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Encoding Embodiment: Poetry as a Victorian Science

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Encoding Embodiment: Poetry as a Victorian Science

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Encoding Embodiment: Poetry as a Victorian Science

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This dissertation is a study of poetry by major nineteenth-century British writers—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Algernon Charles Swinburne—in the context of major nineteenth-century scientific questions. I analyze how these poets were intellectually connected to contemporary discussions of scientific epistemology, human sensation, and species evolution, respectively, and how their innovations in poetic form constituted one mode of investigating such phenomena. My close readings of major poems—Browning’s “An Essay on Mind,” Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” and Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus”—draw from formalist methods that are attentive to historical forces, and cultural studies methods that are attentive to materiality, thus developing a practice of reading poetry as the product of experimental making. This approach is extended in the companion digital project to this study: an online edition of Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” in which users may explore the poem’s irregular rhyme in an interactive interface. This study offers new

methods and new texts to scholarship of the mutual influence of Victorian science and literature. It furthermore traces connections between the scientific theories in Victorian poetry and those in more recent critical theory, including especially feminist materialisms, affect theory, and transgender studies.

Chapter One reads Browning's understudied 1826 epic poem "An Essay on Mind" to reframe her career-long engagement with debates on scientific method and her particular critiques of scientific materialism. Chapter Two argues that Rossetti's 1861 "Goblin Market" uses irregular rhyming patterns to study the ways in which the relative orientations of its characters may affect each other's experience, a topic of interest to her as a religious educator. Chapter Three argues that Swinburne's poetry plays with words as historically evolved forms capable of unpredictable change and that his sonnet sequence "Hermaphroditus" recognizes the body as capable of similar transformations. Chapter Four examines the potential for poetic form to inform the coding practices used to translate print poetry into digital editions, providing theoretical context for my interactive edition of "Goblin Market."

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Introduction

Poetry as a Victorian Science

“Poiesis means making,” the website for the Centre for Expanded Poetics reminds visitors, in a minimal Bauhaus font over a black-and-white photograph of Richard Serra’s “Torqued Ellipse” in the shadows of a coral tree. The Centre for Expanded Poetics (CEP) is a newly funded “creative research laboratory for the interdisciplinary study of structure, form, and fabrication” that combines the study of poetics with the practices of science, architecture and cinema (N. Brown). Its emphasis on “making,” in the age of the digital humanities, makes a by now familiar claim to authority by way of practical experience,¹ but is also emblematic of a search for new methods across several humanities and social science disciplines that might include, for example, creative non-fiction and non-representational theory.² Its emphasis on collaborations with biology, physics, chemistry, metrology, and materials science is indicative of a turn in critical theory, beyond cultural and discursive meanings, to ecological, organic and physical significance in a variety of fields—a turn known under the collective name of “new materialism.” And its use of the term “poiesis” calls on a long tradition of critical aesthetic making through the Greek word *ποίησις* as theorized by Aristotle in opposition to *techne* / doing, and elaborated by

1 For the argument that one must be a “maker” to be a digital humanist, see for example Stephen Ramsay, “On Building” and “Who’s In”; for a critique of this claim see Debbie Chachra, “Why I am not a Maker.”

2 For example, creative work by Saidiya Hartman, Omi’seke Natasha Tinsley; Vannini, *Non-Representational Methodologies*, and Thrift, *Non-representational theory*.

Heidegger in the special sense of “bringing forth” a work of art with respect for inherent qualities of its material.³ Yet it also harkens back to a mid nineteenth-century moment of defining poetry. The *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the first use, in English, of *poiesis* in an 1850 article by David Masson on William Wordsworth, published shortly after the former Poet Laureate’s passing. In that essay, Masson forces *poiesis* into English to give language to the aesthetic action of Coleridge’s concept of “Imagination,” originally defined as an “essentially *vital*” process of creation which “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate,” and “struggles to idealize and to unify” (Coleridge 488-9). Masson rewrites Imagination as “Creative Energy,” an action that is:

akin (with reverence be it spoken) to the operation of that original cosmic power at whose fiat the atoms and the elements sprang first together. A certain accumulation of material, a certain assemblage of impressions, or mental objects, being supplied by the consciousness, and lying there ready, it is the part of this faculty to discharge into them a portion *self* that shall fuse them into a living whole, capable of being contemplated with pleasure. This—the *poiesis* or creation of new unities, the information of mere knowledge with somewhat of the spirit of the knower, the incorporation of diverse impressions and recollections by the combining flash of a specific mental act—is essentially the function of the imagination. (*Essays* 366-67)

In this Victorian revision of Coleridge, the work of Imagination is not a vitalist process of growth but rather work—an energetic act of shaping matter (“elements,” “atoms”) with force (“power,” “discharge”). *Poiesis*, in Masson, is the process of working matter into shape that produces form, a process that

³ See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Thomson summarizes, “for Heidegger, like Plato, ‘poetry’ names the very essence of art (namely, *poiêsis* or ‘bringing into being’), hence Heidegger’s claim that: ‘All art [that is, all bringing-into-being ...] is essentially poetry’” (sec. 3).

adumbrates the CEP's interest in connections between poetic making and scientific modeling or material fabrication. A return to *poiesis* and the turn to "expanded poetics" in the present suggest that the science and art of poetry may yet be a resource for experimenting with and understanding forms of matter, life and data.

This dissertation is a study of the extended historical moment in which Masson wrote his retrospective of Wordsworth, informed by the presentist concerns represented by the Centre for Expanded Poetics. That is, I approach innovative poetry of the period with attention to the way in which its form is the result of creative and experimental processes of making, constrained by the materials of poetics and language. Reading this way, I argue, may attune us to the ways in which the materials of poetics and language resemble materials more commonly considered *material*, and therefore allows us to read poetry not only as representation but also as experimental model for phenomena at other orders and scales. In particular, the poetry in this study, as much of the writing of the period, is interested in questions of embodiment, sensation, and development. Thus, while this dissertation is in conversation with the large and vibrant body of scholarship on literature and science in the nineteenth century, it offers new reading practices which compliment those driving much of the best work in those fields. It asks how meter, rhyme, and language may resemble (as well as represent and influence) embodiment, sensation and development. My reading practices draw methodologies from literary scholarship, formalist poetics, new materialism, and digital methods. My approach to reading poetic language is

influenced both by recent rapprochements between language and matter in new materialisms and by post-cybernetic awareness of self-adjusting systems of feedback and iterated design. These admittedly presentist concerns are however are rooted in Victorian origins. Insofar as new materialism is partly motivated in response to large scale ecological and geological change, its roots run at least as deep as nineteenth-century science and industry; and cybernetics may be linked to a longer history of multi-sensory affecting arts including sensation genres and physiological poetics. My project speaks to present concerns through historical origins in the nineteenth century, and to Victorian scholarship through the legacies of its objects in the present.⁴

The recent critical turn of “new materialism” is an expansion of the interests and investments of the humanities into realms often associated with the sciences: from cultural and discursive significance to material, ecological, organic and physical significance. This turn is motivated, according to many accounts, by recognition that organic matter and global systems are responding to human change in a manner that cannot be ignored. As Coole and Frost write, critics in the present “find ourselves compelled to explore the significance of complex issues such as climate change or global capital and population flows” (5). At the scale of the global, then, cultural analysis must meet with theory capable of recognizing the intelligibility of rising flood waters or waning drinking water. At another scale, decades of work on the discursive inscription of bodies in systems

4 Cf. Ann Cvetkovich, “Twentieth-century theory makes it possible to historicize nineteenth-century ideology, and nineteenth-century ideology makes it possible to historicize twentieth-century theory” (7).

of sex/gender and race must meet with theory attentive to the way in which sex is produced through the ingestion of hormones, how race is produced through compounding intergenerational physical effects of political exclusion.⁵ There is an overall sense, in new materialist writing, that our analysis of culture and society cannot exclude the things of which our culture is built (literally—molecules, bodies) not only registered in their effects but also as things in themselves open to inquiry. Insofar as this expansion in theory is motivated by material crisis and biopolitical systems, it stands in a complex relationship to the Victorian period.

The critical development of new materialisms is coterminous with new, digital milieus of scholarship that are giving rise to overlaps in method and objects across humanistic and scientific inquiry. When corpora of nineteenth-century novels and sequences of the human genome can likewise be represented as data (i.e., alpha-numerical information encoded in two-bit strings and processed by machines that operate at a rate of computation significantly beyond human comprehension) then humanists and scientists may find themselves performing similar analytical operations on their data, which similarly represents their different objects of study. Furthermore, datalogical representation and computational inquiry have led to new forms of born-digital scholarship that are interactive and experimental in nature.⁶ Rather than constructing a prose argument according to the conventions of disciplinary genre, scholarly digital

5 On the material production of sex via hormones, see for example Beatriz Preciado; on the material production of race through medically significant environmental conditions, see for example Dorothy Roberts.

6 I borrow the term “datalogical” from Clough et al., “The Datalogical Turn.”

maps, editions, or multimedia texts may instead foreground data in a way that allows acts of curation and research to speak more for themselves, in interactive resources open to the user. Although this work is distinctly connected to twentieth-century histories of computation and cybernetics, it is also dependent on nineteenth century developments in encoding.⁷ Even Victorian poetry, as a distinctly printed form that used the affordances of voice, layout, and historical form to create a complex interplay of symbolic systems unachievable in oral, performed poetry, may be considered a milestone in the history of coding connected to today's computational codes.⁸ The present digital, datalogical and material turns in scholarship which represent a new convergence between scientific, aesthetic, and humanist methods and interests is thus a point in a longer plot that includes the period of this study.

Much scholarship has shown that nineteenth-century British poetry was deeply involved with broader discourses around major scientific questions of the day. The mutual influence of Victorian literature and science has been an important field of humanistic enquiry for decades and, especially following the work of Sally Shuttleworth and Gillian Beer, has focused in part on investigating influence at the level of form.⁹ Both examined novelists' engagement with

7 For example, the development of sciences of equivalence in several fields, see Prins, "Victorian Meters," on such developments in prosody and beyond; see Simon Schaffer on sciences of measurement.

8 See Griffiths, *Printed Voice*, and Prins, "Victorian Meters," on the particular affordances of Victorian poetry as a print genre. This argument is further elaborated in Chapter 4.

9 In *Darwin's Plots* Beer examined Darwin's syntax and novelists' assimilation or resistance to evolutionary theory; in *George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Science* Shuttleworth examined Eliot's incorporation of organicism as a literary value and natural history as a novelistic method.

Darwinian or evolutionary theory at the level of narrative, and Beer's deceptively simple introductory statement—"evolutionary theory has been assimilated and resisted by novelists who, within the subtle enregisterment of narrative, have assayed its powers"—has evolved into a powerful and familiar critical approach (Beer 2). A range of recent work has focused on the engagement of poetic form in particular with scientific concerns, both showing that poetry was broadly concerned with scientific questions and advancing the techniques of formalist reading. Jason Rudy's 2009 book *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* is a representative example of this work. Rudy examines the specific relationship between the electrical sciences and poetic theory across the nineteenth century to show that electricity—and electrical discoveries within the individual body (from electric shocks to nerve pulses) and the social body (telegraphic communication)—provided a master trope for understanding how poetry could physiologically affect readers and create community. Adela Pinch's book, *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth Century British Writing*, recovers the scientific thought of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), a group dedicated to investigating how minds affect other minds (not in fringe cases such as mesmerism or hauntings, but in everyday life, such as lovers thinking of each other). Pinch shows how questions of mental influence are tested in poetic form as well as in the SPR. In the process, she shows how the poetics of Victorian writers undergirds our present ethics of thinking, since we still act as if thinking about another could and does affect them, whether or not we admit to believing it does. Gregory Tate's *The Poet's Mind* argues that Victorian poetry not only

attempts a lyric, Romantic expression of the poet's mind, but also simultaneously offers a scientific psychological analysis of that expression. The subfield represented by these works has already done much in the way of reading poetry as a Victorian science, yet such studies have tended to focus on a narrow archive of Victorian poetry, especially the major male poets Tennyson, Arnold and Browning. The poets of this study, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Algernon Swinburne, have less often been included in this kind of work.¹⁰

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Algernon Swinburne form a different archive with its own special considerations. First, the absence of these poets from studies on literature and science is not due to a lack of connection between the poets and contemporary scientific discourse, but rather to the peculiarities of the poets' positions in their social worlds and the literary canon. For example, Browning and Rossetti cannot even be named *Browning* and *Rossetti* (as convention dictates) without difficulty, for those names in Victorian studies and literary history refer to Robert Browning (Elizabeth Barrett Browning's husband) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Christina Rossetti's brother). This problem of naming points up the issue that these women writers occupy positions in the canon marked by their connection to and difference from literary men. Their positions in history and scholarship are similarly modulated by gender. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is most often read as a poet of contemporary social causes, as indeed she was. However, her interests in child labor, women's

¹⁰ They are not all excluded, however. For example, Rudy dedicates part of a chapter each to Swinburne and Barrett Browning; Pinch devotes much of one chapter to Barrett Browning; and Tate mentions Barrett Browning in his introduction.

opportunities and European government do not invalidate her interests in the scientific controversies of her day, which are plainly present in her writing both public and private. Furthermore, recent scholarship on Barrett Browning's engagement with Mesmerism, spiritualism, and Swedenborgianism—now classified as pseudo-sciences—should not deter but rather should motivate readings of her engagement with scientific philosophy writ large, amply documented in her archive.¹¹ In the case of Christina Rossetti, the archive has been severely truncated by her own strict management of her public and private personae. Rossetti systematically destroyed her most candid and intimate letters and was discreet, in surviving correspondence, about her social connections.¹² In many cases, probable social contact between Rossetti and men like David Masson can only be established by comments in her brothers' letters and memoirs. Furthermore, the image of almost ascetic piety that Rossetti cultivated (as a deliberate professional strategy, according to Alison Chapman, *Afterlife*) has made it exceedingly difficult to argue that she was in conversation with almost any contemporary concerns in her day.¹³ However, I read Rossetti's religious concerns as a form of engagement with contemporary psychological thought: as a religious educator she was especially concerned with the psychology of development and learning. Finally, Swinburne presents different challenges. He has been connected to Darwinian theory since the 1870s, after the near

11 On Barrett Browning and Mesmerism, see Winter; and spiritualism, see Chapman, "Risorgimento" and "Spirit Sisters," and Oberhausen and Peters; and Swedenborgianism, see Renk and Camp.

12 Rossetti destroyed all correspondence with the other women in her family, sister Maria and mother Frances. See Arseneau, *Recovering* ch. 1.

13 See Chapman, *Afterlife*.

simultaneous publication of Swinburne's second volume of poetry, *Songs Before Sunrise*, and Darwin's second work on evolutionary theory, *The Descent of Man*.¹⁴ He has furthermore been connected to the libertine "anthropologicals" of the Anthropological Society of London (ASL) and especially to the radical subset of ASL members who dined together as the Cannibal Club, for which he wrote the mock pious "Cannibal Catechism." However, scholars have not attempted to reconcile Swinburne's simultaneous engagement with Darwin's monogenist evolutionary theory and the ASL's polygenist, anti-evolutionary human taxonomy. I look at these incongruent discourses as they map onto the different capacities of Swinburne's poetry and prose. Each of these writers has documented connections to scientific theory, yet the prolific scholarship on them has left much to be done in analyzing these connections. These writers are also important as innovators in form, and constitute a lineage of influence among themselves. They have also been important in feminist scholarship, and feminist scholarship has been important to them, in that work on gender and sexuality has done much to return these particular writers to the canon. My project continues this work, with theoretical approaches connected to feminism including critical science studies, affect theory, transgender studies, and a commitment to reading form as historical and politically engaged.

My approach to poetic form is especially indebted to the study of Victorian poetry and the techniques labelled "new formalism" in the past decade.

14 See Dawson, 46-56.

New formalism¹⁵ (the critical approach rather than the poetic movement) signals a renewed attention to poetic form and its connections to historical, cultural and social forces. My work builds on the foundation of recent new formalisms but also wishes to put them in conjunction with new materialisms. New formalism is a critical approach without allegiance to any literature or period, yet it has been most active in the study of nineteenth-century poetry in English. This is in part because of the special place of form, in poetry and in criticism, in that period. Eric Griffiths claims in *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* that Victorian poetry experimented with the unique affordances of print poetry, when printed poetry supplanted performed poetry as the dominant mode of dissemination and consumption. In the era of industrial printing and mass literacy, printed poems read silently—rather than performed aloud—could set the visual and the auditory at odds to create new kinds of internal tension and a kind of internal commentary. For example, while the established meter of a verse might emphasize one reading of a line, the internal rhythm might emphasize another, allowing the reader to *see* a “mute polyphony” of possible voices rather than *hearing* only one (Griffiths 16).¹⁶ New Formalism has thus been especially fruitful in the study of Victorian poetry.

The critical approach of New Formalism was first named by Heather

15 The critical school of “new formalism” should be distinguished from the poetic movement of the same name. New Formalism was a school of poetic writing that emerged in the 1980s U.S. and “promoted the use of metrical verse technique and rhyme” over free verse (*PEPP* 937). The critical movement is also known as neo-formalism, but I follow Dubrow, Levinson, and others in referring to it as “new formalism.”

16 My choice of Griffiths’ quotes and concise restatement of his argument relies on Prins’s in “Victorian Meters” 91-92.

Dubrow in 1989. A series of critical works from the late 1990s to today have followed Dubrow's call. Susan Wolfson's 1997 *Formal Charges* specified the mission of new formalism as "an historically informed formalist criticism" (qtd. in Wolfson 1). This critical method, "an intensive reading of poetic events within a context of questions about poetic form and formalist criticism," has been employed by a variety of scholars, especially those reading poetry, and criticism, clustered around the long nineteenth century.¹⁷ This work shares an orientation towards literary form as a subtle register and component of historical forces operating at other scales. But it does not share a strong theory of form or an argument about the ways in which social forms get into literature. Indeed, the field largely lacks such metadiscourse and instead deploys "method as theory in action" (Wolfson 1).

Caroline Levine is one of the few new formalist critics who has attempted, in a series of articles and a book, to theorize form itself.¹⁸ In her book entitled *Forms*, she critiques several formalist approaches that understand aesthetic form "as epiphenomenal—as secondary" to other, presumptively more real *social* forms, such as gender or capitalism (14). This presumption, Levine argues, results in a paucity of approaches to literary form and a dichotomy between those who "read literary forms as legible reflections of social structures" and those who read "literary form less as a reflection of a specific social context than

17 The field or movement of new formalism is surveyed in Dereck Attridge's 2008 review essay "A Return to Form" and Marjorie Levinson's 2009 essay "What is New Formalism?" There are several divisions within this broader field, and Levinson provides useful taxonomy. In particular, she notes a division between normative formalism and activist formalism

18 See "Strategic Formalism" as well as *Forms*.

as a deliberate *intervention*" (12). Levine wants to refute the belief that social forms are primary or causal, relative to literary forms, to flatten the formative power ascribed to forms in various realms. Rather, she argues that forms themselves are enduring and primary to their objects, whether social or literary, and that their overlaps, collisions and encounters with "one another inside as well as outside of the literary text" are exactly what generate new possibilities and constraints for lived and aesthetic forms (16). For Levine, forms such as "wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks" are informing patterns that also maintain their existence free of content (23). Yet she does not detail how such forms are able to perpetuate their life.

As Angela Leighton's history of formalism in literary theory explains, forms with the capacity to live on beyond a specific encounter with content have historically been connected to or equated to subjective heuristics, universal or categorical human modes of apprehending the real. This historical connection has roots in the Romantic period. Angela Leighton's book *On Form* provides an extremely useful history of *form* in literary criticism, with a focus on the long nineteenth century and its legacies in current criticism. She recalls that "from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, [*form*] becomes associated with the growth of philosophical aesthetics and the Kantian emphasis on subjective perception" (4). The association with subjective perception becomes tied, through Schiller and Coleridge, to a lively sense of form—the form that Coleridge calls "informing form," as opposed to "formed form" (Leighton 7). This lively, informing form

carries over into some strands of twentieth century criticism.¹⁹ And “formed form” carries over into the New Critical sense of form as a property of the textual organic whole. Leighton however refuses the dichotomy between subjective and objective form, claiming that form is suspended precisely at the encounter between reader and text: “Neither the thing nor the name, form keeps us in a place which postpones the logic of both” (Leighton 21). In my own work, I want to think through form that is objective yet lively, and historical too. Leighton shows that the historical fortunes of formalism in criticism have made this particular conjunction difficult to approach, but I route my approach through work in new materialism.

New materialism is an attempt to extend or expand the purview of critical theory beyond the “human estate” of language and culture, into the realms of the biological, ecological, and physical. It marks a distinct trend in recent theory, with edited collections, conferences, and panels, but it lacks well defined edges, and a longer history of affect studies, critical studies of the body, historical materialism and even deconstruction sit in a complicated relation to the “new materialisms.” I try to review these relationships briefly here, with particular attention to the ways that these discourses connect to an earlier Victorian history. As Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin put it, “new materialism is a cultural theory that does not privilege matter over meaning or culture over nature” (sec. 2). In order to go beyond dichotomies springing from Cartesian dualism, “New

19 For example, Henri Focillon wrote in his 1934 *Life of Forms in Art* that “Form is never the catch-as-catch-can garment of subject-matter. No, it is the various interpretations of subject-matter that are so unstable and insecure” (qtd. in Leighton 18).

materialists open up the paradoxes inherent in those traditions by creating concepts that traverse the fluxes of matter and mind, body and soul, nature and culture, and opens up active theory formation” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, sec. 2). This transversal quality of new materialism is very important to my study, as I am interested in the ways in which we might read poetics the way we read other structures. Dolphijn and van der Tuin point out that the theory has been in use since at least the latter 1990s, when “Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti— independently of one another—first started using ‘neo-materialism’ or ‘new materialism’ [...] for a cultural theory that does not privilege the side of culture, but focuses on what Donna Haraway (2003) would call ‘naturecultures’ or what Bruno Latour simply referred to as ‘collectives’ ([1991] 1993)” (ch. 5).²⁰ This “new materialism is neither realist nor social constructivist. It is precisely the commonalities of realism and social constructivism that are being recognized, though shifted” (ch. 5). It is thus related to, but post-, an era of “social constructivism” or the linguistic turn.

The movement takes the methodological lessons of poststructuralism but abandons the presumption that language is what we know most unproblematically or that which ultimately determines the experience of the world. The presumption of our access to language and alienation from matter is itself a historical standpoint that has changed since the beginning of the Victorian period. Today, critics may take for granted that “there is an apparent paradox in

²⁰ Throughout, bracketed ellipses indicate an omission (of a word, phrase, sentence, or punctuation) from a quotation. Ellipses without brackets indicate ellipses in the original quotation.

thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seems to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, values, meaning, and so on" (Coole and Frost 1-2). They presume that our access to matter is problematic, or mediated rather than direct, routed through a whole "host of immaterial things." Katherine Bond Stockton explains that theorists who presume direct access to language but only language-mediated access to matter find themselves in a predicament similar to Victorians who presumed direct access to matter but matter-mediated access to the spiritual. Between then and now, the gradual shift away from spiritual materialism and towards post-structuralism was nudged along by earlier, Victorian new materialisms. In particular, Marx and Engels' critique of scientific materialism and development of a historical materialism could be read as a step towards an imprisonment in human language and sign systems, as it was an insistence on attending to matter only insofar as it mattered to the conditions of man. The writers in this study were working through the very early stages of that historical shift, when matter was directly available, spirit was removed, and language was beginning to be theorized as a similar kind of medium. Our new materialisms, then, are always triangulated from earlier configurations of matter and systems of significance. On the one hand, new materialism can be read as a

reversal, bypassing historical materialism to return to natural science matters.²¹

On the other hand, there is no going back.²²

This project begins in the early nineteenth century, when scientific materialism was on the rise and Elizabeth Barrett Browning was beginning to use poetry to critique and perform science. The first chapter helps frame the study by investigating Barrett Browning's claims about poetry as an experimental science. At the beginning of the period, the young Elizabeth Barrett began writing, fashioning herself as a poet-philosopher, and laying claim to an intellectual tradition of metaphysical thought that, at the same time, men of science were claiming as their own. She wrote herself as an heir to Francis Bacon's scientific method and refused the distinction between science and art William Whewell would later claim. Whewell argued for the "rigorous separation of the Practical from the Theoretical," of art from science, for the "object of Science is

21 Sari Irni explains that some feminist new materialist work "conflates an engagement with the natural sciences with accounting for 'materiality'. Hence [...] materiality sometimes becomes by definition a natural science matter" (351). As a result of this conflation, the critique provided by historical materialism, as a corrective to scientific materialism, is passed over—often along with the knowledge of materialist feminism, that is, feminism which draws creatively from Marxist theory and other analyses of the production and reproduction of life. Materialist feminism has historically studied the workings of power, racialization, colonization, difference, and sexuality, and has critiqued poststructuralist feminism for its inattention to precisely those matters.

22 Some new materialisms attempt to avoid the escape of what Stockton calls "spiritualist discourse" and instead enact a flattening of the discursive and the material, looking back to the "materialism of the letter" of deconstructive criticism. Claire Colebrook has recently returned to this particular version of materialism in order to put it in explicit conversation with newer materialisms. For Colebrook, Derrida's insights into textuality may teach us about materiality not because Derrida was really talking about materiality all along, but because textuality is ontologically before and beyond materiality. "To consider textual worlds materially and to consider materiality textually is to admit that processes of language and meaning operate in the absence of human command, understanding and imagination" (18). She resists attempts to incorporate Derrida into new materialisms and instead wants Derrida to determine the shape of new materialisms. "Radical rhetorical abandonment, or a sense that sense is itself a material event of inhuman complexity, may awaken us from our political slumbers; our refusal to think of multiplicities beyond the world of man" (19).

Knowledge; the object of Art are Works" (113, 108). "The end of art is the beginning of science," Whewell wrote, asserting a relationship of difference but belying one of contingent connection. Barrett Browning instead set out to develop a poetic method to advance knowledge, an art in the service of science. In fact, she argued from the generic and formal affordances of poetry that it was a superior science. Its generic advantages lay in its capacity, as epic, to incorporate other genres and thus other branches of knowledge.²³ Its formal advantages lay in its intimate relationship to language, the paradoxically material and immaterial phenomenon that was a model for the spiritual-material world. Barrett Browning thus imagined that poetry, working on language, would advance beyond language to thought, just as she hoped science would eventually advance through its study of the material world to a knowledge of the spiritual realm. While she had casual contact with developments in various sciences, her most extensive contact was with those areas of inquiry concerned with immaterial phenomena or spirit: Mesmerism and spiritualism. But her early interest in the philosophy of science kept her interested, often from a skeptical point of view. I argue that reading her poetry as science may offer new insights into the way she uses a sustained study of formal possibility to develop a model of the material-spiritual world in language. But most importantly, I argue that the poetic project she sets up early in her career may offer another vantage point from which to read her own and other Victorian poetry, as an experimental science.

23 Wai Chee Dimock has recently put forward this version of epic, as the first genre with the "novelistic" quality of incorporating all forms of discourse into itself.

My second chapter focuses on the 1850s and 1860s, when diverse psychological discourses including association psychology, mesmerism, theories of mental influence, and physiology flourished. I situate Christina Rossetti in a rich mid-century milieu of thought about psychological development and influence. Rossetti had some contact with these various discourses, but also absorbed ideas about mental development and influence from her work as an educator in religious contexts. I attempt to recover this less specialized common-sense of influence that appears in her long poem "Goblin Market," in her stories for children, and in her later reading diary—a common sense that the relative orientations of bodies affect what one may get from another, and that there is an optimal arrangement for the transmission of faith, a kind of side by side orientation in which two join in training their attention in one direction. Not a theorist of consciousness and psychology, Rossetti was nonetheless practically invested in questions of distraction, attention, and education as she was always involved in projects dedicated to educating others—often those understood to be in fragile or less well states of mind: children, fallen women, the working class. I read "Goblin Market," one of her first long poems, and the longest of all, as a working through of some of these issues, using the two characters Laura and Lizzie, one the savior, one the saved, to explore these possibilities and demonstrate the potentials of different configurations as they tend towards influence, distraction, or other states of mind. As I argue, Rossetti uses the poem's irregular rhyme configurations to study the ways in which influence operates in different arrangements, a study that intersects with and mirrors the

poem's plot. The work of rhyme serves as a model for the kinds of affective influence at work between the sisters, and the poem presumes that each process of action at a distance may provide insight for the other. This reading suggests that, although removed from more public discourse of psychology, mental force, or even rhyme, Rossetti was quietly at work on a project of studying them together.

The third chapter focuses on evolutionary theory in the first several years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin*. The cultural impact of evolutionary theory has long been a subject in Victorian literary studies.²⁴ I focus on the way that Darwin pulled some of his models for evolutionary change from linguistic theory, and how Swinburne returns these newly radicalized models to language in his poetry. In my analysis of Darwinian principles and Swinburne's poetry in the 1860s, I am especially interested in the ways in which Darwinian theory was newly radical and how it catalyzed reactionary discourses and a re-entrenchment of taxonomy that can be seen, for example, in the discourses of degeneration that developed after its publication. Swinburne's poetry, in celebration of anatomical and linguistic transformation, explores the more radical side of Darwinian theory. My reading of Darwin has been informed by recent returns to him from

24 Gillian Beer argued that Darwin's language provided new forms of narrative. Cannon Schmitt argues that in the work of Darwin, other naturalists and novelists, South America became a site of spatialized memory that British writers could tap to establish their difference from a savage past. Dawson argues that impugned associations between evolutionary thought and avant-garde literature forced Darwin and other men of science to carefully censor their literary taste to maintain a level of respectability above that of avant-garde writers. George Levine, in his more recent work on Darwin, has claimed that evolutionary theory operates not as tragedy but as comedy, subverting expectations in a way that enabled writers like Wilde (and Swinburne, I would add) and experiments of modernism.

feminist theorists, such as Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, and Elizabeth Wilson, who wish to recover the radicalism of Darwinian theory, especially for understanding the body.²⁵ Thus I am less interested in evolution as a narrative structure than in the vestige or rudiment—in language and the body—as a sign of past difference and potential change. Swinburne’s poem “Hermaphroditus” explores the potential of the body to transform, especially sexually, in light of Darwin’s theories of a human hermaphroditic past and his researches on pervasive hermaphroditism in nature. I contrast this pervasive potential to the othering and containment of “the hermaphrodite” in discourses of anthropological science. Swinburne was connected to both discourses, and thus his poem provides an interesting meeting of competing models. Ultimately, his own experimentation in language and his interest in exploring word roots and potential reversions enables his poetics to celebrate the historically formed, constantly transforming body.

In the final chapter of this dissertation and in a separate digital project, I have experimented with digital encoding to demonstrate the formal qualities of “Goblin Market” in an interactive user interface. That is, I have engaged in a process of poiesis in the attempt to make material formal elements in the poem, highlighted by my reading and study of the poem. The online edition is a simple design. A reader may explore the poem’s rhyme scheme by selecting any line while reading. Selecting a line will display all lines that rhyme with it, hide all

25 Penelope Deutscher also shows that as early as the 1870s, North American (New England) feminists used Darwin’s *Descent of Man* to reimagine gender relations and imagine gender differently in the future, more evolved human race.

lines that don't, and collapse the space between displayed lines so they may be read straight through on a single screen. This simple design, however, involved several stages of development and creative problem solving, as the languages of new media insist on separating form and content. While much recent digital work on text treats text as information,²⁶ this project treats form as content, and remediates that content in a manner that is accessible for a variety of user needs and technologies. Furthermore, and as a continuation of this project, I want to think about how poetics may be a resource for the study and design of data structures.

