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**When Hands Touch: Manual Intercourse in Victorian Literature**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Kimberly Nicole Cox**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**English**

Stony Brook University

**December 2014**

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**Stony Brook University**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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During the nineteenth century, the hand was a contested site of knowledge. Anatomists and physiologists viewed the hand as an emblem of human ascension; simultaneously, scientific theologians argued that the hand evinced God's intervention in human evolution. Pseudo-scientists popularized the erotic nature of tactile sensation located in the hands, as well as the practices of hand-phrenology, palmistry, and graphology that sought to identify individuals based on the surface character of their hands. Etiquette books acknowledge the important role handshakes played in social intercourse while concurrently establishing rules to regulate such tactile interactions and the unspoken sentiments that they might convey. This dissertation queries how these discourses interested in mapping and policing hands, particularly female hands, during the nineteenth century come to bear on literature of the period. A predominant feature of Victorian novels, hands that touch have long been overlooked by critics as a form of both social and sexual communication in its own right. Touching hands did not merely *signify* communication for the Victorians, it *was* a form of communication that novelists invoked as a means of acknowledging and commenting on the material conditions of gender and the politics of sexual expression that otherwise went unspoken during the nineteenth century. Novelists such as the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Bram Stoker, to name a few, needed not speak of rape, sexual desire, masturbation, or consummation directly; rather, characters' uninvited hand-grasps, lengthy handshakes, or illicit caresses conveyed what could not be written. I introduce the term 'manual intercourse' to identify this literary phenomenon wherein representations of touching hands and the tactile sensations that those touches arouse function as a haptic form of communication not restricted by language taboos or the sociocultural structural conventions that regulate speech. When hands touch in novels, they haptically engage each other, conveying emotion, sentiment, and desire through the quality, intensity, and duration of the touch itself. This dissertation situates manual intercourse in its historical, critical, theoretical, and erotic contexts, considering a variety of works that span genres, disciplines, and centuries.

## Dedication Page

*—For Clydell who never had the opportunity. The most avid reader I know. My inspiration.*

## Frontispiece



### 'TIS HARD TO GIVE THE HAND.

---

Tho' I mingle in the throng  
Of the happy and the gay,  
From the mirth of dance and song,  
I would fain be far away ;  
For I love to use no while,  
And I can but deem it sin,  
That the brow should wear a smile  
When the soul is sad within.  
Tho' a parent's stern command  
Claims obedience from me,  
O, 'tis hard to give the hand  
Where the heart can never be.  
O' tis hard to give, &c.

I have sighed and suffered long,  
Yet have never told my grief,  
In the hope that for my wrong  
Time itself would find relief.  
I will own no rebel thought,  
But I will not wear the chain  
That for me must still be fraught  
With but misery and pain.  
In all else I will be bland,  
But in this I must be free,  
And I will not give the hand  
Where the heart can never be.  
And I will not, &c.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my gratitude to all of the people who both literally and metaphorically had a hand in my project. First, I must thank my committee without whom I could not have completed this project. Dr. Adrienne Munich who embraced my esoteric interest in hands from my first semester at Stony Brook University and continually challenged me to break out of my shell and find my voice. Under her tutelage I have grown as a scholar, writer, educator, and, most importantly, a person. Dr. Peter Manning whose continued enthusiasm for my project enlivened my spirits when I felt the task impossible. His fabulous finds, our animated conversations, and his detailed notations encouraged my project's growth in often unforeseen but productive directions. Dr. Lisa Diedrich whose insightful comments have helped me nuance and deepen my interpretations. Working with her on both my project and within the Women's and Gender Studies Program has helped me find my purpose in both my scholarship and pedagogy. And, Dr. Ann C. Colley who proved a quick and dedicated reader as well as a professional mentor. Her thoughtful feedback encouraged me to think about this dissertation as a book project rather than merely individual chapters to be strung together at the end. My committee helped me shape my dissertation into an object of which I am quite proud.

