is deeply contradictory. Not only does it figure more prominently than the fleeting affection of a mother, but also transitions into a drastic scene of chaotic tantrums and fighting between the children: "Sad to say, what followed was a wrangle…for surely before now in that game toes have been trodden on, hair pulled, and small children overthrown" (328). The story vividly recounts a community built on antagonism, in which "play" repeatedly refers to situations of absurd violence, but violence seemingly oriented around the claustrophobic interchangeability between the children (the story frequently refers to a mass of "ugly faces" to describe them). The uncanny marker of difference—an "apple of discord" that the children "tossed…to and fro as if it had been a pretty plaything"—suggests a

non-pedagogic void around gendered distinction that the Aunt cryptically alludes to in an aside: "[What apple, Aunt?—The Apple of Discord, Clara, which is the famous apple your brothers would know all about, and you may ask them some day. Now I go on]" (328). The apple of discord's origins in Greek mythology involves a dispute between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite that eventually led to the Trojan War. Here Rossetti has carefully redirected this mythological symbol of thinly-veiled carnal strife to the volatile relationships between children.

The accompanying illustration, drawn by Arthur Hughes and entitled "The Apple of Discord," portrays the children cowering under a monstrous, Medusa-like figure, carrying an apple in one hand and a dagger at her waist (Figure 2). This illustration links the apple of discord to two other intersecting references: the apple of carnal knowledge plucked by Eve in the Biblical story of Genesis, and the mythical form of the "femme fatale." Both situate femininity at the uneasy border of violence and rebellion, rather than redemption and purity. Interestingly enough, it is Clara's "brothers" who "would know all about" a signifier of the "discord" at the heart of gendered difference. Here Rossetti displaces the non-knowledge surrounding the marker between masculinity and femininity onto a violent children's game between siblings.

Figure 2: Arthur Hughes, *The Apple of Discord*, from Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (London: Macmillan, 1874). University of Michigan Library.

The struggle to distinguish oneself, then, in such a world of seemingly endless torment prompts Flora to ask: "Was this the end of her birthday? Was she eight years old at last only for this?" (330). Rossetti offers no clear lesson, religious or not, for her girl-protagonist here. Instead, Flora finds herself entering the dark world of fantasy after she knocks on the door of a yew tree and is ushered into "a large and lofty apartment, very handsomely furnished" (332). The scene initially reflects an automaton world populated by objects such as footstools and tea-trays, an uncanny portrait of Victorian domesticity. This world then transforms into a pastiche of elements from the *Alice* books, where Flora notes that "the only uncomfortable point in the room, that is, as to furniture, was that both ceiling and walls were lined throughout with looking-glasses: but at first this did not strike Flora as any disadvantage; indeed she thought it quite delightful, and took a long look at her little self full length" (332). Not only do these looking-glasses reflect oneself to infinity; they also seem to spiral outward and refract a separate

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multiplicity, since Flora finds that she is in a room "full of boys and girls, older and younger, big and little" (333).

Rossetti literalizes the thoughts and subsequent fears of Carroll's Alice by seating the children at "tables like telescope tables; only they expanded and contracted of themselves without extra pieces, and seemed to study everybody's convenience" (333). In Rossetti's world, the ownership Alice rehearsed by comparing herself to a telescope in Wonderland is at a considerable distance from Flora. The boys and girls "stared hard" "with so many eyes upon her" (333), a kind of alienated mass that is produced by the multiple looking-glasses. The many hostile boys and girls of Rossetti's anti-Wonderland neutralize difference to an extreme, such that when the birthday Queen finally speaks, the Aunt asks: "[Who was it? Was it a boy or a girl?—Listen, and you shall hear, Laura]" (333).

The Queen tells Flora: " 'it's my birthday, and everything is mine'" (333). The "ugliness" of this birthday queen at first contrasts with Flora who is "too honest a little girl to eat strawberries that were not given her" (334). Yet the fantasy queen resonates with Rossetti's protagonist in a number of explicit ways. Not content merely to have her protagonist confront a shadow of her self, Rossetti suggests that these "speaking likenesses" approach each other to infinite degrees of closeness:

> The birthday Queen, reflected over and over again in five hundred mirrors, looked frightful, I do assure you: and for one minute I am sorry to say that Flora's fifty million-fold face appeared flushed and angry too; but she soon tried to smile good-humouredly and succeeded, though she could not manage to feel very merry.

[But Aunt, how came she to have fifty million faces? I don't understand—

Because in such a number of mirrors there were not merely simple reflections, but

reflections of reflections, and so on and on and on, over and over again, Maude:

don't you see?]. (334)

The Aunt's explanation of this myriad of reflections strikes a threatening note. It is as if the "five

hundred mirrors" of Flora's fantasy world, already excessive and boundless, might escape the

narrative itself, which is already disrupted by the listener's questions. It is this automatic, lateral

reproduction, rather than any kind of growth or change into maturity, that Rossetti's Aunt

suggests is to be feared most.

These endlessly reflected children rehearse the earlier games of Flora's party, except in

crueler and more violent ways. The children fight over the nature of "girl's games" versus "boy's

games," and the Queen settles on Hunt the Pincushion. With Flora forced to be the "pincushion"

among these "throngs," she endures a kind of figurative child rape before escaping. Though the

Aunt notes that "pleasure palls in the long run" (338), she also cryptically alludes to "unmixed

pleasure" and "exuberant enjoyment" somewhere among the jabs and blows (338). Violence and

pleasure occupy the same, necessary space in this fantasy world, and as the games continue, the

narrative resembles less of a moral lesson and more of an aesthetic exercise in testing the

extreme bounds of likeness. The last game follows a banquet in which Flora, starving, watches

the other children consume a buffet of food. The children start to build glass houses that they

"built from within" (339), enclosing themselves within their creations. While "a very gay effect

indeed was produced…some houses glowed like masses of ruby, and others shone like enormous

chrysolites or sapphires" (340), the reigning effect on a psychic level is clearly claustrophobia.

Flora finds that "she was being built in with the Queen" (340), made not only to confront her

terrifying likeness, but also to be housed with her in a kind of psychic prison. In this final moment before a child hurls a stone at the houses and a climactic scene of warfare ensues, the Aunt's earlier aside to "look at home" (338) for similar signs of violence emerges in a literal and uncanny context. In fact, Rossetti seems to have foregrounded Freud's association of the *unheimlich* with forms of repetition and likeness.

The fantasy world dissolves when "half mad with fear, Flora flung herself after [a stone] through the breach—" (342). Driving herself to death is the only way to break the spell for Rossetti's protagonist. Yet reality does not present an affirmation of Flora's renewal, as the Aunt cryptically closes the story by asserting difference only through the perilous trail of likeness:

> And I think if she lives to be nine years old and give another birthday party, she is likely on that occasion to be even less like the birthday Queen of her troubled dream than was the Flora of eight years old: who, with dear friends and playmates and pretty presents, yet scarcely knew how to bear a few trifling disappointments, or how to be obliging and good-humoured under slight annoyances. (342)

Beneath the surface of a stock moral conclusion lies the more sinister claim that growing older depends upon surviving the event of lateral trauma, that is, striving to be "even less like the Birthday Queen" of one's likeness.

The brief middle story of Speaking *Likenesses* focuses on Edith, a little girl who attempts repeatedly to light a fire under a teakettle in the woods, and fails miserably. Ostensibly, the story sets up a test narrative for Edith to perform the morally correct action by not "playing with fire." As Auerbach and Knoeplfmacher astutely note, this narrative escapes its apparent moralistic foundations immediately to become a tale of utter negation.[140] Though Edith's many attempts to

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[140] *Forbidden Journeys*, ed. Knoepflmacher and Auerbach, 219.

"play with fire" suggest proximity to hell, rather than heaven, and a subsequent Evangelical lesson against moral recklessness,[141] Edith's tale also suggests something more about narrative expectation, and more to the point, gender expectation. Repetition in Rossetti's fantasy world often produces some kind of failure, and Edith's literal inability to succeed in the eyes of others reveals her own shortcomings in two respects: first, if she completed her task properly, she would also grow up, and secondly, she would be able to partake in the social world of her mother's gypsy party. Therefore, the story denies Edith a *bildung*, or success through experience, since her actions repeat but never actually generate growth, progress or change. Further, the narrator of Edith's story carefully enumerates each of the girl's attempts to light a fire—"[s]he struck a second Lucifer, with the like result: a third, a fourth, with no better success"—in order to point out how Edith's desires are again and again propelled by negative labor (219). The point that emerges here is that no matter how much Edith labors, she remains limited by the boundaries of her isolation. But it is precisely the redundancy of growing up, and ostensibly, reaching womanhood, that highlights all the more vividly Edith's separation from the world of adult sociality she so badly wants to join. Like Flora's narrative, this story works by repeating similitude to generate the uncanny fantasy world of Edith's unconscious.

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[141] Anna Despotopoulou observes that Edith's play with fire would resonate with Mary Martha Sherwood's *History of the Fairchild Family*, published in three volumes between 1818 and 1847, in which the Fairchild children must endure nightmarish morality tales, such as their playmate getting burned alive while playing with fire. Anna Despotopoulou, "Nowhere or Somewhere? (Dis)Locating Gender and Class Boundaries in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses*," *Review of English Studies* 61 (2009): 414–34.

The negativity of Edith's labor in the woods recalls the Hegelian dialectic, but with a very different inflection. For Edith, repetitive negative action represents pure stasis, and curiously, this redundancy and lack of progressive movement makes Edith's singularity—Edith as only Edith—all the more prominent. In her story, the Aunt introduces sociality in order to remove it, and foreground Edith's isolation. The little girl, the Aunt remarks, is "as wise as her elder brother, sister, and nurse" (343). Yet as her mother prepares to throw her gypsy feast in the woods, Edith is left utterly alone with no one but her doll. In the woods, where she ventures to boil her kettle, she finds herself in the company of talking forest animals, including a judgmental toad who eggs Edith on: "'Now,' cried the frog hopping up and down in his excitement and curiosity, 'Now to boil the kettle.'" (349). As Kathryn Burlinson has observed, Rossetti's interest in animals and other creatures in her fantasy worlds registers the importance of the nonhuman.[142] In Edith's circumstances, however, the animals are anthropomorphized (they speak), suggesting that only the dark remnants of human sociality remain in the woods, creatures who not only remind Edith of the adult realm she cannot join, but also recall the hazardous natural world of traditional folklore. Further, the narrator tells us that Edith must endure the abstract fear that "her relations, friends and other natural enemies would be arriving, and would triumph over her" (346). She is haunted by the expectations of those she identifies with—that is, everyone but her parents it would seem—suggesting that the stakes of successfully lighting the fire have to do with the uneasy task of relating to others, and the sheer impossibility of doing so. "Relations, friends, and other natural enemies" thus brings friends and enemies together in a kind of

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[142] Kathryn Burlinson, "Frogs and Fat Toads," in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1999), 170–93.

collective antagonism. Together, they suggest a fated aspect to Edith's failure, as if her subjecthood has been doomed from the start. Negative labor, then, in the form of striking the lucifers, ultimately reveals Edith's singularity by prohibiting the expectation of generative possibility.

Significantly, the only thing that Edith's suspended oneness can generate is literary form. As we can see in the list of clauses in the final paragraph, the conclusion generates a series of statements, beginning with "as," that resemble poetic form:

> As the pigeons withdrew bowing and silent,
>
> As the squirrels scudded up his beach-tree again,
>
> As the mole vanished underground,
>
> As the toad hid himself behind a toadstool,
>
> As the two hedgehogs yawned and went away yawning,
>
> As the frog dived…(350)

The nursery-like rhythm of the sequence introduces a seemingly endless simile structure before we come across the abrupt arrival of the nurse: "Nurse arrived on the ground with a box of lucifers in one hand" (350). We can see from the quotation, that the "as" connects the different clauses but preserves their separateness from each other. These lines place Edith in conjunction with this strange sociality of creatures who are involved in a movement of withdrawing and hiding in a distinctly unharmonious natural world. Keeping in mind Erik Gray's observation that "any poetic list is to some extent self-defeating,"[143] I suggest that this "as" reinforces the absence of reproductive and generative possibility in Edith's story, while producing a different kind of

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[143] Erik Gray, "Faithful Likenesses: Lists of Similes in Milton, Shelley, and Rossetti," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48 (2006): 291.

movement: oneness within stasis. As a consequence, we can grasp that the "as" has its own

generative principle which in many respects is self-obscuring and self-enclosing. Edith's story

ends by foregrounding its own form: a non-hierarchical, non-progressive narrative. It finally

directs its reader toward a state of oneness separate from everything else.

In the final, "winter story" of *Speaking Likenesses,* Maggie, an orphan, must deliver some

Christmas tapers for her grandmother, Dame Margaret. Like Red Riding-Hood from the Grimm

Brothers tale, Maggie traverses a sinister wood populated by all manner of fearsome elements. In

Rossetti's story, however, what troubles Maggie in the woods resembles monstrous "likenesses"

of her isolation (children not unlike those from Flora's dream world), hunger (the "Mouth boy"),

and desire for rest (the "Sleepers in the Wood"). Similarly to Flora and Edith from the previous

tales, Maggie appears drastically isolated in a world without a clear family structure. The Aunt

tells us that Dame Margaret took home "little Maggie, her orphan granddaughter, when the child

was left almost without kith or kin to care for her. These two were quite alone in the world: each

was the other's only living relation, and they loved each other very dearly" (351). The isolation

the Aunt vividly foregrounds also contributes to the claustrophobia of the story, and the

likenesses that come to haunt Maggie emanate from this place of lack.

Dame Margaret operates a shop, and Maggie ventures into an "oak forest" to deliver the

goods to a doctor on the other side of the village. Though she "set off on her journey with a jump

and a run," (352), Maggie's adventure begins with a violent fall on the ice. The Aunt addresses

this in her usual tone of nonchalance, noting that "whether her brain got damaged by the blow, or

how else it may have been, I know not; I only know that the thwack seemed in one moment to

fill the atmosphere around her with sparks, flames and flashes of lightning; and that from this

identical point of time commenced her marvelous adventures" (352). This nonchalance is cruel,

unsentimental, and distinctly not romanticized. The physicality of this description additionally reminds us that while Maggie might spiritually be "fallen," she is also possibly disfigured, and not whole. The violence of this moment positions Maggie on the edge of constant fragmentation and splitting.

Maggie's desires produce a negative sociality in her fantasy world. As she journeys into the cold, a swarm of chanting, "monstrous" children surround her, seducing her into their game and making her forget her "fatal promise" to deliver her goods (354). For Maggie, her lack of "kith and kin" means she has to imagine these children, and as the narrator reminds us, "we must bear in mind that Maggie had no playfellows at home" (354). Later, Maggie runs into a group of "sleepers" resting around a fire, and the Aunt remarks: "Do you know, children, what would most likely have happened to Maggie if she had yielded to drowsiness and slept out there in the cold?...Most likely she would never have woke again. And then there would have been an abrupt end to my story" (356). The Aunt suggests that the stakes here are much greater than the moral lesson of denying one's desires, or as Julia Briggs observes, the redeeming force of a "spiritual journey."[144] The "abrupt end" of Maggie, or in other words, the constant, drastic foreshadowing of her death, brings the aesthetic and narrative potential of likeness to the fore. It is as if Maggie's proximity to death, like Edith's, represents an immovable condition. Her subjectivity cannot be neatly sublimated in death, to employ the Hegelian terminology these stories seem to ask for, but can only and importantly generate literary form through stasis.

The most striking "likeness" in the story is the Mouth Boy, who ostensibly reflects Maggie's hunger and desire to eat the chocolate from her basket of goods she is delivering. The

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[144] Julia Briggs, "*Speaking Likenesses:* Hearing the Lesson," in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. Mary Arseneau et al, 212–31.

Aunt asks: "Or was it a real boy? He had indeed arms, legs, a head, like ordinary people, but his face exhibited only one feature, and that was a wide mouth. He had no eyes; so how he came to know that Maggie and a basket were standing in his way I cannot say" (356). The gendered dynamic is difficult to ignore here: thus far the story's sharp focus on these "small heroines" (ie. Flora, Edith, Maggie) in Rossetti's own words,[145] shifts to a grotesque boy figure, himself a "likeness" of Edith, but also an important marker of difference. Arthur Hughes's illustration additionally reveals a portly boy with exaggerated lips and sharp teeth, holding his arms out to Maggie (Figure 3). Maggie's fantasy of hunger conjures the boy and magnifies her desires. Not only is this boy of the opposite sex; he is also impotent and incomplete, since he is notably missing his eyes and can be read as metaphorically castrated. Maggie's "appetite" generates a stilted form of desire, refusing clear gendered opposition in favor of this hideous physical asymmetry. This is an interesting disjunction that recalls, but also reworks, the Lacanian splitting of the subject. Jacqueline Rose glosses Lacan in her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality* (a 1985 anthology of Lacanian writings on the topic): "sexuality belongs in this area of instability played out in the register of demand and desire, each sex coming to stand, mythically and exclusively, for that which could satisfy and complete the other."[146] In her only confrontation with the opposite sex in this story, Maggie can only experience the loss of any such myth of completeness through gendered opposition. Maggie's desires, culminating in this projection of the Mouth Boy,

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[145] Qtd. in Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2002), 129.

[146] Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Pantheon Books, 1985), 33.

ultimately refract the failure of conventional sexual difference in a grotesque and uncanny

likeness.

Figure 3, Arthur Hughes, *Mouth Boy,* from Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (London:

Macmillan, 1874). University of Michigan Library.

This unusual moment raises a question about the representation of forms of distinction

throughout Rossetti's three tales. Difference in the fantasy worlds of *Speaking Likenesses*

operates as the excess of repeated likeness, as it is Maggie's own repressed desires that project

minimal but threatening forms of difference. Therefore, Rossetti has taken us beyond the limits

of the binary of self/other that this story may superficially represent. In *Speaking Likenesses*, the

projection of otherness always fails to reinforce even an imagined wholeness through clear

distinctions, and this psychic operation transgresses the limits of fantasy. As Andrea J. Kaston

remarks, Hughes' illustrations—most notably the grotesque figure of the Mouth boy—render the world of "real" children

more terrifying than any fairy character.[147] Maggie's determination eventually thwarts her

likenesses and causes them to evaporate, and to be sure, this is a happier ending to her story than

that of Flora's and Edith's. Her ostensible success, however, is ultimately less important than the

perverse activity of girlhood perpetually discovering that projected differences are really forms

of likeness. These likenesses, furthermore, can never reflect a preexisting idea of what girlhood

and femininity should be. Ultimately, Maggie inhabits a world in which predictable forms of

differentiation remain impossible.

Every girl in the set of stories that make up *Speaking Likenesses* must confront her

strangely charged isolation, or "oneness," as a kind of phatasmagoric likeness that operates along

lateral lines. This fantasy structure carries a very different inflection from Rossetti's earlier short

fiction, such as "Nick," in which religious piety carries an important and central weight, and

fantasy itself must be guarded against.[148] While Maggie's journey might suggest the need for

salvation, just as Edith's story references some kind of hellish world symbolized by fire, these

allegorical resonances are secondary to the narrative project of representing girlhood's uncanny

and thus ineluctable singularity. The primacy of singular girlhood in *Speaking Likenesses*

produces a series of highly particularized concerns that explicitly links the representation of

femininity with the inescapable and drastic recognition that it can never transcend itself.

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[147] Andrea J. Kaston, "Speaking Pictures: The Fantastic World of Christina Rossetti and Arthur Hughes," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 28 (1998): 307.

[148] Knoeplfmacher and Auerbach label "Nick" "Rossetti's cautionary parable" (*Forbidden Journeys,* 320).

2. "Goblin Market" and Sisterhood

Critics have long associated the representation of femininity in Rossetti's poetry with some form of sisterhood. In his 1962 essay, Winston Weathers claims that sisterhood symbolized "the fragmented self moving or struggling toward harmony or balance."[149] Weathers' claim recalls Hegel's statements in the *Phenomenonology of Spirit* about the brother-sister relationship as the ideal synthesis of the dialectic, an idea that we see manifested in the works of Schiller as well as Wagner. Many critics in recent decades, such as Jill Rappoport, see the motifs of deferred desire associated with Rossetti's perspective on femininity as reflective of the values of Anglican sisterhood communities.[150] Along with her equally devoted older sister, Rossetti was an associate of St Mary Magdalene's Penitentiary at Highgate, which worked to rescue women branded "fallen" by the norms of Victorian society. Though the fantasies of likeness that repeat endlessly within *Speaking Likenesses* and the worlds of its singular girl protagonists might seem unfamiliar in the canon of Rossetti's writing compared to her widely anthologized work from *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *The Prince's Progress* (1866), Rossetti's preoccupation with a form of feminine singularity that shirks difference in favor of likeness can be traced back to these early poems, and specifically, to her poems dealing with sisterhood, which recast femininity within the framework of the sororal. I return to these poems in order to focus on the relationship between likeness and singularity that sisterhood—a lateral mode of kinship that depends on similarity as much as it depends on minimal forms of difference—articulates in Rossetti's writing.

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[149] Winston Weathers, "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self," *Victorian Poetry* 3 (1965): 81.

[150] See Jill Rappoport, "The Price of Redemption in 'Goblin Market,'" *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 50 (2010): 853–75.

The most celebrated of these works is "Goblin Market," a well known poem that narrates the encounter between the near-homonymic sisters, Lizzie and Laura, and the goblin men who sell fruits with a "shrill repeated cry" of "Come buy, come buy" (6). This is the work that scholars have repeatedly looked to for evidence regarding Rossetti's focused interest in sisterhood. As countless readers will recall, Laura is successfully lured by the goblins and eats their fruit, withering away until Lizzie, who "could not bear / To watch her sister's cankerous care / Yet not to share" (13) offers herself to the goblins who "coaxed and fought her / Bullied and besought her" (16). Lizzie's violent sacrifice leads to a "life out of death" (19) for Laura who "kissed and kissed and kissed her" (18), and eventually a seeming order is restored at the poem's conclusion. This work, which Victorian readers found to be aesthetically redeeming (if not a bit "dark") and "most purely and completely a work of art,"[151] was largely read, in the twentieth century, as an allegory of sexual corruption and fallenness. This reading is not difficult to grasp given the cycle of temptation, death and redemption that the poem invites us to see on a surface level. In the last two decades, however, critics have revisited the work productively in light of other topics. The first important set of critical readings concerns the intersection of gender and consumer power in the market, notably in Elizabeth K. Helsinger's, Victor Mendoza's, and Mary Wilson Carpenter's persuasive accounts.[152] The second vein of criticism contextualizes the poem

[151] Review of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in the *British Quarterly Review* (July 1862), qtd. in Rossetti, *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, 27–28.

[152] See Elizabeth K. Helsinger, "Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'," *ELH* 58 (1991): 903–33; Victor Roman Mendoza, "'Come Buy,': The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *ELH* 73 (2006): 913–47; Mary Wilson Carpenter, "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,'" *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991): 415–34.

in terms of nineteenth-century debates over fallen women and prostitution, a cluster of ideas with which Rossetti would have been familiar with given her involvement with Anglican Sisterhoods and the St. Mary Magdalene Home at Highgate. Jan Marsh for instance, notes the parallels between "Goblin Market" and a religious parable from the Englishwomen's Journal in 1857 about a "penitent who falls ill from distress of mind" after eating a forbidden apple.[153]

Despite the numerous readings that attempt to determine the sources for Rossetti's allusive tale, most analyses of sisterhood in "Goblin Market" have overlooked the poem's structural reliance on likeness to produce a form of difference that results in singular oneness.[154] Janet Casey, for instance, astutely notes: "*Goblin Market* celebrates a dynamism—a 'sisterhood'—between polarities, and allows Laura and Lizzie to embody this interdependence in both narrative and metaphoric terms."[155] But she also posits an ideal of "completeness" and "wholeness" in the poem that sisterhood encompasses, a term that flattens a less than universal oneness we find at the end of the work.[156] To begin with, it is not hard to see that the poem counts: it places emphasis on "ones" and "twos" in order to distinguish the goblins from the sisters. Early verses describe each goblin as follows: "One had a cat's face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat's pace / One crawled like a snail" (7). The sisters, meanwhile, seem to represent an intimate twoness: "Like two blossoms on one stem, / Like two flakes of new-fall'n

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[153] Jan Marsh, "Christina Rossetti's Vocation: The Importance of 'Goblin Market,'" *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994): 242.