This project is entitled *Encoding Embodiment* because I began this study thinking about the ways in which poetic form may encode theories of embodiment. How can poetic form make an argument about bodily form, and how are these arguments different than the ones handed down by what we call science? Early on I became interested in Jasbir Puar's theorization of debility and capacity, concepts for thinking about what a body can do without ascribing to particular bodies a set of fixed abilities or disabilities. Her ongoing project aims to theorize the ways that bodily capacities are affected by and contingent upon forces beyond themselves. I have been inspired by this work for what it might

26 For example, Ted Underwood has studied the development of diction and specialization of diction in genre, over the period, recognizing shifts in the way of speaking in poetry, prose fiction, and prose nonfiction. Natalie Houston is engaged in projects to read Victorian poetry, recognize the trends in style that may be recognized by machine-aided analysis of stylistics and by the visual information on a page that indicates line length, stanza form, and to some extent rhyme and meter. (For example, rhyming lines are often indicated by matching left margins. A poem in short quatrains in which the first and third, and second and fourth, lines are equally indented, may strongly correlate to poems in a ballad meter.) Houston's work is unique because she is interested in asking questions of form, at the level of the poem or page, in the context of massive corpora. More often, digital analysis of massive corpora focuses on larger scale patterns in the body of text.

offer to approaches to poetic form and forces. These questions are pursued particularly in Chapters Two and Three, through the resonances between Rossetti's rhyming model of intersubjective knowledge and recent affect theory, and Swinburne's etymological model of bodily transformation and trans studies. My First and Fourth chapters, on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's philosophy of science and the theoretical framework for my digital edition, respectively, set up the longer context, from the late Romantic period to the present day, for this work. As this project has evolved, my questions have shifted from the ways in which poetic form encodes theories of embodiment, to the ways in which poetic form, code, and embodiment resemble each other.

Chapter One

Poetic Method: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Philosophy of Science

Elizabeth Barrett Browning began her poetic career at time when poetry was in a precarious position. In the 1820s, some writers “quite seriously maintained that ‘the age’ was inimical to poetry,” Isobel Armstrong reminds us, “either because there was simply nothing more for the poet to say [...] or because of a deep antipathy between a mechanistic way of living and thinking and the poetic imagination” (*Victorian Scrutinies* 15). The latter viewpoint was argued, for example, by Thomas Babington Macaulay, who extended this post-Enlightenment problem all the way back to the seventeenth century. In his 1825 essay “Milton,” Macaulay argued that John Milton had, as “he has himself owned, [...] been born ‘an age too late’” for poetry (306). After the founding of the Royal Society in 1660 and with the continual advance of civilization, Macaulay claimed, “poetry almost necessarily declines” (306). The “progress of the experimental sciences” does not extend to the creative arts, for “as men know more and think more [...] [t]hey therefore make better theories and worse poems” (Macaulay 307). The scientific, materialist, and mechanistic nineteenth century was then framed as antithetical to poetry.

The problem posed by Macaulay and others in the early nineteenth century strongly shaped the course of Victorian letters.²⁷ Throughout the century, writers sought to find a place for poetry in a time of science. Controversy about

²⁷ Similar problems were posed for example by Carlyle, “Signs of the Times.”

poetry's contemporary purpose, beginning with review essays of Alfred Tennyson's 1830 *Poems*, flared up repeatedly over the period.²⁸ Some writers imported the systematicity of science to the new study of English prosody; others exploited the findings of new bodily sciences (physiology and electricity) in sensationalist and "spasmodic" poetry.²⁹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a major writer whose poetic career spanned three decades of the Victorian literary period, is always included in such histories. Yet her oeuvre, taken as its own historical narrative, offers a slightly different resolution between poetry and science. E.B.B. recognized,³⁰ as did Macaulay, the problem of unpoetic habits of mind (he wrote in 1825 that men "look less at individuals and more at classes" [306]; she wrote in 1856 that "We talk by aggregates, / And think by systems" [*Aurora Leigh* 8. 801-2]). Yet she refused a generic distinction between poetry and other intellectual pursuits. Writing after Macaulay but before Tennyson, E.B.B. wrote in her first major published work that "Poetry is the enthusiasm of the understanding; and [...] there is 'a high reason in her fancies'" (*WEBB* 4: 78).³¹ In her version of intellectual history, Milton was not the first poet to arrive too late, in an age after the Enlightenment thinker Francis Bacon. Rather, Bacon was the first poet of a

28 For scholarly histories of Victorian poetry as a series of controversies about the place and purpose of poetry, see Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies* and Joseph Bristow, "Reforming Victorian Poetry".

29 Yopie Prins, "Victorian Meters" and Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter* track the importance of meter and prosody in the period; Jason Rudy, *Electric Meters*, traces the influence of physiology and electrical sciences in the period's verse.

30 As the poet signed her name "E.B.B." both before marriage (as Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett) and after (as Elizabeth Barrett Browning) I follow Marjorie Stone and other scholars in referring to her as E.B.B.

31 Unless otherwise noted, all works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning are cited from the *Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 6 vols. Poetry is cited by line number (and, where poems have sections, book number); other writing is cited by volume and page number.

new age of Enlightenment. In “An Essay on Mind” E.B.B. reclaims this intellectual tradition and fashions herself as inheritor of a lineage that was simultaneously claimed, in the early nineteenth century, by men of science. Her 1826 verse essay “An Essay on Mind” argues that poetry itself can be an experimental science. In particular, she argues that the generic promiscuity and formal peculiarities of poetry uniquely suit it to the investigation of complex phenomena such as mind. While many poets of the period “routinely sought to study mental processes, whether exploring their own minds in lyric verse, dissecting the thought processes of the speakers of dramatic monologues, or writing epic or philosophical poems that put forward more or less totalizing accounts of psychological phenomena,” E.B.B. argued outright for poetry’s privileged place as a mode of investigation (Tate 2). This chapter tracks her response to the crisis named by Macaulay and introduces a narrative of Victorian poetry that begins not with Tennyson’s 1830 *Poems* but with E.B.B.’s 1826 *An Essay on Mind, with other Poems*.

This chapter focuses extensively on the 1826 “Essay on Mind,” as this important work has received relatively little attention within scholarship on E.B.B. and because, as I argue, it may be used to frame her poetic project. That early poem makes two major arguments about the status of poetry. First, that generically speaking poetry can be or incorporate anything, and thus has the combined epistemological advantages of many fields, plus the innate capacity to compare perspectives. Second, that formally speaking, poetry resembles its subject, mind, in important ways. As a paradoxically ideal and material entity,

poetry can thus be used to model or investigate other such phenomena including mind. In the sections that follow, I outline these arguments as they are presented in “An Essay on Mind,” and follow their consequences over time, looking especially to the 1856 poem *Aurora Leigh* as the endpoint of E.B.B.’s career. In her later work, I argue, E.B.B. sought through her poetry to prove the existence of a spiritual, immaterial world—a world in which she firmly believed but which, in her opinion, eluded contemporary science. To capture the paradoxical coexistence of the immaterial and the material in her poetry, she sought a freer verse form, evolving from the tight Popean couplets of her early work into an unrhymed iambic line that helped to “transform English blank verse into a more impulsive and dynamic medium” (Stark 49). E.B.B.’s early manifesto on poetry as science thus helps frame how, later in life, she sought to model in poetry what science could not reach.

I. An Essay on Mind

“In offering this little Volume to the world, it is not my intention to trespass long on its indulgence, ‘with prefaces, and passages, and excusations’”—so begins the preface to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s first publicly printed book, *An Essay on Mind, with other Poems* (1826) (WEBB 4: 77). The first sentence of the first volume she offered to the world takes its quotation from Enlightenment thinker Francis Bacon’s *Essays*. The teenage writer, Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett, probably had access to the book in her father’s library, but the reference, slightly misquoted rather than verbatim, suggests she also had

it by heart.³² Based on the references in her 1826 debut collection, the poet had already perused Bacon's *Essays*, *Interpretatio Nature*, *Novum Organum*, and *Advancement of Learning*. The title poem "An Essay on Mind" includes references to and substantial authorial footnotes on natural philosophers including Bacon, Newton, Locke, Leibniz, Descartes, Buffon, Berkeley, and Condillac (*WEBB* 4: 113-19). The citations certainly attest to the young poet's education. According to an autobiographical essay written at age fourteen, E.B.B. had already "perused all modern authors who have any claim to superior merit & poetic excellence," was "familiar with Shakespeare Milton Homer and Virgil Locke Hooker Pope," and ranked "metaphysical knowledge" among her "highest delights" (*BC* 1: 351-3). But the poem itself—an epic verse essay in the style of Pope, treating the subjects of the mind and knowledge—announced E.B.B.'s own arrival in a lineage of work at the intersection of poetry and metaphysics.

At the opening of the nineteenth century, Francis Bacon was still hailed as the father of science. He had offered to post-Enlightenment science an inductive method, the means of progressing from human observation to a systematic natural philosophy. This inductive method was posited in direct opposition to logical syllogism, or the method which "flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immoveable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle

32 The exact quote—"Prefaces and passages, and excusations, and other speeches of reference to the person, are great wastes of time; and though they seem to proceed of modesty, they are bravery"—is from the essay "Of Dispatch" and lacks the first word of E.B.B.'s quote, *with*. See *WEBB* 4: 79n2. No Barrett family copy of *Essays* survived in the library inherited by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning's own child (*The Brownings*).

axioms" (Bacon, qtd. in Klein 3.3). Rather, Bacon proposed a careful ascension up what he called the Ladder of Intellect by tabulating data in tables, in "a complicated mode of induction by exclusion" designed to temper the gradual progression from facts to axioms to the laws of nature (Klein 3.3). At the start of the nineteenth century, Bacon and Newton were hailed as the almost religious figureheads of scientific progress, Bacon as the prophet and Newton as the prophesy fulfilled. In Abraham Cowley's 1667 ode "To the Royal Society" Bacon was figured as the visionary Moses leading to a Promised Land, and in late eighteenth-century discourse Newton was styled as a Christ figure fulfilling science's promise (Smith 11-12). The paired figures reached the height of their reputation in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Humphry Davy, named president of the Royal Society in 1820, spoke of them in his inaugural address as "our great masters" who taught the "sober and cautious method of inductive reasoning, which is the germ of truth and of permanency in all the sciences" (qtd. in Smith 12). In the following decades, however, this reputation would be revised.

In the 1830s and 1840s, steady questioning of Bacon's "cautious method of inductive reasoning" led to new, more critical positions regarding his legacy. David Brewster in 1831 and William Whewell in 1840 published important contributions to the philosophy of science that challenged Baconism. Brewster discounted Bacon's influence and contradicted his method, instead praising Newton and encouraging the formation of "hypotheses without number" (qtd. in Yeo, "Idols" 266). Whewell praised "Bacon's distinction between the Anticipation

and Interpretation of Nature” and “his emphasis on observation and experiment,” but at the same time doubted the contemporary relevance of Bacon’s mathematical process of induction by “tables” (Yeo, “Idols” 270). When the authoritative edition of Bacon’s works was published in 1857, even the editor Robert Ellis wrote that Bacon’s method failed to accurately describe scientific procedure as it was actually practiced, since practicing scientists generally tested facts against a hypothesis or “idea, existing in the mind of the discoverer antecedently to the act of induction” (qtd. in Yeo, “Idols” 275). The basic tenets of the strict inductive method—“Pure objectivity, absolute certainty, avoidance of hypotheses, gradually widening generalization, systematic elimination of possible explanations”—had by mid century been largely rejected by men of science (Yeo, *Defining* 13). Bacon was not rejected: his name retained its rhetorical authority, representing the “spirit” of scientific law if not the letter. Still, his contributions were reassessed and his method revised by those very men who called themselves his heirs.

E.B.B. contributed to the early nineteenth century hero worship of Bacon, echoing the lines of Cowley’s ode in her “Essay on Mind,” and she engaged in the project of revising his legacy. In claiming herself an heir of Bacon, she recovered a different figure than the one celebrated by the Royal Society. Hers was a poet-philosopher, the Bacon of the *Essays*. Throughout “An Essay on Mind,” Bacon is represented as a hero of letters. He “says of Poetry, that ‘it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind;

whereas Reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things”
(*WEBB* 4: 118nM). This strategic representation of Bacon emphasizes the role of poetry in the greater process of the “advancement of knowledge” and allows E.B.B. to mount a defense of poetry as a genre of knowledge production.

The Preface to “An Essay on Mind” is an apology for poetry and a rebuttal to the common assertion “that poetry is not a proper vehicle for abstract ideas” (*WEBB* 4: 77). E.B.B. concedes that if we were to “consider Poetry as Plato considered her, when he banished her from his republic; or as Newton, when he termed her ‘a kind of ingenious nonsense’; or as Locke, when he pronounced that ‘gaming and poetry went usually together’” we would have to assent that poetry is not a means for advancing or disseminating knowledge (77-8). E.B.B. was responding here not only to the figures listed, but also to contemporary discourse on poetry’s place in a scientific age. However, against contemporary anti-poetry rhetoric, E.B.B. marshaled Bacon, whose recently republished literary essays proved the compatibility of literature and learning. “We do not deem the imaginative incompatible with the philosophic, for the name of Bacon is on our lips; then why should we expel the argumentative from the limits of the poetic,” she asked (77).

[For] when we behold the works of the great though erring Lucretius, the sublime Dante, the reasoning Pope – when we hear Quintillian acknowledge the submission due from Philosophers to Poets, and Gibbon declare Homer to be ‘the lawgiver, the theologian, the historian, and the philosopher of the ancients’, we are *unable* to believe [that poetry is not a proper vehicle for abstract ideas]. (78)³³

33 Emphasis in original, in this quotation and throughout.

Thus, E.B.B. represents Bacon as a proponent of poetry as a privileged mode of knowing.

These citations of Bacon, Lucretius, Pope and Homer emphasize the important historical role of poetic and literary texts in a knowledge tradition. “An Essay on Mind” is directly connected to that history through generic links. In its particular form (strophic heroic couplets, multiple books and paratextual apparatus) and in its ambitious subject the poem is part of the epic tradition. The tradition’s origins are in the vast, ancient books of Homer—texts purported to comprise all the knowledge of their time (S. Rudy 413-5). More specifically, as a non-narrative, investigative epic, “An Essay on Mind” is connected to the particular tradition of epic in which the poet, “like his classic original Lucretius, told no extended story but instead honored the Enlightenment by reciting the order of things, the *Rerum Natura*” (Tucker *Epic* 60). This is the tradition of Lucretius and Pope, a subtype that requires the performance of intellectual exploration culminating in mastery which is itself epic. E.B.B.’s poem is most directly and self-consciously related to the work of Pope, adapting its title from his “Essay on Man,” reworking several ideas from his “Essay on Criticism,” and reusing several rhymes from both of these verse essays. As an “essay,” E.B.B.’s poem also claims roots in the work of Bacon, who was not only England’s great reformer of science and learning but also its first major essayist, Britain’s Galileo as well as its Montaigne. And with multiple parts and paratexts—two books of around 600 lines each, a prefatory apology, and about 30 authorial endnotes —“An Essay on Mind” echoes late eighteenth-century epics that aspired to a

scholarly completeness in prolific notes, such as Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, or Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*. Indeed, E.B.B.'s "Essay" was compared to Darwin's poetry in contemporary reviews, although E.B.B. repudiated the charge of imitation, writing, "I never could *bear* Darwin! I have tried his Botanic Garden four or five times, & never could get thro' above twenty pages!" (BC letter 292). Her "Essay," like Darwin's "Garden," was an epic designed to "inlist [*sic*] Imagination under the banner of Science," but it was also committed to redefining Science (E. Darwin 22).

E.B.B. uses the Preface and the "Essay" to argue not only for the superiority of poetry but also for her own authority by subtly suggesting the epistemological advantages of a woman poet. "An Essay on Mind" was published anonymously, therefore not explicitly as the work of a woman, and is subtle in its feminist strain. However the poem was written chronologically after E.B.B.'s abandoned "An Essay on Woman" (1821-22) and uses the conventional gendering of its nonhuman figures—Nature, Truth, Genius, and Mind herself—subversively to animate feminine power.³⁴ Furthermore, the preface deftly invites female readers into its pages to participate in the discourse on mind which, although historically the purview of literature, religion and philosophy, was experiencing incursions from physiology, phrenology and medicine. Alluding to Shakespeare (after Bacon) in the first paragraph of the Preface, E.B.B. wrote that "preface-writing strangely reminds one of Bottom's prologuizing device" (WEBB

³⁴ As Julie Straight and Gail Turley Houston have argued in their respective readings of *The Seraphim* and *Aurora Leigh*, E.B.B.'s gendering of language subtly reclaims patriarchal traditions for a woman's voice. Here the ensemble of female figures, with Mind foremost among them, confirm and amplify the authority of the woman poet's voice.

4: 77). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom the Weaver, planning his own play but concerned that "the ladies [may] be afraid of the lion" in it, resolves to affix a prologue that will warn the ladies that the lion is only Snug the Joiner in costume (III.i.23). E.B.B. will do the same, "declaring to those readers who 'cannot abide lions,' that their 'parlous fear' is here unnecessary" (WEBB 4: 77). E.B.B.'s beast to Bottom's lion is the mind and its work, but E.B.B. "readers" are not Bottom's "ladies." In an important change, the fearful readers here are not gendered, female or at all. Rather than presuming fearful ladies or drawing attention to lady readers, E.B.B.'s neuter terms "readers" and "public" let the ladies slip in quietly with the crowd, uniformly assuaged of their fear (WEBB 4: 77).

The first "lady" introduced in the Preface is Poetry herself, and she is presented by Milton. "Poetry is the enthusiasm of the understanding; and, as Milton finely expresses it, there is 'a high reason in her fancies'" (WEBB 4: 78). Mind is likewise introduced as a "she" whose feminine pronouns are repeated throughout the concluding paragraph, in which the poet deferentially wishes her poem had been written by "a spirit more powerful than mine" (79).

I wish it had fallen to the lot of one familiar with the dwelling-place of Mind, who could search her secret chambers, and call forth those that sleep; or of one who could enter into her temples [...] or of one who could try the golden links of that chain which hangs from Heaven to earth, and shew that it is not placed there for man to covet for lucre's sake, or for him to weigh his puny strength at one end against Omnipotence at the other; but that it is placed there to join, in mysterious union, the natural and the spiritual, the mortal and the eternal, the creature and the Creator. (WEBB 4: 79)

In this passage, Mind is a woman with secret, sacred spaces; "man" is covetous

and “puny”; and the final sublime vision unifies the Creator not with *man* but with all creatures. If anyone is fit to write “An Essay on Mind,” the passage gives little reason to think it would be a man. The poem’s two books continue a similar, subtle gendering of its figures—a gendering that is at once conventional and subversive—to claim feminine power. Important male figures from history, philosophy, and art—Bacon, Locke, Milton—are offset by even more important female figures of philosophy and art — Truth, Genius, the Muses. “An Essay on Mind” is ultimately a poem about woman speaking about woman. Instead of invoking the classical muse—“Why do I not the muse of Homer call[?]” (1.29)—Mind is called to speak for herself:

Thou thing of light! that warm’st the breasts of men,
 Breath’st from the lips, and tremblest from the pen!

 Thou thing of light! instruct my pen to find
 Th’ unequal pow’rs, the various forms of Mind! (1.19-40)

As a woman poet, E.B.B. had to advocate for her own authority, invent a place from which to speak, and create an audience for her verse—maneuvers which are carefully traced in Dorothy Mermin’s *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry*. However, in E.B.B.’s proto-Victorian context, this rhetorical work is parallel to that of the early scientists who claimed the same intellectual lineage as she does in this poem. For example, William Whewell’s metascientific writing essentially created a vocation for himself, influenced the form of scientific commentary, and directed the development of science itself (Yeo, *Defining* 9). Although writing within another realm and for different audiences, E.B.B.’s “philosophy of science” engaged in similar intellectual and rhetorical maneuvers.

Part of the play for authority in this early nineteenth-century context involved the strategic establishment of hierarchical relations among several branches of knowledge. When the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) formed in 1831, it established hierarchical “Sections” around major fields of inquiry (D. Brown 3). As literary historian Daniel Brown argues, the alphabetical arrangement of Mathematics and Physics in Section A, Chemistry in Section B, and Natural History in Section D was “deliberate and hierarchical” (4). Physics, the science of matter, was established as the archetype of “science” itself (D. Brown 4). Bacon had already set up his own extremely complex schemas of knowledge, sciences and arts in the 1605 *Advancement of Learning*, but these charts were now under revision. In fact, most nineteenth-century editions of the text printed a single, revised chart across three pages in place of Bacon’s ten charts over ten pages. “An Essay on Mind” likewise rearranged Bacon’s organization of knowledge. E.B.B. took from Bacon the division among History, Poesy and Philosophy, according to the mental faculties of memory, imagination, and reason. But where Bacon essentially made Philosophy the most capacious of the sciences and effectively put his experimental science on top, E.B.B. made poetry the greatest science, incorporating all others. In the very organization of her epic poem, poetry was the summit of her hierarchy.

“An Essay on Mind” is largely a comparative essay on the various sciences of history, philosophy and poetry. The ostensible subject of the *mind* is an opportunity to examine the works of the mind or branches of knowledge.

From the Preface, the poet is clear in her conviction that speculations upon the “substance” of mind are at best “curious [...] speculations” and “after all [...] acquired from analogy” (*WEBB* 4: 78). In attempts to theorize the matter of mind, “Metaphysicians have cavilled and confuted; but they have failed in their endeavor to establish any permanent theoretical edifice on that windy site” (*WEBB* 4: 78). The poem will therefore offer little in terms of philosophy of mind. In only a handful of lines, the poet argues that Mind is an “essence, or a substance spiritual” (2.772-4), that “the faculties of Intellect” are “to discern, retain, compare, connect” (2.756, 755), and for a middle path between extreme idealism and sensationism. “Sensation is a stream with dashing spray, / That shoots in idle speed its arrowy way,” while reflection is the “mill [that] arrests its waters’ course / Turning to use their unproductive force” (2.759-62). Beyond this, the poem is much more interested in the branches of science, broadly conceived, and their relative potential as genres of knowledge.

The poem treats philosophy then poetry in its first and second books. Philosophy is further subdivided into “History, or the doctrine of man, as an active and social being; Physics, or the doctrine of efficient causes; [and] Metaphysics, or the doctrine of abstractions, and final causes” (*WEBB* 4: 78). These divisions borrow from Bacon and from contemporary interest in the physical sciences. E.B.B. writes with humility that “Lord Bacon’s comprehensive discernment of the whole, and Locke’s acute penetration into parts, have assisted me in my trembling endeavour to trace the outline of these branches of knowledge” (*WEBB* 4: 78). However, while Bacon’s scheme “effectively promotes

philosophy – and especially Baconian science – above [history and poetry], in essence defining history as the mere accumulation of brute facts, while reducing art and imaginative literature to the even more marginal status of ‘feigned history.’” E.B.B.’s arrangement subverts and partially inverts Bacon’s hierarchy of knowledge (Simpson 2h). Poetry, in this poem, is the science that contains all others. Each field of knowledge is presented and in turn subjected to praise and critique, but poetry is posited at the summit, incorporating all other modes of knowledge and affording its own unique advantages.

History, treated first, is accorded great respect for its expansive, shifting scale and its cultivation of a double vision. History’s first task is to juxtapose the present and past: “Majestic task! to join, though plac’d afar, / The things that have been, with the things that are!” (1.254-5). Through this work, the historian begins to develop a double vision which informs a critical consciousness of the present. “Double vision” was later elaborated in E.B.B.’s 1856 poem *Aurora Leigh*, Book Five, in a long dissertation on art. Poets must “exert a double vision; should have eyes / To see near things as comprehensively / As if afar they took their point of sight, / And distant things as intimately deep / As if they touched them,” *Aurora* writes (5.184). This later, 1856 statement on double vision was written in the context of strong Hellenism and Medievalism in poetry, at a time when “poets abound / Who scorn to touch [this age] with a finger-tip” (5.159). However, the double vision of true poets is the faculty to see the past and the present in a mutually implicating relation. This faculty begins with the science of history.

History furthermore has the spiritually significant task of mediating between the living and the dead. “Stupendous charge! when, on the record true, / Depend the dead, and hang the living too!” (1.258-9). For E.B.B., the dead are very much alive in their active dependence on the present’s version of them, and the historian who lets prejudice or politics write his history fails the dead. She shames anyone who would work “To flatter party – not to serve mankind; / To make the dead, in living feuds, engage” (1.286-8). On the whole, however, historians are fortunately taught by their very subject to be humble and to serve. The faded glory and persistent loss of the past tutor them to temper ambition: “past power [...] brings an awful antidote – ’tis past!” (1.454-5). The expansive time scales of history ultimately teach the historian the smallness of man.

If History contains an antidote to immortal ambition, Physics (also called Science in the poem) tends to teach false lessons in permanence. The objects of physical science—heavenly bodies, physical laws—“No tale of change, their changeless course hath taught; / And works divine excite no earthward thought” (1.464-5). Gazing upon the divine workings of our world, the scientist tends to forget his own mortality, “And still, his pride increases with his theme / [...] / And still, self-worship follows self-respect” (1.467-9). The man of Science is especially prone to err in his overconfidence and in the fixed scale of his vision. While history holds the past and present in simultaneous view, science as portrayed in this poem too often lacks the double vision to encompass multiple perspectives. It is rather “Too apt to watch the engines of the scene, / And lose the hand, which moves the vast machine; / View Matter’s form, and not its

moving soul; / Interpret parts, and misconceive the whole" (1.470-3). This is not only a spiritual problem but also a scientific one, for in its tendency to dwell on parts, Science often fails to observe other significant scales. The "Essay on Mind" therefore takes issue with materialist sciences of the mind, which train a narrow focus on the brain and nervous system, but cannot say "Why a like mass of atoms should combine / To form a Tully, and a Catiline" (1.25-6). Strict materialism cannot answer "why, with flesh perchance of equal weight, / One cheers a prize-fight, and one frees a state" (1.27-8). The double vision ascribed to history (and later to poetry) is thus contrasted with the single perspective of physical science.

Progressing from physics to metaphysics, "An Essay on Mind" challenges several natural philosophers whose theories of mind reduce their object to a simple substance or mere operations. The Preface had already questioned the value of such speculations, but the verse is more direct in dismissing a host of authoritative thinkers who err, E.B.B. charges, in their attempt to theorize mind. Materialists Hobbes and Spinoza err in imagining mind too much in "Her 'native mud'" (2.624). The naturalist Buffon errs by confusing the "modes of Mind" with the "modes of clay" (1.495). Monadist Leibnitz errs by giving "to Matter, Mind's best attribute" (1.505). Idealist Berkeley errs in one direction, crying "Out on the senses!... All is idea!" while sensationist Condillac errs in the other, attempting "to stamp sensation *all*" (2.722-3, 728). And phrenologists Gall and Spurzheim err in their dogmatism: E.B.B. suggests they would seek the "mystic bumps indicative of Thought" even on the head of a hound (2.736).

The poem proceeds to offer its own few lines on philosophy of mind, then concludes its Philosophy section with apostrophes to the great British philosophers, Locke and Bacon. But as soon as the poet has established these great heights, she sites poetry above them. For “where Philosophy would fear to soar, / Young Poesy’s elastic steps explore” (2.900-1). As the “Analysis of the Second Book” explains, Poetry is “More daring than Philosophy” for “she personifies abstractions, and brings the things unseen before the eye of the Mind” (*WEBB* 4: 98). Structurally, then, poetry is presented as the height of knowledge, a realm above philosophy that incorporates the best of philosophical science. It is the continuation of metaphysics, elaborating the abstract in the material. Like Physics, Poetry taps into the divine and unchanging, but, like History, it attends to several scales in recursive acts of comparative vision. Poetry provides a method of advancing knowledge by comparing perspectives.

The procedure of comparing perspectives, for which poetry is so well suited, is again associated with Bacon: his inductive method is rewritten as a process of accumulating perspectives rather than facts. The Enlightenment image of Bacon was a prophet guide who “led us forth at last, / The barren Wilderness he past, / Did on the very Border stand / Of the blest promis’d Land” (Cowley 5.93-6). E.B.B. reimagines Bacon as a prophet explorer: “Where prejudice’ wild blasts were wont to blow, / And waves of ignorance roll’d dark below, / [Bacon] raised his sail – and left the coast behind / Sublime Columbus of the realms of Mind” (“Essay on Mind” 2.866-9). This subtly different image—leaving a coast rather than arriving at one—is important to E.B.B.’s revision. For her, a seeker

after truth must leave the coasts of his own mind, must push ever onward against the tendency to become set in one perspective. In a footnote, she links Bacon to this constant quest:

Perhaps, after all, the great danger of knowing is in not knowing enough; and certainly 'il pie fermo' is not 'il piu basso' [the steady foot is not the lower one]. [...] In our progress towards [intellectual elevation] then is our risk – lest we rejoice to have gone a yard, without remembering we have a mile to go. [...] if during the ascent we turn back to gaze, we are transformed into black stones — capable of impeding others, though not of advancing ourselves. (WEBB 4: 115nP)

In E.B.B.'s philosophy of science, Bacon's images of tabular fact gathering are transformed into images of progressive climbing. Rather than accumulating more facts, the seeker after truth must be on the move, attaining more vantage points. In this set of images, updated for the nineteenth century, knowledge is situated and the knower must change her situation in order to know more. Any pretension to a final or complete perspective is met with skepticism. This epistemological stance reflects the skepticism and relativity of the time, both in advancing sciences and in poetry emphasizing partiality and situated perspective.³⁵ In E.B.B.'s longer career, this stance is reflected in a trajectory of shifting poetic speakers and subjects.

The path between the 1826 "An Essay on Mind" and the 1856 *Aurora Leigh* explores several genres, points of view and poetic subjects, but the overall trend is one from a less situated view—what feminist philosophers of science would

35 On scientific relativity and skepticism in the era, see Christopher Herbert, *Victorian Relativity*, and Peter Garratt, *Victorian Empiricism*. On poetic forms emphasizing partiality, see E. Warwick Slinn "Experimental form."

later call the “view from nowhere”—to a particular embodied and socially embedded point of view (Haraway). E.B.B.’s first major work, “An Essay on Mind” (1826), is an epic verse essay on the spiritual-material mystery of mind spoken by a disembodied voice. Her last major work, *Aurora Leigh* (1856), is an epic verse novel on an individual life spoken by its autobiographical narrator. The trajectory between them may be traced across her major works.³⁶ After “An Essay on Mind,” E.B.B. published her translation of Aeschylus’ Classical tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, set in the mythic realm of gods and demi-gods. In 1838, she published the original closet drama “The Seraphim,” recording two angels’ impressions of the incarnation and the crucifixion, viewed from on high (WEBB 2: 75). Next she wrote “A Drama of Exile” (1844), a masque on Adam and Eve’s postlapsarian limbo between Eden and Earth. Her next major work, *Casa Guidi Windows*, was set on Earth, recording E.B.B.’s eye-witness view of the Italian Risorgimento in two scenes, before and after political disillusionment. The final major work, *Aurora Leigh* (1856), was a fictional, first-person novel in verse recounting the life and artistic formation of poet-narrator Aurora Leigh. The arc across these works is from a less situated to a more situated perspective.