Throughout this process, I have also learned that I, at least, cannot write in isolation, so I offer my warmest, most sincere thanks to my writing group who kept me accountable and connected: Ula Klein, Anthony Teets, Sophie Lavin, Aliza Atick, Nathaniel Doherty, and especially Nicole Garret and Margaret Kennedy who have read everything that I have ever written at least twice. I must also thank my colleagues and dear friends Lauren Esposito and Brandi So who read for me, encouraged me, and kept me grounded throughout this trying process.

Finally, I must thank my family. My Uncle Gene and Aunt Kathy for their continuous support and encouragement during these years. Few people would house their niece and her romantic partner for years in exchange for cleaning dishes and taking out the trash. Their patronage has made my work possible. My mom and dad for their excitement and understanding throughout this process; for their help, support, and encouragement when I initially applied to graduate school; and for instilling a value for education in me at a young age. My sister, brother, and aunts for their love and support. And, finally, Nathaniel Doherty, my rock who held my hand and never let go during the madness of this last year.

## Introduction: Touching the Victorians

“How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance ‘o learning in that way, and you did not help me!”  
—Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), Ch. 12

Through the voice of its eponymous heroine, Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* associates a woman’s control over her hands with control over her body, an association prevalent in Victorian literature throughout the century. Tess, not having been taught the dangers of unregulated touching, finds her body violated by another’s hands. Alec’s touch subsumes and dominates her. Shortly before the rape, the narrator describes Alec’s foreboding touch that approximates the sexual assault that follows: “He touched her with his fingers, which sank into her as into down” (*Tess* 86). Tess defends herself to her mother by asserting that ladies learn “what to fend hands against” by reading novels; she suggests that her lack of manual instruction has left her helpless in hands such as Alec’s. Nancy Armstrong and J. Hillis Miller have established the relationship between novel reading and conduct among a growing female readership during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that novels depicted the dangers and pleasures that manual contact posed to female characters as a means of educating their female readership about the eroticism and communicative character inherent in touch, and of offering them instruction for its management. The fallen woman of George Eliot’s first novel *Adam Bede* (1859) confronts a similar dilemma; much like Tess, “Hetty had never read a novel; [...] how then could she find a shape for her expectations?” (*Adam Bede* 148). Whereas Alec’s touch establishes his social and sexual authority over Tess, those of Hetty’s

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<sup>1</sup> See Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987) and Miller’s *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (2005).

lover, Arthur, titillate her desires and inflame her passions. Tess and Hetty both negotiate the sexual dynamics of these interpersonal relationships through their hands—a cultural phenomenon that the novel in particular inscribes, which I term ‘manual intercourse.’ A predominant feature of Victorian literature, hands that touch have long been overlooked by critics as a form of communication in their own right.

Through representations of moments of tactile contact and expression, novels frequently commented on the material conditions of gender and the politics of sexual expression that often went unspoken and thus unacknowledged during the nineteenth century. Touch functions apart from language as a form of communication to which all humans have access.<sup>2</sup> I offer the term ‘manual intercourse’ to identify a form of communication that relies on representations of physical sensation rather than on language-based descriptions or the structural conventions that undergird them.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that manual intercourse in literature often makes legible erotic exchange, such innuendos did not prove as shocking to Victorian audiences as the free expression of female desire and of pleasure for pleasure’s sake. Reading Victorian novels through the lens of manual intercourse encourages scholars to think beyond voice as the only mode of communication available to characters. When hands touch in novels, they haptically engage each other, conveying emotion, sentiment, and desire through the quality, intensity, and duration of the touch itself. This introduction situates manual intercourse in its historical, critical,

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<sup>2</sup> I specify humans here as those considered less than human were often denied the right or capacity to communicate through touch.

<sup>3</sup> Briefly, to communicate effectively, one must have access to the dominant language spoken, which traditionally means that women and those from lower socioeconomic or non-Western European backgrounds were through a lack of education and of social authority often denied the right to speak. Additionally, in the philosophic tradition language has been associated with reason and thus the masculine side of the social body, rendering it phallogocentric and often divorced from or unable to account for the body and alternative non-phallogocentric modes of expression.

theoretical, and erotic contexts, ending with a brief discussion of more transgressive or nonnormative forms of contact.