[154] A notable reading of sisterhood in particular in this poem is by Dorothy Mermin: "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market,'" *Victorian Poetry* 21 (1983): 107–18.

[155] Janet Galligani Casey, "The Potential of Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,'" *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991): 66.

[156] Casey, "The Potential of Sisterhood," 75.

snow, Like two wands of ivory / Tipped with gold for awful kings" (10). This distinction, however, is not as polarized as the poem would lead us to believe. By the end of the poem, oneness falls on the side of the sisters, and we find that the deceptively simple twoness of their sororal relationality has effectively un-duplicated itself. The much-discussed conclusion to the poem, in which the girls have transformed into wives and mothers, demonstrates a form of singularity that not only distinguishes itself from the particularized oneness of the goblin men, as I will discuss here, but also depends on their twoness to exist:

> "For there is no friend like a sister
>
> In calm or stormy weather;
>
> To cheer one on the tedious way,
>
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
>
> To lift one if one totters down,
>
> To strengthen whilst one stands." (20)

Here, the poem shows us quite clearly that likeness cannot be mimesis, or in Jean Luc Nancy's words, that "the like is not the same (*le semblable n'est pas le pareil*)."[157] My choice of Nancy here is quite deliberate, as I want to foreground the move the poem makes to a tenuous form of community that is no longer wed to a petrified notion of the solitary individual, nor the isolated "one." Rather, these lines encourage us to differentiate between the "oneness" of the goblin men, which is numeric, particular, and only operates on a descriptive level, and the "oneness" ascribed to the sisters that involves action and possibility ("to cheer one," "to fetch one," "to lift one"). The decisive shift in the poem from "like two" to "one" negates erotic complementarity

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[157] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 33.

produced through gender binaries, because sisterly likeness has lead to a singularity that bears little relation to the forms of difference that previously carved out and defined this sameness.

It is no accident that Michie, who has looked at sisterly difference in her reading of the poem in *Sororophobia,* notably invokes these ones and twos to suggest that the poem moves from the twoness of sisterly intimacy to the oneness of sexual knowledge. According to Michie, Victorian texts exhibit a form of "sororophobia": the simultaneous desire for and aversion to the representation of sisters. Such literary works "frequently enrich and complicate feminist notions of sisterhood, as they undermine our most dearly cherished tropes of female unity."[158] Michie quite aptly suggests that "Goblin Market" "is perhaps more accurately also a poem about sexual difference."[159] Michie, however, goes further by drawing attention to a complex dichotomy in the poem between domestic sameness, the "undifferentiation" of virginity that Lizzie, the "good sister" operates in, and the goblin men's trade in difference, or more precisely, the individuation produced by sexual knowledge and sexual difference. Yet aligning difference, or "ones"—a term that is distinctly non-homogenous in the poem—exclusively with the goblin men, and sameness, or "twos" with the domestic safety of the sororal, does not adequately capture the poem's ultimate emphasis on a oneness that escapes both of these categorical distinctions.

In what follows, I analyze the ways in which "Goblin Market" navigates various forms of difference—economic, sexual, and aesthetic, all of which scholars have studied in detail—as means for examining seemingly hard and fast distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Indeed, the gendered distinction between goblin men on the one hand, and Lizzie and Laura on the other hand, has been the main binary through which critics have sought to understand this

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[158] Michie, *Sororophobia*, 21.

[159] Michie, *Sororophobia*, 33.

poem. It is clear from the onset that the goblins represent some form of racialized masculinity.

They are "merchant men" (7) and animal-like: "the cat-face purr'd / The rat-paced spoke a word"

(8). Lizzie and Laura, of course, represent the only recognizable femininity in the poem

(although they do allude to their deceased friend Jeannie). What remains absent from the

conclusion of this work is an affirmation of a form of femininity by or within these gendered

polarities. The singular femininity we find in the conclusion to the poem, similar to the drastic

isolation we see in *Speaking Likenesses,* arises unexpectedly from an uncanny likeness that

characterizes sisterhood, and this sisterhood runs against the grain of Michie's claim that

"sisterhood, like the Oedipus complex, is fundamentally family drama."[160] Rather, "Goblin

Market" takes great pains to distinguish sisterhood from familial structures.

In the poem, sisterhood stands in a relationship of complete alterity to precisely those

vertical lines of kinship that the Oedipus complex signifies. No sooner have we read the opening

lines than we realize that Oedipal structures are absent from "Goblin Market," since the poem

begins by notably representing "maids" and "goblins" in a shared form of generality, one that

suggests no point of origin for either: "Morning and evening / Maids heard the goblin cry: 'Come

buy our orchard fruits, Come buy, come buy" (5). While "maids and goblins" certainly refer to a

gendered distinction, "morning and evening" only connote cyclicality, without patrilineal or

generational history. Further, the sisters Lizzie and Laura bear no relation to anyone but each

other. When we first hear of their individual names, they appear isolated from any clear history

or familial context:

> Evening by evening
>
> Among the brookside rushes

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[160] Michie, *Sororophobia,* 20.

> Laura bowed her head to hear,
>
> Lizzie veiled her blushes:
>
> Crouching close together
>
> In the cooling weather,
>
> With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
>
> With tingling cheeks and finger tips. (6)

By stark contrast, the goblin men represent a clear form of fraternity that preserves their differences through the familial bond of "brothers":

> They stood stock still upon the moss,
>
> Leering at each other,
>
> Brother with queer brother;
>
> Signalling each other,
>
> Brother with sly brother. (7)

The goblins, importantly, represent a lateral generative order that is seemingly endless. Therefore, distinction between the goblins on the order of the "one" is also blatantly non-distinctive, slipping easily into the mass of "they" and the inclusive "voice and stir" (308). The goblins, then, possess an individuality that only represents a part of a whole: their difference belies universal sameness.

The sisters, however, initiate the reverse movement in the poem, in which seeming likeness becomes the vehicle for difference:

> Golden head by golden head,
>
> Like two pigeons in one nest
>
> Folded in each other's wings,

> They lay down in their curtained bed:
>
> Like two blossoms on one stem,
>
> Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
>
> Like two wands of ivory
>
> Tipped with gold for awful kings. (10)

Despite their differing approaches to the Goblin men (Laura plugs her eyes to their cries, while Lizzie goes to meet them), here Lizzie and Laura are framed by the poem as commensurable; they are yoked together by the rhythm of this stanza and the rhetorical logic of simile. The poem seems to affirm a state of perfect complementarity between the women. Yet these few lines, unlike the majority of the poem, do not rhyme: the repetition of "like two" substitutes for the propelling force of rhyme to carry the lines forward, making these words striking both formally and thematically. These lines also frame the intimacy between the sisters through a series of images that, upon closer inspection, reveal subtle distinctions: the mirroring that occurs through Laura and Lizzie's pairing is refracted through related kinds of particularity: colonial (signaled by the "two wands of ivory"), phallic (suggested by the wands "tipped with gold"), and economic (implied by the two terms "ivory and gold"). Unlike Dorothy Mermin's claim that the poem "shows women testing the allurements of male sexuality and exploring the imaginative world that male eroticism has created,"[161] male eroticism cannot seem to generate anything but sameness, while sororal likeness functions to produce imaginative difference through simile.

The point becomes even clearer when we hear about Jeannie, a third, spectral friend figure of the sister's, who "took their [the goblins'] gifts both choice and many, / Ate their fruits and wore their flowers." Jeannie represents Lizzie's cautionary tale to Laura, since she "fell with

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[161] Mermin, "Heroic Sisterhood," 117.

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the first snow" after eating goblin fruit and "While to this day no grass will grow / Where she lies low." Jeannie haunts any kind of perfect binary between Lizzie and Laura. But she also haunts complementarity between the goblin men and sisterly femininity, such that she forecloses generative possibility in the poem out of sexual difference. Jeannie's story shadows the later, more violent demonstration in the poem of gendered complementarity, that of Lizzie's symbolic rape at the hands of the goblins. In this later scene, Lizzie, wary of her sister's condition, proposes an exchange to the goblins: " 'Good folk,' said Lizzie, / Mindful of Jeannie: / 'Give me much and many:'— / Held out her apron, / Tossed them her penny" (14). While much has been made of Lizzie's knowledge of the market, compared to Laura's lack of exchangeable coins, on a much simpler level, both the market and the goblins' violence depend upon clear oppositions between sameness and difference.

Objectification, either through economic or sexual means, requires a suppression of likeness in favor of clear othering, and the goblin men only operate in terms of these binary classifications. Thus they tell Lizzie that "Such fruits as these / No man can carry; / Half their bloom would fly, / Half their dew would dry, / Half their flavour would pass by" (15). The goblins' logic of the "half," the logic of classification and particularity, can easily slide into violence, as the poem suggests when Lizzie's encounter with the goblins culminates in the form of symbolic rape: the goblins "hugged her and kissed her: / Squeezed and caressed her," then "held her hands and squeezed their fruits / Against her mouth to make her eat" (14–15). Because her sacrifice produces an antidote that then saves Laura and brings the ailing sister a "life out of a death," this moment conflates erotic imagery with the distinctly Christ-like vision of redemption. But Lizzie's sacrifice to the ultimate expression of the violence of gendered opposition—rape— also nullifies the force of this difference in the poem. Lizzie's endurance of the goblin men

amounts to gender confusion, as she alternatively inhabits a phallic position, one "like a rock of blue-veined stone," and Christ-like strength: "like a lily in a flood." The similes proliferate when Laura drinks from the "hungry mouth" of her sister:

> Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
>
> Or like an eagle when she stems the light
>
> Straight toward the sun,
>
> Or like a caged thing freed,
>
> Or like a flying flag when armies run. (18)

It is no accident that simile, rather than metaphor, flourishes at this crucial moment of resurrection, because unlike the latter, simile reinforces likeness without sliding into the perfect vertical sameness. Similes cannot express discernible identities or opposites, but they preserve a form of minimal difference in the figural act of announcing similarity. The space of minimal difference between Lizzie and Laura thus produces "life" out of the death of gendered opposition. It would seem that the poem begins to theorize sexual difference along different lines than goblin men and maids, relocating it to the space between sisters.

In the final lines, the poem glances toward a future in which the sisters move from "maidens" to "wives" and "mother-hearts":

> Days, weeks, months, years
>
> Afterwards, when both were wives
>
> With children of their own;
>
> Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
>
> Their lives bound up in tender lives
>
> Laura would call the little ones

And tell them of her early prime. (19)

As critics have noted, no men remain at the end besides the grotesque masculinity of the goblins; and the sisters' claim to motherhood seems strangely devoid of any patrilineal authority. Further, the poem only tenuously relates the children listening to the story of goblins to Lizzie or Laura, they are merely "little ones." The conclusion continues with an even stranger shift in tone:

> "For there is no friend like a sister
>
> In calm or stormy weather;
>
> To cheer one on the tedious way,
>
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
>
> To lift one if one totters down,
>
> To strengthen while one stands."

This conclusion to "Goblin Market," framed by the cheery motto, "there is no friend like a sister," has raised considerable critical attention regarding Rossetti's seemingly straightforward support of a domestic sororal world unconcerned with sexual knowledge. However, according to the poem, femininity does not signify in any meaningful way through the norms of kinship we associate with this division between knowledge and innocence, sameness and difference, and masculinity and femininity. The sisterly "ones" that conclude the poem strike an utterly different note from the "ones" of cat-faced and rat-paced goblins. This form of oneness, as I have noted before, transcends description to evoke potential, and since there are effectively no other relations in "Goblin Market" that persist besides sisterhood, this form of oneness can only carve out difference through the peculiar form of sameness that sororal relationships—or the difference between two "ones"—produces. Further, when we read the final lines out loud, the phrase "to lift one" invokes the shadow of "like two": the preposition "to"—with its implications of moving

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forward, is ghosted by the numeric energy of "two," the number. The facile tone of these final lines calls to mind the very banality of definitions that rest on the numeric value of "half," a form of collectivity and particularity that is associated with the goblin men and the market, gender binaries, and subject/object relations (Lizzie's rape). Instead, the conclusion of the poem affirms a singularity that draws from the complicated, boundary-less realm of sisterhood rather than the final, secure image of mothers and children, or the oppositional relation between goblin men and women. In effect, the poem's representation of feminine singularity is one of accession to freedom: in its final lines, femininity can operate freely in a narrative landscape that has neutralized certain forms of difference, but has its origins in a likeness that is ultimately irreproducible.

Sisterhood and Asymmetry

The extent to which Rossetti allows for feminine singularity to win out in the landscape of "Goblin Market" is exceptional in the 1862 volume, given that the issues she raises in it— gender asymmetry, the lateral trauma of siblings/sisterhood, the inescapable violence a "one" must endure—occur throughout *Goblin Market* with different consequences. When we turn to the poem that follows "Goblin Market," "In the Round Tower at Jhansi, June 8th, 1857" (1857), we can see how the asymmetry between the genders from the volume's opening narrative poem results in a strange, void-like death in this shorter lyric, a notable departure from "Goblin Market"s life-affirming ending. The poem refers to an incident that reportedly took place during the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, in which Captain Skene, superintendent of the Jhansi district, and his wife were trapped in a tower by the native infantry. The report in the *Illustrated London News* (later proved to be inaccurate) claimed that Skene "nobly resolved to save his wife from the atrocities perpetrated by the savages upon every Englishwoman unhappy enough to fall into

their hands," and shot his wife and then himself.[162] The melodrama and subsequent popularity of this story raises a number of questions about sexual difference, not least the preservation of British womanhood against the threat of the masculinized, and animalized "mass." Reminiscent of the confrontation between undifferentiated goblin men and singular sisters, the context for "Jhansi" foregrounds a couple and their joint suicide, an act that cannot seem to bridge the inescapable asymmetry between the two.

The poem juxtaposes the historical specificity of the title with the colonial violence of the rebellion, a moment the poem marks with the tyranny of the more-than-one, or in other words, the mass:

> A hundred, a thousand to one; even so;
>
> Not a hope in the world remained:
>
> The swarming howling wretches below
>
> Gained and gained and gained. (20)

In these opening lines, the poem establishes the problem of an undifferentiated mass in the terror of the "thousand to one." The mass (not without its problematic colonial reference) possesses supremacy in strength, and also in time: the stacking of the verbs "swarming," "howling," and "gained and gained and gained" portrays the mass's enduring, extended temporal presence. The all-encompassing mass is thus not only frightening in its lack of differentiation, but also in its ability to prolong and level time. In the lyric, this mass is pitted against a husband and a wife who remain unnamed throughout the poem, and the four following stanzas construct a dialogue between the two figures before they commit their dual suicide.

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[162] Qtd. in Rossetti, *Complete Poems,* 888.

As it moves from the threat of the mass to the coupling of voices, the second stanza develops the problem of time as a medium of differentiation, as the two speakers contemplate their choice to die: "'Is the time come?'—'The time is come!'—" (6). There is an ambiguity in these lines between the two voices, as if the figures of husband and wife turn indistinct from each other. But while the speakers seem to echo each other's voices, the dashes, which force a pause in the rhythm, remind us that the echo is not closed, and that the relationship is not one of perfect call-and-response. These figures do not seek a harmonious coupling, as the lapse between echoes suggests. Rather, the voices seek differentiation in the singular temporal moment: the moment before death that marks perfect stasis.

The poem makes explicit the narrow interface between sexual intimacy and death, as the "agony" of death also crosses into the domain of the erotic in these final stanzas. In the third stanza, the couple enters into a perverse embrace, each line beginning with the repetition of "close":

> Close his arm about her now
>
> Close her cheek to his,
>
> Close the pistol to her brow—
>
> God forgive them this!
>
> "Will it hurt much?"—"No, mine own:
>
> I wish I could bear the for pang for both."
>
> "I wish I could bear the pang alone:
>
> Courage, dear, I am not loth.
>
> Kiss and Kiss: "It is not pain
>
> Thus to kiss and die.

One kiss more."—"And yet one again."—

"Good bye."—"Good bye." (20)

It is unclear who will die first, and who will "bear" the pain of murdering and mourning the other. Yet death itself cannot produce reciprocity, or correspondence here: the voice that cries "mine own," desiring possession, is rhymed with the voice that answers "alone." In sexual intimacy as in death here, the self experiences only partial identification with an other, revealing what cannot be shared. Therefore, the "closeness" of the embrace paradoxically marks a desire for absolute singularity in these lines. This mark of difference does not seem to be associated with the force of first person lyric speech. In the confusion of voices in these lines, the first mention of an "I" is strangely unassertive, producing no singularity. The irregular meter counterpoised with the near-perfect rhyme highlight the poem's attempt to bear out oneness in "twos," and its ultimate failure to reconcile this.

"Jhansi" inaugurates the enduring problem in Rossetti's work of gender complementarity, one that, as I have discussed, finds forceful representation in the haunting incident of the "Mouth Boy" from *Speaking Likenesse*s, and the sexual violence of "Goblin Market." "Wife to Husband" (48), a little-discussed poem from *Goblin Market,* recapitulates the familiar theme of dissolution within sexual difference. The confrontation occurs in the lyric between a the speaker, or "wife," whose repeated refrain, "I must die," forecasts her impending parting from the husband-addressee:

Pardon the faults in me,

For the love of years ago:

Good bye.

I must drift across the sea,

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> I must sink into the snow,
>
> I must die. (48).

The imperative "must" drives this poem, separating the wife's impulse to "drift across the sea" from the husband to whom she instructs: "You can bask in this sun, / You can drink wine, and eat." While the speaker does mention "the love of years ago," the poem is curiously self-enclosing rather than mournful of the assumed union. This lyric speaker performs a form of oneness in the desire for the death, rather than married life. The repeated "I"s pull the wife away from the husband in a steady movement of withdrawal, culminating in this final, negative assertion:

> Not a word for you,
>
> Not a lock or kiss,
>
> > Good bye.
>
> We, one, must part in two;
>
> Verily death is this:
>
> > I must die. (49)

Death here again marks the ultimate separation between "wife" and "husband" that can only foreground the wife's singularity: oneness sought out of a failed two. But the end of the poem suggests an ironic twist on this numeric oscillation, in which oneness takes on its opposite value. The fracturing of the supposed "one" of the heterosexual pair into the "two" of death and life does not merely occur with the wife's awaited (and notably deferred) death, but begins to resonate with their speaking and living reality. The lines "verily death is this: / I must die" encase death within life, reminding the reader that the refrain has been generating such a tenor throughout the poem.

In a much later iteration of this familiar relationship, "He and She" (293) from *A Pageant and Other Poems*, "oneness" slides between coldness and indistinctness in this call-and-response structure:

> "Should one of us remember,
>
> And one of us forget,
>
> I wish I knew what each will do—
>
> But who can tell as yet?"
>
> "Should one of us remember,
>
> And one of us forget,
>
> I promise you what I will do—
>
> And I'm content to wait for you,
>
> And not be sure as yet." (293)

"Remembrance" and "forgetting" mark the difference between these two voices. And yet a "one" is the main preoccupation of both these lyrics, an impossible singularity that the lyric voice knows the relationship cannot produce.

In "He and She," Rossetti repeats the familiar structure of aggressively deferred reciprocity within heterosexual romance. Like "Jhansi" and "Wife to Husband," this lyric generates a perverse and relentless interest in oneness that arise from the failing "two" of heterosexual difference. I suggest that this cluster of shorter poems draw into focus a persistent set of questions in Rossetti's work around the asymmetry of masculinity and femininity, and the roles which they respectively may inhabit that range from specific to cryptically general (wife, husband, "he," she"). In the space of these rigidly delimited differences between the sexes, Rossetti demonstrates a specific form of desire for feminine singularity that these pairings can

never produce. In what follows, I further discuss the alternative to heterosexual parings in

Rossetti's work that sets feminine singularity on a different axis: sisterhood. As the predominant

relationship through which Rossetti characterizes femininity in "Goblin Market," sisterhood

reoccurs throughout her shorter lyrics. By shifting from the motif of gendered opposition based

on the heterosexual economy of desire, toward the more ambiguous but seemingly more

compelling arena of siblings, Rossetti explores feminine singularity and its potential for

representation.

In her short poems dealing with sisters, Rossetti suggests that while femininity may have

more potential to escape other-oriented subjectivity (such as the failed individuation we find

through sexual difference), it is perhaps only in the space of narrative that feminine singularity

can flourish. Two poems from *Goblin Market*, "Noble Sisters" (27) and "Sister Maude" (53–54)

reveal a tense, rather than harmonious, vision of this relationship. Both of these poems were

composed shortly after "Goblin Market," yet have attracted very little critical attention: Helena

Michie has noted that the antagonism in both of these works predominately allows for "the

expression of hostility among women."[163] Similarly, Scott Rodgers writes that, in these shorter

works, "Rossetti demonstrates how women's relationships, even within female communities, are

triangulated in relation to men."[164] But what is startling about "Noble Sisters" is not so much its

inscription of sisterhood within patriarchy as quite self-consciously the opposite: "Noble Sisters"

recasts the drama of Antigone and Ismene, the sisters in Sophocles' *Antigone* entangled by the

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[163] Helena Michie, "'There Is No Friend Like a Sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference," *ELH* 56 (1989): 407.

[164] Scott Rogers, "Re-Reading Sisterhood in Christina Rossetti's 'Noble Sisters' and 'Sister Maude,'" *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 43 (2003): 868.

pressure of what Rossetti's poem also calls "our father's name" ("Noble Sisters," 59). In *Antigone,* the incestuous house of Oedipus echoes the endogamous force of the phallic order, one that Antigone, by burying her brother, puts to an abrupt end by reasserting her lateral line of kinship as a sibling. In Rossetti's poem, the energy of this lateral form of kinship substitutes for patrilineal lines, recalling Antigone's narrative. And despite the overt hostility between sisters, sisterhood remains a potent expression of a differential likeness that escapes the limiting polarity of gender.

We may recall Stefani Engelstein's claim that because sisters only partially identify with each other as they do with other family members, "sibling logic resists the metaphoric economy of castration, instead following the model of synecdoche, a part-whole relationship that does not entirely relinquish the object it moves away from."[165] Engelstein's claim bears on my argument because she puts into focus the ambivalence that characterizes the sibling relationship, one that never quite occupies the clear poles of sameness and difference. In Rossetti's "Noble Sisters," the patriarchal family is clearly in distress, and its security depends on a relationship between sisters that can unravel its seeming wholeness as easily and it can secure it.

In the poem, two sisters converse over one of their lovers, whom the other sister describes as a "thief" and "nameless man." The poem references ballad form and the medieval aesthetic of such anthologists as Thomas Percy, with the two first lines structuring a refrain, and its archaic imagery of "falcons," "bower walls" and "eaglets on his glove." While one sister poses the question, in a call-and-response structure, the other sister answers. In each of the stanzas, the inquiring sister asks after a token from her lover, such as a falcon carrying a ring, a hound carrying a "chain of gold and silver links," or a page carrying a letter:

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[165] Stefani Engelstein, "Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again," *PMLA* 126 (2011): 41.

"Or did you meet a pretty page

Sat swinging on a gate;

Sat whistling whistling like a bird,

Or may be slept too late:

With eaglets on his glove?

If you had turned his pockets out,

You had found some pledge of love." (27)

In a similar movement in each stanza, the answering sister affirms her sibling's expectations only to reveal that she has thwarted them:

"I met him at this daybreak,

Scarce the east was red:

Lest the creaking gate should anger you,

I packed him home to bed." (27)

The rhymes of "red / bed" and "glove / love" lend the poem erotic movement and harmony despite the building tension between the sisters, one who desires to escape with her lover, and the other who forbids it. When the inquiring sister finally mentions the lover who comes "to woo [her] for his wife" (42), the other sister answers:

'I met a nameless man, sister,

Who loitered round our door:

I said: Her husband loves her much,

And yet she loves him more." (28)

Rather than seeing this sister as straightforwardly critiquing sexual knowledge outside of the family, we might read her duty to a form of familial insularity as inhabited by excess that

effectively produces this poem. The antagonism between these sisters rehearses the violence of being a speaking "one" within a kinship structure, and it is clearly sororal trauma that shapes a one, rather than the vague threat of a "father's name." To claim then, as Rodgers has, that "the most significant bond between these sisters is not a sororal one, but rather the one created by their mutual place within a patriarchal political structure"[166] would be to ignore the substitution this poem has made between sisterhood and relationships between men and women. Here, it is the dialogue between sisters that expresses the problem of identification with an other, while "husbands," "fathers" and "lovers" appear (as in "Goblin Market") to be unable to generate communication or recognition. And though the poem is certainly not a simplistic affirmation of female community, it is an acknowledgment of an uncanny yet productive likeness, rather than patriarchal norms of difference. The poem thus always remains in the domain of singularity, pressing toward an impossible demand for minimal difference.