Aurora Leigh continues this trajectory of testing poetic perspective, and takes up the questions of scale and perspective directly in its plot. Scale becomes an issue on several levels: how to understand the world’s social ills, and thus act

36 By “major works” I refer to the long poems printed as title poems or leading poems to E.B.B.’s major publications or as separate works. In addition to these major works, E.B.B. wrote hundreds of shorter poems—ballads, sonnets, lyrics—and the famous sonnet sequence, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (first published as a separate collection). This survey is therefore admittedly partial. Yet because E.B.B.’s own publication history emphasizes these works, they constitute an important thread in her poetic development.

ethically in the present; how art relates to life and what it may do in the world; how to be partial yet part of something larger. These issues play out in the debates between the title character Aurora and her cousin Romney, in Aurora's own musings on art and life, and in the form of the poem itself. The story, narrated by the Italian-British poet Aurora Leigh, concerns her artistic development and her marriage plot with English cousin Romney Leigh. Romney is Aurora's cousin, friend, ideological opposite, rejected suitor, and eventually reunited lover. As Rebecca Stott puts it, "Aurora (Italy, development, instinct, love, the Ideal) and Romney (education, system, philanthropy, the practical) embody the majority of these oppositions and their conflict and eventual resolution is worked out through a love plot" (189). The conflict of their oppositions is elaborated in several verbal debates between the characters, especially regarding how to act ethically in the world. Their mutual friend, Vincent Carrington, boils their disagreement down to a question of whether one should make "bread or verses," material or ideal comforts, for mankind (7.635-6).

Aurora and Romney's recurring debate over right action stems from a deeper disagreement on how to understand their world. Romney is the "materialist," but materialism has changed since 1826. His materialism is a program for social reform through architectural and other social interventions, based in the argument that material conditions shape human development and the utilitarian logic of attaining the greatest good. Romney stresses the aggregate while Aurora, the poet, focuses on the individual. Thus he charges that Aurora reduces the human race to "such a child, or such a man, / You saw one morning

waiting in the cold / Beside that gate" (2.190-2). Such attention to such and such an individual, Romney charges, entails an inability to generalize and makes one "hard / To general suffering" (2.198-9). In this world "half brutalised / With [what passes for] civilization," attention to the individual is insufficient to confront "the great sum / Of universal anguish," Romney argues (2.208-9). Aurora, for her part, complains that Romney the social reformer "lives by / diagrams, / And crosses out the spontaneities [...] With formal universals," pretends to "keep God's books for Him in red and black / And feel by millions" (3.744-6, 749-50). His Utilitarian view from nowhere is, she charges, both blasphemous and alienated.

Aurora Leigh, as a changing character immersed in the temporality of her own plot, is allowed to contradict herself, as several critics have noted. Herbert Tucker writes, "The moral action of E.B.B.'s magnum opus proceeds by Aurora's repeatedly investing herself first in some high-sounding, unsustainable maxim that gets it all together in a phrase, then being overtaken by experiences that send her back to the drawing-board, or writing-desk, to try again" ("Ebbigrammar" 461). And Mary Mullen notes that "the passage of time frequently causes Aurora to contradict herself," such that "although Aurora declares that she did not love Romney 'nor then, nor since, / Nor ever' in the second book (2.713-714), in the ninth book she tells Romney 'I love you, loved you . . . loved you first and last, / And love you on for ever. Now I know / I loved you always, Romney' (9.683-685)" (70-1).

The perspective of *Aurora Leigh* is constantly shifting and revising itself; the perspective of "An Essay on Mind" is constant. One has all the hallmarks of a

novel, the other of an essay. Yet E.B.B.'s writing insists that these two crucial genres of the period are both subsumed by poetry, that the epic is flexible enough to incorporate the perspectives of several genres and thus to compare their points of view. More than double vision, this generic advantage is also an epistemological one, staked out in "An Essay on Mind" and carried out over E.B.B.'s career trajectory.

II. Form

In addition to her claims for the generic supremacy of poetry, E.B.B. argues in "An Essay on Mind" that poetry has particular advantages due to its special formal relation to language. In an important aside early in the Second Book, E.B.B. considers language and its relation to thought:

For thoughts uncloth'd by language are, at best,
Obscure; while grossness injures those exprest –
Through words, – in whose analysis, we find
Th' analogies of Matter, not of Mind:
Hence, when the use of words is graceful brought,
As physical dress to metaphysic thought,
The thought, howe'er sublime its pristine state,
Is by th' expression made degenerate; (2.631-8)

The two predicates which begin this passage match in their meter, in their enjambed internal rhymes, and in the early caesurae which follow them: For thoughts uncolth'd by language are at best / *Obscure*; | while grossness injures those exprest / *Through words*. Together, these lines set up a kind of double bind between thought and word. Language is *gross, degenerate, physical*. But *metaphysic* thought is unrealized without it. Beyond this world, "voiceless intercourse may pass between" soul and soul (2.664); but here, "among the embodied," we must

think through words (*BC* letter 3286).³⁷ If on earth we cannot transcend the matter of language, however, the lines which follow suggest we may work through it, from thought to word to thought, to reach a kind of synthesis.

The poet cautions, “Yet spurn not words! ’tis needful to confess / They give ideas, a body and a dress!” (2.643-4). The lines which follow are peppered with writing advice, echoing Pope’s “*Essay on Criticism*.” “Respect the technicality of terms!”; do not send the reader “*hunting meaning down the mazy page, / With three long periods tortured into one*”; and “*let not clearness be your only praise, / When style may charm a thousand different ways*” (2.676, 684-5, 691-2). These instructions however alternate with contrasting warnings: never “*conception’s essence [...] forget / And place all wisdom in the alphabet*” (2.679-80). The entire impromptu style guide is a diversion from Book Two of “*An Essay on Mind*” which began, fifty lines prior, with the line, “*But now to higher themes! no more confin’d / To copy Nature, Mind returns to Mind*” (2.601-2). However, the diversion and the reversals within this passage attain a synthesis at the heart of this poem’s logic. Language is not merely the accident of thought, but neither is it the source. It is only by way of language, by way of attention to language, that one might approach thought itself.

The peculiar problem of language—metaphysic thought *dressed* in words it cannot shed—represented for E.B.B. the greater problem of the spiritual world realized in the material present. Thomas Carlyle also explored this problem in

37 In an 1853 letter to her sister Arabella, E.B.B. uses the phrase “among the embodied” somewhat comically in an account of spiritual communication to distinguish between those present in body and those present in spirit.

Past and Present (1843) and *Sartor Resartus* (1831), taking the clothing metaphor from Pope, as E.B.B. did. Carlyle pursued what Katherine Bond Stockton calls a spiritualist discourse—“discourse on what exceeds human sign systems; discourse on where human meanings fail; discourse on escapes from discourse; and, most importantly, culturally constructed discourse on escapes from culture” (7). E.B.B., on the other hand, pursued poetic language as a way through discourse to its beyond, a way of inhabiting the material until the material resonates with the spiritual. Poetry, for E.B.B., had a formal advantage over other branches of knowledge: all were expressed *in* language but only poetry was *of* language. Or as she put it playfully in “A Thought on Thoughts,” an 1823 essay that personifies modes of thought as members of a family, Poetical Thought is at ease with words, while Philosophical Thought is at odds with them. “Mrs. Poetical Thought, first Cousin of [Mr. Philosophical Thought], is a venerable old Lady [...] and flirts away most valiantly with the Words, who continue her humble servants, though [they are] at variance with the rest of the family” (WEBB 4: 282). This playful magazine essay sets up a relationship of serious importance for E.B.B.’s poetic project. She continued to explore the way in which poetry could explore the material and immaterial dimensions of language, and she rarely wrote professionally in prose.

While E.B.B. explored and innovated many genres in her poetic writing, from her verse “Essay” to her verse-novel *Aurora Leigh*, she never published creative prose and wrote very few prose essays in an age when that genre flourished (Himmelfarb 18). She published three prose essays in her lifetime, all

in the *Atheanaeum* magazine during 1842. The essays—“Some Account of the Greek Christian Poets,” in four parts from February to March; “The Book of the Poets. Scott, Webster and Geary,” in five parts from June to August; and “Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years, Including the Borderers, A Tragedy. By William Wordsworth,” on 27 August, 1842—cover an impressive amount of literary history: Greek writers of the second through fourteenth centuries, English writers from Chaucer to the Elizabethans to Cowley to Dryden to Cowper, and finally Wordsworth (*WEBB* 4: 347, 443, 507). Yet this experiment in the review essay genre only led E.B.B. back to poetry with a greater conviction. The closing section of her review of Wordsworth parroted contemporary complaints about the death of poetry: “our shelves groan with little books over which their readers groan less metaphorically – there is a plague of poems in the land apart from poetry” (*WEBB* 4: 516). Critics complained that true poetry had passed from the world, and suggested that readers ought to “content ourselves for the future with a rhythmic prose, printed like prose for decency, and supplied for comfort, with a parish allowance of two or three rhymes to a paragraph” (*WEBB* 4: 516). E.B.B., however, inspired especially by Wordsworth (whom she set up as the exception to this state of affairs), returned to her art with greater conviction, and rejected outright the prospect of writing further prose.³⁸

Instead, E.B.B. continued to expand the generic and formal possibilities of

38 E.B.B. wrote to her friend Mary Russell Mitford that she would not “give up poetry for magazine-writing, or for prose of a higher character” and went on to assure her that “I could’nt if I tried. Whatever degree of faculty I have, lies in poetry [...] At this moment I love it more than ever—& am more bent than ever, if possible, to work into light .. not into popularity but into expression .. whatever faculty I have. This is the object of the intellectual part of me” (*BC* letter 903).

poetry in her prolific and impressive body of work. And late into her career, she continued to explore how poetry and science could be synthesized. E.B.B. remained aware of developments in mainstream science and spiritualism. Her correspondence records responses to the Bridgewater Treatises, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, the 1842 Report of the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, writings on Mesmerism, and reports of spiritual phenomena—and her letters are peppered with references to developments in several branches of science. Over the decades, her critical responses to scientific writing suggest an abiding conviction of the fundamental connection between science and poetry. In fact, many of her critiques of scientific writing are critiques of style. Hugh Stuart Boyd’s geological treatise includes “a beautiful & not a verbose passage at the conclusion of the first paragraph,” Thomas Chalmer’s work is “surpassingly beautiful,” Dr. Brown is a “wonderful writer” in whom “Poetry knows the place of his soul” (BC 354, 510, 513).³⁹ E.B.B. furthermore remained convicted of a heterodox spiritualist worldview, but she was unimpressed by attempts to scientifically prove Scripture or to add religion to science.⁴⁰ Instead, she held out hope that scientific-poetic progress would eventually develop a “new metaphysics,” building on physics and electrical sciences to detail not only the mode of connection between spiritual and material

39 Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s letters are cited from the *Brownings’ Correspondence* by letter number, as these numbers are constant across the print and digital versions. Supplemental material included in the print version only is cited by volume and page number.

40 She jokingly used the phrase “pure Bridgewater” to describe a worthless treatise, and she wrote that the “writer [of *Vestiges*] has a certain power in tying a knot—(in mating a system) —but it is not a love-knot,—& it appears to me that I have read in my life few more melancholy books” (BC 1441, 1805).

realms but even scientific knowledge of the spiritual world. She read everything on spiritualism, but she became increasingly frustrated with scientific writing on spiritual phenomena, looking instead to the eccentric spiritual theory of Emanuel Swedenborg and to reports of individual mediums.⁴¹ But in her own work she kept refining a method to attend to both realms.

Aurora Leigh explores how not only poetic language but also poetic meter may provide access to investigating the mysterious, material and immaterial nature of the world. The poem is written in blank verse stanzas of irregular length. Its nine books are approximately 1100 lines each in length, except for the ninth, which is approximately 950 lines. E.B.B. also uses blank verse in portions of her closet drama *A Drama of Exile* and in her second translation of *Prometheus Bound*. In *Prometheus*, the blank verse gives her greater freedom with the material, especially after the literalism and general rigidity of her first translation. But in *Aurora Leigh*, the blank verse provides a more complete liberty. E.B.B. wrote, in 1845, having expressed her desire to write a long, modern epic, "I am waiting for a story—& I wont take one, because I want to make one—& I like to make my own stories, because then I can take liberties with them in the treatment" (*BC* 1852). The stanzas swell or shrink with Aurora's thoughts, may end abruptly to allow self-interruption, or let Aurora take another angle on her thoughts. Stanza breaks serve as opportunities for the poet to take a leap in the process of getting

41 For example, E.B.B. wrote with excitement about spiritualism that "the subject is making steady advances everywhere .. & is destined to advance, I think, still further. [...] I expect from the solution that it will be the breaking up of some of the deepest & dumbest mysteries of our double Being" (*BC* 3252). However, she wrote with disappointment that the "misfortune is that earnest serious men dont take up this subject earnestly & persistently & religiously" (*BC* 3338).

outside herself. For example, after seeing Marian Erle with an illegitimate child in her arms, Aurora writes, "I cannot name it now for what it was. // A child," overcoming herself in the stanza break's shift (6.346-7). Rhythmic variation in the line expands the possibilities of blank verse (Stark). And E.B.B. uses the half line or hemistich to vary the rhythm of line ends and change the tone of the otherwise iambic poem.

Many stanzas end (and begin) not with an iambic pentameter line, but with a hemistich line: two half lines that together add up to one line of iambic pentameter. The hemistich, usually used in dialogue but here used in self-interrupting monologue (following Wordsworth's *Prelude* and some "spasmodic" epics of the 1850s), enables two important effects. The poem achieves a new rhythmic effect, beyond the shape of its meter, and the break between stanzas allows a kind of leap through which, most often, Aurora takes her subject from a new point of view.

The hemistich is a half line of a split verse line, often used in dramatic poetry to capture the quick, witty, or terse repartee of dialogue in verse while maintaining the iambic line. Shakespeare made great use of this technique, increasingly so over his career (*PEPP* 1206). E.B.B. uses the technique extensively in *Aurora Leigh*—sometimes, like Shakespeare, to split a single line of verse into two or more lines of dialogue, but more often to end a stanza and a thought mid-line, only to interrupt herself. The first instance of this technique comes in Book One. Aurora is discussing her father and what he taught her.

He sent the schools to school, demonstrating

A fool will pass for such through one mistake,
While a philosopher will pass for such,
Through said mistakes being ventured in the gross
And heaped up to a system.

I am like,
They tell me, my dear father. [...] (1.194-9)

The mid-line entrance of a new stanza allows the poet to take her subject from another approach, to revise or reflect on her prior statement. Here she shifts from her father's lessons to herself, to her resemblance to her father. The split also lets another rhythm enter the verse while maintaining a dominant iambic meter. Most of the split lines add up to a perfectly iambic pentameter line, but the two parts introduce another cadence to the poem which alters its tone. By splitting an iambic foot, this line creates one hemistich which ends weakly on a falling beat, and one hemistich which begins strongly on an accent. The latter, however, is almost always enjambed, so that its own rhythm joins the next line, while the former hemistich precedes a significant pause (at the close of the stanza) so that its rhythm sustains. This effect introduces new possibilities into the poem even as it remains in the form of regular iambic pentameter.

The most common rhythm created with the hemistich in the poem is a line of five or seven syllables, with the rising then falling cadence of "And heaped up to a system" (- / - / - / -). The lines are especially stressed on the second and sixth syllables, and this rhythm becomes a tonal signature of the poem, a kind of key note from which it varies and returns.⁴² In the final book, this key note or root rhythm returns strongly, shifted to a different tone by the changed context. In the

⁴² This rhythm is captured in Swinburne's parody of E.B.B., "The Poet and the Woodlouse."

end when Aurora and Romney are united in love, the incompleteness of this rhythm takes on a different mood. Rather than completing each other, Aurora and Romney realize their partiality and the possibility for self-expansion as lovers: a kind of happy imperfection as captured in Romney's lines, "Shine out for two, Aurora, and fulfill / My falling-short that must be!" (9.910-11). Here falling short and the falling cadence on the second line is triumphant, trusting in the other to pick it up. Indeed the line continues, "work for two" (9.911).

Just as the hemistich gives a shape and a sound to the partiality of perspective that inhibits Aurora and Romney until they finally join forces, overflowing enjambed lines give material form to phenomena that exceeds the set shape of presupposed perspectives. Marian consistently exceeds the frames of reference brought to bear on her by Romney and Aurora. And her narrative consistently exceeds the boundaries of the Books, spilling from Book Three into Four, and from Book Six into Seven. So too her voice exceeds the writing of the book, the rhythm of the line. She speaks in a natural rhythm that Aurora claims she cannot capture even in verse.

She told the tale with simple, rustic turns,—
Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden eyes
That took the gaps of any imperfect phrase
Of the unschooled speaker: I have rather writ
The thing I understood so, than the thing
I heard so. And I cannot render right
Her quick gesticulation, wild yet soft, (4.151-57)

Marian's words are held beyond the written poem; the poet claims that the verse does not render them exactly but grasps only their meaning. Yet even the lines about this rendering find the rhythm of Marian's speech, its rustic turns and

gaps, as these lines of strong rhythm building into trochees abruptly alternate with the writer's iambs:

/ / - / - - / - /
 Strong leaps of mea'ing in her sudden eyes
 - / - / - / - / - /
 That took the gaps of any-imperfect phrase
 / - / - / - | / - / - /
 Of the unschooled speaker: I have rather writ

Like so much of this poem's verse, the rhythm here exceeds the lines. Robert Stark has studied the use of elision in this poem in light of E.B.B.'s early writing on the subject. As Stark points out, E.B.B.'s own poetry and prosodic theory was in line with the dominant conception that aesthetic pleasure is derived from a creative tension between meter and rhythm (51). Furthermore, Stark notes that E.B.B.'s rhythmic experimentation influenced the popular analogy of meter and rhythm as body and spirit, theorized by Coventry Patmore shortly after he reviewed *Aurora Leigh* (Patmore 7). E.B.B. employs poetic rhythm to approach the way that spirit at once occupies and simultaneously exceeds the material.

In a poem that stresses the relativity of scale and the insufficiency of preconceived frameworks, the swelling and falling rhythms of the lines provide a kind of material proof not only of multiple material scales but also of the immaterial. E.B.B.'s verse lines, at once encased in the shape of iambic pentameter and at the same time obeying a rhythm and logic all their own, achieve the kind of spiritual material science E.B.B. kept hoping for. During the 1850s, E.B.B.'s hope for the scientific project was invigorated by the spiritualism gripping the public. E.B.B. anticipated a "larger metaphysics" prompted by the

spiritual phenomena observed in North America, England and among her own circle at Florence.⁴³ Communications between the living and the dead—through table rapping and automatic writing—might force a reconsideration of the relation between material and spiritual. However, she was largely disappointed by scientific writing on the subject, both sympathetic and debunking. Her poetic practice, however, kept pursuing this project.

She did not live to see scientific materialism redefined by Tyndall's 1874 Belfast address, but rather worked to prove in the material of her meters a spiritual materialism that continued to inform nineteenth century science of prosody.⁴⁴ A revised history of Victorian poetry which centers E.B.B. might begin to put these discourses—of prosody, spiritualism, and materialism—more closely into conversation. Here, in the chapters that follow, I use this framework in which poetic form may serve as an experimental model for the subject of interest (mind or spirit here, affect and development in the chapters that follow) to read the dense and innovative poetics of Christina Rossetti and Algernon Swinburne, two poets greatly influenced by the work of E.B.B.

43 See Porter for a history of this movement.

44 See Lightman for the historical significance of Tyndall's address in defining materialism.

Chapter Two

Rhymes With: Christina Rossetti's Sensationalism

The final stanza of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" frames the poem's narrative about Laura, Lizzie and the goblins as a tale told by its now grown protagonists to "children of their own" many years after the events of the story (545).⁴⁵ This framing scene concludes with a refrain recited by all—Laura and Lizzie of the tale, and the "little ones" of their later domestic lives—cast back over the poem, and thus significantly foregrounded by the structure of the text. The lines recite a deceptively simple moral, "For there is no friend like a sister," yet evince an interest in a complex range of ways in which one sister may affect another.

Then joining hands to little hands,
[Laura] Would bid them cling together,
"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." (560-7)

These common, and seemingly common-sense modes of influence—to cheer, to strengthen, to metaphorically fetch or lift—generally pass below notice. We know what it is to cheer someone up, to lift someone's spirits; we know how to strengthen a friend who needs support, to fetch a friend who lacks direction. But the way in which this influence travels is by no means a settled matter. Indeed,

45 Quotes from "Goblin Market" are cited by line number and are from the edition *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*.

recent scholarship on affect as an extra-individual force points up the continued relevance of this unresolved research question.⁴⁶ And recent scholarship on affect and sensation in the nineteenth century has pointed out how urgent this question was at the time when Rossetti was writing.

In this chapter on Rossetti, I attempt to stay at the level of affective influence, to follow the way in which Rossetti's poem tests the various modes of interpersonal influence at work between the sisters of "Goblin Market" and in several other contexts. In the 1850s and 1860s, Rossetti was writing and publishing at a historical moment of intense interest in questions of mental influence, the transmission of sensation, and capacities for sensation in several fields.⁴⁷ As I show, Rossetti was connected to major current in these fields. And, as a religious educator responsible for imparting faith and knowledge to others, Rossetti was especially interested in the way that an individual may be influenced by the affective and perceptual orientation of those around her and how such influence affected her capacities for sensation, perception and attention. In this chapter, then, I read Rossetti as a kind of clinician of this question, a researcher whose "Goblin Market" is an experiment that tests the effects, on Laura, of several varying configurations of sisters and goblins.

For Rossetti, the question of how an individual's sensations or perceptions could be altered by those around her was of pressing practical concern in her

46 Much work within affect studies has focused on affect as an interpersonal phenomenon and on the means of its transmission. See for example Brennan *The Transmission of Affect*, Rei Terada *Feeling in Theory*. For more general overviews of this field see Gregg and Seigworth, and Blackman.

47 For historical and cultural accounts, in Britain from the 1850s to 1870s, of mental force see Pinch, *Thinking*; mesmerism see Winter, *Mesmerized*; sensation as a bodily capacity see Crary *Techniques*, Parisi "Tactile Modernity," Garrison, *Science*; spasmodic poetry see J. Rudy; sensation fiction see Garrison.

own life, both as a Christian seeking spiritual knowledge and as a religious educator aiming to impart the same. Rossetti continuously investigated how to develop her own capacities for sensation and perception. In particular she studied how to sensitize herself to the Christian symbolism she believed was constantly communicated to her through the things of this world. And as an educator, she asked how to communicate the capacity for faith to those she taught through her writing and her work: children, women rejected by their communities, readers eager to improve themselves.⁴⁸ These were questions Rossetti returned to again and again. In this chapter, I focus on these questions as they surface in Rossetti's early work—especially her masterpiece “Goblin Market”—and in her late 1884 text, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, which records her process of spiritual self-education. I argue however that this question is also worked out at the level of poetic form, especially in “Goblin Market,” and in Rossetti's innovative use of rhyme.

Poetic rhyme—a word affected by words in its vicinity through a commonplace but complex mode of influence—is not unlike the affective influence that interested Rossetti, and is an important mechanism of Rossetti's poetry. Rhyme was always central to Rossetti's poetics. But during the 1850s and 1860s she increasingly experimented with irregular rhyme—that is, rhymes in unpredictable configurations—which complicated the effects she could achieve in her poetry. I read “Goblin Market” as a culmination of this experimental

48 Rossetti worked at a children's school with her mother in 1851 and from 1853 to 1854 (Marsh “Introduction” x, xxii) and wrote many works for children; she worked with “fallen” or sexually devalued woman at the Highgate Penitentiary for several years beginning in 1859 (xxiii); and she published several devotional prose works with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

process, a poem in which constantly shifting configurations of rhyme and of characters interpenetrate to texture the exploration of influence at several scales.⁴⁹ “Goblin Market” is as various in its rhyme configurations as it is in its configurations of goblins and sisters. The poem not only follows the ways in which a sister may cheer, lift, fetch, or strengthen another, but also the ways in which the goblins can distract her, how she can lose her senses, and how she can feel what another is feeling. In reading these contingent, local, temporary forms of influence in “Goblin Market,” I am both building on and working slightly against earlier studies of sisterhood in this poem, many of which read women’s relations as a structural and therefore more permanent phenomenon. My approach draws from recent affect theory including work by Sara Ahmed and Eve Sedgwick, both of whom knit together feminist, queer and affect theory. Sedgwick’s work on touch and texture has helped me read rhyme configurations as textural rather than structural: as contingent, temporary and able to be felt. Ahmed’s work on “queer phenomenology” has sensitized me to orientation as a condition of experience and especially to the ways in which particular affective pressures accompany the actions of lining up or stepping out of line with dominant orientations. My approach to Rossetti’s rhyme thus responds to and reframes the history of “Goblin Market” criticism, which is at the same time a vital lineage of feminist literary theory. I return to this lineage at the end of this chapter. First, I review Rossetti’s early innovations in rhyme during the 1850s

⁴⁹ Although “Goblin Market” represents an achievement in Rossetti’s poetic experimentation, it does not represent the end point. She continued to experiment with irregular rhyme throughout later poetry in works such as “The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children” “Despised and Rejected” (in *A Prince’s Progress and Other Poems*, 1866); “A Pageant,” “Mirrors of Life and Death,” “A Ballad of Boding” “All Saints” (in *A Pageant and Other Poems*, 1881).

and provide historical context of increasing interest in questions of affect and sensation across several fields. Second, I perform an extended close reading of *Goblin Market* that pays attention to the ways in which rhyme and character align themselves in shifting configurations, prompting significant consequences for the feelings experienced within their bounds. This reading illustrates how poetic form can serve as an experimental model, in this case, of intersubjective influence.

I. Rhyme and Sensation

Rhyme was always central to Rossetti's poetics. But during the 1850s, Rossetti began experimenting more liberally with irregular and shifting rhyme shapes. Here I provide some background on the crucial role of rhyme in Rossetti's formation as a poet and in scholarship on her poetry, before sketching her shifting use of irregular rhyme in the 1850s. I argue that her increasing use of irregular rhyme was in conversation with poetic precedent not only from the past (for example, John Milton's *Lycidas*) but also from her present (for example, the 1855 poem *Maud* by her contemporary Alfred, Lord Tennyson). In linking Rossetti to Tennyson in the latter half of the 1850s, I also place her in a broader cultural context of increasing interest in sensation, evident in spasmodic poetry and physiological experiment (both of which were linked to *Maud*), and in theories of mental influence and sensation fiction. This context provides a background against which to better read Rossetti's "*Goblin Market*" as a timely yet innovative investigation of affective influence.

Rhyme was so central to Rossetti's poetry that she at times referred to her

compositions not as “poems” but simply as “rhymes.”⁵⁰ As a young person, she honed her writing skills by playing at *bouts rimés*, a family game in which one Rossetti sibling would supply a column of fourteen “rhymed ends” (words rhyming according to the pattern of a Petrarchan sonnet) and another would “fill up” the lines—racing the clock or another sibling—then record the total composition time at the foot of the finished sonnet. This was such a favorite pastime that when Rossetti spent a few weeks away from her family (with the Collinsons at Pleasley Hill during summer, 1849) she wrote her brother William to complain of the “perpetual” “talk of *beaus*” among her companions and to sigh, “Ah Will! if you were here we would write *bouts-rimés* sonnets, and be subdued together” (*Letters* 1: 19). In her lifetime, Rossetti wrote over one thousand poems, in varying forms, but always in rhyme. Many of these were in received forms, but Rossetti often played with original stanza and rhyme shapes. Indeed, what we might call her “native” form—the Italian sonnet she knew intimately through Petrarch and Dante (and, in English, through Milton)⁵¹—already encouraged such play. For while the form has a tight octet rhyming *abbaabba*, it has a looser sestet generally containing three rhyming concords of two spread out in configurations varying according to the poet’s discretion: *cdceed*, *cdeedc*, *cdecde*, etc. Thus as early as Rossetti began playing with poetry she began playing with rhyme as both a constraint and a variation.

For scholars of the last several decades, rhyme and repetition have proven

⁵⁰ See for example Rossetti *Letters* 2: 36 and 1: 382.

⁵¹ Rossetti’s father Gabriele Rossetti was an accomplished scholar of Italian literature and an expert on Dante. Rossetti herself absorbed the works of these writers in her early domestic education and went on to write professionally on both Petrarch and Dante. She contributed an article on Petrarch to the *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography* (1863) and articles on Dante to the *Churchman’s Shilling Magazine* (1867, 1884) (see Martinez).

important tropes for understanding Christina Rossetti's poetics. Angela Leighton has noticed that "repeats that play for time or seem to sing for the sake of it"—such as "what I do I do," "every plan we planned" and many more similar constructions—seem to be "the basis of Christina's work," for they appear with conspicuous regularity especially in her sonnet sequences.⁵² Lorraine Janzen Kooistra has argued that Rossetti uses repetition with a difference—"the defining characteristic of rhyme"—as the "principal structuring device" in her nursery rhymes dealing with loss to figure the slight and sudden differences between "breath and death," presence and absence ("Modern Poetry" 120). Stephen Connor argues that "Goblin Market" is Rossetti's "most urgent exploration of the idea of the ritualizing reenactment of experience through alternation and repetition" and that, within it, the "circulation of recurring rhyme elements" alternately express congruence and difference (443, 445). Indeed, Stephen Connor's short study of Rossetti's rhyme is the most extensive exploration of rhyme in "Goblin Market." But because it touches on many of Rossetti's works in only nine pages, this generative article still leaves much work to be done. To contextualize my analysis of irregular rhyme in "Goblin Market," I briefly consider Rossetti's earlier experiments in the years preceding its composition.

Rossetti's unpublished poem of 1853 "To what purpose is this waste?" is

52 Leighton quotes a litany of such repeats from Rossetti's sonnet sequences: "'what I do I do,' 'songs I sang,' 'my heart's heart,' 'more than myself myself,' 'I, if I perish, perish,' 'I grieve to grieve,' 'every plan we planned'" from "Monna Innominata"; and "'then God was God,' 'If making makes,' 'the laughs we laugh, the shrieks we shriek,' 'sweets are sweet,' 'Our teachers teach,' 'one and one make one,' 'Those nightingales were nightingales indeed,' 'June . . . like a doubled June,' 'spring is not indeed like Spring,' 'O Death who art not Death'" from "Later Life" (qtd. in Leighton "On 'the Hearing Ear'" 510).

an early example of experimentation in irregular rhyme.⁵³ The poem, which takes its title directly from Scripture,⁵⁴ narrates a tale of human foolishness overcome by spiritual wisdom. It is especially relevant to a discussion of “Goblin Market” because it uses changing rhyme shapes to texture and compliment the poetic action and because the poem focuses on the way faith may enhance human sensation. The poem’s lyric voice begins by describing natural beauties in remote locations—“A windy shell singing upon the shore: / A lily budding in a desert place”—then complains, at the close of the second stanza, “What waste / Of good, where no man dwells” (1-2, 30-31). The arrogant speaker presumes that only man possesses the sensual capacity to appreciate such beauty, and that such beauty out of man’s sight is waste. But the speaker is promptly corrected by a dream vision in which “Mine eyes were opened to behold / All hidden things, / And mine ears heard all secret whisperings” (43-46). The dreaming speaker learns that all beauties are sent “as incense rising toward the skies” and sensed “by other eyes than our’s” (110, 78). The moral is twofold: first, that human sense is not the sole sensitivity calibrated to observe the beauty of this world (other beings sense it too) and second, that mere human sense is insufficient to the task of appreciating the vast and sometimes invisible beauty of God’s good work, which requires a sensation enhanced by faith. The poem concludes, “We want the faith that hath not seen / Indeed, but hath believed His truth” (119-20). Here, belief or faith enables an enhanced vision that is more sensitive than mere seeing.

53 This poem’s formal resonance with “Goblin Market” is noted by Jan Marsh in her edition of Rossetti’s *Poems and Prose* (430n31).

54 “There came unto [Jesus] a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?” (King James Bible, Matt 26:7-8).

To see is merely human, but to believe is to access a greater, more sensitive vision.