## **I. Historical Context: ‘Manual Intercourse,’ Furtling, and Haptic Exchange**

In her comprehensive study of tactile sensation, Constance Classen points out that “Touch lies at the heart of our experience of ourselves and the world yet it often remains unspoken, even more so, unhistoricized. [...] This omission of tactile experience is noticeable not only in the field of history, but across the humanities and social sciences” (*Deepest Sense* xi). I address this omission in the field of humanities by offering a literary history of nineteenth-century understandings of hands and touch that reaches back to its eighteenth-century roots. I define “manual intercourse” according to the standard nineteenth-century definition of each term, which would have been determined by Samuel Johnson’s preeminent dictionary comprehensively documenting words of the English lexicon as they were most commonly used.<sup>4</sup> Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) defines the term “manual” as “1. Performed by the hand[,] 2. Used by the hand[, and] 3. n.f. A small book, such as may be carried by the hand,” and “intercourse” as “1. Commerce; exchange [and] 2. Communication followed by *with*” (italics original).<sup>5</sup> Taken together, “manual intercourse” identifies not a language but rather a specific mode of haptic exchange represented in literature that facilitates social communication between characters via actions involving, or performed by the hands. In other words, touch is a form of social intercourse, not merely a discourse.

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson’s *Dictionary* was widely used until the publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary* near the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Today, the OED defines these terms as follows: “manual” as “Of work, an action, a skill, etc.: of or relating to the hand or hands; done or performed with the hands; involving physical rather than mental exertion,” and “intercourse” as “Social communication between individuals; frequent and habitual contact in conversation and action; dealings.”

My pun on the term “intercourse” is intentional. In posing this pun, I draw on two different but related senses of the term: social and sexual intercourse. Though I intend the pun for a modern-day audience, according to the second edition of Oxford’s *Pocket Fowler’s Modern English Usage* (2008), the “use of this word as short for *sexual intercourse* [was] first recorded in 1798,” suggesting its appropriateness for my periods of study as well. “Manual intercourse” highlights the direct link during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries between hands, social interactions, and sexual expression. My understanding of touch builds on that of William Cohen and Peter Capuano. Cohen’s early work on Victorian literature establishes hands as erotic appendages and asserts that “in a genre that forbids direct observation of genitals in action, this manual code gives voice to what otherwise cannot be spoken” (*Sex Scandal* 33). Capuano develops Cohen’s idea of a manual code further, arguing that it gives voice to more than just erotic desires when read through Victorian handshake etiquette and hand-phrenology. Though Cohen offers the term ‘manual conduct’ to reference hand gestures within Victorian literature and Capuano uses ‘manual discourse’ to refer to the language of gesture,<sup>6</sup> I find neither term satisfactory because both limit our ability to explore the physiological, psychological, and communicative varieties of haptic experience by either focusing on hands as symbols of behavioral management or encoding gesture within language as a means of clarifying what such representations of touch might convey to readers. Additionally, neither “conduct” nor “discourse” directly addresses the association of hands that touch with sexual expression in spite of the fact that Cohen suggests that self-touch signifies autoeroticism in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. In its literary manifestations then, “manual intercourse” refers to the physical

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter two, “Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*,” of Cohen’s *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996) and see Capuano’s article, “At the Hands of Becky Sharpe: (In)Visible Manipulation in *Vanity Fair*” (2008).

communication of a character's innermost desires, sympathies, and aversions through various forms of tactile contact made by the hands whether in a social or private setting. While Johnson's definition of "intercourse" does not include sexual penetration, the word "intercourse" as understood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved both social and sexual—public and private—haptic exchange, a key feature of manual intercourse as I address it. I use the term "intercourse" to highlight the reciprocal nature of touch as well as the emotional, erotic, and social dimensions embodied in haptic exchange.