"Sister Maude" echoes a similar problem, with two sisters, one ostensibly with a lover, and Maude, who betrays her, together refracting the collapse of the family: "Who told my mother of my shame, / Who told my father of my dear?" (53). The haunting difference between this poem and "Noble Sisters," as we find out, is that everyone seems to be dead: "Cold he lies, as cold as stone" (54), says the sister about her lover, while also noting that "my father may sleep in Paradise, / My mother at Heaven-gate" (54). While the conflict revolves around a lover, whom the sister insists to Maude "would never have looked at you" (54), the only surviving figures in the poem are Maude and her sister. Sisterhood thus stands as a remnant here, the engine of this poem despite its clearly non-reproductive axis. In the final stanza, sisterhood persists beyond the

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[166] Rogers, "Re-Reading Sisterhood," 869.

boundaries of the deceased family, as the speaker claims that in the afterlife, Maude's envy will continue to haunt her:

> My father may wear a golden crown,
>
> My mother a crown may win;
>
> If my dear and I knocked at Heaven-gate
>
> Perhaps they'd let us in:
>
> But sister Maude, oh sister Maude,
>
> Bide *you* with death and sin. (54)

Notably, we never hear from Maude herself in this poem. But in these concluding lines, any kind of suggested collective in the poem has dissolved. Furthermore, despite the sister's seeming anger, there seems to also be a perverse pleasure in the failings of this familial community: her repeated invocation of "my" and "you" and "I" places the speaking sister in a position of singular possession. Paradoxically, the similarities and likeness implicit in sisterly relations here put into relief the troubling endogamy of the family that lays claim to certain modes of difference. Thus the drama of failed romance, betrayal, and patriarchal familial security is generated by, rather than imposed on, the sisters themselves. It is this central relationship of likeness that creates the hierarchies of difference outside it, and effectively controls the poetic space.

Within the secular space of the family, these poems expose how devalued relationships monitored by norms of difference can be. In Rossetti's later volume of poetry, *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), sisterhood encounters a slightly different inflection, but is of no less importance. Here, the "sister" figure is primarily the figure of the nun. But as Diane D'Amico has pointed out, even spiritual life cannot seem to solve the problem of sexual difference: "The speakers of 'The Novice,' 'The Convent Threshold,' and "Soeur Louise' appear to seek the

convent motivated more by ill-fated love than desire for the religious life."[167] "Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674)," for instance, opens with the bold proclamation: "I have desired, and I have been desired" (327). Despite the speaker's claim that "now the days are over of desire" (327), desire is the force around which this entire poem turns, structuring the refrain: "Oh vanity of vanities, desire!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Soeur Louise, a Versailles courtesan turned Carmelite nun, embodies a kind of desiring single woman subject, a form of femininity that would seem to resist the easy distinctions we could make between austerity and desire and oneness and reciprocity. In its culmination in the institutionalized form we find in *A Pageant*, sisterhood and its numerous inflections, while strictly non-reproductive, demonstrate the ability to generate multiple structures of desire and difference for Rossetti.

Critics have long attempted to read femininity in Rossetti's works as circumscribed by multiple discourses—the publishing market, family pressures, Tractarianism—but her repeated interest in oneness as an explicitly singular and feminine subject position suggests that her work veers away from women's particularity within these very discourses that proclaim certain generalized values. "Goblin Market", in particular, approaches the question of gendered identity in a way contrary to the standard one. Instead of attending to how difference produces particular kinds of individuation, while erasing others, the poem suggests that any thought of the individual is a thought of relations, and that the point of distinction between the two does not usually take an anticipated form. One could say then, that the most exciting—though perhaps not entirely possible—focus of much of Rossetti's writing is the numeric and strangely irreducible "one" that emanates from forms of likeness.

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[167] Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999), 50.

Chapter Three

Brothers and Sisters: Liberalism's Horizontal Imaginary and Wilkie Collins' *The Woman*

in White

>   This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and of what a Man's resolution can achieve.
>   If the machinery of the Law could be depended on to fathom every case of suspicion, and to conduct every process of inquiry, with moderate assistance only from the lubricating influences of oil or gold, the events which fill these pages might have claimed their share of public attention in a Court of Justice.
>   But the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse; and the story is left to be told, for the first time, in this place. As the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now.
>   — "Preamble," *The Woman in White*[168]

So begins Wilkie Collins' celebrated sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, in a series of

sentences that characterizes the story—which unfolds through the testimonies of more than ten

narrators —as a quasi-legal document inviting readers to play detective.[169] This inaugural gesture

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[168] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Don Richard Cox and Maria K. Bachman (Peterborough,

ON: Broadview Press, 2006), 49. All subsequent references to the novel, unless noted, will be to this

edition, and will appear in parentheses in the main text.

[169] This contract promises not only fidelity to the truth, but also dedication to "immediacy and

continuity," as Walter M. Kendrick put it in his essay, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*."

Nineteenth-Century Fiction 32 (1977): 24. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that E.S. Dallas reviewed

the novel's first edition in *The Times,* pointing out that Collins had tripped up on the novel's Blackwater

Park Chronology, or the timeline for Laura's kidnapping. Collins subsequently corrected the timeline in

the 1861 edition, noting in his new Preface: "I have endeavored, by careful correction and revision, to

make my story as worthy as I could of a continuance of the public approval" (*The Woman in White*, ed.

John Sutherland [Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1996], 3).

(as thrilling to the Victorian reading public in 1860 as it would be now, given the enduring popularity of crime narratives) testifies to a crucial transition from the single sovereign power of a paternal lawgiver—"the machinery of the Law that could be depended on," "the Judge," and by extension a King or God—to the self-governing individual in a collective social body: a body projected onto the fantasy of equality between "Readers" (45). We might call this introductory observation a horizontalizing of authority, in which the vertical structures of paternity are replaced by the lateral structures of readerly affiliation. My argument in this chapter begins with the claim that the Preamble provides a paradigm for the organization of Collins' novel, one that frames its exploration of femininity and gendered existence.

This reshifting of authority has hardly escaped the most prominent critics of *The Woman in White.* Canonical readings of the Preamble have argued that it establishes the novel's Foucauldian worldview. This is society that Foucault, in the influential *Discipline and Punish,* describes as follows:

> [t]his enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted into a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuously hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.[170]

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[170] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1995), 137. Originally published as *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

As D.A. Miller has argued in his oft-quoted 1986 essay, the novel's invocation of juridical inquest refracts just such a disciplinary universe where "suspicion and inquiry have already become everyday practices." The individual incarnation of this universe is, as Lyn Pykett also identifies, the "nervous modern subject." [171] Ann Cvetkovich manages to elaborate these points by summarizing the critical consensus on Collins' work: "The extension of the law beyond its usual boundaries installs a hermeneutics of suspicion in which every fact that excites a sensation merits investigation."[172] These readings put forth the *bildung* of a nervous and self-policing individual: in this case, that of Walter Hartright, a reluctant drawing teacher and the novel's main narrator. Yet these various analyses have elided the even more basic fact of the Preamble's striking social contract. This contract undergirds the novel's trial structure, one in which the various witnesses to a crime of attempted substitution between two women—Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie—include not only Hartright and Count Fosco (an Italian spy), but also a tombstone.

That the rhetorical impact of Collins' pact between text and reader is an overtly political one is not difficult to grasp. Its urgency derives from the fact that it articulates nothing less than the foundations of modern liberal society laid out in the classical theories of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill, which loosely imagine a basic covenant by which self-interested individuals collectively form a civic society based on principles of equality and

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[171] D. A. Miller, "Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's the Woman in White," *Representations* 14 (1986): 113; Lyn Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 55.

[172] Ann Cvetkovich, "Ghostlier Determinations: The Economy of Sensation and *The Woman in White*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 23 (Autumn 1989): 25.

justice.[173] Recent critical studies on mid-Victorian liberalism by Lauren Goodlad and Elaine

Hadley have rightly refined and complicated our understanding of this basic core of liberal

thought. Furthermore, as Goodlad argues, nineteenth-century narrative is often the site of

political modernity's most energetic unfolding: "the most important feature of Victorian novels

is their intense grappling with contemporary worldviews."[174] The goal of this chapter is to

explore a connection in *The Woman in White* between its canonical plot involving the exchange

of Anne and Laura by Laura's husband Sir Percival Glyde and Fosco (which pivots on a timeless

anxiety about the stability of feminine identity), and the shadow plot of "The Brotherhood," a

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[173] As feminist political theorists such as Carol Pateman, Linda Zerilli, and Mona Ozouf have examined in

recent decades, the universal ideals of the social contract are not only long-standing but also

fundamentally porous. Pateman writes that in order to neutralize what is the ideal liberal subject's

irrevocably dominant masculinity, "contract theorists constructed sexual difference as a *political*

difference, the difference between men's natural freedom and women's natural subjection," (*The*

Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988], 5). *The*

Woman in White crucially bears witness to this rapidly sedimenting symbolic system by invoking the dual

figures of a "Woman's patience" and a "Man's resolution" in its very first sentence. But rather than reify

the binary Pateman identifies, this inaugural mention of a "Man" and a "Woman" reminds us of what the

novel's trial form and the civic sphere it allegorizes must jettison. See Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the*

Abyss of Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Mona Ozouf, "Liberté, égalité,

fraternité," in *Lieux de mémoir,* ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 353–89.

[174] Lauren Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal*

Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003), xi.

fraternal secret society modeled after the Italian *carbonari*.[175] Taken together, both aspects of Collins' narrative provide a different account of the Preamble's stated democratic project, by revealing the failure of the fictional narrative to coalesce around a unitary liberal subject: one who, in Mill's stated ideal, "over himself, over his own body and mind…is sovereign."[176] As I demonstrate here, these two plots identify only sororal and fraternal subjects who are connected by horizontal likeness, rather than difference. In puncturing the veneer of liberalism's basic celebration of the self-disciplining sovereign citizen, this great work of Collins' fiction suggests that gendered human existence is *both* singular (non-substitutable and irreducible to particularity) and serial (always connected in a series that repeats).

I. Sickly Likenesses

One of the most striking features of *The Woman in White*—suggested in microcosm by the Preamble—is that it registers a shift from a vertical axis of patrilineage to a horizontal one made up of literal and figurative brothers and sisters. This shift radically questions the intersubjective ideals of a liberal body politic, while also foregrounding different modes of individuation from the atomized subject of modern thought. In order to make a claim for how the novel asks us to think about singular gendered identity as both a lateral and serial phenomenon, one with political consequences for the idea of collectivity, this chapter proceeds in two parts. First, I discuss how the novel moves from the insular verticality of Limmeridge House, the

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[175] The *Carbonari* is perhaps the most recognizable Italian secret society, but several others were appearing throughout the nineteenth century on the Italian peninsula, including the *Latini,* the *Federati*, and the *Gelphi.* All practiced a radical form of politics, and strove for an independent Italy.

[176] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859, Reprint: ed. Alan Ryan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 48.

Fairlie residence and touchstone for a patrilineal model of the family, to a laterally organized world of sibling-like figures. I then examine how such a shift establishes a parallel between *The Woman in White*'s two sororal and fraternal plots.

As Collins' narrative unfolds, Laura's legal, social and symbolic status undergoes effacement after Fosco and Glyde substitute Anne, the eponymous "Woman in White," for Laura's dead body in an elaborate kidnapping scheme. These villains, as well as Hartright, all claim that Anne and Laura share an "ominous," "electrifying," and "sickly" likeness" with each other (90). Anne is therefore buried, and a tombstone is erected on her grave with Laura's name on it, while the "real" Laura is interned in an asylum under Anne's name, and Glyde and Fosco claim Laura's fortune. After rescuing Laura from potentially life-long confinement, her half-sister Marian Halcombe, together with Hartright, begins a quest to reestablish Laura's identity, by setting out to prove that on the date "Lady Glyde" was proclaimed dead, she was still very much alive and on her way to London from Blackwater Park, Glyde's estate. Subsequently, Marian and Hartright explode Sir Percival's "Secret": his illegitimacy and forgery of his parent's false marriage record. This much-discussed "Secret"—which I explore at length in this chapter— immediately reveals a series of absent fathers and connects Sir Percival (whose dead father was deformed) with Hartright (who has no father) and, importantly, a series of half-sisters (Anne and Laura share a father in the dead philandering Philip Fairlie, and Laura and Marian share Frederick Fairlie, their uncle). As a result, any kind of tenuous hold the nuclear family maintained in the novel is lost after Laura has been rescued, and a new kind of family forms itself in its place along noticeably horizontal lines. As Hartright recounts: "two women live, who are described as my sisters, I get my bread by drawing and engraving on wood for the cheap periodicals. My sisters are supposed to help me by taking in a little needlework" (421). The

prominent motif of siblinghood, and particularly of sisterhood, repeats throughout the novel in literal as well as figurative ways. For much of the narrative, Hartright describes Laura as his "lost, afflicted sister" (480), and the object of his desire "to love and honour as father and brother both" (423).[177]

These family arrangements prove to be quite unusual, as Collins' novel initially seems poised to excavate (along the lines of many Victorian novels) the patriarchal family and the manner by which this type of family shapes gendered identities. Much of the criticism on the novel has assumed this to be the case. Pykett, for example, characterizes Collins' sensation plot as one that fundamentally "turns on a series of interconnected family secrets and deceptions."[178] Similarly, U.C. Knoepflmacher explains *The Woman in White* as a "collision between a lawful order in which identities are fixed and an anarchic lawlessness in which these social identities can be erased and destroyed."[179] In other words, this "lawful order" is implicitly one directed by the law of the father and its patriarchal social oppression, while "anarchic lawlessness" represented by Count Fosco, symbolizes a "counterworld" of near-nihilism. Further, Helena Michie refines this point by claiming: "*The Woman in White* brings the criminal into the domestic, obscuring safe distinctions between them. Every act of immorality or criminality has its double within what seems to be the safe haven of Victorian marriage."[180] According to

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[177] The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, from 1835, which prevented widowed men from marrying their sisters-in-law, further exposes the political grounds of sisterhood in the mid-nineteenth century.

[178] Pykett, "Collins and the Sensation Novel," 54.

[179] U.C. Knoepflmacher, "The Counterworlds of Victorian Fiction and *The Woman in White*," in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction,* ed. Jerome Hamilton Buckley (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975), 362.

[180] Helena Michie, *Sororophobia: Differences among Women in Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 59.

Michie, the patriarchal family structure in Collins' work that seeks to fix "Lady Glyde" as a neat unitary identity faces the threat of this feminine identity's doubling and proliferation. One could group these critical readings once more under the banner of Foucauldian interpretations of the novel, which collectively expose the domestic space as inherently troubled by sexual desires and transgression, even as this space seeks to impose a discernible binary upon men and women. However, what these interpretations have not addressed is the overarching structure of filial relationships upon which the patriarchal family depends for its continuation and for its legitimacy, and how such a structure is called into question by the novel's investment in likeness, rather than difference.

To the extent that Laura's and Marian's, as well as Anne's subjectivities under the law turn upon Laura's marriage to Sir Percival, which was arranged on the deathbed of Laura's father, their gender initially seems overtly marked by patriarchal family organization. This structure ostensibly reduces their symbolic identity to objects of exchange. Marian, perhaps the most vocal figure in this trio, manages to escape the snare of marriage law by declaring herself perpetually single. She nevertheless voices some of the most rigid commentary on sexual difference, such as her dismissal of Hartright's nervousness: "Mr. Hartright, you surprise me. Whatever women may be, I thought that men, in the nineteenth century, were above superstition" (100). Marian's observation suggests that femininity at this stage in the narrative is filtered primarily through patriarchal assumptions about sexual hierarchy, which in turn directs and shapes the thought of all members of the family.

Yet any reconsideration of Collins' novel must rethink the filial grounds upon which gender is organized without reproducing the male characters' own restricted thinking: namely, the men's belief that women's difference is analogous to their exclusion. Under the conditions of

traditional patriarchy, the criminal exchange of Anne and Laura represents femininity as a commodity that can pass from father to father or father to husband. This exchange is predicated on the men's perception that the women present a manageable form of "likeness." Yet as the novel takes pains to show, this is actually categorizable difference: Laura is viable property, while Anne is merely a placeholder. On the same note, Sir Percival's "crime," by relying on the clean substitutability between two women who in some ways resemble each other, merely sensationalizes what is the case under the law itself. The Count puts this rather neatly in his diary entry at a later point in the novel: "That conception involved nothing less than the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one with the other—the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change, being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Sir Percival's secret" (563). Both women, from Fosco's perspective, are lacking any subjectivity removed from the verticality of patriarchal family order, which genders their roles either as legitimate or illegitimate, economically valuable or not, and they therefore can only exist within this mode—and as far as the male characters are concerned, of binary thinking.

For a while, the narrative intimates that Fosco's comment is plausible. Limmeridge House seems haunted by the kind of symbolic fatherhood that forms the origin point for this familial organization. We see this in the solicitor Mr. Gilmore's comment that Laura "takes after her father," just as we recognize Hartright's initial point of view regarding the mystery of Anne Catherick, which seems troubled by the future continuation of patrilineage and the passing of property from father to husband (160). After his second encounter with Anne, he obsesses over "the life-long interests which might hang suspended on the next chance words between us; the sense that, for aught I knew to the contrary, the whole future of Laura Fairlie's life might be

determined." (131). These "life-long interests" and his mention of her "whole future" resonate

sharply with the problem of Laura's inheritance.[181] Walter has implicated himself in Laura's life,

one that betokens that everything will be reproduced economically through kinship lines in the

future. This is the case because inheritance, as a narrative concern, in Allan Hepburn's words

"stretches indefinitely forward in time." This future-oriented indefiniteness obviously invokes

individual history as well, since, according to Hepburn: "it does not release the living from the

clutch of the dead and the past." [182] Anne Catherick lays bare this perspective in the novel when,

in her "anonymous" warning letter to Laura, she writes: "Inquire into the past life of that man

with the scar of his hand, before you say the words that make you his miserable wife" (117).

As we can see, inheritance in its abstract, temporal form symbolizes the authority of

father-son relationships that in turn reproduce identity along strictly vertical and reproductive

lines. Consequently, it is evident from the narrative of Mr. Gilmore that the legal force of

filiation initially commands the attention of the narrative. In discussing the arrangement of

Laura's marriage settlement, Gilmore notes: "I warn all readers of these lines that Miss Fairlie's

inheritance is a very serious part of Miss Fairlie's story" (178). Laura's claim to her two-fold

inheritance—the property of Limmeridge House and the income from her estate—places her

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[181] Much has been made about Walter's contradictory point of view and the class argument the novel

highlights. As a self-made drawing teacher, his entry into a world of patriarchal aristocracy lays bare the

stark difference in consciousness between his middle-class masculinity and the Fairlies. As Cannon

Schmitt observes: "In Collins' and other sensation novels, middle-class English masculinity incorporates

within itself the signs and powers of aristocracy," (*Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and

English Nationality* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997], 118).

[182] Allan Hepburn, *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of

Toronto Press, 2007), 10.

identity under patrilineage. But the stability of this familial network, predicated on the transmission of wealth along a clear vertical axis, is clearly wavering, as Gilmore continues in the chapter: "Mr. Philip Fairlie died leaving an only daughter, the Laura of this story; and the estate, in consequence, went in course of law, to the second brother, Frederick, a single man. The third brother, Arthur, had died many years before the decease of Philip, leaving a son and a daughter. The son, at the age of eighteen, was drowned at Oxford" (178). The only other possible benefactor of the estate happens to be Laura's aunt, the scheming former suffragist Madame Fosco, the Count's wife. It is consequently through Laura's impending marriage that we are exposed to the inevitable dying out of paternal vitality and influence in the world of the novel. Laura and Marian's uncle, Frederick Fairlie, represents the near-comic culmination of this attenuated patriarchy, as his failing health, self-interest, and aesthete sensibility stand in direct opposition to robust masculinity. The resonance of hereditary wealth and lineage seems to be utterly lost on Fairlie, as he tells Hartright, in an early conversation: "There are no children, thank Heaven, in the house…I sadly want a reform in the construction of children. Nature's only idea seems to be to make them machines for the production of noise" (85).

The absence of heteronormative coupling and family units in much of Collins's work has not gone unnoticed by attentive critics. When we focus our attention on the kinship structures that frame *The Woman in White*'s sensation plot, we find the novel chafing against the patriarchal inheritance narrative it seems to have set up. More specifically, the basis of Sir Percival's crime reveals a deeper subterfuge in the fracturing of the patriarchal family, and by extension, the patrilineal ideology of the law. In *Avuncularism*, Eileen Cleere perceptively claims that nineteenth-century novels represent a more diverse "topography" of kinship than the nuclear family we have come to associate with Continental modernity: "The father-child bond may have

been a dominant metaphor of the nineteenth-century social world, but its inadequacies or failures as a universal paradigm were sometimes registered by alternative ideologies of kinship."[183] According to Cleere, "under industrial capitalism, a socioeconomic philosophy founded upon the law of the father was threatened by a competition-based commercial code that took its shape from the law of the uncle."[184] For Cleere, uncles represent a challenge to the nuclear family's endogamous bonds, since they stand "at threshold of an economically driven social order."[185] While Cleere acknowledges the diminishing of traditional patriarchy in *The Woman in White*, she reads the novel's ultimate reinscription of it through the failure of the avuncular (Frederick Fairlie) to subvert the dominant paradigm.

In Collins' world, a shift nonetheless occurs on a kinship axis that is different from the one Cleere suggests. The novel's alternative to the closed familial economy of the Fairlies is not the uncle Frederick but the drawing-master Hartright, who spends much of the narrative away in Honduras, and reappears after Laura and Anne have been switched, seemingly strengthened by his colonial adventures. Rather then assume a kind of avuncular role in the manner that Cleere discusses, Hartright represents a sibling or brother position in the novel. On this note, Carolyn Dever observes*:* "Collins frequently maps the positive components of companionate marriage on to same-sex sibling or sibling-equivalent relations."[186] There is, however, an intractable difficulty

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[183] Eileen Cleere, *Avuncularism: Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 4

[184] Cleere, *Avuncularism*, 24–25.

[185] Cleere, *Avuncularism*, 15.

[186] Carolyn Dever, "The Marriage Plot and Its Alternatives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 114.

to Dever's approach to sibling relations in the novel. Read in this vein, Collins' reimagining of

the conjugal along a lateral axis seems ultimately geared toward promoting greater domestic

stability. But, in truth, the lateral axis on which most of the novel is poised showcases something

altogether more distinctive about the larger political fabric of a mid-nineteenth century world.

Rather than seeking what Kellen Williams calls "the difference *between* two women, the

difference *of* women, Woman's Difference,"[187] *The Woman in White,* as Irene Tucker concisely

argues, "*in nuce,* is the story of this likeness." [188] Laura and Anne's ominous *likeness*—which

reveals itself in the form of sisterhood—is precisely what finally prevents their complete

substitution from occurring, and that allows a larger world of sororal and fraternal seriality to

emerge.

In Collins' novel, I suggest that relationships governed by horizontal likeness transcend

simple divisions between the private and public. This is no more evident than in the events that

crystallize around The Brotherhood and the Italian *Risorgimento*. The Brotherhood is a covert

and violent collectivity helmed by Count Fosco, the novel's most colorful character, and whom

Margaret Oliphant named "the most interesting personage in the book."[189] After Sir Percival

Glyde dies and Laura's identity is (seemingly) restored, Hartright embarks on a final mission to

destroy the Count: the point at which the novel shifts from a critique of English marriage laws'

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[187] M. Kellen Williams, "'Traced and Captured by the Men in the Chaise': Pursuing Sexual Difference in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White,*" *Journal of Narrative Technique* 28 (1998): 92.

[188] Irene Tucker, "Paranoid Imaginings: Wilkie Collins, the Rugeley Poisoner, and the Invisibility of Novelistic Ekphrasis," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8 (2009): 1.