The poem's irregular rhyme patterns interact with this moral and the speaker's conversion in interesting ways. As the poem shifts between passages describing the beauties of the world and passages describing the speaker's doubt, the lines shift from simpler to more complex rhyme patterns. Simple, non-overlapping rhyme shapes (couplets side by side, envelope shapes) are used in the first and third movements of the poem, while overlapping, complex rhyme shapes (*abab* and other interlocking configurations) accompany the second and fourth movements. As the poem begins, nested rhyming lines describe the supposed isolation of unseen beauty:

A windy shell singing upon the shore:
A lily budding in a desert place;
Blooming alone
With no companion
To praise its perfect perfume and its grace:
A rose crimson and blushing at the core,
Hedged in with thorns behind it and before: (1-7)

These lines, rhyming *abccbaa*, trace the concentric shape of an enclosed bud hidden from view. But the speaker goes on to learn that all such beautiful forms are ultimately sensed, that is, not in fact hidden and never wasted. Thus in the third movement of the poem, following the dream vision, concentric, non-overlapping rhyme shapes return with a revised connotation, to emphasize the way in which every beauty is met with a sentience, as every rhyme meets with its mate.

And other eyes than our's
Were made to look on flowers,

Eyes of small birds and insects small:
The deep sun-blushing rose
Round which the prickles close
Opens her bosom to them all. (78-83)

These moments of simple non-overlapping rhyme forms alternate with sections in which complex rhyme configurations cross over each other, figuring the speaker's temporary inability to follow the means by which every sight is seen. The speaker must learn, through faith, to trust that no beauty goes to "waste." The reader, like the speaker, must learn to see through the confusing rhyme shapes to see that every line finds its mate and that no rhyme goes wasted. In the penultimate stanza we find a line not rhymed until ten lines later—in the next and final stanza. The concord begins, "We want the faith that hath not seen" and concludes "All eyes shall see thee [earth] lost and mean" (119, 129). The good reader, like the speaker, learns that all beauties are "seen" just as all lines are rhymed, but that such concordance cannot be known by human sense alone. Eyes alone may see the earth "lost and mean," but a vision supplemented by faith will know Paradise. Likewise, ears alone can't catch a much delayed rhyme, but faithful reading will find it. The poem teaches, in an interplay between content and form, that the reader may extend her human senses with a sense of faith; its moral teaches that by believing all is ultimately sensed by God, we may cultivate an enhanced sensation.

This early creative use of irregular rhyme by Rossetti draws from a precedent of using delayed and less regular rhyme shapes to figure the trials and ultimate rewards of faith. Milton's lyric *Lycidas* uses progressively more regular rhyme shapes to signal a spiritual shift in the poem, from the speaker's hopeless

mourning to his spiritual reassurance.⁵⁵ But when Rossetti takes up this technique in 1853 she links it to questions of human sensation and its limits, an issue that became culturally pervasive as the decade wore on. Rossetti has not often been linked to contemporary interest in sensation, psychology or the power of mental force. However these fields, to which Rossetti was connected by personal and professional networks, provide important context for the cultural work of "Goblin Market," written in 1858 and published in 1862.

The 1850s were a major decade for the advancement of British psychology grounded in a new understanding of the human sensory system. An older philosophical tradition of the association of ideas, stretching back two centuries to Locke, was joined to more recent empirical investigations into human physiology in the works of Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer known as association psychology. Association psychology, especially in the comprehensive works of the 1850s, aimed to understand the mind through a materialist, associationist model, from its simplest parts (nerves, muscles, brain) to its most complex formulations (aesthetic, scientific, and moral principles). This materialist model had several significant consequences for the study of mind. First, questions of development over time became crucial to understanding mental

55 Milton's influence on Rossetti's poetry has long been noted; see Vejvoda for a review. Scholars have found particular Miltonic echoes in *Goblin Market's* female Christ figure (Vejvoda) and its catalogues of similes (Gray), but Rossetti's rhymes have not been read with Milton's. *Lycidas* "consists of eleven verse paragraphs, or strophes, each with an irregular rhyme scheme, although the last forms an ottava rima stanza" and includes "several unrhymed lines scattered across the poem" (MacKenzie 537). As MacKenzie summarizes, the poem is lyric of mourning interrupted by the response of Apollo: "the poet/shepherd's 'unceasing care' (line 64) is seen and recognized after all, and the poet does indeed participate in the oceanic eternal" (544). Yet after Apollo's answer, MacKenzie notes, the poet/shepherd returns to his bewailing "as if nothing of note had happened" (544). The significant difference is in "the extraordinary assurance of the verse from Apollo's speech forward" (544). Other scholars including Oras and Wittreich have also noted the progression towards more regular rhyme patterns in the poem.

faculties, since mental faculties were understood to be built up from numerous iterations of embodied actions, sensations and reactions. If the mind possessed no “innate ideas,” as Locke had claimed, 1850s associationists claimed to describe the complex process by which the body, nervous system, and mind acted together to form all ideas. Second, the mind became a distributed nervous system, unseating the old doctrine of “the *sensorium commune*, the cerebral closet, as the central seat of the mind” and replacing it with a vital, contingent, momentary, embodied dispersal of what Bain called nervous current (Masson “Bain” 218). David Masson, an acquaintance of Rossetti who reviewed Alexander Bain’s influential 1855 text, *The Senses and the Intellect*, summarized the new doctrine: “Our present insight enables us to say with great probability, no currents, no mind” (218).⁵⁶ If under Bain, the mind was equated to currents traversing the nervous system, and the source of nervous energy was attributed to nutrition absorbed and processed by the body, the third consequence of the new theory was that while the senses became a complex of sensory systems, the whole system was given a new self-powering sovereignty. The researches of association psychology therefore focused on individual development over time rather than lateral transmission of affect. Yet at the same time, empirical research

56 Rossetti first crossed paths with Alexander Bain in 1850-51 and she may have read a review of his first volume, *The Senses and the Intellect*, by David Masson in 1856. She met both men at the gatherings of artists and intellectuals held at the home of Mrs. Eliza Orme, to which Rossetti was invited and escorted by her brother William Michael during 1850 and '51 (Marsh 127). W.M. Rossetti recalls that it was there he met “in a minor degree” both Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer, and it was there that the Rossettis met Professor David Masson (*Some Reminiscences* 89-90). Christina Rossetti maintained her relationship with Masson during the ensuing decade. In early 1852 she took drawing lessons with Masson’s betrothed, the eldest Orme daughter Emily Rosaline (Marsh 171), and in late 1853 she wrote that she had received his wedding cards (*Letters* 76). After Masson became founding editor of Macmillan’s Magazine in 1859, Rossetti sent him her poems in 1861, citing their “personal acquaintanceship” (Letter to David Masson, 19 Jan 1861)

into sensation and the materialist models of mind inspired new interest in the capacity of the embodied mind to be affected.

A new sensationalism—different than the “sensationalism” derived from Locke’s doctrine that all ideas are formed from sensation or reflection—emerged in the culture of the 1850s and became dominant in the 1860s and 1870s. The sensationalism of sensation fiction and sensational events—concerned with the production of specific sensations in particular bodies—is generally located in the 1860s and earlier 1870s, but is connected to the 1850s through the sciences of physiology and the “spasmodic poem” that preceded the “sensation novel.” The “sensation novel” was named as such in Mrs. Oliphant’s genre-defining essay printed in *Blackwood’s* the month after Rossetti’s *Goblin Market and Other Poems* was published, in 1862. But, as Henry Mansel put it in another essay on the genre (printed in the *Quarterly Review*, 1863), “the sensation novel is the counterpart of the spasmodic poem” which had come before. Spasmodic poetry was, according to its critics, mainly interested in transmitting sensation or shock to its readers. But like sensation fiction, spasmodic poetry was a genre that organized the reception of much writing in its historical vicinity.⁵⁷ The 1855 poem *Maud*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (appointed poet laureate in 1850), was linked to spasmodic poetry through its “mad” protagonist and its experimentation in irregular rhyme and meter.⁵⁸ The poem comprised 28 sections, each in a unique meter and rhyme scheme, many of them irregular. This formally radical poem most likely had an influence on Rossetti, who began experimenting more

57 Jason Rudy makes the case for centering the spasmodic poetry in our understanding of Victorian poetry and its reception in *Electric Meters*.

58 J. Rudy 99-107.

liberally with her own irregular meter and rhyme following its publication, in the years from 1857-59.⁵⁹ The shock aesthetics, or what Jason Rudy calls “physiological poetics,” of *Maud* and the spasmodics were influential in terms of formal poetic experimentation. Rossetti was in touch with these developments formally but, intellectually, perhaps more aligned with contemporary writers and thinkers studying subtler forms of mental influence.⁶⁰

As Adela Pinch has shown, a diverse range of Victorian writers, from physicists to poets, were interested in the problem of the mind’s capacity to exert power or force over another mind. Pinch has recovered a range of work on this topic across intellectual sites in the Victorian period: from the nexus of philosophy and psychology to mesmerism, from poetry to the Society for Psychical Research. Her research shows that the kinds of affective influences that seemed almost too common or common-sensical to notice at the opening of this chapter received a fair amount of scholarly attention in the middle nineteenth century. Especially in the wake of the physics of electrical and magnetic fields, theories of mental action at a distance became unexceptional (Pinch 48-9). Much of this work took place later in the century, but Pinch shows that the mental force theories of Ferrier and the animal magnetism theories of mesmerists were influential in the 1830s and 1840s, and were reflected in the poetry of the middle century. Poets including Christina Rossetti used lyric address or apostrophe, “thinking in the second person,” to experiment with the power of thought to

59 Poems in irregular rhyme include “Spring,” “My Dream,” “Winter: My Secret” and “The Convent Threshold,” all published in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862).

60 Jamison argues that Rossetti developed a technique of “stealth” as a mode of poetic transgression in, a counterpoint to the techniques of “shock” also associated with Charles Baudelaire (6-7).

affect others and to model the ethical use of such powerful thinking (chap. 3).

This context is helpful for reading Rossetti's poem and its practical interest in influence. The theory of influence offered by the poem does not fit neatly into any one of these intellectual camps, but overlaps with all of them. Rossetti shared the association psychologists' interest in development and education, the sensationalists' interest in the transmission of sensation, and the mental force theorists' interest in intentional influence. However, Rossetti was original in her use of rhyme as an analog for and potential source of insight into the effects of influence. The irregular rhyme of "Goblin Market" draws from the tradition of faithful lyric ("Lycidas," "To what purpose") and of spasmodic first-person epic (*Maud*) yet is unique in that it is narrative rather than lyric, a poem of characters, relations and action that interact with and reflect shifting relations among rhymes lines. Here rhyme begins to work as a kind of experimental feedback for the changing relations within the plot, never settling into a predictable pattern but echoing the poem's changing configurations. The resultant, radically irregular rhyme was widely remarked upon by Rossetti's contemporaries. John Ruskin read the poem in manuscript and warned that no one would publish poetry so full of "quaintnesses and offenses" (qtd. in W. Rossetti *Ruskin*). After the book was published, the *Saturday Review* lamented Rossetti's "affectation in language and in rhythm," and advised her to recognize that "quaintness is not strength, and that it generally interferes with beauty" (596). Other magazines however praised the poem's distinctive style: the *Eclectic Review* noted that "Goblin Market" was "in verse remarkably fresh and free" (496) and the

Athenæum strongly praised the verses that, it claimed, “express both in essence and form the individuality of the writer” (557).

Modern scholarship has devoted less attention to Rossetti’s rhyme and formal innovations, but recent interest in historical formalism has prompted some investigations. A recent study by Anne Jamison has explored the intricacy and significance within what is often glossed as the simply “irregular” form of “Goblin Market.” Jamison’s book *Poetics en Passant* reads the shifting meter of “Goblin Market” as a proto-modernist collage that overlays “goblin metrics” (the “pulsing dactylic foot” heard in merchant street cries and nursery rhymes) with “modest maiden meter” (accentual-syllabics that suggest “ballad form or common measure”) (155-56, 158, 160). As Jamison shows, the aggression of goblin men and the modesty of maidens interpenetrate and resist each other at the level of meter, giving the poem a metrical complexity that compliments its action. “Composed of many prosodic systems interspersed, [the poem’s] collage of structures resolves itself into no single style, system, or story, just as the poem gives the tremendous impression of rhythm and sonority but adheres to no set metrical pattern or rhyme scheme” (Jamison 146). Jamison’s study devotes attention to the metrical patterns rather than rhyme schemes. Yet the interlocking rhyme systems of the poem are as complex, as intricate, and as significant as the metrical variation Jamison has elucidated.

II. Goblin Market

“Goblin Market,” as I read it here, is the story of Laura and how her changing relations to Lizzie, goblins, and Jeanie influence her affective states and

capacities. The poem's plot is a tale of temptation and redemption but also, as I emphasize, a tale of sensation lost and regained. The poem begins on a nightly visit to the glen where goblin men sell goblin fruit, and sisters Laura and Lizzie are called to "Come buy!" Lizzie resists the temptation and flees, but Laura buys with a lock of her hair and gorges on fruit. After this episode, Laura finds she can no longer see or hear goblin men and grows ill pining for their fruit. To save her sister, Lizzie returns to the glen, is attacked by goblins, and returns home smothered in fruit juices which Laura feeds on and revives, then faints. Lizzie tends to her until Laura wakes restored at morning. The relationship between Laura and Lizzie is clearly set up as the most important one in the poem, but also as one that is constantly shifting. Their states relative to each other pass through stages of distraction, separation, isolation, reciprocal attraction, and shared influence. In addition to the phases of their own relationship, they are subject to the influence of goblins and their fruits, and of the poem's other woman, Jeanie. My reading attempts to track these changing relationships and their effects, especially on Laura, through the action of the poem and in the texture of its constantly shifting rhyme. As in Rossetti's earlier work, the shapes that rhyming lines take literally figure for relationships, at other scales, of interest in the poem. Here, especially, configurations of rhyme compliment the interpersonal relationships constantly changing in this poem.

The poem's first two stanzas establish signature sounds and patterns for the goblins and the sisters, respectively. The stanzas are formally quite distinct, yet linked by the delayed rhyme that connects their first lines, "Morning and

evening” and “Evening by evening” (1, 32). The goblins’ characteristic repetitions are initially contrasted with the sisters’ near rhyme, but also linked to them and soon affecting them. The poem’s first stanza is dominated by the list, a form that proliferates in “Goblin Market,” as many critics have noticed. By the fifth line we are thrust among,

Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries, (5-10)

And the list goes on—for another four consecutive lines and another seven in the stanza. Sean C. Grass has argued that the “multiplicity and abundance” of this list and others in the poem register the overwhelming “variety of nature” which tempted and troubled Rossetti the nature-lover (363). Yet even in its multiplicity and variety, the list also has a homogenizing effect. The first stanza—which Grass notes includes twenty-nine fruits in its first twenty-nine lines—also includes only eight end-rhyme sounds in its total thirty-one lines (362). While the listing offers up endlessly different fruits—quinces, oranges, peaches; cherries, raspberries, mulberries—it also offers up always the same thing—fruits—with always the same final sounds. The stanza’s only unrhymed line, “Come buy our orchard fruits,” opens the goblin cry and hangs over the lists that follow. *Fruits* rhymes with the no other line-end but “lines up” with most of them, as most of them are fruits. The line serves as a heading, establishing the stanza’s “line” or orientation, if not its rhyme. The list, like the goblins, always points to fruits. The categorical parameter of the heading and the repetition of the list’s half-identical rhymes—

raspberries, mulberries, cranberries, dewberries—point to the core characteristic of the list: not its endless variation but rather its potential endlessness. Any additional fruit will add to the rhetorical force of the list, but no additional fruit can force its closure. If the list is the goblin’s “signature syntax,” as Jamison has suggested, their signature sound is repetition (Jamison 239n4). Their rhymes come in concords of three or more in close succession, repeating sounds as in their constant chorus of “come buy, come buy.” Like their fruit and their words, the goblins are all ostensibly different—“One had a cat’s face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat’s pace” (71-3)—yet all the same, echoing each other’s actions and words.

In the second stanza, sisters Laura and Lizzie are set up as similar but opposed in orientation, often in a relation of off rhyme. Like their alliterative and metrically equivalent names, Laura and Lizzie are nearly the same but never quite in line with each other in this early scene. Their dialogue forms a duet in which the lines of one only partially rhyme with the lines of the other:

[Laura:] “How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Thro’ those fruit bushes.”
“No,” said Lizzie: “No, no no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us.” (60-66)

While Lizzie’s line ending “No, no, no” rhymes on the final stressed syllable with Laura’s lines ending “grow” and “blow,” Lizzie’s line misses the double rhyme of the Laura’s iambs “must grow,” “must blow,” or even the extended near rhyme of her whole lines, “How fair the vine must grow,” “How warm the wind

must blow." Likewise, Laura's lines ending "luscious" and "bushes" form feminine rhymes with each other, but form only half-rhymes with Lizzie's feminine-rhymed endings "charm us" and "harm us." When lines describing the sisters do rhyme perfectly, it is only to describe their opposing actions and ultimate separation.

[Lizzie] thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger
Wondering at each merchant man. (67-70)

The sisters are set up in a relationship of off rhyme, lined up but not quite the same, the same but not quite in line. While the action of these lines stages their difference, the similarity in the lines' rhymes heightens that difference. Just like their names, sisters Laura and Lizzie are recognized as different because they are yet much the same.

Much scholarship on nineteenth-century sisterly relationships has established this arrangement of sameness within difference as the master trope of sisterhood. Michael Cohen begins his authoritative study *Sisters: Relation and Rescue in Nineteenth-Century British Novels and Paintings* with an analysis of the mirrored images of sisters sitting opposite each other in Augustus Egg's painting *The Travelling Companions*, dated the same year as "Goblin Market," 1862. All the sisterly stances Cohen introduces through an extended analysis of this painting—symmetry, asymmetry, likeness, unlikeness, twinning, equality, rivalry, containment, self-sufficiency, mirroring—are likewise enabled by rhyme. Indeed he writes that the "effect of twinning or partial symmetry [in Egg's painting] resembles the subtle effects of rhyme in verse: once we get past delight at the

likeness, we begin to see that it is only partial, and partial likeness draws attention to remaining *unlikeness*" (Cohen 16). Cohen's archive of nineteenth-century art includes Dante Gabriel Rossetti's frontispiece to "Goblin Market"—an engraving of the visibly similar Laura and Lizzie asleep, embracing, with the caption "Golden head by golden head." The caption comes from a point in the poem after Laura has lingered to taste goblin fruit then comes home to sleep beside innocent Lizzie. Cohen is discomfited by the image's mixed message, given the competing conventions of depicting women in "closeness, physical intimacy, and touching" and of depicting a fallen woman (i.e. a sexually impure woman, as Laura may be described at this point) as physically lower than, different from, or untouchable by others in the frame (86-89).

Helena Michie's work *Sororophobia* explains the seeming contradiction of this image and the stanza it illustrates. The two sisters are described in intimate sameness—"Golden head by golden head / ... / Like two blossoms on one stem / ... / Cheek to cheek and breast to breast" (184, 188, 197)—only after Laura's lingering and tasting has placed the difference of sexual impurity between them because, in Michie's reading, sisterhood is precisely the capacious trope that serves as "a structure for the containment and representation of sexual differences among women" in "Goblin Market" and other nineteenth-century texts (19).⁶¹ Sisterhood extends a sameness across (sexual) difference, forming a bond which does not homogenize the difference it contains and allows an

61 Michie's chapter, "'There Is No Friend Like a Sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference," also reads the sisterly relations in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and Willing and Rae's stage adaptation of *Jane Eyre*.

otherwise taboo intimacy.⁶² Like a rhyming concord of two, sisterhood preserves unlikeness even as it tunes in to the resonant same, often bringing together otherwise unlikely pairs. And in reading the way rhyme textures the shifting relationships among the sisters in “Goblin Market,” we may build on Michie’s work to look at the less structural, more contingent forms of difference at play between Laura and Lizzie.

Already in the second stanza, Laura and Lizzie’s tentative connection threatens to break apart. Not only are the sisters’ rhymes “off” with each other but their stanza is laced with unrhymed lines that threaten the fabric of rhyme itself. Seven unrhymed lines stand out in this stanza—more than in any other stanza—emphasizing the stark contrast in the sisters’ use of their senses. For example, “Laura bowed her head to hear,” “Lizzie covered up her eyes” (34, 50). Lizzie censors herself while Laura reports on the sights: “One hauls a basket / ... / One lugs a golden dish” (56, 58). Among the unrhymed lines are each sister’s desperate addresses to the other: “‘Oh,’ cried Lizzie, ‘Laura, Laura’”; “Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie” (48, 54). Their called-out names hang at line’s end (almost as if they would rhyme with each other) tangled among the stanza’s

62 Michie goes on to note that this arrangement usually involves an implicit pact of self-sacrifice in which neither sister will “develop all her potential” but both develop complementary selves (McNaron, qtd. in Michie 19). Michie cites the findings of Toni McNaron’s sociological study: “Either one sister encourages the other to play out some complementary self that she does not or cannot become, or forces around them are such that complementarity becomes the pattern within which they both act out their adult lives” (19). Sara Ahmed’s study of orientation, which informs my reading of “Goblin Market,” provides a framework for analyzing the smaller, more local movements that may ultimately be constructive of this family dynamic. Ahmed argues that the family investment in its “line,” the very figure of which suggests straightness (heterosexual) and sameness (reproduction), encourages sibling investment in fitting side by side within that line, choreographing complementary difference across a same-sex relation (79-92). Ahmed illustrates how such alignments are enforced in micro-adjustments of perception and orientation, such as when family elders see sons as small versions of their fathers or when the child learns to aspire toward a future that reflects his “background” (81-2, 90).

many other unrhymed loose ends, including the competing cry, "'Come buy,' call the goblins" (46) This general confusion of "loose ends" or unrhymed lines parallels the disconnection of Laura and Lizzie at this point. Their opposing orientations quickly escalate into complete separation.

Lizzie leaves Laura alone to face an onslaught of repetitive goblin rhyme.

The goblins approach Laura:

Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother,
One set his basket down,
One reared his plate;
One began to weave a crown
Of tendrils, leaves and rough nuts brown
(Men sell not such in any town);
One heaved the golden weight (93-102)

The goblins' signature sound of repetition characterizes these ten lines with only three end-rhymes, and the sounds influence Laura's own speech as she responds to their bid to "come buy." She begins with resolve, in studied rhymes of original sound, introducing to the poem the new rhyming ends, *-oin*, *-urse*, and *-either*.

Good folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either, (116-19)

But the sound of "either" will be revised when it slant rhymes in her succeeding line with *-ether*, a sound already used to connect the description of goblin fruits—"All ripe together / In summer weather" (15-6)—with that of sisters—"Crouching close together / In the cooling weather" (36-7). Laura continues,

And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather

Above the rusty heather. (120-22)

Her rhymes are revealed as unoriginal and she is caught, so to speak, with goblin sounds in her mouth. This contact is reenforced when Laura's own word *weather* is rhymed with the goblin-describing term *together*: "'You have much gold upon your head,' / They answered all together" (124-25). From sharing sounds it is a short fall to sharing fruit. Laura buys from them with a lock of golden hair, then sets to "suck[ing] their fruit globes fair or red" (128). In the thrall of the fruit Laura is reduced to repetitive, automatic action expressed in the infantilizing suck, repeating rhymes, and regular lines. While the narrator interjects with trochaic interruptions (italicized below), the lines describing Laura's action are in perfectly monotonous iambic tetrameter ending ever in the same sound:

Clearer than water flowed the juice;
She never tasted such before
How should it cloy with length of use?
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She sucked until her lips were sore; (131-36)

The repetition initially associated with the goblins is linked to Laura here. She has eaten of their fruit and fallen under their influence.

In the following stanza, Laura and Lizzie are reunited, but their distraction from each other is complete. Laura returns home, Lizzie greets her with "wise upbraidings," and Laura recounts her seductive sensations—yet each fails to hear the other. Lizzie speaks for roughly 20 lines, Laura interrupts—"Nay, hush, my sister"—then speaks for 20 lines (163-64), but neither responds to the other. The sisters perform a kind of duet, speaking past each other in two opposing monologues. Far from lining up, the sisters here diverge, pass without

comment, exerting no influence one on the other. In the stanzas that follow, this initial distraction and separation escalates further, for Laura, into complete isolation.

The temptation plot in which Laura sins and suffers is especially powerful in “Goblin Market” because the poem introduces the cautionary tale of Jeanie, a woman who ate of goblin fruits, pined away and died. Lizzie recalls this third woman when she meets Laura, fresh from her indulgence, at their garden gate.

Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met [goblin men] in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours? (147-52).

Jeanie, who “[f]ell sick and died” pining “for joys brides hope to have” (315, 314) is the figure of the fallen woman who haunts the poem and triangulates its “alternative possibilities of selfhood for women” (Gilbert and Gubar 564). Alison Chapman has called Jeanie the sisters’ “paradigm” and noted that she is “recalled” three times in the poem because she recalls the trebled figure of woman: the spiritually pure maiden she once was, the bride/mother she never could be, and the fallen woman she became (*Afterlife* 147).⁶³ The stanza that introduces Jeanie also abounds in triplets—three consecutive lines rhymed only with each other—a figure that becomes linked to Jeanie and the third possibility

63 This trebled structure of female characters and possibilities is also used in Rossetti’s unpublished short story *Maude* (1849-50), in which three female peers take three paths: Magdalen becomes Sister Magdalen, Mary is married, and Maude flirts with poetry then dies after a carriage accident. The three are established as the limits of feminine possibility in Maude’s adolescent imagination: she asks cousin Agnes, “if you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three ... merely as regards circumstances, would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?” (*Poems and Prose* 272).

of womanhood.⁶⁴

Jeanie as the third term motivates and threatens the poem's plot resolution which, according to conventional reading, restores the besmirched Laura if not all the way to maidenhood at least to a level of sexual-spiritual worth fit for a future bride. Yet the three-way connection embodied in the triplet rhymes stresses the ways in which maidenhood and marriage are dependent upon the third position of "fallen" woman. As Diane D'Amico has shown, many of Rossetti's "fallen woman" poems trouble the conventional opposition between virgin bride and fallen woman to instead assert their shared guilt in a system of sexual exchange ("Equal Before God"). While the fallen woman is fooled by a seducer, the bride consciously takes him as husband, ignoring his ruinous actions and entering into an exchange which values her own virginity while settling the other woman's worthlessness. The hardened brides in Rossetti's poems "Cousin Kate" or "An Apple-Gathering" disavow sympathy with the fallen woman whose speech nonetheless implicates them. Yet in "Goblin Market," Laura is ultimately saved because Lizzie refuses to disavow their mutual relation and dependency. Lizzie "could not *bear* / To watch her sister's cankerous *care* / Yet not to *share*" (299-301). These triplet lines establish an ethical imperative to feel for and with fallen sisters.

The triplet form limns those turning points in the poem which approach Jeanie's fallen fate but detour to ensure that neither sister becomes her. When Laura seems about to lose all sense and sensation as Jeanie did, "Lizzie weighed

64 The stanza includes four triplets (including the *flowers-bowers-hours* lines above) and one mono-rhymed sestet.

no more / Better and *worse*; / But put a silver penny in her *purse*, / Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of *furze*," to brave the goblin glen (323-25). There Lizzie, instead of Laura, is threatened with a fall as the goblins tempt her to "Sit down and *feast with us*, / Be welcome *guest with us*, / Cheer you and *rest with us*" (380-82). They try to dissuade her from escaping with goblin fruit, claiming that "Half their bloom would *fly*, / Half their dew would *dry*, / Half their flavour would pass *by*" (377-79). But Lizzie draws strength from a recollection of Jeanie, speaking back to the goblins in triplets that rhyme with her precursors' name, "If you will not sell me *any* / Of your fruits tho' much and *many*, / Give me back my silver *penny*" (386-88). The goblins respond to her willfulness with abuse: "[They] cuffed her and *caught her*, / Coaxed and *fought her*, / Bullied and *besought her*" (424-26). But Lizzie resists, and the threatening figure of Jeanie finally recedes in the poem's final triplet, fifty lines later, when Lizzie returns to save Laura. "Laura started from her chair, / Flung her arms up in the air, / Clutched her hair"—these lines of the poem's last triplet are the first signs of life in Laura, ending the dangerous period of her isolation.

If Jeanie's triplets, figurative of the third possibility for woman, threaten Laura's fate so too does Laura's increasing sensory isolation. In the middle section of the poem, even the sisters' physical closeness cannot penetrate Laura's affective distance. The morning-after stanza that follows the description of the sleeping sisters, "Golden head by golden head," is the first and only one in the poem comprised primarily of couplets: two lines side by side rhyming only with each other. The couplet suggests self-sufficiency, stability, and permanence—

aspirations of the couple form. Yet the couplet form is broken here in the lines beginning “Laura” and “Lizzie,” respectively. Though side by side, these lines reach across and past each other to find their rhymes (italicized below). The sisters, in their divided affective and sensory states, act as a couple but remain distracted.

Early in the morning
 When the first cock crow'd his warning,
 Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
 Laura rose with Lizzie:
 Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows,
 Air'd and set to rights the house,
 Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
 Next churn'd butter, whipp'd up *cream*,
 Fed their poultry, sat and sew'd;
 Talk'd as modest maidens should:
 Lizzie with an open *heart*,
 Laura in an absent *dream*,
 One content, one sick in *part*;
 One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
 One longing for the night. (199-214)

The earlier, closer configuration of off rhyme has here been sundered. Laura and Lizzie's lines, set amongst perfect couplets, emphatically do not rhyme, signaling the sisters' separation.

When the night Laura longs for arrives, the sisters venture to fetch water at the goblin glen where they were tempted the night before. But Laura finds, in a cruel reversal, that she can no longer see or hear the goblins that Lizzie refuses to look at or listen to. The narrator asks, “Must she no more such succuous pasture find / Gone deaf and blind?” (258-59). She loses all feeling—“Laura turned as cold as stone”—her vitality—“Her tree of life drooped from the root”—and her voice—“She said not one word in her heart's sore ache; / ... / So crept to bed

and lay / Silent" (253, 260, 264-5). This sensory deprivation continues "Day after day, night after night," prompting further decline and isolation. In each of the following three stanzas, Laura is described alone, with worsening symptoms: "sullen silence of exceeding pain," "hair grew thin and grey," "sunk eyes and faded mouth," "dwindling / [till she] Seemed knocking at Death's door" (271, 277, 288, 320-1). Her isolation or lack of relation is joined to her lack of sensation. The stanzas portray Laura as "cut off" in envelope rhyme patterns which never cross each other, as in the interlocking *abab*, but enclose each other in *abba* form.

She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,
Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat. (293-98)

Both the fifteenth stanza (quoted in entirety above) and the thirteenth use enveloping rhyme forms to illustrate Laura's isolation. Together they enclose a central stanza whose content and rhymes offer but ultimately revoke signs of life and returning sensation. Laura remembers her hoarded "kernel stone" and plants the seed in the hope of growing her own goblin fruit. But the seed, like Laura, cannot sense: "It never saw the sun, / It never felt the trickling moisture run" (286-87). And when Laura seems to taste and see, it is with distorted rather than restored senses.

... with sunk eyes and faded mouth
She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze. (288-92)

Laura is utterly isolated here, as the desert imagery and enclosed structure

suggests. Yet just as the “lily budding in a desert place” was ultimately seen by “other eyes than our’s,” in “To what purpose,” Laura’s suffering is always sensed by Lizzie. Aware of the threat of her sister’s ultimate fall, Lizzie will brave the goblin glen to save her sister.