A contemporary coffee-table book that claims Victorian origins offers, perhaps, my favorite illustration of the type of nonverbal communication that manual intercourse facilitates. "Furtling," the practice the book details, offers a clear example of how touch functions according to contemporary phenomenology while simultaneously rendering Victorian cultural anxieties about sexuality accessible to modern day readers.<sup>7</sup> Published in 1989, *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book; Furtling: The Rediscovered Art of Erotic Hand Manipulation* humorously parodies contemporary perceptions of Victorian sexual repression and provides a complete history of the so-called practice of "furtling," a practice supposedly begun to offer pent up eroticism a healthy avenue for release (see Fig. 1). Ideally, two or more people take part in the recreation. To begin furtling, one reader uses a hand to create a sexualized body part that has been cut out of an image. For example, as in Fig. 3, a woman riding a horse jumps over a fence and her dress flies up exposing her bottom, the shape of which has been cut out of the image. Following the instructions given on the page preceding the image (see Fig. 2), one reader then clasps her thumb under her other four fingers, creating the missing posterior with the crease that forms where the

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<sup>7</sup> Though the book details the origins of this practice, I have not yet been able to validate any of the sources it references nor have I found any nineteenth-century engravings associated with the practice. I believe furtling itself to be a clever hoax, but am still trying to get in touch with the authors for confirmation.

index finger and thumb meet. The reader then presses that crease into the cut out portion of the image, forming the rider's buttocks with her finger's flesh—a body part other readers can then explore with their own fingers. Contemporary readers that engage with *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book* learn that their excitement should come as much from using their hands to create sexual body parts as from being caressed by another's curious finger. As the book explains, “These engravings induce powerful statements of tactile value where the reader is encouraged to delight in the sensation of touch—as if the body were in miniature and the fingertip the caressing palm” (3; italics mine). The last part of this sentence highlights the hands' capacity to arouse, to communicate one's own arousal, and to safely indulge one's carnal impulses through a form of hand-play. Furtling promotes social intimacy through haptic exchange, encouraging readers to communicate excitement and stimulate pleasure through touch alone.

The book hails “furtling” as a practice begun during the Victorian period as a means of safely engaging and releasing erotic tension, the humor, of course, coming from the common association of Victorians with sexual repression as well as the public nature of this form of tactile carnal indulgence.<sup>8</sup> I would argue that these contemporary perceptions about Victorian repression continue because our views about what counts as an explicit sexual act have changed. To the Victorians, a caress of the hand *was* a sexual act akin to modern day caresses of more intimate parts of the body. In *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*, Michel Foucault puts forth his Victorian repressive hypothesis: because extramarital carnal indulgences (i.e., non-procreative sex) were unspeakable, Victorians sublimated and converted their more hedonic desires into socially acceptable discourses. While Foucault focuses on language-based discourse, this

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<sup>8</sup> In spite of the early and continued work of scholars such as Steven Marcus, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, William Cohen, Sharon Marcus, and Deborah Lutz Marsh, contemporary perceptions of the Victorian period popularized in film and on television still seem to imagine it only as a time of sexual repression.



# INSTRUCTIONS

How to use the Hand Book



Fig I. Lay book on a firm surface. With the right hand, adopt the hand shape shown, as in fig I below for example.

Fig II. While maintaining this shape, lift two pages and position the right hand directly under the illustration of the hand.

Fig III. Turn the top page to expose. Make final adjustments with your hand as appropriate.