[189] Unsigned Review, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 91 (May 1862): 565–74, reprinted in Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Cox and Bachman, 641.

feudal and antiquated norms, to a more sinister pan-revolutionary quest that takes Hartright to Paris, and draws in Hartright's mentor, Professor Pesca (whom we eventually discover is the secretary of the Brotherhood). This plot takes over the final third of the story and institutes an anarchic set of "brothers" in a social world where fathers have been lost: a clear picture of what Freud, many years later, formalizes in the theory of the primal horde.

These lateral relationships put into play by Collins' novel are not out of place in Victorian literature and culture. As social historians such as Leonore Davidoff and literary scholars such as Helena Michie have pointed out, sibling and sibling-like bonds feature prominently in the Victorian imaginary, not to mention in canonical literary works by George Eliot, Christina Rossetti, and the Brontës. Michie argues in *Sororophobia*, for instance, that sisterhood in the nineteenth century was anything but "utopian" and instead, involved a complicated "negotiation of sameness and difference."[190] Such readings have drawn noteworthy attention in recent decades to the multiplicity of relations in nineteenth-century literature that transcend the model of the nuclear family. However, given the broader centrality of brothers and sisters to Western conceptions of political life and political futures—Antigone, who buries her brother against the law of the city, remains the resonant ur-figure, as does the slogan of the French Revolution *liberté, égalité, fraternité*—the specific impact of serial bonds of kinship to the mid-Victorian conception of its political modernity remains an open question.

Returning to *The Woman in White,* we can see that when Marian exclaims to Hartright, in response to Laura's marriage to Sir Percival: "I will trust you—if ever the time comes, I will trust you as *my* friend and *her* friend; as *my* brother and *her* brother" (157), she is not merely calling forth Leila Silvana May's claim of an "earlier Romantic relation between brother and

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[190] Michie, *Sororophobia,* 9.

sister,"[191] but articulating a lateral axis of kinship that structures a particular ideal of political

community: fraternity. Fraternity or brotherhood, according to Juliet Flower MacCannell, is the

post-Enlightenment ideal of equality that nevertheless preserves the hegemony of patriarchy

along different lines, because it risks dissolving into "group narcissism," reducing sexual

difference to the proliferation of the same.[192] On a similar note, Juliet Mitchell explains that,

contrary to fraternity's seeming logic of democratic cooperation, "the assimilation of

'brotherhood' to patriarchy is an illustration of the way all is subjugated to vertical

understandings at the cost of omitting the lateral."[193] Finally, as Jacques Derrida writes: "in the

confraternal or fraternizing community, what is privileged is at once the masculine authority of

the brother (who is also a son, a husband, a father)… Fraternity is equality in the sharing of the

incommensurable."[194] Despite being used to ground a kind of egalitarian political foundation,

brotherhood points to the fragility of relations rather than their solidarity. In the absence of a

common Father, the fraternal foregrounds a political community grounded in a tenuous model of

patriarchy.

The remaining sections of this chapter show how *The Woman in White* makes the

connection between lateral bonds and political futures explicit and wide-ranging. I argue here

that Collins' narrative sets the horizon of its liberal social world further than Britain, drawing on

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[191] Leila Silvana May, "Sensational Sisters: Wilkie Collins's the Woman in White," *Pacific Coast Philology* 30 (1995): 85.

[192] Juliet Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 15.

[193] Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), ix.

[194] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 57–58.

the Italian *Risorgimento* and French revolutionary history to foreground the inevitable haunting of a liberal individual by its absolutist counterpart: one who is hopelessly gendered in bonds of horizontal likeness. I will then examine how the novel puts the focus on seriality as the paradoxical structure by which singularity—notably a feminine singularity—arises. In other words, the irreducible sameness of lateral bonds foregrounds new horizons of difference that liberal thought does not accommodate. Seriality in the form of horizontal kinship thus introduces the possibility of a singular subject: one who is irreplaceable and cannot be reduced to the particularity by which the liberal subject is codified.

II. "Was I Walter Hartright?" Femininity and the Limits of Narrative

The analysis I pursue here draws into question the traditional approach to the presence of liberalism in *The Woman in White*. Most scholars understand the novel to be largely concerned with the execution of reform in Britain at a critical moment—the 1850s—between the passing of the first and second Reform Bills. While often veering between "progressive" and somewhat reactionary views, Collins was clearly invested in reform, and specifically marriage reform, as the plots of many of his novels from the end of the 1860s into his later stage of novel writing reveal (he also contributed articles to the socialist paper *The Leader* until 1856).[195] Collins' plots involving marriage reform often concentrate on a women's inability to assume a legally secure identity without marriage, a problem shared by the characters of Anne and Laura, as well as Magdalen Vanstone from *No Name* (1862). Beginning with Laura's disenfranchisement, *The*

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[195] Graham Law and Andrew Maunder write: "the *Leader* was a radical organ, committed to socialism, secularism, and rationalism" (*Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 50). See also Kirk H. Beetz, "Wilkie Collins and the 'Leader,'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 15 (Spring 1982): 20–29.

Woman in White loudly intervenes in debates surrounding the Woman Question, specifically those around the practice of coverture that culminated in the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882.[196] To provide a bit of context: it is worth remembering that by virtue of both Sir Percival's and Fosco's relationships to Laura—that of husband and uncle-in-law, respectively—they each stand to inherit from Laura's considerable fortune from her father upon her death. This is the case because the English laws of coverture established a wife as the sole sexual and economic property of her husband. On this view, William Blackstone wrote, in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69): "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband; under whose wing, protection, and *cover,* she performs every thing, and is therefore called in our law-French a *feme-covert.*"[197] The issue of marriage reform and divorce laws is thus typical of many sensation novels of this period. It is no accident that the sensation novel earned its title in the 1860s, and Patrick Brantlinger characterizes its features as a "unique mixture of contemporary domestic realism with elements of the Gothic romance, the Newgate novel of criminal 'low life', and the 'silver fork' novel of scandalous and sometimes criminal 'high life'." Brantlinger continues: "even in those sensation novels whose plots do not hinge upon bigamy,

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[196] After the success of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* (1868), Collins' fiction from the 1870s became even more concerned with social commentary. See, for instance, *Man and Wife* (1870) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875).

[197] Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: In Four Books, Volume 1.* (London: A. Strahan, 1803), 442.

there is a strong interest in sexual irregularities, adultery, forced marriages, and marriages formed under false pretenses."[198]

The sensation novel's basic premise then is poised to reveal that the law's definition of universality is reliant on forms of containment that are explicitly gendered. In her thorough history of marriage reform in Victorian England, Mary Lyndon Shanley discusses the case of Caroline Norton, who in the 1830s engaged in a fierce and public custody battle with her husband, George Norton. Norton had accused her of adultery with the current Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. Her struggle against the English courts resulted in a widely circulated tract, *A Letter to the Queen* (1855), which bluntly lays out the lack of rights and freedoms a woman in the mid-nineteenth century experienced under a marriage contract. Norton's case opened up an ongoing discussion of marriage reform among women, such as Barbara Leigh Smith, who founded the Married Women's Property Committee to address questions of women's employment and professional roles. While marriage reform advocates tended to agree on the general condition of disenfranchisement for women under these punishing contracts, they varied substantially on what such legal changes meant for the cultural discourse on femininity and gendered difference under the law. Shanley writes: "Whereas Norton appealed to the differences between men and women to justify her appeal, the Married Women's Property Committee insisted that the state recognize the fundamental and equal rights of men and women."[199]

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[198] Patrick Brantlinger, "What Is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel?'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37 (1982): 1–3.

[199] Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1989), 33.

Critical readings of *The Woman in White* therefore tend to focus on how the novel portrays Britain's slow grind toward marriage reform, but its consciousness of a transforming political modernity has wider roots. One of the basic questions in the remainder of this chapter is what is at stake in both the plots in Collins' novel—that of Anne and Laura's exchange and the Brotherhood—which involve a revolutionary context that appears to invest horizontal bonds with a particular political charge. In 1992's now canonical *Dead Secrets*, Tamar Heller observes that like his friend Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* (which the serialized version of *The Woman in White* followed in *All the Year Round*) Collins preserves "an equation...between the revolutionary plot and a plot of sexual transgression."[200] Yet, Heller ultimately finds that the novel flattens femininity's frightening political potential (which she largely reads in terms of the female Gothic): "The triumph of liberal ideology [is] that, while it defeats a corrupt aristocracy, [it] also diffuses the novel's radical thematics and the Romanticism associated with them."[201] Furthermore, Heller does not read the novel's serializing of identity in the context of Continental upheaval. While pointing out the fiction of Victorian ideals of the sovereign citizen might not be new, critics have rarely turned their attention to how the literary imaginary invests likeness and seriality with the capacity to unravel basic ideas about a unitary subject.

It is worth recounting that the novel's trial mode—the touchstone of its liberal understanding of justice—belies the fact that Hartright presides over the novel's ultimate organization from an omniscient point of view in which all events are resolved: his is the ideal *bildung* of the neutral and deeply generalized subject of liberalism. Hartright functions as a proto-Kantian ego, collecting, uniting, and thus projecting a fantasy of integration onto the world

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[200] Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 123.

[201] Heller, *Dead Secrets,* 128.

of the novel. An effectively fatherless character from the very beginning, his claim to an authoritative masculine subjectivity occurs not along the vertical lines of traditional patriarchy but along the lateral lines of general fraternal selfhood. He casually notes: "[e]vents which I have yet to relate, make it necessary to mention in this place that my father had been dead some years at the period of which I am now writing; and that my sister Sarah, and I, were the sole survivors of a family of five children" (51). These desires for a form of integration seem to reach a culminating point at the beginning of "Part the Second," where he reflects on the missing dates from his narrative when Anne and Laura are exchanged for one another:

> My heart turns faint, my mind sinks in darkness and confusion when I think of it. This must not be, if I, who write, am to guide, as I ought, you who read. This must not be, if the clue that leads through the windings of the Story is to remain, from end to end, untangled in my hands. (421)

His defining pathology, as we can see, is narcissism: in the drive toward the "End," Hartright imposes the fullness of his diegetic vision onto narrative absence and otherness, and creates a chain of self-same projections. It is no accident, however, that the failed exchange of two women punctures his all-encompassing perspective, because these women, as the novel shows, interrupt a fraternal economy of sameness that Hartright's point of view embodies.

Yet, there is no better figuration of Hartright's general fraternal ego in the novel than his initial attraction to women (specifically, Marian Halcombe and Laura Fairlie), and his desires to recreate Laura in aesthetic form, as he draws her all the time. After describing her physical features early in the novel at Limmeridge House, Hartright asks: "Does my poor portrait of her, my fond, patient labour of long and happy days, show me these things? Ah, how few of them are in the dim mechanical drawing, and how many in the mind with which I regard it!" (90). In my

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reading of this passage, Hartright's comprehension of Laura is a form of self-understanding: he imagines a kind of sympathetic introspection that only draws him further back into himself while viewing another. Several critics have also questioned Hartright and his repeated claim to objectivity, because of his role as self-proclaimed editor and arranger of the diary entries in the novel, in which he writes from a retrospective point of view in which all events have been neatly resolved. Pamela Perkins, for example, suggests: "Walter, far from being objective, is manipulating the narrative for his own ends."[202] According to Rachel Ablow: "even at this point in the novel, each description of Walter's sympathetic bond with his future wife is indistinguishable from an account of projection."[203] Further, as Sutherland succinctly puts it: "The novel is as good as Hartwright's word."[204] And Hartwright's word is only as good as his self-reflection. In musing over his first meeting with Laura, he recalls: "How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in a later time?" (89). This statement presents a temporal problem in stabilizing identity, as Tucker argues, that opens up the question of how Laura "exists over time and in what ways such an existence is legible."[205] But more forcefully, I think, it brings into focus Hartright's elision of difference in his narrative perspective: a point of view that cannot seem to generate anything other than an extension of itself, endlessly reflected and multiplied.

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[202] Pamela Perkins and Mary Donaghy, "A Man's Resolution: Narrative Strategies in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*," *Studies in the Novel* 22 (1990): 392.

[203] Rachel Ablow, "Good Vibrations: The Sensationalization of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*," *Novel* 37 (2003): 165.

[204] Sutherland, Introduction to *The Woman in White*, xiv.

[205] Tucker, "Paranoid Imaginings," 153.

Elaine Hadley has perceptively claimed that one of the defining traits of the liberal citizen is "cognition": "Through the liberalized mind of ideas, a liberal individual might be extracted from conventional and habitual notions, abstracted from the corporate and physical bodies that traditionally bound human aspiration."[206] The generalizing authority of Hartright's narrative perspective, which he immediately and continuously evokes through the novel, can be read in the vein of Hadley's decorporialized liberal individual. Yet this capacity for abstraction is a violent impossibility in *The Woman in White*. The problem with Hartright's "universal" male subjectivity—a Kantian subject who can supposedly generalize itself in a fraternal order—is that this generalizability ultimately finds the limits of its extensiveness in femininity. After reflecting on Laura's appearance, when Hartright muses on the "familiar sensations which we *all* know" regarding the beauty of women, he also quickly admits to "the idea of something wanting" in her presence: a lack "that seemed strangely inconsistent and unaccountably out of place" (91). This "something wanting" is disturbing to Hartright because it suggests something incomplete within his own egomimesis: "At one time it seemed like something wanting in *her*, at another, like something wanting in myself, which hindered me from understanding her as I ought" (91). What we discover is that this "something wanting" is also a "sickly likeness": the seemingly indelible connection between Laura and Anne that initially drives the novel forward. Alternating between lack and excess in Hartright's narrative, this obsession initially lays bare his erotic idealization of femininity, as a fantasized other construed by his infinitely projected "I." Yet Hartright's inability to generalize and thus absorb Laura completely in his narrative does not end there, but

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[206] Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 10.

crucially harkens back to his first encounter with Anne Catherick, in a pivotal moment Miller calls the novel's "primal scene."[207]

In the serialized version, this moment opens the novel's third installment, poised to draw as much shock and surprise from its readership as possible. Hartright turns to a point "where four roads met" on his way to Limmeridge House, thinking "of the two ladies whose practice...I was so soon to superintend" and "what the Cumberland young ladies would look like" (62). Instead of these potentially erotic fancies, Hartright is jolted back to reality by the uncanny appearance of the woman in white:

> There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road—there, as if it had that moment
> sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven—stood the figure of a solitary
> Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments; her face bent in grave inquiry on
> mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her. (63)

This scene not only defines Hartright's narrative in the negative (by simultaneously fueling and denying its completion), but also the criticism of the novel since its publication. Margaret Oliphant shared Dickens' estimation of this moment as "a sensation scene of the most delicate and skilful kind."[208] In recent criticism, this encounter has captured what Jenny Bourne Taylor calls the sensation novel's "sense of continuous and rapid change, of shocks, thrills, intensity,

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[207] Miller, "Cage Aux Folles," 152.

[208] Margaret Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 91 (1862): 564–84. Dickens called this scene "one of the two most dramatic descriptions in literature." (*The Recollections of Sir Henry Dickens, KC.* [London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934], 54, Qtd. in Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Cox and Bachman, 9).

excitement,"[209] emblematized by Hartright's experience of "the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me." While this canonical moment, with its conventional tropes—moonlight, isolation, strangeness—adequately contributes to the *frisson* experienced by the novel's readers, its impact also derives from how it presents alterity and difference to the reader and to Hartright.

Ablow perceptively observes that in this pivotal scene "Walter's sensations and his sense of himself as a man in relation to a woman make it impossible for him to act rationally."[210] The crucial ground on which this moment rests, therefore, is the problematic of "a Man in relation to a Woman": the grounds of gendered difference that the woman in white throws sharply into relief. Anne "faces" Hartright and thus arrests his gaze more than he commands hers. She is also, as he takes great pains to point out, non-eroticized. He immediately recounts: "there was nothing wild, nothing immodest in her manner." After briefly noting her all-white clothing, he declares: "this was all I could observe of her." (63). As a result, the woman in white is epistemologically unrecognizable to him within any kind of temporal or symbolic continuity. But she nevertheless manages radically to interrupt his self-extending autonomy, to the point that he asks: "Was I Walter Hartright?" (67). Later, as Hartright attempts to draw, he once again acknowledges the loss of his overarching perspective: "I sat down and tried, first to sketch, then to read—but the woman in white got between me and my pencil, between me and my book…were we two following our widely-parted roads towards one point in the mysterious future?"[211] Beyond

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[209] Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 3.

[210] Ablow, "Good Vibrations," 163.

[211] Ablow, "Good Vibrations," 72.

merely pointing out the unreliability of memory and testimony, the woman in white returns Hartright's narrative agency to potential ignorance (self-doubt), rather than potential fullness (all-knowing). She accordingly lays bare the fraternal axis upon which he stakes his masculinity in the novel, by interrupting the self-perpetuating hegemony of his narrative perspective.

Several critics have quickly grasped the complexities of representation that Anne's "whiteness" and blankness invite. "Whiteness" here resists the easy dimensions of purity and virginity, generating, rather, an excess of figuration. Diane Elam, for instance, observes: "the figure of the woman in white first of all genders the problem of referentiality and truth. More interestingly, the woman in white appears as the figure of reference itself."[212] On the same note, Mario Ortiz-Robles writes: "the figure of the-woman-in-white is functionally capable of resisting allegorical determinations (say, for instance, 'bride') but, as an empty subject position, it can also accommodate them in an iterative series: Laura Fairlie, Anne Catherick, and, by extension, 'Woman', as such."[213] Seemingly moving between the registers of metaphor (i.e. whiteness as virginal) and metonymy (i.e. blankness as serially iterative), Anne occupies an inaugural position in a fraternal narrative order, because she introduces the potential for feminine singularity in this novel. Feminine singularity arrests the iterative series of gendered identification Ortiz-Robles points out, one that culminates in the universal "Woman," but crucially also exists within in it, because it does not conform to the binary model of gender that we might associate with the difference between masculinity and femininity. The insubstitutability of the woman in white—

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[212] Diane Elam, "White Narratology: Gender and Reference in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 50.

[213] Mario Ortiz-Robles, "Figure and Affect in Collins," *Textual Practice* 24 (2010): 851.

she ultimately cannot be exchanged for any other—makes manifest the axis on which femininity operates in Collins' novel: an oscillation between generic and singular, rather than particular and universal.

This startling focus on feminine singularity gains additional weight when we look at the novel's sources. *The Woman in White*'s source materials, to begin with, reveal more than just a passing engagement with the wider context of modern revolutionary Europe that raises certain questions about the role of femininity vis-à-vis the fraternal order. Collins was inspired by numerous criminal cases for the novel, such as the William Palmer poisoning trial.[214] Indeed, in his review of Collins' novel, E.S. Dallas writes, in reference to the Palmer case: "It is not often that much new matter comes to light at these jury trials, and it is rather the manner than the matter that occupies the public attention."[215] Reviews such as these remind readers that the novel shares its central narrative motif—that of multiple "witnesses"—with the structure of the court itself. As Jonathan Grossman observes, in the 1840s and 50s, "the courthouse was not only

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[214] The murder trial of William Palmer (otherwise known as the "Rugeley poisoner" or "The Prince of Poisoners") was the first of many poisoning cases throughout the 1850s, and allegedly may have inspired the narrative structure of *The Woman in White*, since the case was won through a series of testimonies told by different witnesses in court. Other events, such as the widely publicized Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 (which moved divorce cases from the ecclesiastical to the civic courts), and several instances of the false incarceration of wives, reflect the novel's interest in the separation, confinement, and cloistering of femininity.

[215] E.S. Dallas, *The Times* (30 October 1860): 6, qtd. In Collins, *The Woman in White,* ed. Cox and Bachman, 633.

beginning to be newly defined and built as a central urban building; it was for the first time powerfully shaping the way that novels conceptualized their own storytelling structure."[216]

Nonetheless, most critics agree that one of *The Woman in White*'s most plausible sources, as Clyde K. Hyder claims in 1939, is the case of Madame de Douhault, detailed in Maurice Méjan's *Recueil des causes celèbres* (1808). In brief, the case involved Adéläde-Marie-Rogres-Lusignan de Champignelles, whose husband and father both pass away within three years of one another. Madame de Douhault, along with her mother and sister, are deprived of their share of paternal inheritance by her brother, M. de Champignelles. On a journey to Paris in an effort to recover her mother's share, Madame de Douhault is drugged and awakens to find herself in the Salpêtrière, under the name Blainville, while her brother liquidates her estate. Disenfranchised by a paternal ancièn regime, Madame de Douhault finds herself at the mercy of its modern adjunct: a fraternal order that continues to stake its authority on men's domination of women. This formidable case therefore places the novel's central concern with the capturing and cloistering of femininity in another revolutionary context, that of the French. It is an intriguing one, as Hadley reminds us: "in political philosophy and theory, this liberal subject sometimes originates in the French republican context, where rationality's abstraction is absolute and absolutist."[217] Paris' infamous Salpêtrière, which serves as a reference for the asylum where Anne and Laura are both interned in Collins' novel (at one point or another), would also become the site for the ultimate challenge to Enlightenment reason. It is here that French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot diagnosed traumatic hysteria in his female patients, effectively inspiring

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[216]Jonathan H. Grossman, *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2002)*, 5.

[217] Hadley, *Living Liberalism*, 52.

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Freud's psychoanalytic theories. These sources suggest, clearly, the history of the feminine carceral that intersected with debates in the 1850s and 60s over lunacy. Yet, such a prehistory is steeped in the French tradition of political radicalism, and invites a reconsideration of Collins's identity exchange plot in a wider context, one that is more than just a historical footnote.

The case of Madame de Douhalt recalls another important concern in *The Woman in White*: the shadowing of identity fraud (as it is initially framed by patrilineal legitimacy) by something more difficult to describe: fraternity. This point is made clear when we look at Sir Percival's much-discussed Secret. The Secret is the story of his illegitimacy under a legal structure that only recognizes patrilineage. Sir Percival, as Hartright uncovers, is bankrupt, and had taken advantage of Laura's inheritance to substitute for his own lack of title or estate: "The disclosure of that secret, even if the sufferers by his deception spared him the penalties of the law, would deprive him, at one blow, of the name, the rank, the estate, the whole social existence that he had usurped" (508). Before Sir Percival dies in the burning vestry at Old Welmingham, attempting to protect his secret from Hartright, the novel reveals the absent marriage between Glyde's parents that signals his illegitimacy. The novel brackets his discovery of the marriage record in such a way as to highlight the confusion of lateral and vertical relationships in the novel itself:

> I turned to the month of September, eighteen hundred and three. I found the marriage of the man whose Christian name was the same as my own. I found the double register of the marriage of the two brothers. And between these entries at the bottom of the page—?
>
> Nothing! Not a vestige of the entry which recorded the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde and Cecilia Jane Elster, in the register of the church!

My heart gave a great bound, and throbbed as if it would stifle me. I looked

again—I was afraid to believe the evidence of my own eyes. No! Not a doubt. The

marriage was not there. The entries on the copy occupied exactly the same places on the

page as the entries in the original. The last entry on one page recorded the marriage of the

man with my Christian name. Below it, there was a blank space—a space evidently left

because it was too narrow to contain the entry of the marriages of the two brothers, which

in the copy, as in the original, occupied the top of the next page. That space told the

whole story! (507–508)

This celebrated revelation of absence and blankness in *The Woman in White*—the same formal

characteristics of the other illegitimate figure in the novel, Anne—renders the idea of marriage

and patrilineage clearly arbitrary and semiotic. Yet this moment is uncanny in the other ways in

which it implicates Hartright and fraternal masculinity into a similar kind of oblivion. As

Hartright tells the reader, the record first shows the "marriage of a man with my Christian name"

and the "the marriages of two brothers," both facts that he repeats in astonishment over

discovering the secret. The parallelism between all three records cannot help but implicate the

marriage of "two brothers" and the man named "Hartright" in a similar kind of potential kinship

and potential unraveling to Glyde's absent lineage. We find that Sir Percival, far from simply

being the aristocratic object of class revenge in the novel, is part of the same affiliative network

of fraternal male subjects, all of which, grasping for some kind of paternal validity, never find it.

Sir Percival not only lacks a legitimate parentage, but is also the last of a line of seemingly

degenerate fathers, as Hartright discovers toward the end of the novel upon visiting Mrs.