The poem’s climax comprises six stanzas—three describing Lizzie’s experience, three describing Laura’s—in centripetal orientation around the sister-sister contact at its center. The climax thus has a doubled structure and a mirrored movement, from Lizzie to Laura, from the internal to the external to the internal. It is the most intense scene of affective connection in the poem, and enables both sisters to feel what the other feels. The movement begins in Lizzie’s bosom as she resists a goblin onslaught around her. While they “Scratched her, pinched her black as ink, / Kicked and knocked her, / Mauled and mocked her,” Lizzie shuts tight all her orifices and retreats within (427-9). She “laughed in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrugged all her face” (433-4). The movement ends in Laura’s bosom as “Swift fire spread thro’ her veins, knocked at her heart, / Met the fire smouldering there / And overbore its lesser flame” (507-9). In between these scenes, Laura and Lizzie meet at the level of flesh, sharing goblin juice between them. The movement thus progresses from Lizzie’s heart to Lizzie’s flesh to Laura’s flesh to Laura’s heart, with the scene of contact in the center.

The mirrored movement of the scene is enforced in doubled language, figures, and rhymes. Lizzie’s earlier experience is mirrored in Laura’s later painful pleasure. When the goblins attacked her,

Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrugged all her face,
And lodged in dimples of her chin,
And streaked her neck which quaked like curd. (430-36)

Laura, later licking that juice from Lizzie's dimples and chin, is described as her inverse image: she "gorged" and "leaped and sung" while "shaking" (510, 496, 491). If Lizzie was the picture of self-possession, Laura "Writh[ed] as one possessed" (496). The sisters' mirrored reactions are further described in parallel lists of similes, each 14 lines long. Lizzie is "Like a beacon left alone / In a hoary roaring sea," yet Laura is "Like a foam-topped waterspout / Cast down headlong in the sea" (412-3, 519-20); Lizzie is "Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree / ... / Sore beset by wasp and bee," while Laura is "Like a wind-uprooted tree / Spun about" (415-7, 517-8); Lizzie is "Like a royal virgin town / ... / Close beleaguered by a fleet / Mad to tug her standard down," but Laura is "Like the watch tower of a town / Which an earthquake shatters down" (418-21, 514-5). It is as if each sister's reaction can only be described in terms of the other's, in reframed images and reused rhymes. Laura and Lizzie each feel what the other feels and, in the moment of contact, literally feel each other.

As a juice-smearred Lizzie returns through the garden and approaches the sisters' home, she calls out for Laura to close the diminishing gap between them by joining flesh to flesh.

Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices

Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew. (465-70)

Each rhyme collapses distance and encourages contact. The inherent separation of “miss me” is resolved into the commanded closeness of “kiss me.” “Bruises” and “juices” bleed into each other as stains impressing the skin from inside and outside, and the skin’s “dew” is brought into contact with “you.” In the following stanza, Laura obeys Lizzie’s commands and “clung about her sister, / Kissed and kissed and kissed her” (485-6). The repetitive phrasing of Laura’s kissing echoes her earlier sucking to distraction of goblin fruit. But while that oral act plodded along in monotonous iambs toward dissipation (“She sucked until her lips were sore”) this act proceeds with trochaic urgency and no sign of satiety.

/ - - / - / - /
Shaking with anguish, fear, and pain
- / - / - | / - / - /
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth. (491-2)

The climactic scene of contact is also one of great poetic intensity.

Such passionate oral contact at the height of a scene organized by reciprocal action, mutual attraction, and rhythmic urgency has understandably generated many eroticized readings.⁶⁵ For example, Germain Greer wrote that Laura’s “salvation is literally that she makes love to her sister” (Greer qtd. in Sagan 68). Martha Vicinus notes that while most writing in the long nineteenth

65 The first reading of sexual or erotic content in this scene is in Jeanette Foster’s 1956 compendium *Sex Variant Women in Literature: A Historical and Quantitative Survey*; it resurfaces in Maureen Duffy’s *The Erotic World of Fairy* (1980) and Terry Castle’s *The Literature of Lesbianism* (2005). The long list of scholarship is paralleled by the list of illustrations that interpret the sisters’ climactic re-encounter as an explicitly sexual encounter (a list including Playboy magazine as well as art books). See Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, for the history of Goblin Market illustrations, including those which sexualize the narrative.

century used the trope of friendship to figure for lesbian love, “Goblin Market” is an exception that “portray[s] intensely eroticized sisterly love” (xxvi). And Sarah Annes Brown claims that in “Goblin Market”—more than in any other text in her survey of the “lesbian incest effect”—it is “possible to see lesbian incest (or something very like it) as a positive choice” (146). However, the sensual overindulgence at the center of “Goblin Market” is not exactly advocated as a “positive choice.” The choice is a risky, one-time, last resort means of restoring sensation—not an everyday means of directing it. Both sisters expand their senses in the climactic sequence, but do so at their peril. As soon as Lizzie “halted by the brook: / And for the first time in her life / Began to listen and look,” the goblins who “spied her peeping” laugh with malice. Twenty lines later they assault her: “Hugged her and kissed her, / Squeezed and caressed her” (348-9). Fifty lines later they attack: “Clawed with their nails, / ... / Tore her gown and soiled her stocking, / Twitched her hair out by the roots” (401-4). Lizzie’s sensual openness is a vulnerability that invites abuse, which she endures only in the hope that her sister’s senses may be restored.

Laura’s diminished and distorted senses are indeed restored, but through a likewise risky process that threatens to overwhelm her entirely. Laura first recovers her senses—she “started from her *chair*, / Flung her arms up in the *air*, / Clutched her *hair*”—in a final triplet that banishes the threat of Jeanie’s insensate fate (475-77). Next she recovers her voice to ask, “Lizzie Lizzie, have you tasted / For my sake the fruit forbidden?” (478-9). She regains her sense of touch as she clings to her sister and brings lips to kiss her. Her eyes revive and her taste

returns, and the sensory restoration is emphasized by reused rhyme words from the earlier contrasting scene of her hallucination. Earlier, Laura's "sunk eyes and faded mouth" met with "False waves in desert drouth" (288, 290); now real tears "Dropping like rain / After long sultry drouth" "Refreshed her shrunken eyes" as juice slakes her "hungry mouth" (489-90, 488, 492). But the intensification of Laura's sensation carries on without end. "Her lips began to scorch, / That juice was wormwood to her tongue" (493-4). The intensity overwhelms her and "Sense failed in the mortal strife: / ... / She fell at last; / Pleasure past and anguish past" (513, 521-3). Laura's recovery here is hardly assured or safe. The final line of the section asks, "Is it death or is it life?" (524). The sisters have been "turned on" sensually in this climactic scene, but the poem portrays the act as risky. Indeed, the poem advocates a different, subtler form of shared sensation in the following scene, which has received far less scholarly attention. The penultimate stanza of the poem—the final stanza and scene of the goblin tale—resolves the long plot of endangerment and restores Laura to a new state of faith-enhanced sensation. Under the careful influence of Lizzie, Laura not only recovers her senses but elevates them. The "absent dream" that began in the morning-after stanza finally concludes, and Laura "awoke as from a dream" to a new sense of the world enchanted.

The messy intensity of the climactic scene is tidied up here as loose ends of ostensibly unrhymed lines are tied to delayed rhymes in this stanza. The "juice that syrugged all [Lizzie's] face," having hung unrhymed beyond the goblin glen and all the way home now rhymes with Laura's "face," which Lizzie cools, "With

tears and fanning leaves" (529). Laura's unrhymed "shrunken eyes," having strayed, suffered, and finally learned to see, are finally rhymed with their reformed selves as "light danced in her eyes" (542). The unrhymed lines characteristic of the goblin glen and the sisters' early distraction are converted here into delayed rhymes, that trope of faith rewarded.

As the delayed rhymes come home in the penultimate stanza of "Goblin Market," Laura wakes to behold a re-enchanted world the likes of which she has not known in this poem. The natural world is suddenly endowed with more beauty than her wildest dreams. Her earlier fantasy of a goblin world—"Odorous indeed must be the mead / Whereon [goblin vines] grow, and pure the wave they drink / With lilies at the brink"—is overshadowed now by the poetry in her own garden (180-2).

But when the first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laughed in the innocent old way,
Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice; (530-39)

As Herbert Tucker writes, these lines are "like nothing else in 'Goblin Market,' but they do resemble a good deal of the best verse Rossetti went on to write" ("Rossetti's" 129). The dew-wet grass that seems at first to texture the "place" (along with "golden sheaves") takes on unexpected vitality as it *bows* in the enjambed continuation of its clause. The "morning" likewise shifts from containing the grass and sheaves to modifying the "winds so brisk to pass." The

rhyme scheme likewise surprises after the stanza begins *abba, cddc* (in lines preceding those quoted above) then returns to *d* in the ninth line's "sheaves."

Moreover, as Tucker beautifully explains,

The chastity of diction, the easy rightness of iambic pace within a very liberal handling of the line, the only slightly heightened density of verbal texture, and at last the lung-cleansing gamble of "new buds with new day / Opened of cup-like lilies"—a bold art syntax that Victorians were no likelier than you and I to use in speech, ever; a crisp farewell in itself to naive orality—all these mark a poem that has grown up, converted to a simplicity no longer childish. ("Rossetti's" 129-30)

The poem has indeed converted, progressed finally into sensation enhanced by faith, sensitive to a spiritual beauty in the simple sights of the garden. This conversion is effected in Laura and enabled by the patient influence of Lizzie beside her. That is, this final harmony is achieved not because of the sensational climax but because of the subtle influence, following that climax, of Lizzie on Laura in a long night of patient care. With sensitive attention Lizzie monitors her sister for signs of vitality—"Counted her pulse's flagging stir, / Felt for her breath"—not with sensuous interest in Laura's body itself, but to guide her sister out of her dream and back to life. "That night long Lizzie watched by her"—not *watched* her—in a side-by-side orientation that looks ahead and puts the sisters in train for the shared sensation of the morning (525).

This final form of influence—a side by side, shared orientation, ultimately advocated by the poem—was also a basis of Rossetti's work at the St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary in Highgate, where she worked during the time in

which she composed “Goblin Market.”⁶⁶ “Sister Christina,” as she was known there, visited the home to devote time to the “fallen women” who lived there (Marsh *Christina* 221). According to the clergymen, “sisters” were wanted by the male clergy as a class of mediators who could go among the women penitents in intimate mingling. The sisters’ connection with the penitents depended both on their sameness—“What the Clergy could not do, they could; the very sameness of sex would inspire confidence and trustfulness”—and upon their difference—sisters must be “not merely kind, but holy; not merely sympathising, but staid” (Armstrong 9, 8). Reverend John Armstrong, a prominent figure in the early penitentiary movement,⁶⁷ wrote:

By [Sisters and penitents] living together, we can only hope to destroy in the penitent’s mind the idea of being watched and spied into; the Sisters cease to be viewed as inspectors, ever looking in to see how things are going on, and are regarded as the elders of the house, dwelling naturally with the younger on terms of love. (10)

The Sisters’ presence attains a naturalness in the shift from looking *at* the penitents to looking *with* them, and “sitting with them, reading with them, living with them” (Armstrong 8).

This intimate, side-by-side contact was designed precisely to influence the senses of the penitents, who according to the clergy suffered from “thorough derangement of the nervous system, and hence the fitful and fluctuating character of the mind” (Armstrong 14). Their nervous system and mind would be brought into line by Sisters “directing and controlling their conversation,

66 The poem and Rossetti’s work at Highgate have often been linked. For example, D’Amico suggests that the penitents inspired the poem and Bentley argues that Rossetti read it to them.

67 D’Amico *Christina Rossetti* 105.

moving about them like a moral atmosphere, acting on them in many ways of indirect as well as of direct influence” (J. Armstrong 9). The investigation of indirect and direct influence (to cheer, fetch or lift, to strengthen whilst one stands) was therefore of particular interest to Rossetti not only as a poet but also as a religious educator. She aimed in her devotional work to achieve that form of influence portrayed between Lizzie and Laura in the final scene.

III. Conclusion

Rossetti remained invested in various forms of religious education throughout her career. Though she worked at Highgate only until 1864 or 65,⁶⁸ she published poetry for children and devotional prose for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) until the end of her life. She also continued her own religious education, always seeking to better sense the spiritual import of the things of this world, as recorded in the 1884 text *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*. This devotional work, published by SPCK, reflects the diary structure of the *Book of Common Prayer*, “providing a devotional prose passage or poem for each day of the Christian calendar year” and echoes the question and response style of liturgical tradition (Roe 133). It records Rossetti’s interpretations, or readings, of parables provided by Scripture and by ordinary life. The text is therefore shaped by the typological reading strategies Rossetti absorbed from the Tractarian and Oxford Anglo-Catholic movements.⁶⁹ However, *Time Flies* is not only interested in

68 Marsh xii.

69 In the typological tradition, the Old Testament is read for symbolic or typological precursors of the New Testament, just as the things of this world are read as symbols bearing Christian significance. See Roe, 156-65, on typology in *Time Flies*; see Mary Arsenau, 96-135, on the typological structure Rossetti’s poetry collections including *Goblin Market and Other Poems*.

the proper readings of spiritual symbols, but also equally interested in misreadings, their corrections and the conditions which enable or deter both. In this late work, Rossetti continued to explore the ways in which interpersonal influence may affect what one is capable of sensing.

One exemplary entry, quoted in its entirety here, illustrates the way in which *Time Flies* continued to explore interpersonal influence as a factor in achieving sensation enhanced by faith.

A friend once vividly described to me how in a country walk he had remarked cobwebs shaped more or less like funnels or tunnels, one end open to the road, while deep at the other end lay in wait the spider.

I walked a little about the same country, and failed to observe the spider. Fortunately for me I was not a fly.

The spider was on the alert in his sphere, my friend was on the alert in his higher sphere; I alone, it would seem, was not on the alert in either sphere.

If we turn all this into a parable, and magnify the spider to human or superhuman scale, what must become of the wayfarer who strolls along not on the alert in any sphere? (310)

The wayfarer “not on the alert in any sphere” serves here, like Jeanie, as an invented warning. Rossetti as narrator puts herself in the fictional role of ignorant wayfarer—“I alone, it would seem, was not on the alert in either sphere”—but the fiction of this role shows through. The narrator is not simply “not on the alert,” for the friend and his vivid description have sensitized the narrator to the phenomena of spiders lying in wait at the end of funneled webs. If the narrator can fail to observe the spider it is only because the narrator knows it is there. Furthermore, the narrator here takes the place of the friend to the

reader, providing a story that turns her on to things unseen yet right before her. And, “magnify[ing] the spider to human or superhuman scale,” the narrator encourages the reader to apply her newly awakened senses to her own sphere. It is still however the role of the “friend”—the friend who like a sister alerts one when she’s not on the alert—that crucially enables the processes of sensitization.

This brief reading may illustrate that the questions Rossetti pursued in “Goblin Market” and her earlier work were not exhausted but were continuously present in her long and prolific career. To conclude, I briefly ask how this reading of Rossetti might speak back to the scholarly writing on Rossetti during the past several decades and on “Goblin Market” in particular. The critical “recovery” of Christina Rossetti has also entailed the recovery of obscured layers of meaning in her masterpiece: the biographical backstory, the psychic drama, the social critique. For example, Mona Losk Packer argues that “Goblin Market” is a “biographical” poem about Rossetti’s secret and unrealized love for William Bell Scott (rather than one about her unrealized love for Collinson, an argument that had already been made by Violet Hunt). Winston Weathers argues that Laura and Lizzie are projections of a divided self sexually repressed. Terrence Holt argues that “Goblin Market” interrogates the woman’s, and the woman artist’s, ambivalent relation to the market. These representative readings have been valuable and generative; they teach us that the poem negotiates lived experience, enacts a psychic drama, and reflects historical subject formation. But all have ignored the sisterly relation at the poem’s center by collapsing the two sisters into one, whether that one is Rossetti herself, the female psyche, or the Victorian

woman.

While the first readings of "Goblin Market" treated the sisters as one, Dorothy Mermin corrected this critical tendency in 1982 by emphatically reading the sisters as two in her article, "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market.'" "By turning the two sisters into parts of one person," Mermin explained, "[earlier readings] minimize or distort the central action in which one sister saves the other; ... they ignore the energy, triumph, and joy of the poem; and they give insufficient weight to the ending" ("Heroic Sisterhood" 107). Mermin's correction authorized new directions in feminist criticism of the poem: on the one hand an exploration of female-female relations—feminist, sexual, and familial—and on the other hand a feminist critique of goblin relations. Mermin argues that Laura and Lizzie take control of the male sexuality that would control them by making art from their goblin encounters in a self-sufficient world without (goblin) men. Sarah Annes Brown argues that the sisters' refusal to compete for male favor and their choice to love each other produces a "lesbian incest effect" that valorizes same-sex love. Jeanie Watson argues that the poem enacts the family dynamic in which sisterly self sacrifice is demanded for family coherence. These representative studies of female community are balanced by analyses of goblin relations, begun in 1990 by Terrence Holt and Elizabeth Campbell. Holt argues that the gendered determinations of the market objectify Laura and Lizzie and undermine female authority. Campbell argues that the poem's domestic sphere offers an alternative, female economics which escape the market logic of scarcity and self-destruction. Some of the best readings of "Goblin Market" have

followed in this vein, and cleared ground for studies which historicize the poem in other contexts of commodities and consumption.⁷⁰ Yet, this often exciting work turns away, once again, from the poem's own insistence on the importance of the sisterhood at its center.

This back and forth adumbrates a deeper impasse between social critique and psychoanalysis in feminist criticism. Concluding her study of poetry by Rossetti (including "Goblin Market") and Emily Dickinson, Cora Kaplan explained in 1979, "This group of lyrics pierces to the root of a particularly painful, unresolved contradiction in feminist theory—the contradiction between progressive social struggle and the recalcitrant female psyche" (78). Kaplan names the problem—psychoanalytic criticism may reify the female psyche and ignore social determinations of the feminine—but at the same time she reinscribes the problem by folding this *narrative* poem into the tradition of *lyric*. Likewise, when Gilbert and Gubar define the aesthetics of renunciation, through a reading of "Goblin Market," as "passionate renunciation of the self-assertion lyric poetry traditionally demands" they demand a self-assertion this *narrative* poem never promises (564). Misreadings of the poem as lyric explain the tendency to read two sisters as one self and support the picture of Rossetti as a poet struggling against and within the conventions of sentimental verse.⁷¹

Reading the poem as it insists, however, as a lesson in sisterly relations, enables

70 For example, Rickard Menke, "The Political Economy of Fruit"; Megan Norcia, "'Come Buy, Come Buy': Cristina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and the Cries of London"; and Maria LaMonaca, "'Hoc est corpus meum': Aurora Leigh, Goblin Market, and Transubstantiation." Some of the best readings in this vein include essays by Herbert Tucker and Elizabeth Helsinger.

71 This reading of the poet, best realized in Alison Chapman's *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti*, is extremely useful for understanding Rossetti's persona and much of her writing. But the long narrative poem "Goblin Market" allows us to examine other aspects of Rossetti's work.

us to see that this poem is more sensational than sentimental.

If Rossetti's best readers cannot agree on whether to read *Laura and Lizzie* as two or as one, it is because "Goblin Market" is especially interested in the ways in which each one is influenced by and therefore inherently connected to the other. Rather than reading this poem as lyric, I have here attempted here a "lyrical reading" in the sense advocated by Prins and Jackson: that is, a reading which assumes that poetry, even lyric, is not a spontaneous expression of selfhood but rather goes through the motions of historical subject formation, registering and troubling the forces which contain selfhood at the level of form. Rossetti's own studied persona as a pious poetess has made it difficult for critics to connect her to the historical forces that affected her.⁷² Indeed, recent critics who connect Rossetti to her contemporary concerns admit of a special resistance to their work.⁷³ In staying close to Rossetti's poetic form and her innovations in irregular rhyme, I join critics such as Herbert Tucker and Anna Jamison, advocating for a recognition of Rossetti's poetics as both highly original yet completely of its time. Rossetti's experiments in rhyme evince a sophisticated interest in the possibilities of resonance and interpersonal influence, possibilities still of interest to scholars in affect studies and poetics today.

72 Alison Chapman argues that this persona is an artistic creation of Rossetti's own making.

73 Herbert Tucker finds the tropes and trappings of advertisement throughout, and Anne Jamison finds a hybridization of high and low forms that prefigures modernist collage. Both scholars anticipate resistance to their readings. Tucker asks, "Why not credit the poet with knowing this as well as we do? We would extend such credit in a heartbeat to a poem by her brother" ("Rossetti's" 130). Jamison comments, "The most curious experience of writing this book has been the consistency with which it has generated its own range of shock reaction" (215)

Chapter Three

Sexual Evolutionary: Algernon Swinburne's Trans Poetics

[T]he fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must be an intellectual hermaphrodite.

Robert Buchanan⁷⁴

I, like many transsexuals, may desire some mythic wholeness, but what is truly intact for me, what I live, what I must be part of, is a body pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history, and bone.

Eva Hayward⁷⁵

This chapter argues that the poetics of Algernon Charles Swinburne has an evolutionary quality. His poetry, written in the wake of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), embodies the radical claims of that text: that all evolved forms are contingent, variable, formed in concert and formed from past forms. I read Swinburne's 1866 poem "Hermaphroditus" as not only a poem about a dual-sex figure but also an experiment in language-as-material, subject to the same laws and processes as the flesh, an experiment that shows how the material of language may offer intellectual tools for thinking about the flesh. As I hope to show, my reading across language and biology as two heterogeneous fields in homologous processes is in touch with mid-nineteenth-century developments in evolutionary theory, which were heavily influenced by theories of linguistic evolution,

74 *The Fleshly School of Poetry*, 335.

75 "More Lessons from a Starfish," 74.

developed in comparative philology. Furthermore, I draw from “new materialist” studies of the body to demonstrate the ways in which language and biology may be alike, not only in that they share heuristics developed in the nineteenth century, but also because they are elaborated in co-extensive fields and mechanically similar components. This argument owes much to the thinking of Elizabeth Grosz, who has returned to the writings of Charles Darwin in recent years to rethink, among other things, the relationship it posits between nature and culture, and the resources it offers for thinking about the generation of the new in the world. In Darwin’s *Origin*, Grosz writes:

Culture cannot be seen as the overcoming of nature, as its ground or mode of mediation, the representational form that, through retrospection, produces the natural as its precondition. According to Darwinian precepts, culture is not different in kind from nature. Culture is not the completion of an inherently incomplete nature (this is to attribute to Man, to the human, and to culture the position of destination of evolution, its telos or fruition, when what Darwin makes clear is that evolution is not directed toward any particular goal). Culture cannot be viewed as the completion of nature, its culmination or end, but can be seen as the ramifying product and effect of a nature that is ever-prodigious in its techniques of production and selection, and whose scope is capable of infinite and unexpected expansion. (30-31)

Grosz’s writing on Darwin is crucial in recovering the radicalism of his project and his premises that life forms are contingent, mutually dependent and variable. This project was in fact quite a threatening one. Grosz writes that Darwin’s “work develops an antihumanist—that is, a broadly mechanical or fundamentally mindless and directionless—understanding of biological dynamics which refuses to assume that the temporal movement forward can be

equated with development or progress” (17-18). However, Darwin’s work immediately occasioned and galvanized efforts to argue that temporal movement forward was progressive, that evolution had a humanistic telos, and that man in his diversity revealed the traces of that uneven progress. Darwin’s *Origin* was a major force in spurring a reactionary reverse discourse on man and the boundaries of the human, a discourse that not only made man a species, but looked for distinctions to taxonomize the subtypes of man.

One site of such discourse was sex, the understanding of bodily sex and how it is formed. Darwin’s work destabilized even this by drawing heavily from researches into plant hermaphroditism and noting the anatomical vestiges of secondary sex characteristics in the human, which suggested a hermaphrodite past and, given the nature of variation, hermaphroditic potential. As I argue, this development may be productively read with the simultaneous discourse on “the hermaphrodite,” a sexual type increasingly understood to be rare and primitive. However, in this chapter I look back to the extended moment in the 1860s when these possibilities were simultaneously alive, and captured in the poetry of Swinburne. His “Hermaphroditus” is not only a dramatic-lyric love song to the dual-sex figure but also a linguistic investigation of the processes, linguistic and biological, that have created the bisexual species of man,⁷⁶ with the possibilities for various sexual embodiments in any single body. I argue that this material, evolutionary version of hermaphroditism, is a useful intellectual tool for today’s trans theory, especially as it increasingly looks to the biological and the material

76 Here I mean “bisexual” in the biological sense which describes a species containing two (rather than one, or more than two) sexes.

for ways to think about fleshly embodiment.

I. Evolutionary Poetics

To say that Swinburne has an evolutionary or rudimentary poetics, I mean to convey that Swinburne's poetry plays with properties of language that belong to language by virtue of its historically accreted forms and its capacities for unpredictable variation. Indeed, some of Swinburne's best readers have already elucidated the ways in which his poetry incorporates fragments of past forms and generates infinite mutations.⁷⁷ Here I wish to point especially to the connections between these qualities of Swinburne's poetics and contemporary discourses of evolution, in both the linguistic and the natural sciences.⁷⁸ In the poems of his 1866 collection, *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne explored both realms, and I argue that his poetry emphasized homologous connections among forms and processes as they occur in culture and nature. Cultural and natural evolution were already inherently linked, for Darwin's theory of descent with modification was modeled on theories of linguistic change from the field of comparative philology. But Swinburne recombined these realms in the 1860s, following the publication of *Origin of Species* and its concomitant introduction of a destabilizing potential into all evolving forms.

As Gillian Beer has shown, Darwin's theory of evolution imported its

⁷⁷ See Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, chap. 3, and Jerome McGann, "Introduction."

⁷⁸ Linguistics scholar Max Müller made the argument that the study of language ought to be removed from the historical sciences and included among the physical sciences, for language is subject to "that modification which takes place in time by continually new combinations of given elements, which withdraws itself from the control of free agents, and can in the end be recognised as the result of natural agencies," as is for example the "crust of the earth" (*Lectures* 66).

models and methods from the comparative linguistics Darwin had read as early as the 1830s (“Darwin” 102). The premise of a single progenitor (language) was originally offered by William Jones, theorizing a common, extinct “mother tongue” from which Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin had sprung (Beer 107). The methodology of synthesizing “fundamental *laws*” in the face of incomplete “material *evidence*” was provided by Jacob Grimm, and Franz Bopp “provided a programme of linguistic research which would analyse the grammatical structures of several languages, comparing their morphology and illustrating the common laws of change” (Beer 108). Jerome McGann has shown that Swinburne was exposed to these proto-evolutionary methodologies through Max Müller, Professor of Modern European Languages at Oxford, while Swinburne was an undergraduate in the late 1850s (“Swinburne” 286-90). In the 1860s, we still find echoes of Müller in Swinburne, who claims in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* that “suffering” and “passion” are indeed “the same thing and the same word.” This capacious sense of the “same word” is characteristic of Müller’s deep etymologies:

In the same manner [that] the Latin name for money, *pecunia*, was derived from *pecus*, cattle; the word *fee* [...] was in Old English *feh*, and in Anglo-Saxon *feoh*, meaning cattle and wealth; for *feh*, and Gothic *faihu*, are really the same word as the Latin *pecus*, the modern German *vieh*. (*Lectures* 239-40)

Swinburne not only absorbed these concepts from the accomplished linguist Müller; indeed Swinburne was also a linguistic scholar in his own right who knew intimately Greek, Latin, Italian, French and English, and “composed as easily in French as in English, and nearly as easily in Greek Latin and Italian”

(McGann, "Introduction" xv).⁷⁹ Through his extensive study of ancient and modern languages and literatures, Swinburne commanded an archive of extinct and extant forms to rival Darwin's knowledge of biology. Many contemporaries remarked on Swinburne's almost preternatural powers of recall, "his incredible memory and knowledge of literature, classic, mediaeval, and modern; his faculty of reciting a play of Sophocles or a play of Shakespeare, forward or backward, from beginning to end; or Dante, or Villon, or Victor Hugo" (Adams 140).⁸⁰ Swinburne's poetry likewise tended to recall and reanimate older, originary forms, creatively deploying the deep history of words and poetic forms. If, as Müller wrote in 1856, "Language has been called fossil poetry. But [...] the artist does not know that the clay which he is handling contains the remnants of organic life," Swinburne was the rare artist who knew ("Comparative" 32).

Poems and Ballads knowingly revives long-dead forms and explores the transmutation of language through a kind of evolutionary poetics. The verses revive classical meters—Sapphics, hendecasyllabics—and adapt modern meters—the *Rubaiyat* stanza and *Praed* meter—to develop new, hybrid forms (Saintsbury 215-17). Yopie Prins has examined especially how Swinburne's verse incorporates fragments of Sappho not as recognizable pieces but in a Sapphic style that performs further fragmentation (*Victorian Sappho* ch. 3). Several

79 Swinburne's Latin compositions include poetry written as an undergraduate; his French compositions include a novella and a significant of personal correspondence.

80 Henry Adams, who recorded Swinburne's impressive recall, admitted that "no number of centuries could ever educate him to Swinburne's level" (142-3). (McGann also recounts this example, "Introduction" xix-xx.) Swinburne's friend and biographer Edmund Gosse also wrote of the poet's seemingly supernatural access to the book of history. In Gosse's account a transfixed Swinburne, with "occasional tremors through his limbs," would intone, "Down all the vista of literary history it is impossible to see a figure, etc. etc.' almost as though he were reading out of a book; and then he would turn to recite with an almost excruciating ardour some lines of Aeschylus or Marlowe, or a French lyric" ("Swinburne's" 233-4).

scholars have adumbrated an evolutionary aesthetic in Swinburne's later work. For example, Ysrael Levin argues that Swinburne's 1880 poem *By the North Shore* develops a vision of "ecological regeneration" in which "struggle and destruction ultimately enable the world [...] to sustain itself" (Levin 71). Jerome McGann argues that Swinburne's 1871 poem "Hertha" embodies the "living reality" of evolutionary ideas elsewhere explained "by the prose minds of Darwin and Huxley and Tyndall" ("Swinburne" 286). These are but a few examples from an archive of scholarship that argues for Swinburne's evolutionary poetics, mostly focusing on work after his first collection.⁸¹ Here I want to show that, as early as in *Poems and Ballads*, which was composed from 1858 to 1865, Swinburne's poetics emphasized the continuity between evolutionary processes linguistic and organic.

Swinburne's collection concludes with a poem of dedication⁸² that describes the preceding verses through a series of naturalistic images. The verses are not only made natural through metaphor, but are furthermore imagined as simultaneously "old" and "young" in a way homologous to organic bodies. The poem begins with the following stanza.

The sea gives her shells to the shingle,
The earth gives her streams to the sea;
They are many, but my gift is single,
My verses, the firstfruits of me.

81 For example, McGann argues that Swinburne's poetry "imitates life" and "suggest[s] that language itself, as it were, possesses within itself an infinite capacity for mutation and transformation" ("Introduction" xxiv); Thomas Brennan argues that Swinburne's tributes to Baudelaire do not displace the older poet but revive and incorporate his poetic body into Swinburne's own poetic corpus; Sarah Eron argues that, in Swinburne's verse, "natural forms themselves change shape; they emerge and reemerge, are sculpted, remolded, and reborn" (293).

82 "Dedication 1865." The collection is dedicated to Swinburne's friend the artist Edward "Ned" Burne-Jones.

Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf,
Cast forth without fruit upon air;
Take rose-leaf and vine-leaf and bay-leaf
Blown loose from the hair. (1-8)⁸³

The contrast established in the third line, between the “single” gift of Swinburne and the “many” givings of earth and sea, seems at first to set up a dichotomy between the complexity of the natural world and the simplicity of this verse. But this ostensible contrast elides a deeper connection that is established at the same time. “Verses” (line 4) are rhymed internally with “earth gives” (line 2) and described as “firstfruits,” an offering born of the land. Furthermore, “verses” and “firstfruits” are plural, complicating the earlier statement they modify, “my gift is single.” What does this single plurality mean? In a dialect of Northumberland, Swinburne’s ancestral home, *a single* means a “handful or small bundle of gleanings,” that is, of corn or other crops felled and left by reapers (*OED*). In much of what follows, in this poem, Swinburne’s verses are described as gleanings: “Dead fruits,” “scattered,” “fell,” and “Long left among idle green places, / [...] gathered but now among men” (14, 17, 18, 20-1). Verses as gleanings, however, is in contrast to verses as first fruits, the earliest crop picked as an offering long before harvest. The poem insists that they are paradoxically both, “the green leaf and the grey leaf” (5). As the poem explains, the verses that were earliest picked are now the oldest, while the most mature works are yet green: “For the youngest were born of boy’s pastime, / The eldest are young” (47-48). Yet while individual verses vary in relation to these temporalities, the whole of the collection—the “single” plural “gift” of the verses—incorporates all

83 Unless otherwise noted, citations of Swinburne’s poetry are from the edition *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, edited by Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh.

of these temporalities. The collection is like a bed in which fallen leaves fertilize new growth.

The sense of “single” that means gleanings, grounded in a dialect of Swinburne’s Northumberland origin, is suggestive for this poem that traffics in metaphors of fruit and reaping. But another sense of “single” is suggestive for this poem that closes a collection of evolutionary verse. In the poem’s third line, “single” is end-rhymed with “shingle,” the mix of stone, sand and shell that falls from sea and streams to form the sea floor. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that although this word’s origin is obscure, it may have a so-called “echoic origin” from the word chink. That is, the chinks or cracks in sea shells cleave and fall chinkling to the sea-floor forming shingle (chingle). As “single” echoes “shingle” in this poem, might we read *single* as a parallel, echoic form from *sing*, as a nonce word for a fossil bed of fragments of song—an organic archive in which old verse forms support new life? This would indeed describe Swinburne’s collection of verseforms young, old, old made new, and new grown from old. Of course, this sense of *single* does not exist in the language, but only in the same way that the sense of *shingle* formed in the sixteenth century from an echo of “chink” did not exist in the language before it was formed. By staging the possibility for such a sense to form in this poem, however, Swinburne’s verse insists that we think together the processes of organic, linguistic and cultural change. Müller posited that the process of linguistic change ought to be called “growth” because it was the “result of natural agencies” (*Lectures* 66). For Müller, this premise grounded a research project of reconstructing the past course of lost

languages. For Swinburne, it grounds an artistic project of testing the liveness of extant language in the present, exploring the unpredictability of its next adaptation. That linguistic and cultural fields would forever generate new forms was, for Swinburne as for Darwin, part of their beauty.

In the conclusion to *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne adopted the rhetoric of Darwin's *Origin of Species* to argue for the unfettered development of poetic art. In a passage that echoes Darwin's famous concluding image of the entangled bank, Swinburne pleaded that art be allowed to grow freely, to develop according to the laws of use and disuse, and to be spared the artificial selection processes of domestication. Swinburne cautiously hoped for a future in which England would value poetry and desist from censoring art through a moralistic review culture. He prophesied that imagined future:

Then all accepted work will be noble and chaste in the wider masculine sense, not truncated and curtailed, but outspoken and full-grown; art will be pure by instinct and fruitful by nature, no clipped and forced growth of unhealthy heat and unnatural air; all baseness and all triviality will fall off from it, and be forgotten; and no one will then need to assert, in defence of work done for the work's sake, the simple laws of his art which no one will then be permitted to impugn. (23)

Swinburne's language reflects the language of natural selection and artificial selection, or variation under domestication, found in Darwin's *Origin* and in broader discourse. The "clipped and forced growth of unhealthy heat and unnatural air" that truncates the growth of art borrows imagery from the horticultural practice of "forcing" fruits to grow beyond their season.

Swinburne's more approving language echoes the terms of natural selection, the "laws" of use and disuse that Darwin details in his study. And Swinburne's

closing syntax echoes, in its rhythm and periodic structure, the final passage of *Origin* in which Darwin invites the reader to “contemplate an entangled bank” teeming with plants, birds, insects and worms, and “to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us” (489). Having reached the end of a volume whose purpose is to delineate these laws, Darwin concludes on a note of wonder, claiming that there is “grandeur in this view of life,” for it enables us to see how “from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved” (490). Darwin delays the verb “evolved” in the closing periodic clause, withholding the means of production and letting the reader linger among the raw fecundity of nature. Swinburne compounds clause upon clause, but delays mention of the “simple laws of his art” to protect those laws in the final modifying clause. Swinburne’s final plea assumes the operation of homologous laws in the evolution of life and of cultural forms—laws which need only be left to their natural course in order to thrive.

By arguing that Swinburne employs Darwinian language in this 1866 pamphlet and an evolutionary aesthetic in poetry composed during the preceding years, I am dating the poet’s engagement with Darwinian theory well before more well-known encounters in the 1870s and 80s. As Gowan Dawson has shown, Swinburne’s *Songs Before Sunrise* and Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, both published in 1871, were implicitly associated with each other in the periodicals, reviewed often in the same language and once in the same issue of the *Edinburgh*

Review.⁸⁴ By the end of that decade, in an 1877 essay, mathematician W. K. Clifford quoted from Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* to illustrate the "way in which freedom, or action from within, has effected the evolution of organisms," and an 1879 retrospective stated that Clifford considered Swinburne "the prophet, of evolution" (Clifford 426, Mallock 483). But Jonathan Smith has pointed out that Swinburne was in conversation with Darwinian issues already in the early 1860s. Smith has focused on "The Sundew," an 1862 poem on an animate plant, *Drosera rotundifolia*, that "blurred the seemingly firm boundary between plants and animals" and was later determined by Darwin to be insectivorous (Smith 141). I follow Smith in arguing that Swinburne was already in touch with evolutionary discourse in the early 1860s. This argument is crucial to my reading of "Hermaphroditus," for I wish to show that Swinburne was at the crux of discourses on hermaphroditism from both anthropological science and evolutionary theory.

The evolutionary poetics that characterize Swinburne's first published collection evince a knowledge of evolutionary theory as it functions not only in comparative philology but also in natural science, and an insistence on thinking these processes of evolution together. Both language and the living organism are simultaneously old and young, composed of vestiges of the past yet on the brink of the future, with the potential to become other through spontaneous change. As we will see, this conception of the body has consequences for bodily sex which on this model, becomes less of a stable taxonomic identity, and more of a time-bound, incomplete, mutable characteristic.

84 See Dawson, 46-56.

II. Victorian Hermaphroditism

The history of the “nineteenth-century hermaphrodite,” as we know it, is a partial history. The story has often been told through the discourse of sexual science, following the narrative put forth by Michel Foucault in his introduction to the *Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. This narrative, beginning in the Middle Ages and culminating in the latter nineteenth century, follows the shift from *lived sex*, a social and juridical matter, to *true sex*, a medical and biological fact; documents the increasing surveillance of the sexual and sexually indeterminate body; and tracks the subtle erasure and expulsion of hermaphroditism. In this section I review this history, but I also argue that medical conceptions of sex were deeply intertwined with both anthropological and evolutionary science. Anthropological science and its practices of establishing human type were instrumental to the development of sciences of sexual type, and observational sciences of biological diversity—from natural history to evolutionary theory—challenged simple models of sexual difference. As I argue here, these several discourses were deeply connected parts of a larger debate around bodily sex and hermaphroditism. The received, partial history of the nineteenth-century *hermaphrodite* may therefore be read as the reaction to the lesser-known history of *hermaphroditism*, a pervasive and destabilizing concept, in nineteenth-century science. The larger history will be crucial to my reading of Swinburne’s poem “Hermaphroditus,” written in 1863 and prepared for publication in 1865, for Swinburne was at the crux of anthropological and evolutionary discourses: both a dues-paying member of the Anthropological

Society of London and a poet remembered as the “prophet, of evolution” (Mallock 483).

The 1865 field report “Notes on an Hermaphrodite”—from precisely those years during which “investigations of sexual identity were carried out with the most intensity” (Foucault xi)—is in many ways emblematic of nineteenth-century sexual science. Sir Richard Burton, Swinburne’s intimate friend, recorded the “Notes” while traveling in the Cape Verde Islands and sent them to be read before the Anthropological Society of London, a society over which he presided as vice president and to which he had recruited Swinburne in 1863. The “Notes” demonstrate the contemporary control over bodily knowledge, and over individual bodies, exercised by medical science; the dehumanizing anatomization necessary for scientific interpretation and identification; and the expulsion of hermaphroditism spatially, racially, and anatomically from the modern European body.

Over the course of the century, human hermaphroditism and sexual determination became increasingly subject to medical knowledge, partly due to newly codified medical paradigms for understanding hermaphroditism, and partly due to increasing encounters between bodies and the medical establishment. French zoologist Isidore Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire’s 1832 treatise on teratology established a developmental and biological framework for understanding hermaphroditism as a natural result of abnormal sexual development (Dreger 33-5) while the ascendance of hospital medicine in France and Germany produced encounters and practices in which bodily sex was

increasingly exposed to medical diagnosis (Mak ch. 4). Colonial encounters, like the one recorded in Burton's text, produced further scenes in which medical authority asserted its prerogative over the body. "Notes on an Hermaphrodite" demonstrates the medical power to determine true sex in spite of lived sex: although the "hermaphrodite" of the title is "considered a boy" by his community, Burton bypasses social consensus to discover the child's sex by an examination of the body (262). The level of detail in the report furthermore indicates the extensive control scientific actors—Burton and his ship's doctor and engineer—exercised over the individual body.

In the taxonomic paradigm represented by Burton's report, identifying sex was a matter of identifying sex organs. The majority of Burton's report describes the child's sexual organs, which were examined by ship's doctor J. T. Taylor. The textual description is supplemented by a "hand-sketch" and a "photograph of the parts, made by [the ship's engineer,] a skillful artist" (263). Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire in France, and James Simpson in Britain, had established observational schemata for distinguishing external and internal sex organs of the male, female, and hermaphrodite type (Dreger 140-5). Expert interpretation of these organs amounted to an identification of an individual's sex, and these significant parts therefore represented the truth of the whole. In Burton's report, the child's height, girth, shoulders, hips, and face—"rather that of a boy than a girl"—are interesting but ultimately irrelevant details in the diagnosis of sex (262). In the context of deciding indeterminate sex, the individual is reduced to the sexual parts. This logic accorded easily with Burton's context, for in the race-based

science of the Anthropological Society of London, racial types were regularly identified by—and consequently reduced to—comparative anatomical features such as cranial size and shape.⁸⁵ In Burton’s anthropological report from a West African archipelago historically crucial to European control of African bodies, the local boy—“Antonio di Ramos, as the malformation is called”—is reduced to the “malformation” that interests Burton (Burton 262).

Victorian hermaphroditism was in general bound up with colonial science and scientific racism. Sexual abnormality was racialized and spatialized in a way that expelled difference from the modern European body and located it in the non-white colonial periphery. Drawing from Michael Foucault’s work on biopower, Hilary Malatino explains that the scientific discourse which divided the family of man into distinct races was “not content to stop at race alone, but [would] extend to the ostensibly more nebulous realm of ‘abnormality’ and ‘degeneracy,’ although always through a reliance on a distinct biologism which attempts to ‘scientifically’ typologize said ‘abnormality’” (88). Not only was the surveillance of sexual type related to the surveillance of racial type, but often cases of hermaphroditism were “discovered” in colonial spaces, no doubt because such spaces produced the power dynamics in which Burton and others were “allowed to inspect” a native body, and because normal genital variation in unfamiliar bodies was often read by Europeans as abnormal, i.e. hermaphrodite (Burton 262). Hermaphroditism was meanwhile projected into the past, as a condition found either in “primitive” peoples or in European history. And

85 The Anthropological Society’s first publication contains several articles devoted to the study of cranial size and shape, such as “On the Weight of the Brain in the Negro,” “On the Two Principal Forms of Ancient British and Gaulish Skulls,” and “The Neanderthal Skull: its Peculiar Conformation explained Anatomically.” See Anthropological Society *Memoirs*.

because most published cases were historical, or recent but discovered only after autopsy, sexual science repeatedly confirmed the claim that hermaphroditism was always more prevalent than in the present.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the criteria for sexual identification steadily narrowed—from several visible anatomical features to, by the 1870s, the microscopic character of gonadal tissue—resulting in the relative decrease of bodies considered hermaphrodite.

The narrowing criteria of hermaphroditism became more extreme over the century. James Simpson's 1839 medical text introduced the concept of spurious hermaphroditism: the mere "appearance of hermaphroditism in persons actually of the female [or the male] sex" (684). Theodor Albrecht Edwin Klebs's 1876 Handbook broadened this concept, re-designating as "pseudo-hermaphrodite" all cases except those in which both male and female gonads (testes and ovaries) were present in one individual, a relatively rare condition (Dreger 145). According to Alice Dreger, the gradual erasure of hermaphroditism would culminate, in England, in an 1896 article in the *Transactions of the Obstetrical Society of London* in which Klebs's criteria was retroactively applied to existing literature and only twenty-eight cases in all of history were determined "true hermaphrodites." But even in 1868 France, a doctor concluded from his autopsy of so-called hermaphrodite Alexina Herculine Barbine "that hermaphroditism does not exist in man and the higher animals" (qtd. in Foucault 139). The "hermaphrodite" of Burton's 1865 report was likewise finally described as a case of mistaken sex rather than dual sex. The report concluded, in the either-or

⁸⁶ Mak notes that in the first half of the nineteenth century, medical science encountered most of its hermaphrodite cases only in autopsy (ch. 4)

language of male and female, that “the so-called boy is a mere case of deformed clitoris, the feminine apparatus being abnormally developed”—a girl mistaken for a boy, rather than a “hermaphrodite” (263).

Human hermaphroditism was in these several ways contained, expelled and erased in discourses of sexual and anthropological science. Yet these currents were in response to other contemporary natural sciences, including the botany and embryology from which Darwin drew in *Origin*, in which hermaphroditism had become a common, pervasive concept. The hermaphroditism of plants had been established in the late seventeenth century. Camerarius proved by experiment not only that plants had sexes (i.e. engaged in fertilization) but furthermore that hermaphroditism was “the rule in plants” (Sachs 388). This botanic dogma was institutionalized by Carl Linneaus’ system of plant classification based on the number of “male” and “female” sex organs in each blossom (Sachs bk. 3 ch. 1). In the later eighteenth century, Erasmus Darwin’s poetic treatment of the “Loves of the Plants” popularized the concept that each plant contained so many sexualized “males” and “females.”⁸⁷ Indeed the general rule of hermaphroditism, in certain species including plants, was often noted in nineteenth-century articles on the human hermaphrodite by way of contrast.

Meanwhile, contemporary embryology analyzed hermaphroditism and sexual differentiation in the human fetus. Although embryologists disagreed on the original sexual character of the embryo—female, neutral or hermaphrodite—they necessarily agreed that some sexual transformation was a regular stage of its

87 Erasmus Darwin’s poem anthropomorphizes stamens and pistils as males and females and depicts their courting and love.

development (“On Hermaphroditism”). Robert Knox in 1844 claimed that the fetus was “originally hermaphroditic [...] comprising elementary yet distinct parts, out of which both sets of sexual organs could be formed” and therefore argued that adult hermaphroditism was a “permanent condition of the original double sexual type”—not an abnormal excess, as in the framework of teratology (“On Hermaphroditism” 524). Embryological studies served as models for theories of evolutionary change, and therefore supported the claim that the long past progenitor of all sexual forms was hermaphrodite.⁸⁸

Darwin adopted the theory of a hermaphrodite evolutionary past from embryology⁸⁹ but furthermore attempted to confirm it through extensive research on hermaphrodite types in nature. The reigning botanical controversy was whether hermaphrodite plants self-fertilized or cross pollinated. In a protracted effort to prove the latter, as essential to his theory of evolution, Darwin searched broadly for counter-examples. In correspondence to colleagues he solicited examples of an “eternal and absolute” hermaphrodite—one that self-fertilizes over generations—only to find, as he anticipated, that hermaphrodite species cross pollinate, involving two individuals in reproduction and engendering natural variation.⁹⁰ He furthermore argued that hermaphroditic species evolved over time into bisexual types, a process he found underway in barnacles who reproduced by way of microscopic, “supplemental” males growing on the larger

88 See Richards chapter 3.

89 Richards chapter 5.

90 This claim is stated in *Origin* and elaborated in his 1862 study of the fertilization of orchids. Darwin apparently asked colleagues for examples so persistently that Huxley, having jotted down “Darwin, an absolute & eternal hermaphrodite” in his notebook, began to call Darwin by this epithet in jest (*DGP* letter 1914). The phrase became an oft-quoted joke in their correspondence.

hermaphrodite barnacles.

[T]hese parasites, I now can show, are supplemental males [...] I never sh[oul]d have made this out, had not my species theory convinced me, that an hermaphrodite species must pass into a bisexual species by insensibly small stages, & here we have it, for the male organs in the hermaphrodite are beginning to fail, & independent males ready formed. (DCP letter 1174)

Drawing from this research, Darwin's evolutionary theory accorded a much more prominent role to hermaphroditism than did contemporary sexual science. The *Origin* not only pointed out the high incidence of hermaphroditism in nature—"a vast majority of plants are hermaphrodites," "[o]f aquatic animals, there are many [...] hermaphrodites," and "on the land there are some hermaphrodites" (96, 100)—but also located hermaphroditic potential in all sexed bodies by way of the *rudiment*.

The rudiment, formerly used in biology to describe a "small and (as yet) undeveloped precursor of an organ, limb, leaf, etc.," became in Darwin's *Origin* a technical term meaning a terminally un-developed or inactive organ, etc., indicative of a precursive life-form (*OED*). Darwin imported the concept from language theory: "Rudimentary organs may be compared with the letters in a word, still retained in the spelling, but become useless in the pronunciation, but which serve as a clue in seeking for its derivation" (*Origin* 455). Such formations are quizzical in models that explain everything by design, but in Darwin's theory "of descent with modification, [...] the existence of organs in a rudimentary, imperfect, and useless condition [...] can be accounted for by the laws of inheritance" (*Origin* 455-6). Darwin's primary example of the rudiment confirms

the human hermaphroditic past and opens up an unstable site of potential reversion.

Organs or parts in this strange condition, bearing the stamp of inutility, are extremely common throughout nature. For instance, rudimentary mammæ are very general in the males of mammals. [...] Rudimentary organs sometimes retain their potentiality, and are merely not developed: this seems to be the case with the mammæ of male mammals, for many instances are on record of these organs having become well developed in full-grown males, and having secreted milk. (450-1)

The body Darwin describes is a heterogenous form, “always itself composed of the vestiges of other creatures” and under ecological pressure (Alaimo 390).

Rudiments of prior forms may become the buds of new adaptations, and a common hermaphroditic past is therefore a common hermaphroditic potential.

Sexual and anthropological science stabilized hermaphroditism by way of a taxonomic model of bodily difference. These frameworks contained hermaphroditism in the hermaphrodite: a rare and often removed (spatially, racially, temporally) form of difference to be controlled by scientific knowledge. Darwin’s evolutionary theory meanwhile destabilized hermaphroditism by way of a dynamic model of constant, contingent bodily differentiation. Drawing from botany and embryology, this framework located hermaphroditic potential in all sexed bodies, themselves the result of an evolution from hermaphrodite types. In Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus,” these two discourses come into contact.

III. Swinburne’s “Hermaphroditus”

Against the background of these competing scientific discourses, we can better interpret the hermaphroditism and the hermaphrodite in Swinburne’s

poem "Hermaphroditus," written in 1863 and prepared for publication in 1865. The dramatic monologue to the mythic Hermaphroditus draws from Classical sources but revises Ovid's version of Hermaphroditus' transformation as a loss of masculinity. In Ovid's legend the boy Hermaphroditus and the nymph Salmacis join to form a new, double-sex body that is immediately disciplined and cursed as "half a man." In Swinburne's poem, this taxonomic compulsion gives way to a curiosity and recognition that the transformed body is quintessentially a living body. In the figure of Hermaphroditus, as in language, the signs of transformation are the sources of beauty and the sites for further potential. Swinburne's poem plays with the transformative potential of language and recovers from Ovid's legend the image of grafted growth, the ability to incorporate other life forms as the very sign of life. Competing discourses of hermaphroditism are explored. Cycling through the tropes of sexual science—an attitude of control; an anatomizing interest in the part over the whole; a classical, static taxonomy of types—the speaker gradually and subtly transcends them. A Darwinian model of change works through the poem. Like much of Swinburne's best verse, "Hermaphroditus" has an evolutionary aesthetic that emphasizes the contingencies of forms accreted over history—linguistic, poetic and anatomical. The productive impurity of language and the unpredictable potential of evolved forms here opens up a discourse of the body that exceeds one sexual form and constantly transforms. The impure and the rudimentary are not, in the final turn of "Hermaphroditus," forms of difference to be feared, expelled or erased. Rather they are the common ground of identification between the speaker and

Hermaphroditus.

The poem is a sequence of four sonnets in an extended apostrophe to Hermaphroditus delivered through a direct second-person address to the “Sleeping Hermaphroditus,” a late Hellenic sculpture Swinburne saw at the Louvre while traveling in Paris. (Swinburne asserts this poetic occasion in the poem’s signature, “*Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863.*”) The poem therefore begins from classical sources but subtly revises them, translating sculpture into the temporal art of poetry and critiquing Ovid’s version of Hermaphroditus’ fate. The marble sculpture of Hermaphroditus that Swinburne saw in 1863 depicts the figure horizontally in troubled sleep, as if reliving that nightmare in which the Naiad Salmacis attacked the then male Hermaphroditus as he swam, wrapping her limbs around his resisting body, as “the polypus beneath the waves, / by pulling down, with suckers on all sides, / tenacious holds its prey” (Ovid 4.363-5). According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, this ambiguous embrace was transformed into a single body when Salmacis begged the gods never to part them hence. The sculpted Hermaphroditus is represented with both female and male bodily markers—pleated hair, slender waist, hips and shoulders of equal girth, full female breasts, and male genitals—but because the figure is twisted, it appears largely feminine on one side (pleated hair, soft face and full breast) and hermaphrodite on the other (male genitals and female breasts). The spectator walking around the larger than life-size sculpture therefore experiences a “typically Hellenistic theatrical surprise,” seeing one sex and then another (Pollitt qtd. in Maxwell 202). Swinburne’s poem seems to circle the sculpture not to enact

a surprise but to perform an evolution, in both the figure and the speaker. The sculpture is immediately thrust into movement that belies the static taxonomy of sexual type while the speaker evolves through changing perspectives in each sonnet.

The poem begins, “Lift up thy lips, turn round, look back for love,” and consistently works through *turn* and its dual meanings—to turn round or turn into—to emphasize an inherent connection between movement and change (1.1).⁹¹ Sonnet 1 begins by calling Hermaphroditus into motion and concludes by describing the change effected on anyone who sees them.⁹² With the imperative commands “Lift up” and “turn round,” the first line not only describes the orientation of the sculpture but also sets it into motion, breathing life into the cold marble through the incantatory power of apostrophe.⁹³ The final lines describe the transformation effected, by Hermaphroditus, upon “whosoever hath seen thee”: “Two things turn all his life and blood to fire” (1.11-12). In Sonnet 2, *turn* again functions once as transformation and once as rotation. The creation of Hermaphroditus is described as a union that *turns* “hers and his” into “them”

91 Catherine Maxwell furthermore notes that in “Fragoletta” (a companion poem to “Hermaphroditus” named after the androgynous hermaphrodite protagonist of Henri Latouche’s 1829 novel) the repetition of “turns’ is a turning-point or moment of transformation,” meaning both “turn towards” and “turn into” (212). Charlotte Ribeyrol argues that “Swinburne replaces the Ovidian metamorphosis (‘turn into’) with a hymn to sexual deviance (‘turn’) which can be interpreted both as a per-version of the normative gender codifications of the age and as a sub-version of the previous romantic readings of the myth of the hermaphrodite, from Shelly to Gautier” (224).

92 I have chosen, when appropriate, to use the neuter plural pronoun “they” to refer to Hermaphroditus in Swinburne’s poem. *They* offers a simple solution to the dichotomy of she and he, especially in the case of Hermaphroditus, mythically formed from her (Salmacis) and him (Hermaphroditus). Furthermore, the term has been adopted among various trans communities as an alternative pronoun.

93 Jonathan Culler has written extensively on apostrophe, the master trope of lyric, as a “ritualistic, hortatory, a special sort of linguistic event,” the point of which is to “make something happen” (“Lyric” 886-7). See also Culler, “Apostrophe” in *The Pursuit of Signs*.

(2.4-6). But the creator, Love, then “turned himself and would not enter in” the house of Hermaphroditus (2.14). And in the final sonnet, *turn* is made to mean both at once, as when the weather turns, or as in this case, the light. The final lines portray the mythical joining of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis as a simultaneous movement and transformation.

Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
Beneath the woman’s and water’s kiss
Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
And the large light turned tender in thine eyes, (4.9-12)

In this last line the pyrrhic pitch *And the* into the spondee *large light*, and the alliteration which shifts from l’s to t’s at “large light turned tender,” provides a kind of fulcrum which slows the line at *turned*, letting the reader linger before *tender*, on the edge between *turn* as intransitive and transitive verb. Here, it is both. Movement and change are essentially connected in the poem just as, in the Darwinian model of evolution, life is essentially connected to variation. As Elizabeth Grosz explains in her feminist reading of Darwin’s *Origin*, “Nature itself may be understood as perpetual variation, and life as the evolutionary playing out of maximal variation or difference” (48).

The speaker of the poem is likewise involved in transformation through a series of formal movements, between each of the four Italian sonnets and at the *volte* within them. In this sense the poem is a dramatic monologue as Dorothy Mermin defined it—a mode of poetic discourse in which “the auditors’ [unvoiced] response significantly affects the course of the speaker’s utterance”—even as it is a hybrid of genres (*Audience* 1). The speaker’s attitude and perspective alters between each sonnet, and the sequence traces an evolving

approach to Hermaphroditus.⁹⁴ Sonnet 1 commands in the imperative voice, Sonnet 2 narrates in third-person declarative, Sonnet 3 inquires in the interrogative voice, and Sonnet 4 apostrophizes in a mixed mode of second-person address. On the whole, the shift is from mastery to interest, from control to surrender; from speaking *at* and *for*, to speaking *with*, Hermaphroditus—an arc which moves away from the controlling and descriptive tendencies of anthropological science.

Sonnet 2 in particular reflects the contours of the anatomizing, dehumanizing sexual science of the hermaphrodite. The sonnet invents a creation myth, different from Ovid's, in which Hermaphroditus is rendered passive, made sterile, and reduced by synecdoche to significant body parts.

Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,
Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss; (2.3-5)

This anatomizing and barren image is compounded by the fleshly, loveless description of Hermaphroditus as a thing made for others' use. "Love made himself of flesh that perisheth / A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin," but "Love turned himself and would not enter in" (2.9-10, 14). As a thing made "for" another's pleasure, Hermaphroditus is here almost violently deprived of agency, like the boy used for Burton's report. Hermaphroditus is likewise assigned a fixed taxonomic position, in this sonnet, *between* man and woman, for "on the one side sat a man like death, / And on the other a woman sat like sin" (2.11-12). Yet even as the sonnet seems to contain Hermaphroditus in sterile imagery and

⁹⁴ Swinburne claimed that his *Poems and Ballads* was a collection of dramatic monologues (*Notes on Poems and Reviews* 6) but there has always been a critical reluctance to read it that way. See Morgan, "Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues."

static taxonomy, a persistent dynamism resists this logic. The barrenness ascribed to the “sterile kiss” between “hers and his” is belied by the erotic charge issuing therefrom: “Yet from them something like as fire is shed / That shall not be assuaged till death be dead” (2.4-7). And the seeming fixity of the taxonomic position between man and woman is undone in a shift from spatial to temporal logics of *between*, when at the end of the sonnet Love releases rhythmic sobs “between his breath” as a contrapuntal emergence (2.13).

Sonnet 3 constitutes the turning point of the sonnet sequence. Written in the interrogative voice, it signals the entrance of curiosity, a shift in the progression from mastery to love. The sonnet furthermore shifts, between its octave and sestet, from asking what Hermaphroditus is to asking why Hermaphroditus is so fair. This sonnet signals the entrance of curiosity, a shift in the progression from mastery to love. Its questions are never answered, until the terms they introduce undergo a change. The sonnet begins, “Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light / That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?” (3.1-2). Rather than selecting a possible answer, the poem precedes by transforming the possibilities and transcending their apparent difference.

This transcendence is achieved through Swinburne’s use of poetic language, exploring forms of evolutionary change through linguistic roots and rudiments, subjecting words to varied environments of syntax and meter. These subtle forms of linguistic transmutation are misread, by Swinburne’s critics, as mere sonic repetitions. Robert Buchanan declares, “there is a trick in his very versification, [...] it owes its music to the most extraordinary style of alliteration”

(33). Morley likewise claims that Swinburne's "music" depends on "something like a trick of words and letters," for his "hunting of letters, his hunting of the same word, to death is ceaseless" (26-7). But for Swinburne the word is but one strata of a historically accreted form, and the "same word" contains difference. A repeated word, like *turn*, is an opportunity to unearth rudimentary forms in response to changing syntax. While *love* appears five times in the first octave, it means differently every time—an abstract principle, the blind god, an instance of loving, a lover, a desire—and is trivialized then elevated by the rhymes which follow it—of, enough, above. In other words, the "same word" is an important site of change in Swinburne: his repetitions are not only rhetorical but also etymological in their effects. Even different words reveal a sameness as they gather around lines of descent. Etymological relations are explored as the cognate descendants of *spiritus*, *breath*, *air*, *suspire* and *life* are transformed into *fire* in the sestet of Sonnet 1.

Their breath is fire upon the amorous air,
Fire in thine eyes and where thy lips suspire:
And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
Two things turn all his life and blood to fire; (1.9-12)

Given the deep structure of linguistic development, the "same word" is not always the same, and apparent difference may contain sameness grown strange over time. Swinburne, who was an exhaustive student of Greek, Latin, Italian, French and English literature and language, could survey these gradual changes and exploit them.

Words not only reveal their etymological roots in Swinburne's poetics, but also their rudimentary potential, spontaneously generating new orthographical

ramifications. Sonnet 1 of “Hermaphroditus” echoes the opening line of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 144, “Two loves I have, of comfort and despair.”

Swinburne writes:

Two loves at either blossom of thy breast
.....
A strong desire begot on great despair,
A great despair cast out by strong desire. (1.7-14)

In his final two lines, Swinburne replaces Shakespeare’s pair of etymologically equivalent words—comfort (from Latin roots meaning *with strength*) and despair (from Latin roots meaning *without hope*)—with the orthographically related pair *desire* and *despair*. While Shakespeare’s opposed terms represent two opposing ends of desire, Swinburne’s terms, with their superficially identical beginnings and chiasmatic crossings, represent cyclical and constant change. Desire begets despair begets desire. The terms are related not in the etymological past but in the generative future.

The poem reveals that our words, as products of historical, etymological change, are more mixed than pure. In Swinburne’s poetics, this “impurity” is a source of value, and this value is extended to anatomical bodies, similarly evolved over time and capable of further change. The final sonnet of “Hermaphroditus” rejects the value placed on purity and expresses love for Hermaphroditus as a mixed, impure and therefore very human figure. The poem addresses first Hermaphroditus the boy, then Salmacis the Naiad, and finally the compound united Hermaphroditus. The first two lines comprise a strophe to Hermaphroditus the assaulted boy—“Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear”—and the metrically equivalent antistrophe to Salmacis the rejected lover—“Nay,

sweet, it is not fear but love, I know" (3. 1-2). The next six lines extemporize the speaker's passion in a less regular, partially enjambed iambic pentameter.