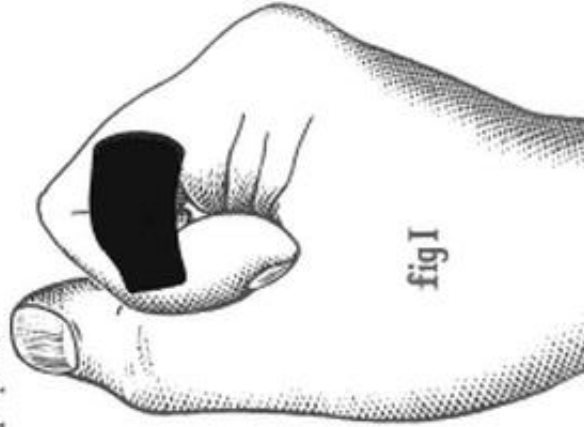
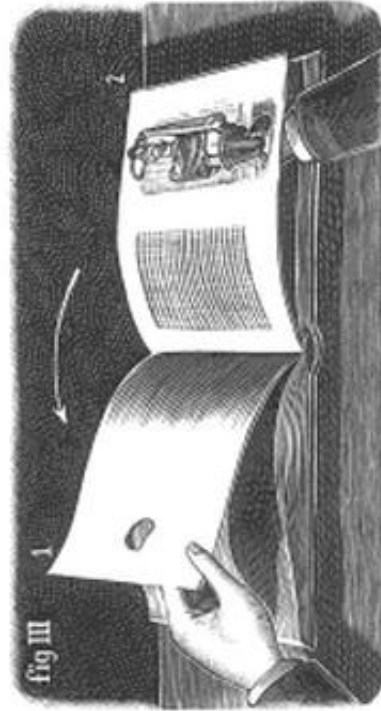