Catherick: "Sir Percival was an only child. His father, Sir Felix Glyde, had suffered from his

birth, under a painful and incurable deformity, and had shunned all society from his earliest

years." (460). In the very blankness that characterizes Glyde's past, the novel not only places him on the side of kinship occupied by Walter and his "sisters," but also draws our attention to the blankness that characterizes the woman in white, the locus of feminine singularity in the novel.

Sir Percival's secret, therefore, and the absent phallic order it reveals, points us in the direction of women's singularity in *The Woman in White.* This is the case because the unraveling of the name "Sir Percival Glyde" that occurs in the vestry discloses the serial, iterative structure by which he is in truth connected to others, instead of the false patrilineal ties he tries to uphold. In the novel, this seriality is also, and more fundamentally, linked with femininity, rather than masculinity in Collins' work. When Sir Percival's secret comes to our attention, we realize that Anne is also illegitimate, and most probably the child of Philip Fairlie and Mrs. Catherick. Because of this information, the narrative implies that Anne is the half-sister of Laura, who is also the half-sister of Marian. All three women, therefore, are linked together in a laterally organized chain of kinship, once removed from one another in relationships that hover between clear difference and obvious likeness. It is this horizontal axis of likeness that eventually impedes the success of Fosco and Glyde's plan. As I have briefly mentioned before, despite the novel's fixation on the "electrifying," "sickly" and "sensational" likeness between Anne and Laura that initially drives the plot to exchange them, this scheme actually relies on difference carved out by the objectification of these two women, and not their likeness. In a conversation that Marian overhears at Blackwater Park, Fosco and Glyde discuss this very problem:

"I must know how to recognize our invisible Anne. What is she like?"

"Like? Come! I'll tell you in two words. She's a sickly likeness of my wife." …"Fancy my wife, after a bad illness, with a touch of something wrong in her head—and there is Anne Catherick for you," answered Sir Percival.

"Are they related to each other?"

"Not a bit of it."

"And yet, so like?"

"Yes, so like. What are you laughing about?" (348)

In order for Glyde and Fosco's plan to succeed, the "sickly likeness" they depend upon in order to orchestrate a substitution instead must rely on a manageable difference handed down by patriarchy: one that creates distinctions between the pure from the profane; the legitimate from the illegitimate. But the novel reveals that this likeness between the women does not conceal such differences, but only more likeness in the form of kinship, since they are half-sisters. As a result, the plot resets the economy of knowing perpetuated by its male characters, since lateral forms of likeness comes to haunt the organization of sexual difference along filial lines.

As a consequence, what we find at this stage in *The Woman in White* is that the Secret has transformed the underlying axis of kinship relations. To begin with, it becomes increasingly apparent that Walter Hartright is not the exception to this seemingly well-organized patrilineal world. He sets up a world of lateral relations, and as the plot of the novel unfolds, we realize that femininity belongs to a parallel series that unravels the entire plan to exchange two women. In each case, the men and the women represent same-generation relationships that no longer refer to filial and patrilineal origins. Furthermore, these relationships are oriented around likeness rather than binary difference, such as the arrangement we find Hartright, Marian and Laura in the final third of the novel. This form of kinship, especially when we focus on femininity, is structurally

organized like a series. This serial structure, it is important to note, is one that is necessarily differential, and not a chain of static similitude. But the horizontality that ultimately governs relationships in the novel does not solve the "problem" of feminine identity—symbolized by the name "Lady Glyde"—that the narrative might seek to rectify. Nor does the series of feminine lateral affiliations make feminine identity more manageable. As I will show, because the name "Lady Glyde" is not a point of resolution, the serial structure of femininity cannot be slotted into this particularized identity.

From one angle, the question that Ablow has posed about Lady Glyde puts this problem into clearest focus: "how does Walter know who this woman is?"[218] The anxiety that Ablow attends to in her question (that is, the uneasiness about femininity's instability and iterative force) manifests itself throughout Collins' work. It reaches its culmination when Walter, upon his return from Honduras, visits what he believes to be Lady Glyde's grave and finds Laura standing above it: "we stood face to face, with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. Her gown touched the black letters…Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave" (419–20). Though this confusion in the novel as to who Lady Glyde is directs us to consider femininity through an epistemological lens, the problem is in fact structural. That is to say, feminine identity in *The Woman in White* is not within the domain of knowledge, but rather reveals the structural organization of collectivity in this diegetic world.

Understandingly, this graveyard scene has been subject to critical commentary because critics have drawn conclusions about how this startling encounter brings up the crucial issue of femininity's iterative possibilities. Michie has argued that the novel betrays a patriarchal anxiety

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[218] Ablow, "Good Vibrations," 158.

about female duplicity against the "oneness" of a stable male self, and that "it is the job of the reader and/or the detective figure of each novel to sort through the multiple identities offered by each heroine, to work against her self-reproduction, and to close the novel with a woman confined to a single identity, a single name, and a single place—in both cases, the grave."[219] According to Michie's reading, feminine subjectivity displays a kind of "self-reproducing" autonomy that must, according to the teleology of the narrative, be contained. What the scene I have described dramatizes, however, is not so much connected with the epistemic work of reading femininity as a closed unit as the impossibility of such a project. The series of feminine relationships at the heart of the plot—the half-siblings of Laura, Anne and Marian— renders the threat of its proliferation non-reproductive, because this series operates horizontally, and does not ground itself in filiation. It does not belong on the axis of generational descent, and therefore is only productive of subjectivity, but it is crucially not *reproductive*.

These same-sex and same-generational relationships are central to the representation of gendered difference in Collins' work. Juliet Mitchell's psychoanalytic study of sibling desire provides one way of trying to understand how this series might be productive on the level of gender in general, and feminine singularity in particular. In her work, Mitchell makes the powerful claim that "lateral desire does not involve the symbolization that comes about through the absence of the phallus (or womb); it involves seriality."[220] Mitchell's observation reminds the reader of Collins' novel that femininity gendered laterally is greatly at odds with a patriarchal order that takes its origins from phallic symbolization, or the verticality of Oedipal identification. At the same time, in foregrounding the serial relationships of women, *The Woman in White* is not

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[219] Michie, *Sororophobia,* 59.

[220] Mitchell, *Siblings,* 128.

attempting to highlight or accentuate their reproductive threat, which would merely preserve

their exclusion from filial and vertical patriarchy. In other words, the novel would risk

"spinsterizing" femininity. Rather, the half-sisters Anne, Laura, and Marian represent forms of

feminine singularity precisely because potential likeness is exactly what reveals their differences,

which cannot, under patriarchy, be reproduced. Glyde and Fosco's plan, for instance, which only

relies on the substitution of two women, fails to take into account that there are actually three

(including Marian), because of the inherent seriality, rather than binary logic, that governs their

subjectivity. Certainly, the subject-positions of Lady Glyde, and by extension, the woman in

white, rely on minimal likeness; but they are not grounded in oneness. But the potential series of

lateral feminine relationships and permutations rather showcases a kind of differential singularity

in its most potent form. This is because subject-formation occurs and reoccurs along the lines of

horizontal proliferation, and not through filiation, or the reification of legal identity. As the novel

reveals, singularity cannot be oneness (in the vein of the single identity "Lady Glyde') nor can it

be reproducible sameness (as the fraternal imaginary of Hartright and Glyde read it). Instead,

feminine singularity reveals the difficulty of managing difference, while remaining highly

generative of gendered subjectivity.

The reality that Lady Glyde's legal identity involves a kinship tie that is always in excess

of filial identity is put into relief for Hartright by the novel's third section. Nevertheless, in order

to "mark" the truth of Lady Glyde's identity, Hartright stages a public destruction of her

tombstone, and finally pays written tribute to the diseased Anne in her place. This final

graveyard scene is, in many ways, his aim to perform, to an absolute melodramatic extreme, the

complete substitution of these women that the perpetrators themselves could not execute: "not a

soul moved, till those three words, "Laura, Lady Glyde," had vanished from sight…One line

only was afterwards engraved in its place: 'Anne Catherick, July 28th, 1850'" (610). Helmed by Walter, this deceptively simple textual substitution seeks to endorse the fantasy of feminine interchangeability. "Three words" collectively imply a plurality of subjects implicit in the name "Lady Glyde" that is swiftly replaced by the one name, "Anne Catherick," seemingly a stable but always empty placeholder. This substitution, though central to Fosco and Glyde's plan, is also importantly part of Hartright's fraternal imaginary, as he is the one who orchestrates it in concrete form in the graveyard. It would seem that both kinds of patriarchal orders, patrilineal and fraternal, stake their hegemony on the substitutability of these women.

This scene remains crucial to my argument about the novel, because the forceful assertion of the identity of "Lady Glyde" on the tombstone necessarily betrays the fact that there is no concrete evidence that the woman Hartright marries is not Laura, and that she may in fact be Anne Catherick. As a consequence, the stability of the woman in white's subjectivity is left radically open at the end of the narrative, despite the many efforts on the part of its male characters to contain it. We understand, finally, that Collins' novel is not about one particular woman, and her relationship to Woman as a universal. Nor is it really about the stability of such causal relationships between general truths and their particularized iterations. Instead, this form of feminine singularity is a differential concept that proves to be highly generative, and operating on the level of horizontal kinship. The narrative is therefore ultimately about female subjectivity as a singularity that cannot be interchanged or substituted according to a logic of sameness and substitution. By leaving the question of feminine identity open, the novel therefore asks whether the contours of such a subjectivity could ever be recognized under a general or universal paradigm, whether that is heterosexual desire, patrilineal and filial relationships, or the seemingly all-encompassing force of the law.

"The Mark of the Brotherhood": *The Woman in White* **and the Italian Question**

"England is the land of domestic happiness," decries Fosco, in his cheerily menacing way (591). Fosco's irony here is two-fold: not only is English domesticity a complete fiction, but it is also, from my perspective, not really the whole story. As we have seen, *The Woman in White* not only challenges Victorian social conventions, but also broadens this critique to incorporate a vision of gendered seriality that exceeds national borders. And despite the changed landscape of the family that concludes the novel—Marian, Walter and Laura live together in life-long harmony to collectively raise the "heir of Limmeridge"— the narrative does not end with the precarious reinstitution of Lady Glyde's identity, nor can it end there according to the logic it has exposed. Instead, the plot follows a figure that cannot be readily incorporated into the fabric of the novel's kinship ties: Count Fosco. Both Professor Pesca, from whom Walter feels a "brotherly affection," and Count Fosco, Laura's uncle-in-law, are Italian political exiles living in England, and both are members of The Brotherhood. When the novel begins, we learn that Hartright has rescued Professor Pesca from drowning in a lake. While this incident may seem minor enough, Hartright cryptically notes that Pesca "was to turn the whole current of my existence into a new channel, and to alter me to myself almost past recognition" (53). Pesca consequently reappears in the last third of the novel while Hartright goes on a hunt for Fosco after the crime has been solved, engaging in a drawn-out cat-and-mouse game with the Count.

While seemingly tangential to the main plot involving Glyde's secret and the singularity of the woman in white, Pesca and Fosco instead introduce a different kind of "brotherliness" that concentrates attention once more on the lateral development of gender as a phenomenon haunting liberal individualism. Their actions produce two sets of consequences for the narrative that I will discuss here. First, Fosco's and Pesca's involvement with the Brotherhood produces a

different set of implications, at times violent and excessive, for a male fraternal imaginary that counters the kind of lateral kinship cohesiveness we find reinstated by Marian, Walter and Laura. The kind of generational sameness that these lateral bonds foreground reaches its anarchic limit in the form of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood presents a strange kind of male community whose axis of violence operates along the lines of anonymity, anarchy and absolutism. In the critical literature on *The Woman in White*, the dearth of discussion of the Brotherhood as a fraternal community at first glance suggests that this fraternal organization cannot be easily incorporated into the larger fabric of the narrative. However, critics have not attended to the ways in which the Brotherhood crucially shadows the sibling kinship structures in Collins' diegetic world, a world delimited by Hartright's modern, fraternal imaginary. By working along the same preferred axis of lateral kinship, but intimately challenging its neatness, the Brotherhood opens up the question of how a fraternal imaginary—the form that both Hartright and Glyde traffic in—can function in modernity.

Lateral relations are therefore far from benign in *The Woman in White,* as brotherhood in particular recalls the Republican ideals of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*: three words that continue to frame modernity's encounter with gender and collectivity. As Stephanie Engelstein perceptively argues: "the very rhetorical force of fraternity derives from the acknowledgement of particularistic passion and sets two limits to universal equality of feeling—at the gender boundary and at the national border."[221] One reason why the brotherhood often struggles to find a place in the larger world of the novel is, as Adrian Wisnicki puts it, because *The Woman in White* "initially presents the Brotherhood as a cipher—a shadowy and unknowable

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[221] Stephanie Engelstein, "Civic Attachments and Sibling Attractions: The Shadow of Fraternity," *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 206.

organization."[222] But such secrecy functions as a rhetorical device, largely to foreground Hartright's narrative omniscience. More noticeably, the plot of the Brotherhood invites us to consider Engelstein's claim about national borders by introducing Italian revolutionary activity into the novel's central interest in sexual difference and likeness. As Albert Pionke writes in *Plots of Opportunity, The Woman in White* "propels its readers through the ideological gauntlet of the Italian Question."[223]

The Woman in White notably begins in 1849, a crucial moment for revolutionary activity across Continental Europe, but most explosively in Italy. The *Risorgimento* ("Resurgence") encompasses the long struggle for Italian territorial unification that began with a brief stint under the rule of Napoleon (who took over the throne in 1805) and ended, effectively, in 1870–71 with the Franco-Prussian War, which granted Italy Rome and the Papal states. The surrounding cultural debate about Italian unification and freedom could not fail to interest Collins and other Victorian writers in Britain, for whom a certain curiosity about the Mediterranean had a long historical precedent. Collins visited Italy on three occasions—as a child with his family, on a trip with Dickens, and with his mistress, Caroline Graves. Peter Caracciolo goes so far as to characterize Collins as an "Italianophile," along with his contemporaries, the Rossettis and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.[224] More broadly in the mid-nineteenth century, Italian nationalism served English nationalism in varying ways. Politically, it occupied the hot-seat for British hopes

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[222] Adrian Wisnicki, *Conspiracy, Revolution, and Terrorism from the Victorian Novel to Modern Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 108.

[223] Albert D. Pionke, *Plots of Opportunity* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2004), 110.

[224] Peter Caracciolo, "Wilkie Collins's 'Divine Comedy': The Use of Dante in *The Woman in White*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25 (1971): 384–404.

for a wider European liberalism, as Jonathan Parry observes: "'Italy' was the best sort of political issue because different Liberals could adopt it for different reasons: its ambiguities greatly helped to strengthen and widen the Liberal coalition."[225] Culturally, Italian nationalism also figured strongly in debates about masculinity and Englishness. The most prescient summary of this is the case that Annemarie McAllister has argued: "Questions of what it meant to be a man, what was appropriate manly behaviour, and the construction and policing of gender boundaries were all opened up for consideration, with the Italian operating as Other against which to define English nationality."[226] The unthreatened abstract male citizen of British liberal discourse, as we can see, revealed itself to be anything but when framed by the wider upheaval of Continental nation building.

The conspiratorial fraternal collectivity that Fosco and Pesca introduce to the novel partakes in what François Furet calls "the dialectic of people and plot."[227] Born out of the Terror during the French Revolution, this mechanism formed the basis of the revolutionary aristocracy's creation of its own counterrevolutionary plots. According to Furet, "conspiracies" in turn generated and fed mainstream political culture, becoming the guiding dialectic of the political sphere for decades to come. In Collins' work, the intersection of nationality and gender takes on a specific tenor in the subplot involving Pesca and Fosco, by which the narrative comes to

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[225] Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830– 1886* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 233.

[226] Annemarie McAllister, *John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders: English Attitudes to Italy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2007), 26.

[227] François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, UK and Paris: Cambridge UP; Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981), 69.

redefine the place of fraternal masculinity, and the violence of creating national communities around this formal structure. By extension, the novel shines the spotlight on what it means to exclude women's singularity from a public sphere modeled on an abstract liberal subject. More specifically, the novel filters this question of subject constitution through the notion of a citizen, a position deliberately parodied by the itinerant Count Fosco. Certain things about Fosco have consistently grabbed readers' attention: his corpulence, parodic manners, odd compulsion for pets, and general panache. He is, in other words, a near-caricature of the liberal notion of "character" that he simultaneously seems to engage with and satirically deny. Goodlad explains: "to build 'character' in the nineteenth-century was, therefore, to resist atomization and embourgeoisement: whether by fortifying the republican's virtuous citizen qualities, by developing the romantic's individuality and diversity, by strengthening the Christian's moral obligations to God and community, or—as often as not—by diverse appeal to all of these ends."[228] But Collins's narrative obviously highlights one important difference: Fosco's status as a foreigner to Britain throughout, a fact that calls our attention to the Italian revolutionary milieu from which he supposedly has fled.[229]

Collins' portrayal of Count Fosco notably engages with the various myths propagated in print about the *Risorgimento* and its leading figures. In the novel, Hartright attributes the presence of Fosco in England to the Count's activities as a possible spy:

The reason for his extraordinary stay in England…became, to my mind, quite intelligible. The year of which I am now writing, was the year of the famous Crystal Palace

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[228] Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State*, ix.

[229] Fosco's situation, as some critics have remarked upon, bears a resemblance to the Italian republican Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), who from 1840 lived as an expatriate in London.

Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners in unusually large numbers, had arrived early, and were still arriving, in England. Men were among us, by thousands, whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. (559)

By voicing a clear national anxiety about England's borders and the numerous others populating it, Hartright echoes a well-established British sentiment about foreignness and its insidious threat to a modern nation-state, best exemplified by the technological and aesthetic spectacle of The Crystal Palace Exhibition or Great Exhibition (1851). But the role of the Count in the greater landscape of the novel's interest in citizenship and rights does not end here. When Hartright and Fosco finally encounter each other at the Opera, the tone of novel changes decidedly. Professor Pesca, who has accompanied Hartright, reveals that he is the secretary of the Brotherhood, of which Fosco is also a member: "'The object of the Brotherhood,' Pesca went on, 'is, briefly, the object of other political societies of the same sort—the destruction of tyranny, and the assertion of the rights of the people.'" Pesca continues, in an extended monologue:

you think the Society like other Societies. Its object (in your English opinion) is anarchy and revolution. It takes the life of a bad King or a bad Minister, as if the one and the other were dangerous wild beasts to be shot at the first opportunity. I grant you this. But the laws of the Brotherhood are the laws of no other political society on the face of the earth. The members are not known to one another. There is a President in Italy; there are Presidents abroad…We are identified with the Brotherhood by a secret mark, which we all bear, which lasts while our lives last…we are warned if we betray the Brotherhood, or if we injure it by serving other interests, that we die by the principles of the

Brotherhood—die by the hand of a stranger who may be sent from the other end of the world to strike the blow—or by the hand of our own bosom friend." (570)

The extensiveness of Pesca's explanation raises the question of why Collins' novel abruptly shifts its focus from a crime involving feminine substitution to the politics of a fraternal secret society. The most obvious answer lies in the fact that The Brotherhood presents in microcosm the larger issue of gendered subjects and rights that opens *The Woman in White*: the problem of envisaging a narrative world—with particular notions of individuation and collectivity— predicated on an abstracted idea of freedom and a modern, secular understanding of justice. According to Pesca, the Brotherhood does not operate as a standard form of political insurgence that takes shape within the state. It is effectively stateless in its formal structure, and effectively revolutionary in a very absolutist sense: it does not direct its activities at a "bad King" or "bad Minister," its idea of community is built around utter alienation and strangeness, and its ideals of equality derive from the right to die by another's hand.

The organization of the Brotherhood subsequently recalls a number of points. First, that the liberal political order implicit in the narrative structure of the novel—one supposedly built on the equality of all witnesses, readers and subjects before the law—is fundamentally imbued by a spectral violence born out of the universality of this law and its inevitable excess. Liberalism's capacity for abstraction, or more precisely, its reliance on such an abstraction, breeds the mechanisms of violence used to regulate a society. This is the kind of violence helmed by no one in particular: an anonymous, faceless form described by Pesca under the Brotherhood's "principles." The Brotherhood, as a consequence, represents the oscillation between the abstraction of the law and an individual notion of freedom that has clear consequences for the organization of gender, because the supposed expansiveness of this law grounds itself in a

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fraternal order of sameness, in which singularity has no place. Collins' "Preface" begins to address this problem, a problem that eventually culminates in the twentieth century in the way Hannah Arendt has examined in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)*:*

> From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an "abstract" human being who seemed to exist nowhere…This right seemed to contradict nature itself since we in fact know 'human beings' only in the shape of men and women; and the concept of human being, if conceived in a politically useful way, must necessarily include the plurality of human beings.[230]

Though Arendt never directly cites gender as one of her concerns, it is clear from this passage that the doing away of men and women as discrete, gendered, and singular individuals in modernity results from the elevation of identity to a depersonalized mode in the name of the law. This observation by Arendt crucially resonates with its earlier manifestation in mid nineteenth-century liberal discourse. What we are left with is something entirely like the Brotherhood from Collins' novel: a masculinized public sphere, in which sameness and egalitarian rule (in the name of fraternity) have become a kind of diffuse, policing menace. Any kind of transgression of the law in this realm merely ratifies and affirms the law; by extension, women can be only be understood under such a structure as exclusion or subversion, the kind that can then reinforce the structure's new patriarchal mode.

Collins' novel, in its concluding plot twist involving the Count, pursues the possibility that citizenship constructed in the fraternal image is fundamentally devastating, by refining a line of thinking that begins in its "Preamble." *The Woman in White* thus opens and closes with a sustained look at the excess of a fraternal political system and its consequences for gender,

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[230] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 9.

filtered through the characters of Pesca and Fosco. Just as Collins' narrative opens with Pesca's near-drowning and the refraction of novelistic perspective through the law, it effectively closes around the Count's final downfall. This final scene, taking place in Paris, the original site of revolutionary liberalism, makes liberalism's intolerable excess in the name of abstraction strikingly clear. As Hartright wanders through Paris, he happens upon what was then a popular tourist attraction: the "terrible dead-house of Paris—the Morgue." He overhears a conversation between two women in which "they had just come out from seeing the sight in the Morgue; and the account they were giving of the dead body to their neighbours, described it as the corpse of a man—a man of immense size, with a strange mark on his left arm" (613). The grotesque sight of the Count's body arrests Hartright in a very peculiar way. He goes to on to describe the lingering thoughts Fosco's corpse raises for him:

> There he lay, unowned, unknown; exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob—there was the dreadful end of that long life of degraded ability and heartless crime! Hushed in the sublime repose of death, the broad, firm, massive face and head fronted us so grandly…the wound that had killed him had been struck with a knife or dagger exactly over his heart. No other traces of violence appeared about the body, except on the left arm…The hand that had struck him was never traced; and the circumstances under which he has killed were never discovered. (614)

The novel, on many accounts, features the grotesqueness of the Count's body, typically in a semi-comic manner: we subsequently know, for instance, that he is corpulent. But here, Hartright's sustained look at the Count's corpse reminds the reader of the sheer abjection of this masculinized public sphere, in which an individual can only answer to the authority of Arendt's "no one." Fosco's body and his killer are framed by complete anonymity ("unowned,

unknown"), yet his death, symbolized by the mark on his arm, renders his corpse ultra-distinguished. We are therefore faced with a glimpse of masculine singularity that cannot exist since it is framed by the violence of its own making. This moment suggests that in Collins' work, the law operates as a political imaginary that is obsessed with embodiment (as the fantasy of feminine bodily substitution recalls) and simultaneously fearful of it (literally marking bodies as profane and abject). Interestingly enough, a novel that confronts subjectivity as a gendered category mapped out through the unsubstitutability of women's bodies concludes with a stark look at the abject male corpse. The novel therefore renders what Hadley has claimed is the grotesque underside of the modern citizen, its body:

> the absence of embodiment as a theorized, constitutive category…registers liberalism's ambivalent relation to its social mission and the hermetic and elitist traces in liberalism that recoil from the bodily, both the bodiliness associated with the masses and the sensing, feeling, material being that encapsulates the individual.[231]

But as I argue here, this body's abjection is a direct consequence of its gender, and its inability to evacuate itself of gendered subjectivity in the name of equality. *The Woman in White* makes clear that there is something inherent in the universality of fraternal law and fraternal ideology that signals radical failure, and this failure is borne out by the Count's bodily demise. In other words, we are faced with the failure of masculine singularity to transcend its own binding abstraction.