Or wherefore should thy body's blossom blow
So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear
Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear—
Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
Though love and life and death should come and go,
So dreadful, so desirable, so dear? (3. 3-8)

The sestet concludes in an address to Hermaphroditus as a multiple figure who is also united in the second-person singular (thy). The speaker addresses them as both a "boy" and with the feminine epithet "sweet" used formerly for Salmacis. Hermaphroditus is here allowed the full complexity of their identity, while the speaker is finally affected with the passion that, according to the first stanza, transforms "whosoever hath seen" Hermaphroditus.

Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs;
But Love being blind, how should he know of this? (4. 9-14)

This tender conclusion establishes a new connection between the speaker and the addressee. The final line, though ambiguous, expresses a new intimacy in the poem. The speaker's final words may be read as a lament—sorrow that Love has not seen, i.e. ignored, Hermaphroditus' suffering—or as a confession—wondering how Love, though blind, has come to color the speaker's witness of Hermaphroditus. In either case, the speaker is finally implicated. This is the only sonnet to speak in the first person voice. Abandoning the imperative, narrative, and interrogative voices of the earlier sonnets, the poem becomes lyric. In

addition to recognizing the complex subjectivity of Hermaphroditus, it finally renders the subjectivity of the speaker as well, establishing an equality rather than a hierarchy between speaker and addressee. In this move, Swinburne's speaker does what Ovid's myth cannot do, for in that text the post-transformation Hermaphroditus is portrayed as less than his former self. After his change, Hermaphroditus curses the waters of Salmacis' pool so that "whoso shall enter in this fount a man / must leave its waters only half a man," implying that Hermaphroditus has also become less than a man (4. 391-2). Swinburne's poem, however, portrays the post-transformation Hermaphroditus not as diminished, rewriting Ovid's myth and pushing against contemporary degenerative discourse that insisted on an impossible purity. Swinburne's poem embodies impurity and its productive transformations to insist that Hermaphroditus is beautiful form of natural variation.

Swinburne's poem draws from Ovid's myth but reshifts the focus from the story of a loss of manhood, to a story of potential growth. In *Metamorphoses*, Book 4, the story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis concludes with Hermaphroditus, post transition, cursing the waters in which he was joined to the nymph.

The boy, thus lost in woman, now survey'd
The river's guilty stream, and thus he pray'd.
(He pray'd, but wonder'd at his softer tone,
Surpriz'd to hear a voice but half his own.)
You parent-Gods, whose heav'nly names I bear,
Hear your Hermaphrodite, and grant my pray'r;
Oh grant, that whomsoe'er these streams contain,
If man he enter'd, he may rise again
Supple, unsinew'd, and but half a man!

Hermaphroditus retroactively reads his transformation as an unmanning, a loss

of bodily purity, a simple mathematical operation in which two become one and each therefore becomes a half. The speaker confirms this loss of wholeness in the phrase “a voice but half his own.” This mathematics in which combination is tantamount to division and diminution, is invoked again in Swinburne’s contemporary, post-Darwinian milieu.⁹⁵ However, Swinburne suggests in his writing that a living culture is a mixed one. A purified culture could only be a deadened one. Hermaphroditus and Salmacis joined are more generative than either alone, even if the united figure immediately disciplines and diminishes themselves as less than. The mythic, Ovidian scene of spontaneous transformation and immediate containment may be read as allegory for the reactions to Darwinian theory and to the kinds of bodies that illustrated its more radical premises.

Yet Ovid’s tale contains a powerful figure for understanding Swinburne’s material poetics and for furthering trans theory today. When Salmacis embraces Hermaphroditus in the water, the two are described through a series of metaphors of predator and prey, parasite and host. But when they join, they are described in the single horticultural metaphor of grafting.

As when the stock and grafted twig combin’d
 Shoot up the same, and wear a common rind:
 Both bodies in a single body mix,
 A single body with a double sex. (Book 4. 549-52)⁹⁶

⁹⁵ In a later print attack, Buchanan suggested that Swinburne’s writing was spoiled by the feminizing influence of Greek letters and, by extension, that English letters must be purged of Greek roots to become masculine. Swinburne quipped in response that if, as Buchanan argued, ignorance of ancient art and knowledge was the “supreme sign of perfect manhood,” then “Mr. Robert Buchanan should be amply competent to renew the thirteenth labour of Hercules” (*Under* 85). Swinburne’s incisive, lewd joke (the feat of impregnating 49 women in one night was often known as the “thirteenth” labor) illustrates that the very concepts of masculinity and English intellectual culture are made from Greek tradition.

It is by virtue of some organic capacity, not understood but known, even in Swinburne's time, that the two may grow together. The metaphor of grafting and the reality of an organic capacity to literally become other through growth offers interesting material resources for thinking, even for today's trans theory.

IV. Trans Theory

In recovering the fuller potential of hermaphroditism, I hope to recover in Swinburne some usable intellectual resources for today's trans theory.⁹⁷ I use trans theory as an umbrella term here, but it is important to review differences in intersex and transgender studies, especially in their approach to Victorian science. In recovering this era for today, I do not wish to ignore the lasting forms of biopower epitomized for example in Burton's "Notes," but I wish to show that this and related discourses were only one side of a much more diverse discourse of hermaphroditism as a pervasive form and bodily potential. I therefore speak back to recent theorists, including Eva Hayward, Myra Hird, Stacy Alaimo and others, who have looked to a broader biosphere to trouble the cultural understanding of human sex as a simple matter of two distinct forms. I offer this revised version of hermaphroditism for today's trans theory in conversation with intersex studies and intersex identities, but also as a reminder that in the construction of any form of sex and gender, the biological is the ground that

96 This translation comes from Garth, Dryden, et al. (1717). The original passage, "*velut, siquis conducat cortice ramos, / crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere cernit*" has been translated in English alternatively as "if a man should in one barke beholde / Two twigges both growing into one and still together holde" (Golding, 1567) and "Just as when someone grafts a twig into the bark, they see both grow joined together, and develop as one" (Kline, 2000).

97 Trans theory, also written as trans* or trans- theory, is a deliberate renaming of transgender studies to enable a focus on the multiple forms of crossing that are implicated in the construction of sex. See Stryker, Currah, Moore, "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?" and Stryker and Currah, "Introduction."

enables the cultural. Transgender bodies depend on the biomechanics of metamorphosis, on the multi-sex potential of any body, that has evolved over time and continues to produce new forms.

First, I want to stress that my return to hermaphroditism is not a return to the hermaphrodite, a term that has been critiqued by the intersex movement and critical intersex studies. From early intersex political organizing in the 1990s, the movement has taken issue with *hermaphrodite* and related terms. Cheryl Chase wrote, in a 1993 letter to the editor of *The Sciences*, that “the terms true, female pseudo-, and male pseudo-hermaphrodite” are “inheritances from Victorian medicine [...] without prognosticative value,” for they “reflect the Victorian belief that human sexual nature rests entirely in the gonads.” In founding the Intersex Society of North America, one of Chase’s goals was to establish *intersex* as an identity, and to combat the erstwhile and ongoing erasure of intersex conditions through medical intervention and silence. A survey of clinical studies has shown that a variety of intersex conditions—chromosomal, hormonal, or physical conditions of “nondimorphic sexual development”—occur at a rate of 1.7 per 100 births.⁹⁸ However, many of these conditions go undetected and, as Chase documents, the approximately one in two thousand infants born with visually ambiguous genitalia have been, since the 1960s in the U.S., routinely “treated” with a series of medical interventions designed to reshape the genitals in conformance with culturally understood male or female morphology and sexual function (Chase, “Hermaphrodites” 301-3). In addition to stopping such

98 See Anne Fausto-Sterling, 51-4. This figure is controversial because it includes some conditions—for example, hypospadias—not commonly considered intersex in the medical literature.

procedures and educating the public about natural human sexual diversity (i.e. variation in sex characteristics, not in sexuality), the intersex movement has rejected the label *hermaphrodite* and its associated historical legacy of disciplining sexually indeterminate bodies through medical taxonomies and surgical alteration. A second and more recent wave of critical intersex studies has critiqued the hermaphrodite as a category for its co-constitution with other, now discounted, scientific categories of race and animality.⁹⁹ This scholarship, in conversation with critical race and gender studies, reveals how hermaphroditism *and* the categories of man and woman were racialized, spatialized, and either humanized or dehumanized through the taxonomic labour of Victorian anthropology. But as I have argued throughout, this very process may be read as a reactionary response to the pervasive *hermaphroditism* in scientific thinking of the time, including in Darwinian evolutionary theory.

Recent trans and feminist theory, including work by Eva Hayward, Myra Hird, Stacy Alaimo and others, has looked to the biological sciences for a record of sexual diversity that troubles the cultural understanding of sex as a simple matter of two distinct forms, male and female (or three distinct forms, male, female and intersex). Joan Roughgarden has amassed an archive of sexual variation across life-forms to document the extraordinary diversity of sex, gender, sexual contact, and reproductive systems that have evolved within the ecological world but are occluded, she argues, by the sex-bifurcation embedded in the theory of sexual selection. She looks especially to marine life for examples

⁹⁹ Much work on the co-constitution of race and sex in the nineteenth century has in fact preceded what is now transgender studies. See for example Gilman and Somerville. For an example of recent trans work see Chen.

of sexuality and gender that exceed a simple division of male and female types, dwelling for example on the three genders of the bluehead wrasse coral reef fish: males, females that change to males, and females (31-33). Myra Hird has also pointed out, in language that echoes Darwin's, that "Virtually all plant, and many animal species are intersex" (Hird 159). Hird elaborates:

most plants are intersex, most fungi have multiple sexes, many species [change sex], and bacteria completely defy notions of sexual difference, this means that the majority of living organisms on this planet would make little sense of the human classification of two sexes, and certainly less sense of a critique of transsex based upon a conceptual separation of nature and culture. (160)

In other words, Hird argues that trans studies would be mistaken to begin its critique from the cultural construction of gender when it can begin with the biological fact of sexless, sex-changing, and multiple sex organisms thriving everywhere in our midst.

The writing of Eva Hayward takes this project further, looking for ways to think through human transsexuality as a form of embodiment that is constituted in relation to significant animal others (77-8). Hayward's meditation on possible "lessons from a starfish"—an animal that regenerates severed radial arms and, in some cases, generates a new individual from that severed appendage—thinks through the underlying biomechanics of regeneration, reassignment, and transition in the transsexual body. Hayward argues that one becomes a transsexual woman "through the re-working and re-folding of my own body, my tissue, and my skin"—a process that is *initiated* by the surgical cut but *realized* by the body's own biomechanics and capacity to regenerate (67). She argues that sex

transition is not, however, the “transformation of an unlivable, fragmented body into a livable whole,” but is rather part of an ongoing process of becoming that is not becoming whole and is never complete. Hayward writes: “The body (trans or not) is not a pure, coherent, and positive integrity. The important distinction is not the one between wrong body and right body, or between fragmentation and a wholeness” (73). The organic body is always in a process of becoming, and it is this feature of the body that enables the bodying forth of a newly generated sex.

The trope of productive fragmentation appears throughout theoretical writing on intersex, transsex and transgender. Both Susan Stryker and Cheryl Chase embrace the figure of Frankenstein’s monster to reclaim a body made by but no longer beholden to medical science. Stryker: “I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie” (“My Words to Victor Frankenstein” 247). Chase: “ I knew only that I felt mutilated, not fully human, but that I was determined to heal. [...] Thoughts of myself as a Frankenstein’s monster patchwork alternated with longings for escape by death” (“Hermaphrodites” 195). But Charles Darwin’s theory of biological evolution, adapted from theories of linguistic evolution, insists that every living body is already a “monster patchwork,” “an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts” before any mad scientist takes scalpel or sutures to it. Stacy Alaimo articulates this point, arguing that in Darwin’s *Descent of Man* the human is “a particular sort of animal that just happened to happen, as the others happened to happen, an animal that shares a

‘community of descent’ with other creatures, an animal that is, in fact, always itself composed of the vestiges of other creatures” (390). Alaimo argues that this Darwinism constitutes a posthumanism, but I would argue that it constitutes a return to the organicism that is the common lot of the living. It is this evolutionary fact of the body—its composition from vestiges of other lifeforms, its capacity to generate new forms through growth—that provides the bio-material substrate in which trans is realized. Trans embodiments—not only the transsexual embodiment regenerated from a surgical cut (Hayward) but also transgender embodiments produced in response to hormones, endogenous or exogenous—are viable embodiments only because the body carries the potential for sex (not only one sex), a capacity accrued over the deep species time of becoming human and becoming bisexual. The sexed body as theorized in Darwinian evolutionary theory may be a rich site for thinking about trans.

V. An Intellectual Hermaphrodite

In recovering the trans potential in hermaphroditism as it figures in Swinburne’s evolutionary poetics and Darwin’s evolutionary theory, I do not mean to forget or ignore the sexual politics of the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, a scientific category with a damaging legacy. Furthermore, I do not mean to ignore the sexual politics of Swinburne, which at times contradicted his sexual poetics. Rather, I have attempted to argue throughout that these simultaneous developments—a pervasive, potential hermaphroditism and a contained, displaced hermaphrodite—should be read as mutually constitutive parts of a broader discourse of hermaphroditism that ranged across many fields

in the middle and late nineteenth century. Similarly, other contemporary discourses inventing developmental taxonomies between child and adult, savage and civilized, woman and man, must be read as constituting the other side of the radical evolutionary argument that all lifeforms are contingent, variable, and mutually formed. Swinburne's poetry, which embodied the more radical processes of evolution, also occasioned the more disciplinary tropes of the sciences of human type. The critical response to *Poems and Ballads*, which I review below, invoked scientific rhetorics of objectivity and diagnosis, and reviewers read the poetry to pronounce Swinburne less than human in highly sexualized and animalized terms—and generations of critics have followed suit. Yet Swinburne was more than the victim-provocateur of such discourse. In his prose and through his participation in the Anthropological Society of London, he also produced it. My concluding argument then, will be that evolutionary poetics has a unique potential to explore the material possibilities of language not necessarily found in other kinds of writing.

The publication of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* provoked a scandal that determined the course of his career (Rooksby *A. C. Swinburne* 132). The collection, brought out in 1866 by Tennyson's publisher, Moxon, met with such fierce attacks in the press that an obscenity trial was anticipated, Moxon pulled all copies, and Swinburne was left to reissue with a known pornographer. The scandal was set off by three simultaneous reviews which all independently adopted rhetorics of effeminacy, animality and degeneration to dehumanize the author. They claimed the poet demonstrated an "absence of judgment and

reason," "has no meditative faculty," and indeed lacked "any faculty in that direction" (Buchanan 34, Morley 29, 29). Rather, they claimed he exhibited a tendency to grovel "down among the nameless shameless abominations," and a perverse desire to "set up the pleasures of sense in the seat of the reason they have dethroned" (Morley 23-4). They linked Swinburne's baseness to his beastliness, his "excess of purely animal passion" and instinctive flights "to the animal side of human nature" (qtd. In Hyder 37, Morley 22-3). Like a "Swine-born" poet (as *Punch* put it [Hyder 5]), Swinburne "asks us all to go hear him tuning his lyre in a sty" (Morley 23). They imagined his perverse sexual desire and embodiment. Swinburne "has revealed to the world a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy" (Morley 23). He was compared to the self-castrating Atys, a "raving sexless manic," and imagined "long-ringleted, flippant-lipped, down-cheeked, amorous-lidded" (Buchanan 31). The responses to Swinburne in 1866 were an early example of degeneration theory in literary criticism, which reads the deviance or deformation of the poet through the poem (Arata 12).

These and similar rhetorics have had extraordinary longevity in Swinburne criticism. In a retrospective of Swinburne's literary afterlives in the century following his death, biographer and critic Rikky Rooksby lamented the ways in which Swinburne has been consistently "marginalized" through descriptive "caricatures" which occlude his poetic achievement ("A Century" 8). Nineteenth-century contemporaries described a "tropical bird, high-crested, long-beaked, quick-moving, with rapid utterance and screams of humor," or

recalled “his aureole of flaming red hair, his feverishly dancing limbs and perpetually fluttering hands.”¹⁰⁰ Twentieth-century critics imagined a “tadpole scholar” leaping “like a wild creature,” and identified a “certain arrested development.”¹⁰¹ Writers at the turn of the twenty-first century have diagnosed “hypoxic brain damage” at birth causing “hyperkinetic behavior, dysgraphia,” and “masochistic fantasies,” and have discerned in Swinburne the “homophobia” of a “closeted” homosexual.¹⁰²

As Ekbert Fass has noted, Swinburne actively campaigned to discredit this kind of criticism and preserve an aesthetic realm free of moral-scientific judgment (chap. 10). However, as Heather Seagroatt argues, Swinburne also took up the rhetoric of that criticism when convenient.¹⁰³ Furthermore, I argue that Swinburne’s participation in the ASL constituted support for not only the racist project of subdividing the family of man into types but also the critical project of using those types to read literature. In Swinburne’s only recorded contribution to an ASL meeting, which has never received critical attention, he sounds like a spokesperson for degenerative criticism, using literature and racial categories to corroborate each other.

The ASL was founded 1863 by a group split off from the Ethnological Society of London (ESL) (itself an outgrowth of the Society for Aboriginal

100 Mr. Adams qtd. in Gosse, *Life* 286; Peter Quennell qtd. in Rooksby “A Century” 8.

101 Church qtd. in Rooksby “A Century” 8; Rosenberg 152.

102 Ober diagnoses brain damage (47-8); Myers discerns homophobia (8); Schwab identifies the closeted homosexual (54).

103 Seagroatt shows how Swinburne relied rhetorically on gendered hierarchies to draw a line between masculine poetry and feminized novels and thereby distance his collection from sensation debates.

Protection) and Swinburne became a fellow in April of 1865.¹⁰⁴ The ASL purported to establish not only a new society but a new science, in direct opposition to “Prichardian ethnology, the scientific model which on the basis of an historical, genealogical analysis grounded in comparative philology had advanced a theory of the organic mutability and essential unity of the human species” (Rainger 56). Instead, the ASL adhered to the polygenist theory that the human comprises several biologically distinct, historically separate races or species; it relied on methods of comparative physical anthropology, especially craniology, to establish differences; it subscribed to the notoriously racist writings of Robert Knox; and it largely resisted Darwin’s theories of mutability and natural selection. And while the ESL was an elite group of respectable scientists, “Hunt and the ‘anthropologicals’ in various ways violated the canons of behaviour appropriate to a respectable scientific group” and recruited members aggressively with little concern for scientific standing (Stocking 380). It was thus the liberalism, especially in matters of sex, and transgressive behavior of the anthropologicals that attracted Swinburne, rather than their underlying philosophies. Swinburne’s participation in the even more transgressive Cannibal Club, an informal dining group composed of ASL members, is often noted.

Yet in Swinburne’s only recorded speech at an ASL meeting, he yielded to

104 George Stocking details the history of the Aboriginal Protection Society, began in 1837 by Quaker and Evangelical anti-slave activists; the Ethnological Society of London, founded 1843 by members whose scientific concerns took precedent over the humanitarian; and the Anthropological Society of London, founded 1863 by polygenists interested in establishing differences among the races of man. Peter Rainger argues that the ASL was motivated by co-founder James Hunt’s racist theories, indebted to Robert Knox, and his political vision. Stocking also traces the differential acceptance of Darwinian theory in each group, and their eventual amalgamation as the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in 1871. Rainger argues that this union was only possible after the early death on Hunt in 1869.

the society's scientific logic, making an argument about the "American race" as a newly formed species and furthermore arguing that poetry can be used to determine an author's race. The meeting was March 17, 1868 and MacGrigor Allan presented "Europeans and their descendants in North America," arguing that American descendants of Englishmen are not a new race but still Englishmen, refuting Mr. Murray, "who said he had been converted to Darwin's theory of transmutation of species, by the changes produced in Englishmen settled in America" ("Europeans" 157). Allan's paper attempts to prove through examination of *physique*, character, mind and habits that Americans are nothing other than transplanted Europeans, modified by climate but not altered in essence—at least as "long as the race remains pure, does not mingle with African, aboriginal, or Asiatic blood" (128). The paper therefore presumes that the races are distinctly evolved types. In Allan's analysis of the American mind's essential Englishness, he cites Mr. William Clark Russell on American literature: "The Americans have as yet, properly speaking, no literature of their own. ... Irving, Prescott, Longfellow, Bancroft, Cooper, the finest specimens of their literary men, are eminently English" (134). This was what drew Swinburne, the resident literary expert, into the debate.

Swinburne intervened to insist that "in America there are at least two writers who possess natures entirely different from any in Great Britain — Whitman and Poe" (147, 157). As he discussed the poets, however, he strayed from his premise that Poe possesses "special peculiarity" and Whitman has "decided originality" and leapt—illogically, but within the logic of the ASL

debate—to the conclusion that both poets’ unique qualities were “purely American” (145-6). He concluded that “American intellectuality was an original distinct native product, not derivative from any other county,” an argument quite different from his usual logic (146). Writing elsewhere, Swinburne resisted the tendency to take a single poet as representative of a national literature, just as he resisted the tendency to take an excerpt as representative of a work, or a collection as representative of a career.¹⁰⁵ And in his early writing on Walt Whitman—a lengthy comparison to William Blake which concludes Swinburne’s *William Blake: A Critical Essay*—Swinburne advanced the argument that Whitman was so singular, amidst his own time, that he could only be described as “nearly akin” to Blake. In fact Swinburne went on to suggest that “[t]he points of contact and sides of likeness between William Blake and Walt Whitman are so many and so grave, as to afford some ground of reason to those who preach the transition of souls or transfusion of spirits” (300). Yet in the presence of the Society fellows, Whitman becomes not the incarnation of a transhistorical poetic spirit, but the specimen of a species, the new American race of men. Swinburne’s collusion in this project reveals that he was not innocent but rather implicated in diagnostic readings of poetry as symptom, an underwriter of the discourses of degeneracy that served new racial sciences and have followed Swinburne for generations.

While “Hermaphroditus” embodies a radical poetics and much of Swinburne’s critical prose argued for poetry’s right to develop freely in any

¹⁰⁵ Chastising critics who consider George Meredith’s 1862 collection without reference to his previous work or relative standing, Swinburne writes, “It would hardly be less absurd [...] than to criticise the *Légende des Siècles*, or (coming to a nearer instance) the *Idyls of the King*, without taking into account the relative position of the great English or the greater French poet” (“Mr. George Meredith’s” 632).

direction, Swinburne was not always resistant to the proscriptive discourses that attempted to predetermine the forms poetry could take. His own co-optation of such discourses puts him in a complicated position relative to his own reception. He was sometimes a willing participant. Today's trans theory may not wish to claim him as a long lost progenitor. His politics were never as progressive as his poetics. Even his sexual liberalism depended on the elite social standing that enabled him to join a formatively racist organization.¹⁰⁶ Swinburne was contradictory in his politics. But it is not in Swinburne's politics that we find usable theory for thinking through sex. It is not even across all his poetry. Rather, it is in the trans poetics we find in "Hermaphroditus," poetics that preserve the radical potential briefly alive after the publication of Darwin's *Origin*, before reactionary scientific discourse turned "evolution" into an argument about boundaries of the human.

There is something in that poetry that can only be excavated as a fossil bed, or read as a time lapse capture of growth, an experimental biology of language the study of which may teach us something about embodiment as a time based, impure and constant process. It is perhaps this quality of Swinburne's poetry that explains another longstanding trend in his reception: the recourse to naturalistic metaphors. The consensus that Swinburne's poetry is somehow elemental comes across in the recurring critical vocabulary of naturalism. He is the poet "of natural energies—of winds and surging waters" (Rosenberg vii). His verses "accumulate additions, like coral" and

106 His noble lineage protected him, furthermore, from being labelled a "spasmodic poet," even though he borrowed poetic techniques from the working-class poets known as spasmodic (Blair).

“[p]atterns of meaning spread like colonies of bacteria where life develops so rapidly that one has difficulty focusing on individual microbes” (McGann *Swinburne* 41, 174-5). His language is “very much alive, with this singular life of its own” (Eliot 136). T. S. Eliot wrote in a famous critique that, in the verse of Swinburne, “meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning” and “language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment” (136). I hope I have shown that, in the verse of Swinburne, language adapts itself *through* its roots, through the vestiges and therefore the potentials it contains. It is this property of language, theorized by Müller and others, that enabled Darwin to theorize a model of the human as a contingent, time based, assemblage always about to become an other form. This is not the human of *Descent of Man* or of Victorian anthropology, but the human of “Hermaphroditus,”—an organic living form, most wondrous and most beautiful.

Chapter Four

Victorian Poetry, New Media

The texts that form the archive of this dissertation—poetry, letters and articles written and printed in the middle nineteenth century—are in the midst of a massive migration. Most of them have been encoded as digital files and stored on servers, ready to be retrieved from one of the many Victorian studies archives online: The Brownings' Correspondence, The Rossetti Archive, The Swinburne Project. In these and other digital repositories, the textual output of the Victorian period has a strong presence online. But as a growing number of texts are translated from print to digital editions, many peculiarities of form are lost or altered. The historical development of the World Wide Web and practices of textual encoding have produced a system that separates content from form and often ignores the ways in which formal arrangement enacts with and acts upon user embodiment. Within media studies and the digital humanities, scholars have named and analyzed these issues broadly. But few scholarly projects explore alternative practices of encoding. This chapter describes my digital humanities project, a creative remediation of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," an experiment in representing poetic form in a digital interface. My chapter on Rossetti's poem, "Rhymes With: Christina Rossetti's Poetic Sensationalism," uses a historically sensitive new formalist method to argue that the innovative rhyme patterns in the poem are crucial to understanding the relationship of the protagonist sisters. In that chapter, I detail my insights into the poem through an extended close reading. In my digital resource, "Rossetti by

Rhyme,” by contrast, I return those insights to the poem itself, using new media methods of text presentation to “bring to life” the rhyme patterns in the poem in a way that makes them evident to a nonspecialist reader.¹⁰⁷ This resource is therefore a demonstration of the ways in which new technologies can reveal what is already present in the dense aesthetics of literary texts, and especially in Victorian poetry. At the same time, my resource uses the innovative print poetics of the Victorian period to create a new mode of data presentation, one that bypasses the tropes, developed much later, of the zoom and the network, now popular in the data visualization of literature. Poetry has already developed sophisticated means for communicating complex and overlapping structures and textures in a durational user experience. My resource draws from these means and demonstrates that Victorian poetry may help us move beyond data visualization to other modes of data presentation and data perception.

Data visualization refers to a host of techniques and aesthetic languages which translate complex bodies of information into sensible representations. “Visualizations are about making the inhuman, that which is beyond or outside sensory recognition, relatable to the human being” (Halpern 22). The history of such practices—recently taken up in works such as Melissa Gregg’s “Inside the Data Spectacle” and Orit Halpern’s *Beautiful Data*, for example—tracks back to mid-twentieth-century communication technologies and governmental techniques of control, while the aesthetics of such practices emphasize questions of scale (Halpern 14, 35-6). Visualizations of textual corpora and individual texts operate at such a scale that they are generally incompatible with simultaneous

¹⁰⁷ Rossetti by Rhyme may be found at <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/goblinmarket/index>

reading, even while they facilitate or enhance reading through a recursive process.¹⁰⁸ Data visualization often “zooms out” from the text to represent relations among its parts in a radically altered form (for example: Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees* expands the canon to analyze larger corpora of literary output). Meanwhile, some digital visualizations allow the reader to return from the macro to the micro scale for the purpose of reading the text. These two, mutually incompatible but complimentary operations, now so common in digital scholarship, point up interesting problems. It is generally assumed, and assumed a good, that the structures and patterns revealed by computer-aided textual analysis and represented in data visualization are not perceivable in the text by the human reader. “Visualizations, according to current definition, make new relationships appear and produce new objects and spaces for action and speculation” (Halpern 21). The promise of producing such new relationships and objects is one of acquiring new knowledge. Yet the question I would like to consider is the role, in the digital representation of literary texts, of those structures a literary scholar is already capable of noticing in the original.

In recent applications, visualization has become less multi-sensory and multidisciplinary than its historical origins. Halpern explains:

Married initially to psychology, and now digital computation and algorithmic logic, the substrate and content of this practice [visualization] has often had little to do with human sense perception or the optic system. Moreover, with the rise of emphasis on haptic interactions and interactivity, visualizations also often take multisensorial modes. Vision [...] must be understood as inseparable from other senses. (21)

108 Matthew Kirschenbaum, “The Remaking of Reading,” provides an overview of digital reading practices including close reading, not-reading, and distant reading.

The multi-sensory quality of visualization (and of vision) is inherent, but recent applications of visualization, especially those hosted on websites and displayed on two-dimensional, small monitors, somewhat collapses the multi-sensory aspect of data visualization. Indeed, many such visualizations, as digital objects, are rendered only as visual information, and therefore cannot be adapted for other, non-visual or multi-sensory forms of technology or perception. Users without the precise combination of technical and bodily capacity are denied access to the information expressed in such visualizations. The promise of increased access to previously inaccessible objects of knowledge is thus undone, here, by a problem of design. And the design problems of many visualizations bely a conflict with web standards and guidelines, developed by multidisciplinary committees of experts, outlining principles and best practices for making digital information perceivable and usable for as many users as possible (recognizing implicitly that “users” comprise various combinations of embodiments and technologies).¹⁰⁹ Users necessarily vary in their sensory capacities and literacies. “Rossetti by Rhyme” complies with recommended technologies and specifications so that its salient information (including, in this case, form) may be adapted for user technologies. It is not a graphical representation of relationships within the text but an interface that produces new spaces for action on and speculation about the text (Halpern 21). Furthermore, this resource attempts to engender new capacities and literacies through its use, by allowing nonspecialist readers to explore rhyme in an embodied and playful,

¹⁰⁹ The standard document is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, published 2008 by the Web Accessibility working group.

rather than didactic, mode.

This chapter places “Rossetti by Rhyme” in a larger context of digital scholarship and poetics. First, I provide background on existing digital scholarly resources in Victorian studies. Second, I describe my resource and the processes of its creation. Third, I offer a theoretical background on my resource. I discuss major fields that have influenced my project: new formalist scholarship in Victorian poetry studies and electronic textual theory. While these two fields share common concerns, they have not often been in conversation. I conclude by putting them together through a discussion of materiality. In particular, I want to explore what materiality means for digital text, and how materiality as a property of poetry can be translated to data.

I. Victorian Studies, New Media

Victorian poetry arose in the age that first “experienced the emergence of media ubiquity” (Colligan and Linley 1), and scholarship on Victorian literature has been some of the earliest to migrate to the new ubiquitous media of the Internet. English Departments have always been at the leading edge of developments in the digital humanities (Kirschenbaum, “What is Digital Humanities”), and Romantic and Victorian Studies in particular initiated some of the first networked resources, including Victorian Web (1987), The Rossetti Archive (1993), the William Blake Archive (1996). In this section I briefly review digital scholarship in Victorian Studies to analyze some of its trends, limitations, and affordances. Today, Victorian Studies remains especially well represented in online scholarship, especially in resources that are archival in nature. The

Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES), which has coordinated peer review and networked search for resources devoted to the Anglophone long-nineteenth century since 2004 (Nowviskie 4-6), currently lists in their database 125 peer-reviewed websites containing over 850,000 digital objects. The sites and objects networked by NINES vary widely in their focus but also reveal trends in digital scholarship, trends often influenced by the affordances of particular technologies. For example, the hyperlink format of the early Web inspired an emphasis on networks (including for example the cultural networks traced in *Victorian Web*). Meanwhile, the almost limitless storage capacity of digital repositories has enabled the creation of online archives that include various forms of media (multimedia archives including *The William Blake Archive* and *The Rossetti Archive*), would be unwieldy in print (complete works or complete correspondences: *Darwin Online*, *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*), are difficult to access (periodicals, rare books and manuscripts: *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*, *William Morris Archive*) or are understudied (*The Poetess Archive*, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*).