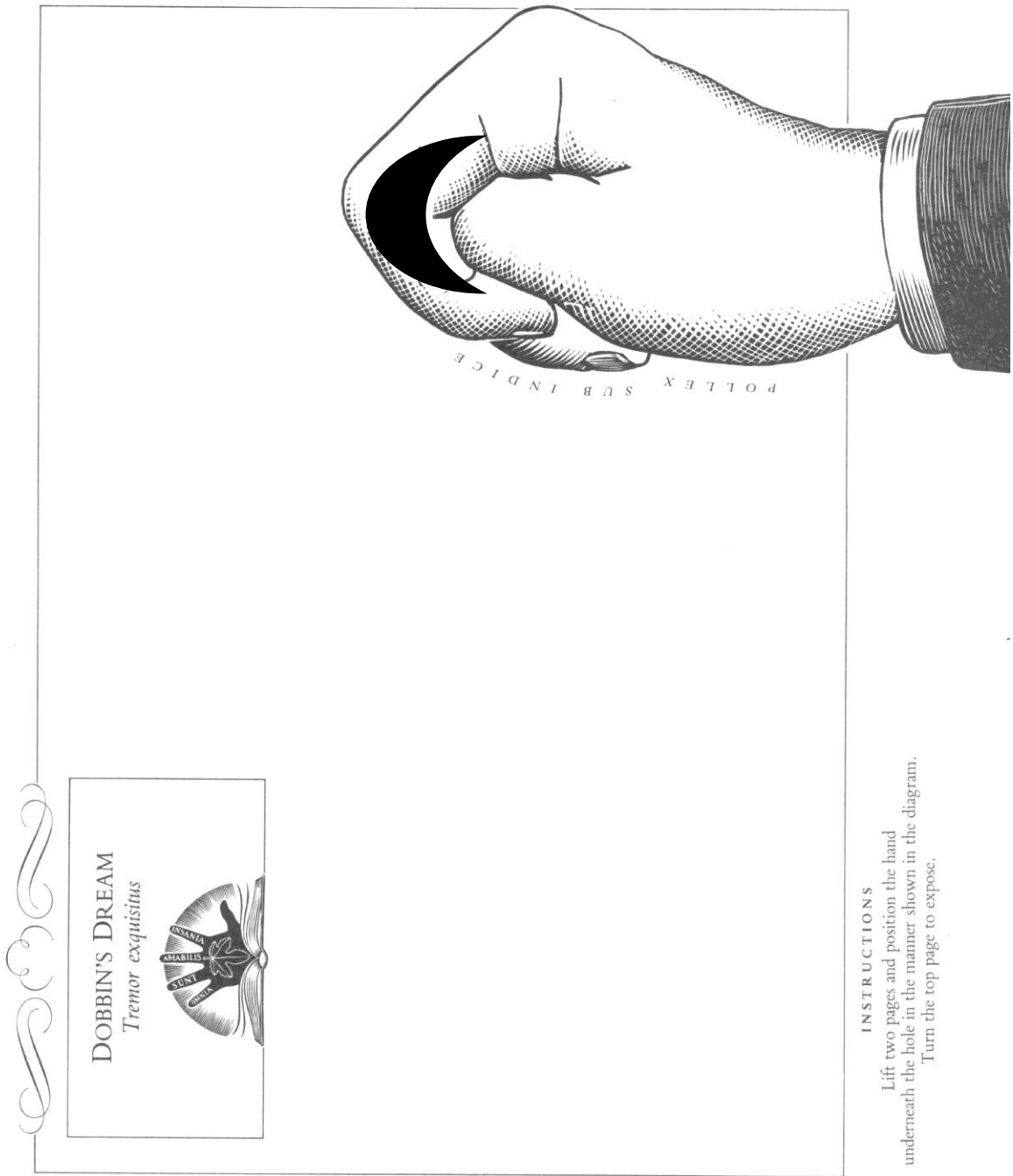
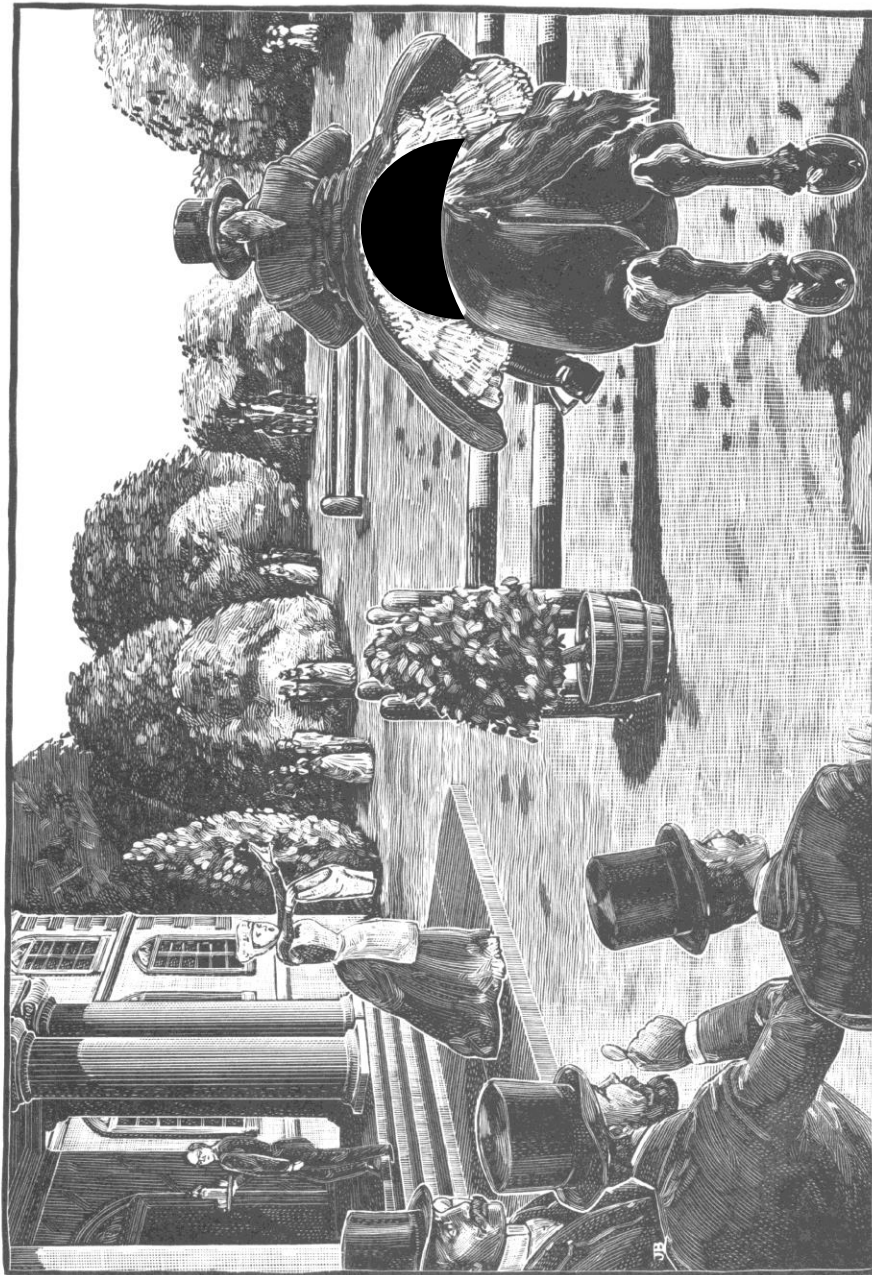