The Brotherhood, and its peculiar axis of violence and fraternity, punctures the veneer of universal rights and justice upon which *The Woman in White* claims to stake its entire narrative project. But this conclusion featuring the long and grisly demise of Count Fosco brings us back

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[231] Hadley, *Living Liberalism,* 21.

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full circle to the novel's prefatory problem: that what it means to be a man or a woman is crucial to the formation of a well-ordered polity, and that the affirmation of gendered identity, and specifically femininity, under the law must encounter the inescapable singularity of its subjects.

Chapter Four

Charles Baudelaire and Feminine Singularity

Of the many critical interpretations of Charles Baudelaire's life and work that have emerged since his death in 1867, the claim that he is a misogynist has enjoyed remarkable critical longevity. Leo Bersani has suggested: "Baudelaire's misogyny can be understood partly in terms of a panicky effort to reject the feminine side of his own sexual identity."[232] Later, Patricia Clements has observed: "Baudelaire's misogyny is staggering."[233] By comparison, Paul Sheehan has recently noted that Baudelaire's anxieties about heterosexual love "are coextensive with Baudelaire's misogyny, his fear that preying women can rob a man of his 'essence.'"[234] Such persistent debate about his aversion to femininity is not so much an argument about his work as it is an observation based on his short life and personal writings that reflect, in often reactionary ways, on his relationship to several women (letters to his mother, and the more confessional prose collected in *Mon Coeur mis à nu* and *Journaux intimes).* Baudelaire's striking adult life between Paris and Honfleur is characterized by a few love affairs, notably with a half Haitian woman, Jeanne Duval.[235] It has long been a critical commonplace that the set of love poems in the section *Spleen et idéal* from *Les Fleurs du mal* can be organized along a number of

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[232] Leo Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 66.

[233] Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 155.

[234] Paul Sheehan, *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2013), 59.

[235] It is important to note that there were multiple feminine figures who feature in his biography, and that he was almost never monogamous. However, some critics would agree with Norman R. Shapiro that "Jeanne Duval was the singular woman in Baudelaire's life and poems" (Norman R. Shapiro, Introduction to *Selected Poems from Les Fleurs Du Mal: A Bilingual Edition* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], xx).

"cycles" that correspond to specific feminine muses.[236] But as Rosemary Lloyd has incisively

noted: "between the women the poems evoke and the women Baudelaire knew in boarding

rooms or salons, whom he had glimpsed in the street or gazed at on the stage, with whom he'd

enjoyed unions of the mind or the body, the connections are tenuous to the extreme."[237] Lloyd's

comment highlights the obvious gap between Baudelaire's well-documented personal life and his

treatment of femininity in his poetry. This is a gap that, when we look carefully, seems to be

bridged by the theme of money rather than women themselves: Baudelaire's lack of and desire

for it for most of his life, and the simultaneous critique of its circulation in his writing.[238]

The other term that critics most often use to describe Baudelaire's relationship to

femininity is "ambivalence."[239] This designation partially draws from the context of mid

nineteenth-century capitalism's changing social norms, which become manifest in Baudelaire's

poetry through the visibility of the female prostitute. Witness, for example, the central place the

woman in the street occupies in the opening verse of "À une mendiante rousse":

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[236] See L. J. Austin, *L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire, symbolisme et symbolique* (Paris: Mercure de

France, 1956) and F.W. Leakey, *Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

[237] Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's World* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002), 92.

[238] Françoise Meltzer puts forth the familiar observation that "almost every one of Baudelaire's

relationships, indeed his entire life, was tainted with the problem of money. At eighteen, Baudelaire

inherited his father's fortune; within a year and a half, as is well-known, he had spent nearly half of it"

(*Seeing Double: Baudelaire's Modernity* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011], 138).

[239] See Amy Ransom, "Mon Semblable, ma mère: Woman, Subjectivity and Escape in *Les Fleurs du

mal*," *Paroles gelées*, 11 (1993), 34; Debarati Sanyal, *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and

the Politics of Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1996), 95; Cecilia Enjuto Rangel, *Cities in Ruins: The

Politics of Modern Poetics* (Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2010), 64.

Blanche fille aux cheveux roux,

Dont la robe par ses trous

Laisse voir la pauvreté

Et la beauté."[240]

More generally, critics have concentrated on the role of the feminine in Baudelaire's work as a

site of degeneracy, false idealism, and commodification: a "mass produced article" in Walter

Benjamin's words.[241] Beyond such attention grabbing statements as "la femme est *naturelle,*

c'est-à-dire abominable," from *Mon Coeur mis à nu* (*OC, I*, 677), many of the poems from *Les*

Fleurs du mal are also candidates for this argument. We thus find the near parodic comparison of

a woman's eyes in "La Chevelure" to the lights of the department stores: "Tes yeux, illuminés

ainsi que des boutiques" (*OC, I*, 27), or the infamous speaker of "Une charogne," who compels

his lover to stare at a carcass by the roadside that he compares to an inviting woman: "Les

jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique, / Brûlante et suant les poisons" (*OC, I*, 31).[242]

Following the often extreme sentiments in these poems, Kerry Weinberg asserts that "since

[woman's] only purpose [for Baudelaire] is to serve man and be used by him, she appears to be

hardly more than an animal. The other extreme in this strange female polarity presents her in an

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[240] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard,

1975), I, 83. Hereafter referred to as *OC, I* and *OC, II* in parentheses in the main text. The translation is as

follows: [Porcelain girl with red hair / whose dress through the holes / lets poverty show / and beauty].

All further translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[241] Walter Benjamin and Michael William Jennings, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles*

Baudelaire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 165.

[242] [Legs in the air like a loose woman / burning and perspiring with poison].

exalted station, as a muse or a divine inspiration."[243] Certainly, we can pick and choose figures

from anywhere in Baudelaire's lyrics and prose works that seem, on the surface, to illustrate a

kind of reductive feminine indexicality that corroborates Charles Bernheimer's account of the

misogynistic "imagination of disgust" around female sexuality in the nineteenth century.[244]

There are the "Femmes damnées" from his set of banned poems about lesbianism; the unnamed

women of the new music halls in Paris; and the exoticized addressee of "À une dame créole,"

one of his earliest published works.[245] These types are often read as a wider prelude to

taxonomies of femininity associated with the critical groupings of decadence and aestheticism,

and the now familiar figures — the femme fatale, the sick muse, the "belle sorcière" — show up

again and again in the later works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, J-K. Huysmans, and Michael

Field (Katharine Bradley Harris and Edith Emma Cooper), for example.

But the problem with settling on this reading of Baudelaire's misogyny (besides the too

easy conflation of private life and public writing) is that it misses a very basic idea about these

poems that Lloyd has made: "what makes Baudelaire different from almost all his

contemporaries is that the women in his poetry are so often distinctively individual."[246] In a

similar vein, Christine Buci-Glucksmann has also observed that in Baudelaire's writing "the

motif of the woman imposes, with its constancy, persistence and wealth of meanings, all its

[243] Kerry Weinberg, "The Women of Eliot and Baudelaire: The Boredom, the Horror and the Glory,"
Modern Language Studies 14 (1984): 31.

[244] Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 4.

[245] "Les Lesbiennes," as Pichois notes, was *Les Fleurs du mal*'s original title when it was announced in
1845 (OC, I, XXXI).

[246] Lloyd, *Baudelaire's World,* 94.

interpretative radicality,"[247] while Peggy Kamuf ponders the fact that "without a doubt

Baudelairean lyricism is stamped everywhere, or almost, by a feminine appeal or an appeal to

femininity." [248] Finally, Deborah L. Parsons has suggested that femininity in Baudelaire implies

"a concern with the place of women in the city and art of modernity that goes beyond personal

prejudice."[249] Because of this thematic, formal, and ideological saturation of femininity

throughout Baudelaire's oeuvre, we are forced to confront the utter impossibility of sealing off

the masculine inflected agency of a misogynist lyric "I" without having it dissolve the very

moment we try to presuppose its stability. My argument in this essay therefore starts with the

fundamental assumption that when we pose the question of femininity's contours and effects in

Baudelaire's works, we correspondingly pose the question of an entire political and structural

system. One of the main reasons for this is that it proves impossible to separate Baudelaire's

observations (on femininity, the individual, art, or the world at large) in his writing from the

fraught center of nineteenth-century Paris in the midst of Haussmanian transformation: an

overhaul not only of streets, buildings, and commerce, but also of ideology, ways of thinking,

and the axis of gendered subjectivity.

My assumption is one that most scholars of Baudelaire's works share but tend not to

probe: the fact that femininity is poised at the intersection of major economic and political

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[247] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern," *Representations* 14 (1986): 220.

[248] Peggy Kamuf, "Baudelaire's Modern Woman," *Qui Parle: Literature, Philosophy, Visual Arts, History,* 4 (1991): 1.

[249] Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 24.

structural change in the mid nineteenth century, and is not simply an object of scrutiny for the shifting lens of medicine and statistics, both of which subjected women's bodies to rigid forms of taxonomy. More specifically, I argue here that femininity defines, rather than symptomatically reveals, the crossroads of two interrelated problems: first, the development of capital, and secondly, the political grounding of the liberal subject. Femininity defines this crossroads for one reason: in Baudelaire's works, the feminine continually escapes being seen as part of these dominant paradigms (capitalism and political liberalism) for understanding the twin poles of individuality and multiplicity. "À une passante," for example, Baudelaire's supreme lyric expression of modern *flânerie,* is grounded in the impossible idealization of a feminine passer-by, a "fugitive beauté" whom the city dweller will never be able to grasp fully within his fractured realm of perception (*OC, I*, 92–93). The sonnet launches with the cry of the personified modern street: "La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait."[250] The assonance deepens the position of an already unmoored city dweller on the brink of subjective dissolution. The opening quatrain relates the immediacy by which the speaker then encounters a woman in the street: "une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse."[251] While the poem might contemplate the *flâneur*'s binary perception of the woman as "la douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue," the terrible asymmetry of the two figures — the drifting "moi" and the indefinite yet singular "une femme" — is difficult to miss. The final tercet deconstructs the traditional situation of unrequited love within modernity's collapse of space and time, maintaining the empty locus of femininity as its anchor point:

> Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! *jamais* peut-être!

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[250] [The deafening street all around me howled].

[251] [A woman passed by, with a luxe air].

> Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
>
> Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais![252]

The force of this poetic strangeness is on an entirely different plane from the statements we find in Baudelaire's 'personal' writings that often appear to bait the reactionary leanings of a reader through sheer rhetoric. In "À une passante," however, to abstract the woman from the mass in lyric terms — the speaker's impossible project — is equivalent to the liberal identification of this kind of feminine figure: it is a form of violent particularity that the "passante" escapes entirely.

In its interrogation of the modern relationship between the individual and the mass, "À une passante" recalls a number of particularizing mechanisms, notably the aesthetics of poetic selfhood, that are trying to work out (and often fix) the relationship of a subject and a greater whole. But as we discover in this short lyric, this form of femininity I call *feminine singularity* (which cannot be understood within a generalized group) frequently challenges the neutrality of the perceiving subject and his assumed grounding in any stable political and psychic foundations. For these reasons, femininity for Baudelaire becomes more than simply a conduit to either spiritual idealism or calculated transgression. In the following sections, I trace some of Baudelaire's prose observations on the self in the crowds that bear on his representation of gendered existence, and follow with a close engagement of two central poems from *Tableaux parisien*s. The first, "Les Sept Vieillards," depicts the collapse of Oedipal masculinity through serialization, and the second, "Les Petites Vieilles," considers feminine singularity as that which succeeds it in modernity.

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[252] [Elsewhere, quite far from here! Too late! Never, perhaps! Since I ignore where you run to, you do not know where I go / O you whom I would have loved, O you who had known!].

"Le Fugitif et l'infini": **Femininity and the Man of the Crowds**

"À une passante" offers a glimpse of a phenomenon in Baudelaire's writing: feminine

singularity, or the form by which femininity consistently refuses collectivization, reappears

frequently where collectivization takes on a specifically economic or political tenor. That

alternate ideas of feminine possibility crystallize around the figure of the woman prostitute

reveals a particular vanishing point at the center of urban capital: a point at which traditional

constellations of gendered difference seem to dissolve entirely. Here I turn briefly to some of

Baudelaire's prose works to suggest that this line of thinking often spills out of poetic language.

In these essays and fragments (contrary to what a reader might infer) prostitution becomes

anything but a personal issue for Baudelaire, and transforms instead into a vehicle for theoretical

contemplations of the gendered individual and the social world. We can look first to a short

observation from *Mon Coeur mis à nu* to consider the crucial nexus of femininity and modernity

in his work: "Goût invincible de la prostitution dans le coeur de l'homme, d'où naît son horreur

de la solitude. –Il veut être *deux.* L'homme de génie veut être *un,* donc solitaire. La gloire, c'est

rester *un*, et se prostituer d'une manière particulière" (*OC, I,* 700).[253] As we can see, Baudelaire

opens up the precarious channel of the indefinite self's relationship to a collective other,

symbolized by prostitution. Prostitution here functions as a conceptual problem, one of desire

and action, as well as freedom and the aesthetic. The leap from individualized prostitute to the

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[253] [The invincible taste for prostitution lies in the heart of man, in which the horror of solitude is born. He

wants to be *two*. The man of genius wants to be *one*, so solitary. Glory is remaining a *one,* while

prostituting oneself in a particular fashion].

economy of prostitution as a metaphor was highly common in nineteenth-century literature and visual culture, as Bernheimer has demonstrated in his study. The complexity of this movement involves, among other things, "the force of contradictory impulses generated by the idea of prostitution: desire and its inevitable disappointment, the intimate contact of bodies and its demystification by monetary exchange, the ideal aspiration of love and the void enclosing each human being in his loneliness."[254] What is interesting, nevertheless, is how Baudelaire dilutes this set of seemingly irresolvable tensions into the numeric problem of being a *one* within a *two*. This statement begins with the seemingly basic (though completely internalized) tenet of desire — becoming other while simultaneously recognizing oneself — which exists as a dual, almost tyrannical psychic force. Further, Baudelaire affiliates the *one* with *l'homme de génie*, the solitary romantic figure of the "man of genius." This is a form of solitary oneness drawn directly from the Romantic tradition with which Baudelaire maintains a clearly complex relationship.[255] Here, the Romantic man of genius appears as a kind of scapegoat for larger issues of gendered self-definition. The *one* as solitary proves ultimately unsatisfactory, as does the *two* as mere reproduction. Something different is required: maintenance of the one within the two, or an enumeration of the poetic subject that exceeds the neat divisions of self and other.

There are two additional points that arise from this quotation that bear on Baudelaire's larger oeuvre, and that consequently draw us to the centrality of femininity to his thinking of urban modernity, masculine desire, and poetic subjectivity. One wonders first if Baudelaire is delineating an aesthetic theory of the impossible (figured as masculine) through the metaphor of

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[254] Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute,* p. 1.

[255] As a critic Baudelaire wrote about "le romantisme" extensively, particularly in visual art, such as in the *Salon de 1846* under the title "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?" (*OC, II*, 420).

prostitution, in which masculinity upholds the contours of a "one" or an "I" while still enjoying the pleasure of scattering itself within the precariousness of a feminine "two" (symbolized ostensibly by prostitution). Yet within this dream of the pleasure of self-dissolution, *l'homme de génie*'s actualized self remains in hypothetical form: he "wants to be," but appears terrifyingly unrealized and unanchored. The seemingly conventional premium that Baudelaire places on genius here is rather a negative account of male sexuality much more central to a perilous modernity. This account primarily occurs through a form of counting: enumerating a "one" and a "two" signals a mode of gendered difference, and becomes the portal to understanding not just poetic selfhood but also far reaching problems of sexual asymmetry and non-coincidence.

At issue, then, is the possibility that the solitary self is fundamentally unbearable, and in some ways this self must obey an internal command to "prostitute" itself in order to exist at all. *Mon Coeur mis à nu*'s opening fragment bears out such an opposition: "De la vaporization et de la centralization du *Moi.* Tout est là" (*OC, I*, 676). The profound tension in which solitude has begun to operate in both of these comments has certain contextual roots. According to Pierre Pachet in *Le Premier Venu*, "solitude" in Baudelaire is a fundamentally unstable term rather than a romantic carryover, for deeply politicized reasons: "Si Baudelaire est au contraire avide de concentration de soi, c'est qu'il est sans illusion sur l'état démocratrique et sur sa façon d'étouffer et d'encercler l'individualité un peu résistante."[256] Pachet reminds us that the emergence of the modern phenomenon of democracy, a seemingly progressive development,

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[256] Pierre Pachet, *Le Premier Venu: essai sur la politique baudelairienne* (Paris: Denoël, 1976), 45. [If Baudelaire is, on the contrary, hungering for the concentration of the self, it is because he maintains no illusions over the democratic state and the manner in which it suffocates and surrounds a barely resistant individuality.]

actually destroys the idea of selfhood, and, by extension, undermines a particular form of oneness. When we consider that the undisputed neutrality of a masculine liberal self, or a romantic genius, might be severely pre-empted by a modern democratic sphere, Baudelaire's mention of prostitution starts to resemble more of a radical possibility, one aligned with a kind of unspecified freedom.

Baudelaire puts this desire for freedom in another way in *Fusées*, where he observes: "Le plaisir d'être dans les foules est une expression mystérieuse de la jouissance de la multiplication du nombre" (*OC, I*, 649).[257] This comment begins with the familiar subject of "À une passante": an urban masculine self that dwells within the amazing sensorium of the city. Elsewhere in his writings, such as his meditation on Constantin Guys, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire reprises this sentiment: "c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini" (*OC, II*, 691).[258] Baudelaire quickly defamiliarizes the observation in both instances by converting the purely aesthetic notion of being in the crowds into the question of numerical proliferation. Richard Burton identifies this trope as "Protean self-multiplication," but the clear-cut juxtaposition of "jouissance," "multiplication," and "nombre" radicalizes mere Protean changeability.[259] The sentence from *Fusées* transitions from pleasure to expression, and finally to "jouissance" and "multiplication"

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[257] [The pleasure of being in the crowds is a mysterious expression of the jouissance of the multiplication of numbers].

[258] [It is an immense pleasure to take up residence in numbers, in waves, in the movement of the fugitive and the infinite].

[259] Richard D. E. Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859: A Study in the Sources of Poetic Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 123.

using the article "de la": this is in itself a syntactic form of numeric unraveling, similar to a Russian doll, in which each noun connects in serial fashion. The sentiment becomes more and more exhilarating as we realize the possible incompatibility of each term: the estrangement from one another of self, "jouissance," "plaisir," and "foule" even as they are brought together by the logic of the sentence. The thrill of the numerical in this evocation of being in the crowd aligns itself with the lyric impossibility suggested by "À une passante": the erosion of a single masculine self, and a movement toward "l'infini" that the poet strongly associates with the feminine.

I investigate these moments in order to draw out a crucial point: when we look at the critical tradition of observing a form of modernity that Baudelaire inaugurated (and Benjamin revives in the twentieth century), femininity always seems to intervene in order to overturn the grounds of such observing. In his writings, Baudelaire consistently demonstrates openness to strangeness as a singularly feminine strain of possibility, in an effort to liberate thought from its dependence on stale ideas of unity and universality. Form and figure both subsequently refract the problem of feminine subjectivity throughout the critical conversation that begins with Baudelaire and develops into the twentieth century. Leo Bersani, for instance, in *Baudelaire and Freud*, makes the following compelling claim about the poet's aesthetic:

> "The beautiful is always bizarre"—and the bizarre is constituted by a particularity so radical as to resist any generalizing enterprise. The particular is not necessarily a source of the general. It is as if a kind of exhilarating meaningless in the fragmented, madly diversified scenes of modern life led Baudelaire to the notion of a particularity which, as it were, goes nowhere, which is not a "part" of anything.[260]

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[260] Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud*, 20.

Here Bersani refers to a comment Baudelaire makes in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. Baudelaire suggests that the beautiful in modernity is an active principle that is unfinished, violent, and never entirely classifiable under familiar rubrics. Thus Baudelaire sums up Guys' aesthetic in the following terms: "Il a cherché partout la beauté passagère, fugace, de la vie présente, le caractère de ce que le lecteur nous a permis d'appeler la *modernité*. Souvent bizarre, violent, excessif, mais toujours poétique" (*OC, II,* 724).[261] Bersani pushes this idea further to contemplate the bizarre as "the notion of a particularity" that cannot refer back to a totalizing whole, "which is not 'part' of anything." In my reading this notion of the bizarre is beyond the realm of particularity, since particularity suggests the instantiation of a more general concept. Rather, Bersani's description of the bizarre is more on the level of the singular, or what cannot be totalized. Bersani goes on to write that Baudelaire often "cancels" out a radical aesthetic of the singular by attempting to "complete" or fill in modernity, by setting it against a backdrop of an absolute aesthetic. For Bersani, this type of overreaching on Baudelaire's part is clearest in the poet's essays on modern art from the *Salons*. But I suggest that when we look at the variety of Baudelaire's observations on the self in the crowds as well as his treatment of it in his poems, we find an overall dismantling of the terms of Marx's observation from 1844's *Economic and Political Manuscripts*, that "prostitution is only the particular expression of the universal prostitution of the worker."[262] Prostitution in the form of the *two*, as Baudelaire discusses it in the comments I cite above, seems to unmask a generalized idea of femininity rather than strictly oppose, denigrate, or commodify it. In these instances then, Baudelaire showcases a kind of short

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[261] [He has searched everywhere for that transitory fleeting beauty of the present day, the character of which allows us to call it modernity. Often strange, violent, excessive, but always poetic].

[262] Karl Marx, *Marx on Religion,* ed. John C. Raines (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), 139 (note 3).

circuiting that occurs when we try to move from the particular to the universal on the current of femininity. The terms of the particular and the universal thus reroute to something entirely different in Baudelaire's thought: what I claim to be an oscillation between singularity and infinity.

In what follows I discuss two of Baudelaire's poems from *Tableaux parisiens,* "Les Sept Vieillards" and its companion piece "Les Petites Vieilles," in which counting to infinity manifests a different understanding of masculinity and femininity. Eliane F. Dalmolin has observed: "The Baudelairean woman is always moving between two infinities, the infinitely ideal, mineral, whole, and the infinitely modern, fleshy, fragmented. It is from the space in-between that an immense number of women appear on the poetic scene of *Les Fleurs du Mal*."[263] I extend this commentary to look more closely at what infinity stands for in Baudelaire's street poetry, which dissolves the very notion of an "ideal" or, by extension, a universal. What we find in these celebrated works is a revelation of the underside of liberal individuality and its glorification of youth, vigor, and sexual conservatism.

Fantômes parisiens[264]

Baudelaire composed both "Les Sept Vieillards" and "Les Petites Vieilles," along with his masterpiece "Le Cygne," in the course of 1859. It is worth remembering that he dedicated all three poems to Victor Hugo, a paragon of the poetic establishment in contrast to Baudelaire's *enfant terrible.* While Ross Chambers has observed that dedications in Baudelaire's work are

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[263] Eliane F. Dalmolin, "Modernity Revisited: Past and Present Female Figures in the Poetry of Banville and Baudelaire," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 25 (1996–1997): 89.

[264] Pichois notes that this was the original section title for the three poems, "Les Sept Vieillards," "Les Petites Vieilles," and "Le Cygne" (*OC, I,* 1009).

often problematic in their intentions, he also notes that such a "plain dedication" as these to

Hugo points out certain aesthetic similarities ("sympathy for the wretched") as well as obvious

differences ("Baudelairean empathy" as distinct from Hugo's "optimistic occultism").[265]

Let me briefly recount what is generally well known to scholars of this period. Baudelaire

claimed to be drawing on Hugo's style for all three of these poems.[266] Their relationship — both

personal and literary — had been particularly charged since 1840 when a young Baudelaire

wrote Hugo a letter of admiration, stating: "Je vous aime comme j'aime vos livres."[267] In the late

1840s to 1850s — an extremely tense period in which Baudelaire abandoned his revolutionary

impulses after the failed uprising of 1848 — Hugo became a relic of the bourgeois establishment

for Baudelaire, despite the older writer's formal exile from France under the regime of Louis

Napoleon for antagonism."[268] But when Hugo refused French amnesty in 1859 (he remained

outside France until 1870), Baudelaire seemed to have shifted his sentiments towards something

positive, soliciting approval of his work from the older writer, in no small part due to his

financial struggles.[269] The details of their literary and personal relationship are too complex to

cover here. Though Chambers argues that the dedication to Hugo serves to politicize these texts

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[265] Ross Chambers, "Baudelaire's Dedicatory Practice," *SubStance*, 17 (1988): 5–17.