Online archives, the most common type of digital project within Victorian Studies, have continued and advanced the scholarly conversation around editorial practice and theory. Creating online scholarly archives may involve the same research and processes as creating traditional scholarly editions, but also involves another layer of interpretive editorial judgements and design decisions. Editorial theory traditionally centers around the question of the text: what version of it should be represented and what elements (stylistic or contextual)

should be preserved. In the copy-text approach to editing, an authoritative text was sought while little attention was paid to incidentals of appearance. In the social text approach to editing, a historically significant version was sought, with particular attention to appearance and context.¹¹⁰ Digital editions entail these decisions and more. Greater freedom in scope, arrangement, and presentation of text demands more decisions on inclusion and organization. Furthermore, the process of translating text from print to the digital, which involves adding “metadata” and embedded data, entails further acts of editorial interpretation unique to the digital environment.

The William Blake Archive serves as a useful example of unique editorial decisions in an online archive because it features a careful statement of editorial policy. The editors argue that the William Blake Archive takes advantage of technology to create a complete collection of work by the *multimedia artist* William Blake, thereby necessarily revising the reception of Blake as primarily a writer. Furthermore, they prioritize the “physical object” (by which they usually mean a single plate engraved by Blake) over the text, illustration, or book.

The priority that we grant to the media, methods, and histories of artistic production has dictated a feature of the Archive that influences virtually every aspect of it. It is utterly fundamental: we *emphasize the physical object – the plate, page, or canvas – over the logical textual unit – the poem or other work abstracted from its physical medium.* (Eaves et al.)

This decision, as they state, stems from an allegiance to Blake’s own processes, in which a plate, page, or canvas was composed as a singular work. The user of the online archive therefore may access only one “work” at a time, although each

¹¹⁰ For considered elaborations of the editorial theories I briefly summarize here, see W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers on the copy-text and McKenzie on the social text.

work is hyperlinked to related works, including consecutive pages from its source publication as well as sketches or alternate prints of the same image. The intentional challenge that comes with these innovations, however, is the relative lack of literacy to process them. It interrupts standard literary scholarship protocols of reading a book as a sequence of poems or a poem as bare text on an otherwise blank page. The archive not only makes an editorial argument about how we should read Blake but also, in this case, provides a lesson in how to read him.

Most online editions and archives do not include a robust statement of editorial principles, but their principles could be reconstructed from the archive's design. For example, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* uses the classic American text to organize discourses of slavery, sentimentality, morality, and race before and after its publication. This edition therefore draws from cultural studies to argue that this text must be understood within the context of contemporary discourses on race and sentimentality and that this text in turn organizes those very discourses and influences their subsequent development. The Poetess Archive is an exhaustive collection of poems in the poetess tradition printed between 1750 and 1900. However, it does not yet include the text of most poems and is therefore more a robust bibliography rather than a scholarly edition. Its design argues that the poetess tradition must be recognized in its breadth and through its publishing history. Online archives and editions may therefore be different kinds of scholarly projects than traditional archives and editions. However, they always require that an editor make interpretive decisions

in the act of creating the project and are therefore records of those editorial decisions.

More recently, digital projects have taken advantage of new technologies not only to edit and remediate text, but also to analyze and visualize its internal features. Here I survey two such projects that have made use of careful, human analysis of text (rather than machine analysis) to inform creative remediation. These two examples from Victorian poetry studies have been particularly instructive for my own project, as they use textual markup and the affordances of digital media to analyze and represent poetics in much the way that I aim to do. For Better For Verse (4B4V) is “An interactive learning tool that can help you understand what makes metered poetry in English tick,” authored by Herbert Tucker. The website’s front page displays one poem with which users can interact by dividing lines into feet, marking stressed and unstressed syllables, and identifying metrical conventions. Users can then “check” their work to get right/wrong feedback on each element they have completed. The site serves the pedagogical purpose of a classroom exercise in scansion. The website “ticks” because data representing the poem’s metrical makeup has been embedded in the poems’ code, and the user’s input may match or not match that code. This is one of few examples of online resources that makes special use of structures evident in the poem: explicitly encoding metrical structure in order to teach a nonspecialist reader how to better read poetry.

“Thematic Networks in Swinburne’s *Song of the Springtides*” is another example that uses poetic structures to create an interactive representation of the

text. Jon Walsh's Algernon Charles Swinburne Archive contains the full text of all of Swinburne's published poems and several other resources, including specially developed tools for the analysis of the poetry. "Thematic Networks in Swinburne's *Song of the Springtides*" is one such tool, detailed by Walsh in the book chapter "Quivering Web of Living Thought." The tool consists of two prototypes, each of which allows the user to visualize the distribution of related words across the six poems of *Song*. Walsh argues that in Swinburne's small collection, "informational and figurative nodes and networks serve to link [...] related concerns of nature and literature across the individual poems and across the bridge of the linking central sonnet" ("Quivering" 34). His strategy is therefore to "explore the volume as a deliberately fashioned and architected whole, and investigate the conceptual networks at play throughout the volume" by systematically recording linguistically connected words and phrases, such as *song*, *sing*, *sings*, *singing*, *sang*, *sung* and even conceptually connected phrases, such as *song* and "lutes and lyres of milder and mightier strings" (32, 44, 47). These connections are carefully recorded ("marked up") in the text and then made visible to the user in the interface. This visualization is accomplished by allowing the user to zoom out to see the six poems together on a single page—with connected phrases highlighted in the same color and connected by colored vectors—then to zoom in to read the relevant text.

Walsh's resource especially highlights issues of scale that become apparent in many data visualizations. The scope of Swinburne's poem collection is such that the reader must "zoom out" to visualize linguistic and conceptual

connections across its six poems, but the reader cannot *read* the poems, in the conventional sense, from that vantage. The scale of the text and the scale of the network Walsh wishes to capture are mutually incompatible. And as in many data visualizations, in this resource they are only visual. That is to say that the networks highlighted cannot be translated or represented by other means.¹¹¹ The particular problems of scale and visuality in this resource are pervasive in today's data visualizations. Walsh's resource, the result of excellent literary research, brings them into focus for poetic texts.

II. Rossetti by Rhyme: Project Description

My interactive edition of Christina Rossetti's long poem "Goblin Market" aims to address these issues and to provide a digital version of the poem informed by its own poetic form. My reading of the poem, explored in Chapter Two, argues that the sisterhood relationship at the center of the poem, and the poem's rhyme scheme—innovative in the context of contemporary poetry, poetic theory, and Rossetti's own body of work—intersect in meaningful ways. I track the irregular rhyming patterns to elucidate the sisters' relative orientations as the poem progresses, and I find that the constantly changing rhyme patterns provide an approximation for the sisters' affective and perceptual experience of their changing relationships to each other, the goblins, and their environment. The question then, for this edition, is how to foreground the salient poetic qualities of rhyme in a media translation of the poem.

When a user accesses "Rossetti by Rhyme," the 567 lines of "Goblin

¹¹¹ The presentation uses Flash-based interactive multimedia, which is fixed in its layout and design.

Market” are displayed as one continuous page, with horizontal lines to indicate stanza breaks. Line numbers are provided for each line of poetry. The user may read the complete poem by scrolling through the page.¹¹² To activate the rhyme networks in the poem, the user may select any line. Once a line is selected, all lines related to it by end rhyme are displayed, while all lines not connected to it by rhyme are hidden. The displayed lines are collapsed towards each other, such that the user can view and read the selected lines (which may be from 2 to around 20 lines) on a single screen window. From this view, clicking any line will restore the complete poem display and expand all lines to their usual position. This particular interface allows a user to read the poem *and* to observe the shape, distance and distribution of rhyming lines (by observing the line numbers corresponding to them) at the same time and in the same view. Rather than relying on a zoom to visualize rhyme in metaphorical networks at scale, it stays at the scale of the text and relies on what we might think of as a metaphor of entanglement to visualize rhyme. That is, when any line is acted upon, the lines related to it through rhyme respond—in this case by gathering around it.¹¹³

The process of creating this project required stages of manual encoding, programmed transformation, and web development. In the manual encoding stage, I analyzed all rhyming lines across the poem, created a schema to label them, and added these labels as embedded information in the digital text of the

112 A later version of this resource may include an audio version of the text, with the option to listen to the complete poem or to listen to lines related by rhyme. The present version may be read aloud, from start to finish or through lines related by rhyme, by any text-to-speech software a user has available on their device.

113 Karen Barad’s work, which transposes the concept of entanglement from quantum physics to larger scale phenomena of matter and meaning, has been helpful in my thinking about rhyme in this way.

poem. This process of adding information in the form of specialized, bracketed terms called tags is generally called “marking up” and employs “markup language.” The particular set of tags I employed have been established by the Text Encoding Initiative, an international consortium of scholars and technologists who develop and maintain the *Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange*. These guidelines were developed beginning in the late 1980s as an infrastructure to create sustainable, sharable, digital archives and tools in a context where most formats were proprietary and involved in cycles of manufactured obsolescence (TEI “History”). The *Guidelines*, released in the current P5 version in 2007 and regularly updated, “define and document a markup language for representing the structural, rendition, and conceptual features of texts,” particularly texts of interest to humanities scholars (TEI *Guidelines*). The *Guidelines*, often simply referred to as TEI, are strictly speaking a defined subset of Extensible Markup Language (XML) and have been developed in close relationship with humanities scholars and particular projects. The TEI is the field standard, has been used to encode every resource listed at NINES, and is behind the information encoded in Tucker’s 4B4V and Walsh’s Swinburne Project.

The TEI includes specialized subsets of tags for different genres of documents, such as manuscripts, performance texts, and verse. The verse vocabulary includes tags to identify structural divisions (stanzas, lines), components of the verse line (feet, caesurae), and rhyme and metrical analysis. This information is encoded, at the editor’s discretion, when the poem is

translated from print text to TEI. The TEI-encoded poem therefore preserves information that would otherwise be lost in the conversion from print text to code—such as line breaks and stanza breaks—and may include further information that is not positively marked in the print poem but is nonetheless present in the original—such as rhyme scheme and meter. This process is generally used to create archival quality texts for preservation that may survive changes in technology.

For my resource, however, I wished to use the encoded poetic information to determine the presentation of the text. Doing so required further stages of transformation and development. The TEI-encoded poem had to be translated into HTML, the language of the web, and an interface had to be created to process the poem in response to user input.¹¹⁴ Briefly, the transformation was accomplished with XSLT, a coding language that automates the transformation of TEI (XML) to HTML. The web interface was created with JavaScript, a dynamic programming language employed in web browsers to allow user manipulation of content. The final project is hosted on Scalar, a platform developed to host born-digital scholarship. It includes the complete interactive poem and a series of pages describing, in generalist language, the importance of rhyme in “Goblin Market” and the theory behind this edition.

This resource mobilizes many of the theoretical issues in the rest of my dissertation. Like my chapter on Rossetti’s poem, my digital edition of the poem argues that the formal qualities of a poem, including rhyme scheme, may serve

114 These stages benefitted greatly from support and collaboration of Women Writers Project staff and web developer Yanyi Luo, respectively.

as a field which registers or investigates historical forces operating at other scales. This new formalist method aims to strike a balance between close formal analysis and a close attention to history. One generative manifesto for this approach is Victoria Jackson and Yopie Prins's 1999 article, "Lyrical Reading," in which they argue that in the minutiae of poetic form, a text often registers and troubles historic forces. Jackson and Prins advocate and indicate by example a "lyrical" mode of reading which remains constantly attentive to the tensions between formal and historical forces. They take as their cases two exemplars of the "Victorian poetess"—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, representing England, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith, representing America—to show, in spite of the feminist "recovery" of the Victorian woman poet, that the poems themselves evacuate the speaking subject in order to carry out their generic work as lyric. The result is nothing like a deconstructive, or purely formal, reading after which the female poet subject is shown to have disappeared. Rather, what is shown is that the female poet subject must disappear herself in order to attain the authority of lyric voice, thus troubling the idea that the poems (nineteenth century lyrics written by women) are either outside of or merely contained by historical conditions (of women writers in the nineteenth century).

The method advocated by Jackson and Prins has been extremely important to Victorian poetry studies in the fifteen years since its publication. One sign of its importance is Marjorie Levinson's *PMLA* article, published in 2007, which defined and surveyed "New Formalism."¹¹⁵ Levinson's study, which

115 Other milestones are the *Modern Language Quarterly* special issue on "Reading for Form" and Derek Attridge's 2008 multiple-book review, "A Return to Form?"

follows the contours of a critical movement rather than a subfield bounded by period or genre, nonetheless shows in its citations the disproportionate presence of Victorian Poetry in the “movement” of New Formalism (Levinson 558). In its taxonomy, the survey characterizes the historically aware formalism of Jackson and Prins as “activist” formalism, following Susan Wolfson,¹¹⁶ and notes that within this work, “With remarkable regularity, one reads that [...] new historicism’s notion of form was more formalist and more agential in its working ideas of form than current practice suggests” (559). In other words, the new project of cultivating a historically informed formalism is also a return to a more historical historicism and materialism (559). So-called new, activist formalism thus claims a prolific lineage.

Levinson furthermore notes the peculiar fact that form itself is not the object of interest in New Formalism; rather, “one finds in the literature [...] no efforts to re-theorize art, culture, knowledge, value, or even—and this is a surprise—form” (561). This lacuna is interesting because the question of what we are reading when we are reading form is a tricky one that goes to the heart of bigger questions—i.e. What is textuality? What is the literary?—of literary criticism. Yet at the same time that a return to form has developed in literary studies broadly and poetry studies in particular, a serious re-theorization of poetic form has taken place in the subfield of literary criticism concerned with digital text. Electronic literatures of the 1990s prompted several essentially

116 The counterpart to activist formalism is normative formalism, which calls to “bring back a sharp demarcation between history and art, discourse and literature, in which form (regarded as the condition of aesthetic experience as traced to Kant, i.e., disinterested, autotelic, playful, pleasurable, consensus generating, and therefore both individually liberating and conducive to affective social cohesion) is the prerogative of art” (Levinson 3-4). Wolfson names activist formalism in “Reading for Form” 2.

structuralist studies of digital poetry, e-literature, hypertext, or cybertext, as a special class of text to be classified and studied.¹¹⁷ Around the turn of the century, however, a second wave of electronic literature theory began to break down distinctions between poetry in new media and poetry in old media, to use the newly available concepts and heuristics of new media to understand anew textuality, poetics, and form. Whereas the first wave of electronic literature criticism often took a structural approach to distinguish the characteristic features of digital literature, the second wave generally used digital literature to remake literary theory, recognizing that many of the salient features of digital poetics simply force to the surface previously unaccounted for features of poetics, broadly speaking.

In second-wave electronic literary criticism, poetry in print is re-theorized in new terms: it is described as “hotlinked and jumpy” and its form is described as “markup code,” “paratextual programming” or “bibliographical code.”¹¹⁸ This work acknowledges that meaningful formal elements do not reside in the poem in any simple way but have a complicated semiotic and temporal relationship to the poem. In poetry, forms including lines, stanzas, rhyming concords, and historically established meters and stanza are always significant to a critical reading. Such elements however are not positively marked in publications of verse but indicated through conventions employing layout, pronunciation, white space, letterforms—using the code of poetry. Jerome McGann has become a crucial voice in this conversation, theorizing from his own experience as an

117 See for example Aarseth, Eskelinen, Glazier, and Simanowski.

118 Morris 14, 36n17; Cayley “Time” 315; McGann *Radiant* 149.

editor of print texts and an online “hypermedia archive.”¹¹⁹ McGann develops the concept of bibliographic code to explain the rhetorical performance by which texts *do* something not equivalent to what they *say*. John Cayley, a new media poet as well as a lucid theorist of his own and similar work, refers to such bibliographical codes as “paratextual programming” (315). This terminology, for Cayley, stresses the durational quality of even print poetry and points up the inadequacy of “the traditional temporally stunned conception of textuality” in modes of analysis that treat text as an object. I quote at length from Cayley’s argument about the programmatological aspect of language:

There have always been programs [...] and these programs are a necessary aspect of the materiality of language—an ever-present aspect of mediation between a text’s physical characteristics and its signifying strategies. The difference lies in where—literally, and also within cultural structures and hierarchies—these programs run, and it also depends on who writes and runs them. There is a continuity between what I will call ‘paratextual programming’ and the kind of programming that is ever more familiar from the proliferation of programmable media. Paratextual programming runs quasi-invisibly within traditional structures of writing, reading, and interpretation. The programmatological dimension of writing has always already been operative, and therefore the traditional temporally stunned conception of textuality has always already been inadequate to literary and especially to poetic practice. However, the coding applied to textuality *in new media* allows us to perceive, if not the coding itself, then the unambiguous effects and consequences of that coding. (315)

This passage is of special importance for my own work for several reasons. First, Cayley introduces the concept of the “materiality of language” and defines it as “an ever-present aspect of mediation between a text’s physical characteristics and

119 McGann is editor of The Rossetti Archive, the full title of which is The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive.

its signifying strategies.” This materiality is not merely physical but rather mediated. N. Katherine Hayles offers a similar theory of materiality, to which I return at the close of the chapter. Second, Cayley argues that poems “run” in a time-based performance of poetry, emphasizing both that such elements must run on a compatible system (including a reader familiar with poetic conventions, with certain kinds of literacy) and that such elements have a durational quality. Cayley is particularly interested in the understudied durational qualities of print poetry. I am interested in designing a dynamic digital poem whose temporality is not pre-programmed, like some “kinetic” poetry that runs like a video on a loop,¹²⁰ but partially open to the reader’s pace and reading order, like a print poem/program. Third, Cayley’s interest is not in the code itself—even though Cayley’s own work shades into the genre of codework, which intentionally makes evident code that is otherwise invisible—but the consequences of the code which are material and meaningful to the reading, in that they produce significance and affect (his terms), and may also be intentional, ideological, or historically significant. Cayley’s approach to code studies, like other formalist work in media studies, may be compared to the new formalism of Jackson and Prins. Both recognize that the code, or the form, does not adhere in the text in any simple way, but rather resides in a complex relation to the text, its context, and the reader. Its importance is activated through a performance and registered in the consequences. Both mark the site of criticism as that place of the code, of the form. The similarity here is due in part perhaps to shared history in the formalist historicism to which Levinson’s review refers. But also due to the

¹²⁰ See Simanowski, chapter 2, on kinetic poetry.

particular similarities of their objects. The robust theorization of poetic form offered here by Cayley suggests that poetry, which has always activated the programmatological elements of language, may have something to contribute to practices of translating poetry from print to digital media.

That poetic code or programming is similar to code or programming in new media does not, however, trivialize the kinds of changes, remediations, or translations made to print poetry when it migrates to a digital environment. Rather, I would argue, it offers an interesting intersection to put these two kinds of code into conversation, to let them bear on each other. We know from centuries of theory that poetic forms have cultural logics and aesthetic trends. We know from recent decades of theory that new media have their own aesthetic tendencies, determinations, and cultural logics.¹²¹ At the loaded site where these forms intersect, other elements simultaneously come into play: the reader's literacy and affective practice, the durational qualities of poetic and new media codes. The process of transforming a print poem to a digital text implicates and activates all of these multiple elements. It is a nontrivial transformation, like any translation.

In *My Mother Was a Computer*, N. Katherine Hayles proposes the term "media translation" to describe the transfer of texts into new media, "which is inevitably also an act of interpretation" (89). She writes, "I use the term 'media translation' to suggest that recreating a text in another medium is so significant a change that it is analogous to translating from one language to another" (109). Translating a text, for Hayles, means rewriting it. She rejects Warren Weaver's

¹²¹ See for example Manovich, *Language of New Media*.

theory—foundational to much machine and machine-aided translation—that a text in an “other” language is in effect an English-language text encrypted. She furthermore rejects Walter Benjamin’s suggestion in “The Task of the Translator” that all language is an instantiation of some inaccessible “pure” language, “spoken before languages differentiated or, even better, before the language of ‘man’ separated from the Word of God” (Hayles 114). Rather, Hayles argues that translation is as writing, for all written works—including translations—are “imperfect instantiations never fully one with the significations toward which they gesture” (114). Hayles builds on Borges’s contention that “texts are provocations to go in search of meaning” to observe that “when they become instantiated in a given set of words (and we may add, a given medium and performance in that medium), they necessarily miss some possibilities even as they realize others” (114). This Borgesian framework flattens the qualities of the “original” (its ontological and temporal primacy) and distributes it among all texts, for there is something original to, but beyond, any and all text. To translate, across language or media, is also to create. Under Hayles’s theory, the process of media translation is opened up to creative expression and critical intervention rather than returned always to the original.

In *Radiant Textuality*, Jerome McGann considers the ways in which translation, especially media translation, is creative and critical work. Media translation, which in certain circumstances and older media is called *editing*, is for McGann a form of critical interpretation that is performative and that productively alters the original. For McGann, editions and translations are “by

definition performative,” for they have the peculiar task of “settling,” as Dante Gabriel Rossetti put it, “many points without discussion” (qtd. in McGann 114). Editions perform interpretation in the act—and the new edition is, in McGann’s terms, the residue of that interpretive act. If such works have paratextual statements about their rationale, these paratexts only outline the performativity of the text itself. McGann furthermore centers the edition as the paradigm for all critical practice, including for example essay writing. He argues that all criticism is performative and furthermore advocates a critical approach he calls “deformative,” a mode of reading that embraces the fundamental premise of altering the original. Deformative criticism reorders, isolates, alters and/or adds significant elements to a poetic text in order to “release or expose the poem’s possibilities of meaning” (108). Deformance (McGann’s term for the performance of deformative criticism) is never arbitrary in its operations, McGann argues, for its possibilities of play are ultimately grounded in the work itself, which is the result of a similar game already played (150-1). Deformance—taking apart a work to make something new—may be more readily visible in artistic practice than in critical, for “criticism (scholarship as well as interpretation) tends to imagine itself as an informative rather than a deformative activity” (*Radiant* 114).¹²² However, McGann argues that all criticism and interpretation may be regarded as deformative and anticipates, even advocates, an embrace of deformative methods in the era of new media translation (127).

Today’s new media environment and digital scholarship offer ample

122 McGann furthermore argues that *explicitly* deformative scholarship “is all but forbidden” (*Radiant* 114). McGann positions his critical program in opposition to this. For him, the point of textual criticism is to change the text, as his 2007 book *The Point Is to Change It* suggests.

evidence to support McGann's claim that all criticism is deformative. In the era of big data, new critical methods draw on the radical alterity of scale to deform original texts into data representations. Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* (2005) announces the advent of big data for genre studies and interrelated national literatures. Matthew Jockers's *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History* (2013) expands the corpus of nineteenth-century American novels and mines their textual data to trace literary style and model thematic content.¹²³ New media tools for comparison (Juxta and the Versioning Machine), for text data visualization (Voyant Tools), for network analysis (Gephi), and for map building (GeoCommons) enable scholars to deform literature into something else with relative ease.

But these new methods also engender new questions. What is being revealed and what is being preserved in big data representations of literary texts? Literary form is often the first to go. Alan Liu argues in "Transcendental Data" that in our poststructuralist, digital humanist present, data has come to figure for information excused from the problems of language, a new kind of transcendental signified which does not need form because it is unproblematically referential.¹²⁴ This is a retrograde position that resembles the earlier copy-text approach to editorial theory, in which the words, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the original *text* were of interest, but the layout, print venue, and context were ignored. Editorial theory has abandoned

123 Stephen Ramsay's *Reading Machines* (2011) provides an overview of similar digital humanities work across literary studies.

124 And, as Melissa Gregg explains, data rhetorically conceals the fact that it has been selected and constructed. "The obviousness of data, its *taken-for-granted-ness*, emanated from the Latin origin of the word, which in the singular means 'gift,' or something that is 'given'" (42).

the assumption that these slightly larger scale elements of form are meaningless, recognizing that they are meaningful especially in a historical approach to a text and its uses. The treatment of form on the world wide web reflects the development of web language and underlying technology that separates form from content, using two different and separate languages, one to indicate “structural” information and another to indicate “style.” The standards that guide best practices for making web content adaptable to a range of technological and perceptual needs—the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0—another product of the web, reflects the same assumption of formless content (or information) in its language. However, the language of the WCAG also opens space for creative interpretation.

Because it is a basic principle of these guidelines to make all content perceivable in spite of perceptual difference (including visual or aural impairments), the WCAG document relies on a logic of equivalence. For example, while visually impaired users cannot see images, they can perceive a “textual equivalent” which accompanies and describes an image. In order for this logic to function, medium and material specificity must be ignored in favor of information. This preference is indicative of broader assumptions of the ideology Alan Liu calls “transcendental data.” Still, the logic of equivalence in the WCAG leaves moot the question of what—form or content—is to be relayed, equivalently, to users accessing it via different technologies and embodiments. So, while the logic underpinning current web accessibility thinking resembles traditional textual scholarship which has presumed that a “text” is essentially

independent of the accidents of its material instantiation, and while my own editorial principles are at odds with this framework, there is room here for creative intervention and critical deformation. In keeping with the WCAG, an online resource should not construct material barriers to certain users on the basis of ability and technology. However, a resource might create material features perceivable to all users as a pedagogical practice. That is, the logic of equivalence does not necessitate an aspiration towards disembodied information perfectly communicated to a disembodied (but presumed able-bodied) user. Rather, the logic of equivalence can be used creatively to imagine a way to materialize textual qualities to users who might not otherwise have access to them.

The translation of text from print to digital media has also occasioned a re-theorization of materiality. As the physical qualities that have been of special interest to bibliographical and textual scholars—paper, binding, typeface—recede from the theoretical picture, the material effects of textual media remain present, requiring new methods to understand medium specificity and how it matters. At the same time, media studies offers models for thinking about media and the material support of communication. Here I would like to explore Hayles's redefinition of textual materiality in light of some practical issues of digital texts.

In the translation of text to new media the material substrate of textual presence changes significantly. Text becomes more obviously a dynamic, distributed process enabled by an ensemble of code, technology, and reader. Second-wave electronic literary criticism uses this dynamic to reframe printed

text, but the two cases remain different. Printed text is produced on a page, while digital text is produced across server storage, encoded output and browser software. This shift, from page to technological circuit, parallels the one Hayles describes in her introduction to *How We Became Posthuman*. The decisive arrival of posthumanism, she argues, is the hypothetical moment when you are put into a “cybernetic circuit that splices your will, desire, and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces” (xiv). If in the new media environment, the locus of human identity is less stable and less singular, the same may be said for text. Embodiment, in both cases, continues to matter but becomes different. Hayles’ analysis shows that embodiment is different after the digital and that textuality is different too. But her posthumanism points back to the “distributed circuit” that was already present between reader and poetic text in the print era.

Textual “embodiment” shows up in the media translation process which inevitably reveals resistances of both media, original and new, at points where textual transmission becomes intractable. For example, the mark-up languages historically available for encoding text for online display may be at cross-purposes with the literary language and structure of the text. As Johanna Drucker explains,

These [mark-up schemes] require that a scholar create a match between the rigid hierarchies of analytic structure with the recursive structures of aesthetic artifacts. Poetry, in particular, relying as it does on overlapping fields of semantic, syntactic, rhythmic, and graphical elements (to name only the most obvious categories), poses serious

resistance to such managerial techniques at the level of the text. Works of imagination, to paraphrase McGann, are not information structures [...] And yet, to make them functional within digital formats, they are often treated as if they were. ("Theory" 688)

These and related problems have had the beneficial effect of motivating renewed theorization of materiality as it applies to text. Hayles, who has engaged these questions for at least a decade, defines a new materiality of text as "the interaction of its physical characteristics with its signifying strategies" (*Mother* 103). She elaborates in "The Time of Digital Poetry":

Rather than think about the materiality of texts as a fixed set of physical properties characteristic of an object, we might consider it as emerging from the ways a text mobilizes the physical characteristics of the technology in which it is instantiated to create meaning. Materiality in this view is a different concept than physicality. [...] Contingent, provisional, and debatable, materiality itself thus comes to be seen as more an event than a preexisting object, a nexus at which culture, language, technology, and meaning interpenetrate. (206)

Thinking materiality as a debatable, emergent event makes it possible to think about materiality as the product of critical judgment. Hayles's concept makes the critic responsible for accounting for the materiality of a text but also provides a framework to ground such judgment.

Materiality in this sense may be interpreted, but does not require an intelligent interpreter: it requires only a relation of interest. Hayles has more recently pushed her concept in conversation with Object Oriented Ontology, which distinguishes between an object's essence and its allure, where Hayles has distinguished between physicality and materiality. "Physicality," she writes, "is similar to an object's essence; potentially infinite, it is unknowable in its totality.

What we can know, however, are the physical qualities that present themselves to us, which I designated as materiality” (“Speculative Aesthetics” 172). However, Hayles argues that “objects do not passively present their qualities; rather, humans attend to certain qualities in specific contexts for motivated reasons” (172). She furthermore extends this capacity for attention, following Graham Harman, Ian Bogost, and especially Jane Bennett, beyond the human and beyond the living: “The same is true of a lion hunting a gazelle or an instrument perceiving the number encoded in an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tag” (172-3). Georges Canguilhem once argued that the capacity to “attend to certain qualities in specific contexts for motivated reasons” or “to radiate; [...] to organize the milieu from and around a center of reference” was the characteristic of the living (113-4). But in this new materiality, it seems characteristic of every thing to ignore the vast excess of information in which it moves, to organize around itself an “elective extraction” (Canguilhem 112). The new materiality insists that this process is always occurring in many directions, and that we have an ethical mandate as scholars to investigate it broadly. I argue that poetics offers a rich field in which to observe such processes occurring within text, and that the translation of poetry from the print to the digital provides an occasion to study more deeply those operations.

III. Conclusions

My digital edition of “Goblin Market” aims to teach new audiences a new reading of “Goblin Market” while sensitizing the audience to poetic form. It joins the many online resources on Victorian literature and culture but activates the

particular qualities of Victorian poetry. Victorian poetry, Eric Griffiths argues, develops through the “break with the organic functions of metre” described by William Wordsworth (Griffiths 74). When printed poetry becomes dominant over performed poetry, the reader *sees* a “mute polyphony” of possible voices rather than *hearing* only one (Griffiths 16).¹²⁵ This function allows the poem to create internal tensions which trouble or critique its literal content. New media translations of poetry may illustrate this function through poetic deformation rather than, or in addition to, explaining it in essay form. Indeed, the intersection of Victorian poetry studies and the media translation of Victorian poetry from print to the digital calls out for such a treatment.

Furthermore, this digital edition is an experiment which considers textual and human embodiment as connected. Much experimental new media poetry has explored these issues. But often due to the methods and technologies used, such work has been inaccessible to significant subsets of users and technologies. Digital poetry interested in the materiality of words, letter forms, and perceptual experience often creates kinetic interfaces that privilege the textual performance over user exploration. My experimental edition instead moves toward the open-ended text as interface. It also tests the extent to which the language of new media, which tends to view all content as formless information, can be repurposed to transmit form as content. Attempts to get beyond form, in the history of literary criticism, have always found *form* tenacious in its returns (Leighton chap. 1). This resource is an attempt to return poetic form to itself in

125 My choice of Griffiths’ quotes and concise restatement of his argument relies on Prins’s in “Victorian Meters” 91-92.

the digital realm.

Appendix: Abbreviations used in Citations

BC: The Brownings' Correspondence

DCP: The Darwin Correspondence Project

OED: The Oxford English Dictionary

PEPP: The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics

WEBB: The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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