Figure 1. Taken from *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book*. Furling instructions.



**Figure 2.** Taken from *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book*. Place this image on top of Fig. 3, and then place your hand under both but mirroring the position presented in Fig. 2.



*This exposure may be considerably invigorated by forward and backward movement of the thumb knuckle under the index finger. Such movement nicely replicates the riding motion in a manner most gratifying to the eye.*

**Figure 3.** Example of furtling taken from *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book*. (See Fig. 1 for instructions.)

dissertation considers touch as a haptic form of communication that both acknowledges and negotiates unspeakable erotic desires. Touch does not merely say something, it does something. Furling offers an example of how erotic indulgence can find haptic release. Dr. Cornelius Ogle, *The Naughty Victorian Hand Book*'s purported authority and champion, states that some have "urged that by exposing manifestations of carnality in the reader's own hand, this book will encourage illicit gratification of the passions and promote a corruption of the vital juices"; however, he holds "a firm and well-founded conviction that nothing is more productive of happiness and amusement than the flesh when exposed by accident" (Bennett and Silver 2). Through the voice of Dr. Ogle, this book establishes the hand as not only a carnal appendage, but also one capable of exciting enjoyment and arousal and thus of releasing pent up sexual tension through sensual contact with another's hand. Those who furtle communicate with each other through touch, a haptic process that depends on what phenomenologists understand as the reversibility of touch—the idea that when one touches, one is touched in return. In this case, I argue that manual intercourse functions as a nonverbal modality through which Victorian authors and characters might explore the desires, emotions, and sentiments about which they could not openly speak.

## **II. Critical Context: Touch in the Eighteenth Century—An Omission**

Over the past decade, sensory studies generally and tactility studies in particular have surged within Victorian literary criticism.<sup>9</sup> William Cohen, Peter Capuano, and Aviva Briefel paved the way in the late 1990s and 2000s with their foundational works identifying hands

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<sup>9</sup> In July 2013, the University of London, Birkbeck, put on "The Victorian Tactile Imagination" conference at which I presented. It was the first of its kind to focus on tactility alone. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* published a special issue based on its proceedings in Autumn 2014. The Northeast Victorian Studies Association has also recently held a "Victorian Senses" conference (April 2014) that had one panel dedicated to touch.

within literature as appendages that explored Victorian eroticism, identity, and race respectively. More recently, scholars such as Pamela Gilbert have begun to contextualize the relationship between touch and human consciousness in nineteenth-century philosophy and scientific thought, arguing that such views on embodied cognition directly influenced literary production. Building on this foundational body of scholarship, the first chapter of this dissertation explores how eighteenth-century novels influenced Victorian perspectives on touch, and argues that literary touches that function as manual intercourse afford female characters a means of asserting agency apart from the social restrictions placed on them by language.