[266] Pichois also mentions that Baudelaire wrote to the journal *Revue contemporain*: "j'ai essayé d'imiter sa manière" (*OC, I*, 1010).

[267] Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance,* ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 1, 81–82.

[268] For more information on Hugo's rebellion against the regime, see David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2000).

[269] For a sustained discussion of their relationship, see R. Turner, "Hugo and Baudelaire," *French Review* 10 (1936): 102–08, and Léon Cellier, *Baudelaire et Hugo* (Paris: José Corti, 1970).

from a comfortable distance, I contend that the dedicatory gesture actually introduces an urgent

set of angles — both social and political — to the overhaul of gender and femininity in these

poems.[270] Besides the treatment of exile (all of the figures in "Les Sept Vieillards," "Les Petites

Vieilles," and "Le Cygne" are outsiders), the poems also reveal the collapse of Oedipal idealism

(with Hugo as the father figure) as a uniquely politicized sentiment (incurring pressure from

Paris's regime changes and failed uprisings), and the replacement of a hollow patriarchy (shown

to be heavily dilapidated in "Les Sept Vieillards") by an approach to modernity that can only be

read as singular and feminine (as "Les Petites Vieilles" will articulate). The remainder of my

discussion concentrates on "Les Sept Vieillards" and "Les Petites Vieilles," two poems that

Nathaniel Wing has singled out in *Fantômes parisiens* for "the uncanny emergence of the

void."[271] My analysis follows what I see as the structural progression of these poems away from

an earlier vision of men and women toward something more future oriented.

An overlooked point of contact between Hugo's writing and Baudelaire's "Les Sept

Vieillards" is the infinite as a concept that both writers approach numerically, as the title of

Baudelaire's poem suggests. Gender dynamics are central to this point, as this poem and its

companion piece, "Les Petites Vieilles," deal with the serializing possibility, both monstrous and

freeing, of old men and old women. In the former, a speaker hallucinates a seemingly endless

parade of aged, potentially evil men, who are indistinguishable from one another and appear out

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[270] Chambers argues that, among the various aims of the dedication is the desire to "*politicize* a text […]

while generally maintaining an air of noble distance from the sordid politics of the 1850's" ("Baudelaire's

Dedicatory Practice," 8).

[271] Nathaniel Wing, "Baudelaire's Frisson Fraternal: Horror and Enchantment in 'Les Tableaux

Parisiens,'" *Neophilologus* 81 (1997): 24.

of nowhere. In the latter, a similar speaker observes a series of old women with melancholy and depth, recalling how each woman reveals a certain kind of singularity. A particular section of Baudelaire's 1859 essay on Hugo ("Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains") opens with a long exultation of the poet's ability to probe the infinite: "l'excessif, l'immense, sont le domaine naturel de Victor Hugo" (*OC, II*, 137). At first glance, we might think this is not a version of infinity, but merely a kind of expansive form of ennoblement. But Baudelaire is not discussing a notion of infinity that has to do with romantic vastness, as we see in his poems about the city in particular. Here it is worth quoting at length the definition Sartre provides on Baudelaire's understanding of infinity, a definition that bears on "Les Sept Vieillards":

> L'infini, pour lui, n'est pas une immensité donnée et sans bornes, encore qu'il emploie quelquefois le mot dans ce sens. C'est très exactement ce qui n'est jamais fini, ce qui ne peut pas finir. La série des nombres sera infinie, par exemple, non par l'existence d'un très grand nombre que nous nommerions infini, mais par la possibilité permanente d'ajouter une unité à un nombre, aussi grand qu'il soit. Ainsi chaque nombre de la série a son au-delà, par rapport auquel il se défini et se place. Mais cet au-delà n'existe pas encore tout à fait: il faut que je le construise en ajoutant l'unité au nombre que je considère. Déja il donne son sense à tous les nombres écrits et pourtant il est au bout d'une operation que je n'ai pas encore faite. Tel, l'infini baudelairien.[272]

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[272] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 41–42. The translation is as follows: "For Baudelaire, the infinite was not a vast given limitless expanse, though he did sometimes use the word in this sense. It was in fact something which never finished and could not finish. For example, a series of numerals will be infinite not because there is a very large number of them which we can describe as an 'infinite' number, but because of the everlasting possibility of adding another unit to a number however

Despite Sartre's general disdain for Baudelaire — the majority of the study cited above essentially psychoanalyzes and condemns the poet's personality — this insight is striking in its precision and originality, since no prior commentator had identified this crucial element in the poet's oeuvre. Sartre helps define a numerically grounded concept of the infinite in Baudelaire's verse that we see operating in "Les Sept Vieillards." What Sartre defines in this passage as Baudelaire's idea of infinity is notably distinct from a version of infinity that is metaphysical, absolute, and totalizing. Both kinds of infinity recall Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in which he discusses the difference between "genuine" infinity and its spurious "bad" counterpart. "Bad" infinity is a serial concept involving infinite addition and divisibility — a possibility that can be thought of as "n+1" — and is therefore always incomplete. For Hegel, this seeming march of the bad infinity in serial fashion is merely a perpetual return to the finite, since it is always repeating and rehearsing its relationship to its "finiteness." If n+1 infinity can be thought of as a line, "true infinity" has closed in on itself like a circle, as Hegel explains*:* "the image of the true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the *circle,* the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without *beginning* and *end*."[273] For Hegel, true infinity elevates itself beyond finiteness by incorporating the finite into itself fully: a kind of present embrace.

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large it may be. Thus every number in the series has a 'beyond' in relation to which it is defined and its place in the series fixed. But this 'beyond' does not yet exist completely: I must bring it into existence by adding another unit to the number in front of me. It already gives meaning to all the other numerals which I have written down, yet it is the term of an operation which I have still not completed. Such was Baudelaire's conception of infinity" (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, trans. Martin Turnell [Norfolk, CT: New Directions], 1950), 37–38).

[273] G.W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic,* trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin: 1969), 149.

What I would like to suggest in light of Sartre's comment is that Baudelaire's infinity is indeed on the level of Hegel's "bad" infinity, and yet does not partake in the endless rehearsal of the finite he charges it with, precisely because it cannot be elevated to the absolute level of the "concept" by which it opposes a static finiteness. "Les Sept Vieillards" is an example of Baudelaire contemplating bad infinity while considering its structural possibility. The number seven already lends the poem a somewhat charged resonance that correlates with a form of "badness," insofar as it has been associated with the occult.[274] The poem's celebrated opening lines "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves | Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!" (*OC, I,* 87–88) recapitulate an increasingly familiar environment of the polluted and alien cityscape, one that conversely produces a heightened sense of the imaginary.[275] The cityscape multiplies itself across numerous types of figures ("mystères," "sèves," "quais d'une rivière") as the speaker finds himself dragged rhetorically from "brouillard" to "vieillard," the visually imperfect rhyme producing what the verse declares:

> Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
>
> Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux.[276]

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[274] Dolf Oehler suggests this poem and a few others from *Les Fleurs du mal* "renews the rhetoric of Satanism" ("Baudelaire's Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. Rosemary Lloyd [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005], 28). See also Jonathan Culler, "Baudelaire's Destruction," *MLN* 127 (2012): 699–711.

[275] [Swarming city, city fully of dreams, where ghosts trap the passers-by in broad daylight!]

[276] [Suddenly, an old man appeared whose yellow rags mimicked the color of this rainy sky].

The old man is distinguished by his "mechanceté," or evil glint in his eye, which anchors the turn in the poem toward an ironic and perverse blazon. The poem describes the old man in terms of various body parts that are shared by the man's double:

> Son pareil le suivait: barbe, oeil, dos, bâton, loques,
>
> Nul trait ne distinguait, du même enfer venu,
>
> Ce jumeau centenaire, et ces spectres baroques
>
> Marchaient du même pas vers un but inconnu. [277]

The doubling of the old men, as critics have remarked, bears the mark of the period's fascination with the fantastic. Yet not only is their utter sameness terrifying to the speaker, it also seems to generate ever-increasing numbers. No sooner has the speaker perceived the twin old men than five more seemingly appear:

> Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute,
>
> Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait!'[278]

Furthermore, the literal as well as metaphoric presence of the overbearing yellow fog and the repetition it inaugurates tells us that we are in an industrial and capitalizing world, one in

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[277] [His double followed him: beard, eye, back, stick, rags, not a single trait distinguished them, from the same hell these centenary twins and baroque ghosts walked at the same speed toward an unknown destination].

[278] It would be impossible to ignore the dimension of the poem that grounds itself in the description of one of the old men's limbs as either "D'un quadrupède infirme ou d'un juif à trois pattes." For a more recent conversation about this and other references in Baudelaire's work (though one that does not take into account the full complexity of nineteenth-century French anti-Semitism, which did not align with traditional political oppositions of "left" and "right"), see John M. Baker, Jr. and Brett Bowles, "Baudelaire and Anti-Semitism," *PMLA* 115 (2000): 1131–34.

which accumulation is everywhere and nowhere, leading to the speaker's hallucinations. But this world is also uncanny, self consciously spectral, and deeply ironic. The old men have no value as commodities under capital but continue to proliferate, like indistinguishable products. They harken back to a time of baroque evils but defiantly march on toward an unrecognizable futurity. Yet even if these repetitions appear out of capital, the grotesque edge of the poem speaks to the fact that its overriding logic is one geared toward infinity. Capital is its own infinity, its own circular transcendence: it cannot recognize the unfinished "beyond" of bad infinity to which it paradoxically owes the trope of serial repetition. But what is intriguing about this poem is that the circuit of repetition fails to close. Instead, the poem presents the possibility of an infinity that might destroy the speaker's grounding in finite presence (already extremely tenuous in the poem):

> Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième
>
> Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal,
>
> Dégoûtant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même?
>
> —Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal.[279]

The threat of n+1 infinity — seemingly arising from within capital's dead time — becomes too much for the speaker to absorb, despite the fact that the little old men have a purchase in some kind of eternity ("Ces sept monstres hideux avaient l'air eternal").

The poem's revision of the grounds of gender is perhaps the most significant reflection of its ideological world. The kind of masculinity Baudelaire observes in the poem is merely the shadow of patriarchal authority, yet the old men certainly ironize the manner by which such

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[279] [Would I, without dying, be able to contemplate the eighth, pitiless, ironic and fatal / Despicable Phoenix, son and father to himself? But I turned my back on this infernal procession].

authority reproduces itself (largely, as Freud will put it fifty years later, through taboo, prohibition, and the law). Terrifying repetition — in the form of non reproductive and supernatural sameness — thereby signals a crucial break with Oedipal structure that Burton has observed: "at every point, 'Les Sept Vieillards' inverts and subverts this classic myth."[280] Rather, this series operates with a maniacal freedom that constructs the old men as "son and father to themselves": a gross subversion of the primary grounds of gender organization under patriarchy. We have, once again, only a trace of its other that the speaker identifies as a "frisson fraternal": a brotherly sense of terror shared beyond the bounds of the poem. This frisson gestures to the notable last line of *Les Fleurs du mal'*s opening poem, "Au Lecteur," which ends with the address: "— Hypocrite lecteur — mon semblable — mon frère!" (*OC, I*, 6). Whether these sentiments are a tragic plea, an outrageous mockery, or a damning curse, they puncture the veneer of modern citizenship that is organized around the inviolability of brotherhood (in other words, the charged legacy of "Liberté, egalité, fraternité") by rendering it abject to begin with. At every step, then, "Les Sept Vieillards" seeks to undo the very basic grounds by which subjects may organize their relationship to something larger than themselves.

The poem ends with the speaker irrevocably weakened and altered by what he has (supposedly) witnessed: "Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité!" Yet the old men seem to have generated or unleashed a form of infinity into the world of the poem that has penetrated the speaker: "Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre / Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!"[281] Within the modernity Baudelaire investigates, the subject is inherently reducible to the structures that constitute and suffocate it: capitalism, liberalism, and bourgeois patriarchy.

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[280]Burton, *Baudelaire in 1859,* 116

[281] [And my soul danced and danced, an old barge without masts, on a monstrous sea without borders].

Yet at the end of this poem, the speaker's soul touches a form of bad or tainted infinity ("une mer monstrueuse") that has cleared these borders. "Les Sept Vieillards" thus carefully imagines a form of serializing — depicted by the subjects least likely to possess any kind of value — that, in all its "badness" manages to escape the systems of accumulation and individuation that would seem to underwrite it.

This narrative of tainted infinity toward which "Les Sept Vieillards" directs us establishes the grounds for Baudelaire's revision of the structure of subject constitution in modernity. This might seem like a lofty claim, but what the poem does in its highly bizarre set of images and ideas is nothing short of a complete overhaul of capital's vision: one that critiques a form of infinity that begins and ends with itself as absolute. Within this schema, as I have mentioned, a subject appears to be the grotesque consequence of what lies beyond it: capital, temporality, urbanity, and so on. Yet bad infinity proliferates, rupturing the rigid economy of self and world (necessarily and always a question of gender for Baudelaire) to which mid nineteenth-century Paris has capitulated. Notably, the poem does not deal with femininity, but only the denigration of Oedipal masculinity. Yet the fact that femininity is absent does not mean that it does not factor into the systems the poem contorts and refracts. When we look at "Les Petites Vieilles," in which Baudelaire intervenes once more into this landscape, we see how the two poems work together to reimagine gender, and particularly femininity, as a question of singularity and seriality.

"Les Petites Vieilles" follows "Les Sept Vieillards" in meditating on the series, but with a very different tenor. Certain elements remain constant in both poems: a dissolute but watchful speaker; a vision of Paris vibrating with derelict possibility; and the close scrutiny of the aged who visibly (or, rather, invisibly) operate on the fringes of the social world. Yet what

distinguishes this poem that focuses on elderly women is that instead of depicting them in a series that leads to bad infinity, the poem recognizes each one as singular.

> Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales,
>
> Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements,
>
> Je guètte, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales,
>
> Des êtres singuliers, décrepits et charmants.[282]

These four lines accentuate a further difference from "Les Sept Vieillards." Femininity in "Les Petites Vieilles" allows the poem degrees of emotional engagement that the evil hallucinations in "Les Sept Vieillards" can only mock from a distance: it is almost as if, with the imperfect rhyme of "charmants" and "enchantements" that toys with their proximity, the speaker comments on this very distance from the previous poem.

The structure of the poem suggests a clearer picture of the subjects the speaker is observing. The poem is arranged into four sections of varying number of stanzas. The four-line stanzas feature the same rhyme scheme as the previous poem (*abab*), yet the sounds are more discordant, manifesting the disjunction between the sight of the aged women and the environment they simultaneously arise from and yet to which they do not belong. Thus the lines that describe the old women contain a number of consonant clusters (notably the 'fr' sounds), suggesting, further, the asymmetry between the speaker's gaze and the vision of these women:

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[282] Baudelaire, *OC, I,* 89–91. [In the serpentine folds of the old capital cities, / Where everything, even horror, turns to enchantment, / I spy, obeying my fatal mood, / Singular beings, decrepit and alluring].

"Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes…Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques / Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus."[283]

Despite the earlier discordance, the poem makes clear that the old women manifest a specific feminine presence that appears grotesque only to the unobservant individual, yet contains an epic, near unfathomable history that deserves a specific reverence. The speaker uses the language of obscure historical figures — "Laïs," the name of several courtesans, "Éponine," the executed wife of an ancient Gaulois Sabinus, and the priestess of Thalia — to stitch the present of denigrated and aged feminine figures together with an exalted genealogy, exclaiming that "Toutes m'enivrent!" Further, the poem, in its second stanza, describes a rare moment (in Baudelaire's oeuvre) of profound tenderness: "monstres brisés, bossus / Ou tordus, aimons-les! ce sont encore des âmes."[284] The women pass in a series "tout pareils à des marionettes" but, unlike the seven old men, reveal to the speaker their inescapable human singularity rather than a hallucinatory sameness: "ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille." As the poem progresses, the speaker is drawn further and further into the series precisely through differentiation. This later verse describes the women one by one:

> L'une, par sa patrie au Malheur exercée,
>
> L'autre, que son époux surchargea de douleurs,
>
> L'autre, par son enfant Madone transpercée,

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[283] [These disjointed monsters were once women…they crawl, whipped by the wicked north winds, trembling at the din of buses roaring past].

[284] [Broken, humped, or disjointed monsters, let us love them! They are still human souls].

<p style="text-align: center;">Toutes auraient pu faire un fleuve avec leurs pleurs![285]</p>

The stanza demonstrates, once again, a depth of understanding with regard to the old women —
who have even less value than the old men in the social system — by suggesting they exist
outside the totalizing grip of the present, and thus remain privileged to a kind of epic humanity.
Crucially, the above stanza describes the women as "one" — again indefinite yet singular —
then follows with a more general and contextual characterization. But even more startling is the
structural work of this poem to rethink how femininity, as individual or in a group, can be
understood within a modern way of seeing. This stanza thus exemplifies what Kamuf has
claimed to be Baudelaire's specific idea of femininity:

> This convertibility of the one and the many, which is the reserve of the "*poète actif et
> fecund*," points to a multiplicity other than the serial repetition of the mass commodity or
> those girls in the music-hall reviews, mentioned by Benjamin, who are all dressed in
> strictly identical fashion… I would venture to say it is the art of modern women in the
> sense that it recognizes itself in a proliferation of fugitive feminine figures without a
> common model, without reference to *la femme en général*.[286]

The series heroically defeats the general in this particular verse, yielding not just figures that are
indistinguishable in their suffering, but ones that are relentlessly singular. They drift away from a
clear relationship to a generalized idea of femininity, but as the poem strives to show, cannot be
thought of as merely aberrant.

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[285] [One, whose homeland succumbed her to misery, / Another, whose husband overwhelmed her with
suffering, / The other, who became a Madonna pierced through the heart, / They all could have made a
river with their tears!]

[286] Kamuf, "Baudelaire's Modern Woman," 4.

The changing landscape of Paris is not simply a quiet background to the speaker's watchful gaze. Rather, the poem casts a shrewd eye on the shifting arrangements of the Second Empire when the speaker contemplates the eventual death and burial of the old women. Meltzer has perceptively noted that Baudelaire's poems often involve a "ghost economy" and that "many of his poems concern not only ghosts but graveyards."[287] And indeed, in this particular verse we do find an interest in death as a possible kind of renewal, a motif Meltzer identifies throughout Baudelaire's poems. However, the image of graves in "Les Petites Vieilles" goes further than that, invoking a realm of insidious political change. The speaker observes the smallness of the women and their resemblance in size to little girls, noting that "il me semble toujours que cet être fragile / S'en va tout doucement vers un nouveau berceau." For the speaker, death may rehumanize those who have become only "fantômes" in the "fourmillant tableau" of Paris. He goes on to contemplate the size and shape of their coffins:

> À moins que, méditant sur la géometrie,
>
> Je ne cherche, à l'aspect de ces membres discords,
>
> Combien de fois il faut que l'ouvrier varie
>
> La forme de la boîte où l'on met tous ces corps.[288]

The image appears once again to be aggressively grotesque, one in the vein of Baudelaire's general irony toward the human condition itself. But the motif of burial and coffins has far reaching resonances in the urban climate of Paris in the 1850's and 60's. The logistics of burying the dead within metropolitan Paris shifted radically from the mid eighteenth century to the late

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[287] Meltzer, *Seeing Double,* 122.

[288] [Unless, meditating on geometry / As I see these discordant limbs, I look for how many times the undertaker modifies / The shape of the box where we put all these bodies].

nineteenth, initiating nothing short of a "cultural revolution" according to Burton in his history of revolutionary Paris, *Blood in the City*.[289] Parish and church graveyards were abolished in favor of mass burial grounds outside the city, where class markers took hold rather quickly. Bourgeois families earned their own private plots while working class Parisians were rendered anonymous in their graves. Furthermore, this pilgrimage of the dead to the periphery of the city is what effectively produced the Foucauldian structure of modern Parisian life in which "death, detritus, drink, crime, prostitution, even labor itself were, quite simply, to be rendered invisible."[290] I would argue further that these divisions between the living and the dead, the sacred and the profane, and the rich and the poor hold up the central division of man and woman that forms the core of the bourgeois familial mythos. Thus, as Burton concludes, "metropolis and necropolis became mirror images of each other."[291]

Baudelaire's poetic scrutiny of the old women's coffins therefore is a highly charged image in the context of Paris's "modernizing" policies, policies that forcibly created a new urban subject who is rendered spectral by burgeoning commodity culture. With this in mind, it becomes almost blasphemous (against the city and the Empire, which effectively poses as the new Father) for the speaker to call the old women "Ruines! Ma famille!" Not only does this sentiment express a certain camaraderie between the invisible in Paris's "sinuous folds"; it also undoes the tenets of bourgeois patriarchy — Burton's articulation of "individual autonomy plus

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[289] Richard D. E. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001), 132.

[290] Burton, *Blood in the City*, 132.

[291] Burton, *Blood in the City*, 133.

family solidarity" — that the new burial grounds sheltered and enshrined. [292] The speaker's identification with the old women, "tout comme si j'étais votre père," further recalls a vision of paternity that this poem and its predecessor, "Les Sept Vieillards," have put into question. With the edifice of patriarchy crumbling under the grounds of both of these poems, what seems to emerge is a complex feminine singularity that is a borne out of the delirium of the series.

Baudelaire's specific interest in the seriality of gendered existence, as I have shown, not only creates a rupture within capitalism's totalizing project, but also reveals that femininity is the crux of such a rethinking. My discussion has identified several significant places in Baudelaire's oeuvre that suggest that his depiction of feminine singularity — an understanding of femininity as structure, rather than anatomy or ideology — recurs throughout his prose and poetic works. This radicalization of femininity appears closely alongside his thinking about the city, but not as its subordinate. Rather, Baudelaire's poetic contemplation of the urban masculine self dissolves its agency in the face of new configurations of gendered subjects, ones that emerge out of the collapse of traditional ways of conceptualizing the links between particularity and collectivity.

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[292] Burton, *Blood in the City*, 133.

Conclusion

In Search of Difference: The Salpêtrière, Hysteria, and the Beginnings of Psychoanalysis

Traiter des maladies que tout les auteurs s'accordaient à regarder comme le type de l'instabilité, de l'irregularité, de la fantaisie, de l'imprévu, comme n'étant gouvernées par aucun loi, par aucun règle, et comme n'étant liées entre elles par aucune théorie serieuse, était la tache qui me répugnait le plus.
—Pierre Briquet, *Traité clinique et thérapeutique de l'hystérie*[293]

It was the symptom, to put it crudely, *of being a woman.* And everyone still knows it. *Ustéra*: that which is all the way back, at the limit: the womb.
—Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*[294]

By the end of the nineteenth century, two visible forms of femininity arguably shared the largest of public attention on the Continent, and particularly in England and in France: the New Woman, and the hysteric. Both of these figures' morphologies take shape in the visual arena: namely, drawings and photographs that circulate for the consumption of others, alternatively for spectacle, ridicule, or sheer curiosity. I turn briefly to these figures, as both suggest a historical and theoretical turning point for the Victorian imagination around feminine singularity.

My study has shown that the mid-nineteenth century is a highly pressurized moment— bracketed by the revolutions of the 1840s, the cataclysmic event of the Paris Commune, and the passing of Reform bills through the 1880s—that initiated a shift in the terms used to describe and

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[293] Pierre Briquet, *Traité clinique et thérapeutique de l'hystérie* (Paris: J.B. Baillière et Fils, 1859), v. The translation (my own) is as follows: "Treating illnesses that all authors agreed to regard as types of instability, irregularity, of the order of fantasy, as unforeseen, as if they were not governed by a single law or rule, nor related amongst themselves by any serious theory, this is the task that repulsed me the most."

[294] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière,* trans. Alisa Hartz (Boston: MIT Press, 2004), 68.

think about sexual difference. Such a shift not only introduces new modes for envisioning femininity largely based on minimal difference, or likeness, but it also dramatically reconfigures any grounds for gendered individuality that rely on the beleaguered notion of particularity. Other developments that I have explored in my chapters complicate this already crowded terrain of changes influencing thinking on gender and femininity, including advances in mathematical thought that concretize the notion of infinity. But while liberal ideals during this period seek to rescue particularity and render it politically fruitful, other discourses, such as the emerging nineteenth-century work of psychoanalysis, take a turn, I argue, toward singularity.

I. The New Woman and the Problem of Novelty

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to recount some of the leading ideas that circulated around the New Woman in the 1890s. The New Woman—usually an educated, self-sufficient, and largely middle-class figure—takes shape in the periodical press during the fin de siècle, alongside the New Woman novels by Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, George Gissing, George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright), and Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth Clarke).[295] In England, the New Woman rises forth, largely in negative form, from the pages of the satirical paper *Punch*. A mocking cartoon from 1897 captioned "Fashion à la Shakespeare," for instance, depicts the usual accoutrement associated with the New Woman: bicycle, cigarettes, and trousers (or culottes). A similar figure takes shape in bourgeois culture of the Third Republic in France, the *femme nouvelle*. Endowed with similar class and aesthetic characters, the *femme nouvelle* appeared in a range of periodicals, from the satirical *Le Groulot* to the middlebrow *La Revue*.

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[295] Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is considered one of the first New Woman novels. Other notable works include Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) and George Meredith's *Diana of Crossways* (1885).

Despite the new woman's ubiquitous visual and pictorial presence, Debora L. Silverman notes that the *femme nouvelle* "rejected decorative opulence in appearance, and challenged the role of woman as an orchestrated objet d'art."[296] Lyn Pykett identifies something similar in British New Woman fiction, noting that the New Woman "represented a threat to art."[297] Further, since the New Woman was also linked with the figure of the lesbian, she made it possible for the public sphere to see more clearly than before same-sex relationships between women, unsettling traditional roles for femininity and also norms of heterosexual coupling. Finally, it is worth noting that the New Woman's role crystallizes in the domain of numbers: in England she comes into being as a response to earlier debates about the "single woman" that take shape after the 1851 Census. In France, as Silverman observes, anxieties about declining population numbers make the *femme nouvelle's* challenge to conventional maternal femininity all the more prescient.

Sally Ledger's pioneering study of the New Woman subsequently puts this figure's cultural and discursive role into clearest focus: "The New Woman was a very fin-de-siècle phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s."[298] The adjective "new" is what interests me here. The New Woman, while flouting Victorian conventions of ideal femininity, nevertheless presents a striking capitulation to norms

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[296] Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 70.

[297] Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine: The Woman's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9.

[298] Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1997), 1.

of social classification in the nineteenth century. The category of the "New" associated with this figure is a tenuous one, since, as Ann L. Ardis astutely observes, "naming is not an objective activity. We name things in order to reassure ourselves that we know what things are—and that our knowledge gives us some sort of control over them."[299] While Ardis attempts to envision a more radical recuperation of the New Woman as a literary and political figure, she is also careful to admit: "the New Woman's program of self-actualisation is completely in keeping with the bourgeois ideology of individualism."[300] The premise of "novelty" then aims to gently energize rather than completely break with old forms of thinking, repackaging femininity as "type" in order to remain within the bounds of a liberal public sphere.

One reading of the phenomenon of The New Woman on both sides of the Channel points to the increasing inability of liberal culture—one in crisis over gender relations—to resort to the machinery of typification to categorize and thus control femininity. To make this point is not to dismiss the New Woman's importance to suffrage and women's professionalization, and eventually to large-scale enfranchisement. Rather, I want to draw attention to a split that occurs in the 1890s around the ways in which European culture pursued imperatives to classify specific types of individuals and the concomitant problems of classifying femininity. The New Woman consequently serves as a type that promises to secure the classificatory imperatives of fin de siècle culture, and vice versa, as the type becomes a mechanism for its self-fulfillment. But as I explore in this conclusion, the New Woman emerged as a type in the same moment as another form of femininity that proved much harder to categorize and understand. This is the hysteric, a

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[299] Anne L. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1990), 13

[300] Ardis, *New Women, New Novels*, 27.

figure who fragments the type as a means of categorization. What is interesting about both the new Woman and the hysteric is the means to which these encounters with the type occurs, which is largely in the register of the visual. Here I want to suggest some paths of inquiry into what we might learn about the destiny of feminine singularity when we juxtapose the eminently classifiable New Woman with her strangely proximate coeval.[301]

II. Hysteria and the Aesthetics of Singularity

Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*—a reprint of a paper from 1893 with additional case studies, including the infamous account of Anno O. (Bertha Pappenheim) who submitted to Breuer's "talking cure" in an effort to overcome supposedly hysterical symptoms—was published in 1895. As most scholars know, this text is foundational to the development of psychoanalysis in terms of its style (the "case study," which in Freud's hands becomes a narrativized account of a suffering individual), its method (clinical observation that situates psychic life firmly within the domain of sexuality, and often of infantile sexual trauma), and its subject matter (feminine desire and feminine sexuality). These cases (and Freud's later, unfinished case study of Ida Bauer, or "Dora") have been of interest to Victorian scholars studying gender, since it proves impossible to analyze nineteenth-century femininity without encountering the prevalence of hysteria in the medical, cultural, and literary realm. Elaine Showalter goes so far as to characterize the fin-de-siècle as "the golden age of hysteria."[302] Jan

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[301] The New Woman was frequently referred to as "hysterical," and the figures were often culturally superimposed on one another as part and parcel of a "shrieking sisterhood," a term coined by the anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton ("The Shrieking Sisterhood," *Saturday Review* [March 12, 1887]: 341–42).

[302] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 130.

E. Goldstein, in *Console and Classify*, additionally puts forth what Janet Oppenheim calls a "rebellion hypothesis"[303] concerning hysteria and femininity:

> the flowering of hysteria in the late nineteenth century was coincident with and a pathological by-product of the flowering of the bourgeois value system of patriarchal authority and sexual asceticism. Fin-de-siècle hysteria, it appears, was a protest made in the flamboyant yet encoded language of the body by women who had so thoroughly accepted that value system they could neither admit their discontent to themselves nor avow it publicly in the more readily comprehensible language of words."[304]

On this view, hysteria, as a particular form of psychic and bodily affliction, arises largely in a binary relationship to the specific terms of nineteenth-century gender ideology. What hysteria unleashes cannot be circumscribed by discourse, or what Goldstein describes as the "readily comprehensible language of words." While this account is fairly canonical—the argument that femininity assumed the shape of a nervous disorder to counter a patriarchal system—it also rests on a logic of opposition and causality that hysteria itself appears to circumvent. This analysis of hysteria therefore elides the fundamental problem facing nineteenth and twentieth-century observers alike: that it cannot easily be categorized as either subversive or transgressive.

In any case, fin-de-siècle culture made an investment in seeing the hysteric as a figure of modernity in relation to femininity. But what is intriguing about nineteenth-century hysterics is that, at first glance, there seems to be nothing new about hysteria at all, as it is one of the oldest

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[303] Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), 226.

[304] Jan E. Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 1987), 325.

recorded illnesses in Western culture. The authoritative histories of this phenomenon remain Ilza

Veith's *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (1970) and Mark Micale's *Approaching Hysteria*

(1995). Oppenheim's *Shattered Nerves* additionally recounts the thorough history of nervous

disorders in nineteenth-century Britain. Yet hysteria, since its earliest recorded mention, remains

somewhat unique in that it is always poised between the feminine and the unknowable. Derived

from the Greek *hysterikos,* which means "of the womb," hysteria appears in the Hippocratic

corpus (specifically the treatise *On the Disease of Women*) and remains ubiquitous in subsequent

medical literature as a kind of feminine pathology linked to the uterus. Despite the "discovery"

of male hysteria in nineteenth-century medicine, it continued to be firmly associated with

femininity by virtue of its physiognomic definition. Cristina Mazzoni, examining the connection

between the hysteric and the mystic in Western tradition, claims that the medicalization of

femininity as inherently hysterical reaches an apex in the Victorian period. Mazzoni explains:

"this apparent blind spot of nineteenth-century medicine must conceal another question, the

question of woman's desire, which medicine takes over by turning it into a pathology and thus

claiming that women's desire is always-already hysterical."[305] Foucault makes a similar claim

for the hystericization of women's bodies, with the bourgeois mother coming to stand for the ur-

hysteric. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, he remarks:

> [I]n the process of the hystericization of women, "sex" was defined in three ways: as that
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> which belongs, *par excellence,* to men, and hence is lacking in women; but at the same
>
> time, as that which by itself constitutes woman's body, ordering it wholly in terms of the

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[305] Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca:

Cornell UP, 1996), 5.

function of reproduction and keeping it in constant agitation through the effects of that very function.[306]

For Foucault, the relationship between hysteria and femininity has direct consequences for the discourse of sex itself in modernity. The vast history of Western medicine's relationship to hysteria, which, as Mazzoni explains, transitions from an "organic disease" in Greek medical literature to a disease of the supernatural in medieval Christianity, which yoked it to the realm of morality, renders its long trajectory impossible to survey in much detail here. Yet studies that follow the Foucauldian vein, while rightly focusing on the connection between hysteria, femininity, and changes in bourgeois family organization that characterize the Victorian period, tend to ignore the contexts in which nineteenth-century hysteria comes to be defined.

My main focus is the work of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), known as the father of French neurology, who studied hysteria at the infamous Salpêtrière School, a woman's hospice and teaching hospital in Paris' 13ième Arrondissement. Originally a gunpowder factory, the hospice was, as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it, "another Bastille," "a kind of feminine inferno," and "a city of women, *the city of incurable women.*"[307] Formed largely as a dumping ground for impoverished women and prostitutes, the Salpêtrière was, by the time of the French Revolution, the largest institution of incarcerated women in the world. However, it could not be kept entirely isolated from the public realm of politics and society, as the hospital was stormed by a mob during the 1792 September Massacres intent to release the prisoners. It therefore maintained a complicated relationship to the civic sphere from which it was exiled. In 1862, when Charcot

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[306] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 153.

[307] Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, xi, 13. Emphasis in the original.

began his work at the Salpêtrière, patients exhibiting epilepsy and hysteria were separated from the general populace in a special division that became his charge. In isolating hysterics from the overwhelming population of the Salpêtrière, Charcot was paradoxically confronted not only with hysteria as such, but also, more important, with hysteria as unclassifiable: as the ultimate unfolding of singularity in the unlikely landscape of the medicalized and institutionalized asylum.

Before Charcot arrived at the Salpetrière, several physicians attempted to classify the apparent polymorphous character of hysteria as a nervous illness: Jacques-Joseph Moreau, Pierre Janet, Charles Lasègue, and Pierre Briquet. Briquet's *Trait de l'hystérie* was published in 1859 and represented the most comprehensive medical account of modern hysteria until Charcot's studies. Lasègue, another physician at the Salpêtrière, was notable for diagnosing patients with "anorexic hysteria," and is also recognized for coining the term "folie à deux," which describes psychotic symptoms shared by family members or close relations. Yet, despite the overwhelming attention to hysteria from the growing field of nineteenth-century medicine, feminist scholars have rightly pointed out that hysteria repeatedly signified nothing more than the discourses to which it was subject. Janet Beizer, commenting on her own research for *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France,* notes that in the midst of reading medical texts "hysteria virtually disappeared."[308] Elizabeth Bronfen argues that the hysteric constantly reorients herself toward paternal law (a law put into effect by ideologies of the Victorian family and subsequently redrawn into a system by Jacques Lacan), "forming the core of her protean,

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[308] Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 3.

irritating resilience."[309] Thus every effort on the part of nineteenth-century physicians and the

critic to classify and render systematic hysteria fails, as hysteria has no identifiable origin point,

and in Asti Hustvedt's words, "the theatrical symptoms of the external body had no internal

reference, no location."[310] The notion then of hysteria as "everything and nothing" might inform

what Mary Kelly calls our "continuing romance"[311] with the disease, and what also might have

led André Bréton and Louis Aragon, in *La Revolution Surréaliste,* to deem it "la plus grande

decouverte poetique de la XIXieme siècle,"[312] bypassing hysteria's confinement in the clinic in

favor of its claim to a possible aesthetic freedom. However, what seems important are the

techniques that were used to understand and manage hysteria in the nineteenth century, all of

which bring us full circle to the core of a much larger problem: the task of separating what is

singular from what is particular.

   If the hysteric confounded medical and scientific knowledge, Charcot took flight into the

aesthetic to deal with hysteria's vicissitudes. He mentions that he was "nothing more than a

photographer,"[313] and Freud, who wrote an impassioned obituary for Charcot in 1893, claims:

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[309] Elizabeth Bronfen, *Knotted Subjects: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998),
121.

[310] Asti Hustvedt, *Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: W.W. Norton &
Company, 2011), 6.

[311] Mary Kelly, *Imagining Desire* (Boston: MIT Press, 1996), 170. Kelly also briefly summarizes feminist
theoretical approaches to hysteria, including those of Luce Irigaray and Helène Cixous.

[312] Qtd. in Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 2.

[313] Qtd. in Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 29.

"he had the nature of an artist."[314] Charcot's "Tuesday Lectures" (*Leçons de mardi*) were held weekly, beginning in 1882, in the Salpêtrière's amphitheater, and quickly gained in popularity. Pierre-André Brouillet's classic oil painting, *Un leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière, 1887*, magnifies the somewhat perverse theatricality of these lectures (Figure 4). The painting depicts a room full of men watching intently as Charcot lectures, with a convulsing woman held by a nurse (most probably, the famous hysteric "Blanche" Wittman) by his side. For Charcot, hysteria originated in trauma—a watershed argument[315]—but could be cured by hypnosis, which the lectures would showcase for the audience. Freud, who attended some of the lectures, and who kept a lithograph of the painting in his study in London, famously built on Charcot's theories (specifically, the role of trauma in engendering hysteria), while also introducing radically new methods for treating it (analysis, which presumes to attend to the gaps in memory that causes the hysteric to suffer). Brouillet's image then strikingly appears to encapsulate Kelly's claim that "woman founds the theory of psychoanalysis and sustains it by making the exchange of ideas among male theorists possible. So hysteria, marginalized in one domain, becomes central in another."[316] Yet, the

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[314] Freud, "Charcot," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 49.

[315] Despite the litany of nineteenth-century physicians who sought to describe hysteria (see page 10), no one had suggested that hysteria originated from trauma. Freud and Breuer's initial assertion that the hysteric "suffers for the most part from reminiscences" draws on Charcot's argument to inaugurate the discovery of the unconscious in what is *not said,* by shifting attention to these displaced traumatic memories. (Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, "Preliminary Statement" to *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst [New York and London: Penguin Books, 2004], 11).

[316] Kelly, *Imagining Desire,* 170.

theater of the Tuesday lectures renders benign another kind of theater, the one set in motion by the hysterical patients themselves.

Figure 4, André Brouillet, *Un leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière, 1887,* Paris V.

Hysteric patients at the Salpêtrière exhibited a range of symptoms that became active during periods known as a hysteric "attack." Charcot attempted to classify these symptoms as a neuropathological system, linking them to the brain, rather than the womb. These symptoms would only manifest themselves during acute periods that were often induced as much as they were supposedly cured by his preferred technique of hypnosis. During Charcot's tenure at the special ward, the Salpêtrière agreed to record the attacks of hysteric and epileptic patients, using the relatively new technology of photography, in an effort to produce a presumptively objective account of hysteria. From 1876 to 1880, the hospital commissioned Desiré Magloire Bourneville and Paul-Marie-Léon Regnard to take a series of photographs of Charcot's patients—all women—in the midst of these attacks. What resulted is the first volume of the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, an astonishing set of images that reproduce hysterical

femininity as a kind of theater in itself. Emptied out of all external references, in these photographs hysteria only gains meaning in relation to its own unfolding, as it is reproduced visually through an aesthetic of the series and repetition. In the name of offering further explanation, the subjects Bourneville and Regnard photographed for the *Iconographie* occupy a variety of poses in theses images, including numerous gazes and facial expressions, bodily contortions, and apparent moments of beatific revelry, or what the series referred to as *attitudes passionelles* (often exemplified by Augustine, a notable patient and subject of the photographs who was interned at the Salpêtrière at the age of 15, only to escape the asylum dressed as a man).

The *Iconographie*'s focus on women, rather than the male hysterics whom Charcot also treated, is evidently quite telling. In his lectures, Charcot mentions that while men exhibit hysterical attacks, they do so "without its [hysteria's] great classical attributes."[317] Charcot's choice of words to demarcate feminine hysteria yokes it to the particular valence of the photographic "iconography." Both terms recall the relationship between femininity and the aesthetic that crystallizes in other nineteenth-century movements, such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. An iconography of femininity, one that we can see operating in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's visual art, for instance, pushes femininity to the limits of the abstract, paradoxically, in order to personalize the woman through desire. But iconography is also a science of classification, a method for identifying and cataloguing the aesthetic. Therefore, at first glance the photographic series appears to correspond with the goals of the nineteenth-century medical profession vis-à-vis hysteria: to standardize hysteria so as to render it intelligible. The technology of the photograph, meant to impose stillness and finiteness (and thereby objectivity) on to a

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[317] J-M Charcot, *Clinical Lectures of Diseases of the Nervous System,* ed. Ruth Harris (London: Routledge, 1991), 100.

dynamic and increasingly unfamiliar world, mirrors the technology of Charcot's treatment, which, through hypnosis, would enforce a catatonic state onto the patient, rendering her motionless, pliable, and therefore observable through the lens of the taxonomical: a living doll. As Huberman explains: "Charcot's 'genius' was…not simply to arrive at a description of all this, but to calibrate it into a general type that can be called 'the great hysterical attack,' examples of which can be further qualified as 'complete and regular.'"[318]

It is clear that this "veritable industry of standardization and measurement of every act of perception, imaginable or unimaginable"[319] at the Salpêtrière was indicative of two things. First of all, the classificatory impulse of the medical profession found another possible outlet in photography, which provided a way to freeze a subject into an object of sight and study. The second outcome of the asylum's photographic enterprise suggests that the study of the hysteric went far beyond the control of marginalized and incarcerated women: it presented a way to reclassify femininity as such. This urge on the part of the Salpêtrière—and it is helpful to remember at this juncture that it was itself an emblem of modern institutionality: it was at once a prison, asylum, hospital, theater, museum, and studio—for a totalizing explanation of illness as identity extended further. In 1888, the Salpêtrière crucially introduced time into subsequent volumes of photographs. Charcot hired Albert Londe to capture chronotopic photographs of hysterical patients in order to map out the temporality of the attack in episodic fashion. Because Londe was able to use electromagnetic technology and a metronome to capture the quick succession of movement via photograph, these images often show a series of women in poses with very minute variations.

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[318] Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 115.

[319] Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 130.

I want to suggest that the photographic series, as Charcot and the Salpêtrière used it to classify femininity through the hysterical attack—an event of great moment—instead unfolded a unique site for the apprehension of feminine singularity. Photography was meant to offer the medical community a way to understand and quantify a phenomenon that seemed to defy what Foucault calls "the eye that governs": the paternalistic gaze of the clinic.[320] Hysteria occupied certain *formes frustes* that resist easy norms of classification in the form of medical data, numbers, and even temporality in the form of stadialism. These very same technologies, which worked to create a new kind of person in the nineteenth century who was statistically measurable, and that contributed to the crystallization of types like the New Woman, seem to fall apart when they attempt to render the hysteric. Hence the photograph, which offers likeness, rather than difference, as its primary mode of individuation, appears to recalibrate the individuality of the hysteric in a completely new manifestation.

Here, photography functions as a technology of representation in which likeness, similitude, and repetition form an integral part of its rhetorical repertoire. Briefly, as Daniel Novak argues, nineteenth-century photography was more often than not oriented toward abstraction, rather than individuation.[321] The popularity of composite photography during the latter half of the century—in which several negatives are juxtaposed together—suggests a certain integration of the two. The leading theorist of eugenics, Francis Galton, who sought to visualize

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[320] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception,* trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 108. Originally published as *La Naissance de la clinique* by Presses Universitaires de France, 1963.

[321] Daniel A. Novak, *Photography, Realism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge UP, 2008), 8.

a central type of racialized body by "averaging" physical differences, eventually put composite photography in service of racial typing, specifically toward mapping Jewishness.[322] While this is only one instantiation of a vast body of photographic techniques and theories that developed out of the mid-nineteenth century, it has a bearing on the type of visual work Charcot and the Salpêtrière were producing. The serializing we find in the *Iconographie* begins to move away from the essentializing of medical discourse critiqued by Foucault, in which, "by its multiplicity, the series becomes the vehicle of an index of convergence."[323] Because the photograph dramatized the series in a different way, the images of these women cease to cohere into something like a "general law" of femininity as pathology. The hysterics in each photo never meet the photographer's gaze, for instance. Their series of posturings (for example in Augustine's beatific moments) gesture toward a radically other form of relation: the theater that unfolded in the hysteric attack began to unravel any empirical reading of the body, as hysterics persistently referred only to absence, or the withdrawing of meaning from the site of its suggested unfolding. The point I want to make about the photographical mode is that its narrative of deinvidualizing femininity in order to produce a medical type ends up unleashing certain kinds of unsettling modes of differentiation. For Novak, Victorian photographic portraits "do violence not to particular bodies (gendered or classed), but to particularity itself."[324] But what if "particularity" was only one facet of individuality, nothing more than the confirmation of the subject as a sub-category of a more general type? It would seem that what photography shows

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[322] See *The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2008), 568–69.

[323] Foucault, *The Birth of Clinic,* 124.

[324] Novak, *Photography*, 42.

us—quite literally—is the cleaving of ideas of particularity from actual singularity: the barely quantifiable form of individuation that the hysteric enacts for the camera.

The photographic series then showcases a form of endless discontinuity, a kind of *coup de théatre.* There is no universality to the repetition of images of hysterical attacks, only the asymmetrical gaze and the theatrical reconstruction of a completely new past. For the subjects of these images, the photographs supplied a fiction of completeness where none was possible (hysterics often reenacted different traumatic histories since the origin point for cases of hysteria was nowhere to be found), rendering the present non-repeatable, absolutely unique. Such forms of theater bear a relationship to what Samuel Weber calls the difference between performativity and theatricality, a difference borne out of theatricality's inauguration of a new form, rather than the rearrangement of old ones. Weber follows this argument from Walter Benjamin's use of the suffix –abilities or *–barkeit* to nominalize verbs, lending them a structural possibility. Weber additionally makes the case for such a possibility another way—in Derrida's concept of iterability as opposed to iteration. Drawing largely on Derrida's statements on the mark from "Signature, Event, Context," Weber suggests: "*Iterability,* the power or potentiality to repeat or be repeated, is not the same as *repetition*, precisely because it is a *structural possibility* that is potentially "at work" even there where it seems factually not to have occurred."[325] Therefore it is not merely that hysterical trauma is unsymbolizable, or that it is a deliberate and knowing protest articulated through the body. Instead, it is an actual shifting of the register of word and idea, of universals and particulars.

One of the basic ideas the *Iconographie* enables us to see is that feminine singularity is often that which hides in plain sight. By virtue of its relationship to acts of repetition, counting, and iterability, it asserts itself on to the landscape of representation, only to retreat from

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[325] Samuel Weber and Walter Benjamin, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 6.

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conventional ways of seeing. Photography literalizes the very mechanisms by which all forms of representation produce, and often fail, to reify particularity. By introducing the trace of what it cannot fully capture in envisioning femininity, the photographic series, like that of Carroll's endless photographic portraits of girlhood femininity, unwittingly reveals the singularity of what it is scrutinizing. Attempts to contain singularity—in the forms I have discussed here—thus merely disclose singularity's unruly presence. My concluding focus on hysteria consequently invites a reconsideration of how we have understood the long history of modern gendered individualism. Perhaps this history has been less a question of the orchestration of difference. Rather, it may be more pertinently about the management of likeness, irreducible relationality, and subsequently, the possibility of alternative futures.

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