Charles Forker's article, "The Language of Hands in *Great Expectations*" (1961), was among the first to identify hands as symbols worthy of attention in Victorian literature.<sup>10</sup> Responding to Forker's call in his chapter "Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*" in *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (1996), William Cohen reads self-touch as a form of autoeroticism through which Victorian authors gave voice to the erotic. His work identifies a language of hands that scholars overlooked in their studies on sexuality. Following this study, Cohen explored the relationship between human consciousness and physical sensation in *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (2009). Invoking contemporary phenomenology, he suggests that the ego is above all an embodied ego shaped by proximate contact with the world.<sup>11</sup> As a result, he asserts that "sensation"—the result of that contact—"affords writers a means of concretely representing emotions, desires, and impulses that tend—at least in nineteenth-century literary idioms—to be otherwise unrepresentably abstract and

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Sanders's article "Tennyson and the Human Hand" (1957) predates Forker's by a few years, but at only a few pages it offers little more than a cursory reading of hands in Tennyson's poetry.

<sup>11</sup> What Didier Anzieu terms a "skin ego" and what contemporary psychologists address as "embodied cognition."

ethereal” (*Embodied* 6). I develop Cohen’s argument by suggesting that tactile sensations embody, communicate, and comment on these “emotions, desires, and impulses” rather than merely representing or concretizing them. For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1848) when Edward Rochester first embraces Jane’s hand on the night Bertha sets fire to his bed, the sensations his touch excites in Jane initiate a romantic intimacy between them and rouses Jane to her sexual subjectivity rather than merely concretizing a moment of desire for the reader’s consumption. Jane exerts a level of sexual agency by first reciprocating Rochester’s embrace and then breaking contact.

Other studies of Victorian hands explore how characters exert individual agency and claim social power through their touches and gestures. A few years after Cohen’s publication of *Sex Scandal*, Katherine Rowe offered a comparative study of the dead, sometimes disembodied hand in seventeenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century literature in *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (1999). Rowe reads dead or ghostly hands in fiction across these centuries as a challenge to bodily autonomy and human agency. However, her study intentionally elides eighteenth-century literature as a means of elucidating “formal connections between early modern and modern versions of this device [the dead hand],” an interesting oversight given that Victorian anxieties about touch arose as this dissertation will show in response to its eighteenth-century characterization as a sexual threat to virtuous women (Rowe xii). Peter Capuano’s body of work approaches a different type of hand entirely. His work introduces handshake etiquette and hand-phrenology to readings of characters’ hands and their gestures in Victorian novels. While he does address gesture as a form of social agency, like Cohen before him, he reads touch through conduct and hand-phrenology guidebooks as a language that can be decoded without considering how those touches sometimes deviate. Though

the last chapter of Capuano's dissertation addresses Jewishness in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Aviva Briefel's article "Hands of Beauty, Hands of Horror: Fear and Egyptian Art at the *Fin de Siècle*" (2008) was the first to bring together anxieties about race, imperialism, and industrialization in her reading of mummy's hands as signifiers of Egyptian handicraft. While, taken together, these studies establish the centrality of hands to Victorian understandings of the self, the self as human, and the self as a member of the nation, none consider *why* the nineteenth century saw such a burgeoning interest in identifying, cataloguing, and managing human hands. Attempting to fill this gap, I begin this dissertation by situating conceptions of hands and touch in eighteenth-century philosophy, science, and etiquette in order to suggest that the Victorian fascination with hands and the regulation of their touches responded to a perceived lack of control over touch during the eighteenth century evidenced in novels of the period.

"Ungoverned Touch: Manual Intercourse in Eighteenth-Century Novels," the first chapter of this dissertation, explores how eighteenth-century novels offer the kind of education that Hardy's *Tess* calls for. Eighteenth-century novels functioned as conduct fiction designed to teach ladies "what to fend hands against." Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1720) and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) teach their readers that women can safe-guard their virtue by restricting their manual intercourse. Hands and their ungoverned touches appear frequently in eighteenth-century novels such as Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and Francis Burney's *Evelina* (1778) during moments of heightened sexual tension or threat, establishing a clear correlation between the uninvited grasp of the hand and the rape of the female body. Lovelace's repeated violent seizing of Clarissa's hands and Sir Clement Willoughby's forceful grasping of Evelina's foreshadow the sexual threat that both of these men pose. While Clarissa unconsciously reacts to Lovelace's uninvited touches by withdrawing her hand, she does not immediately recognize the

sexual nature of the threat the gesture poses. By contrast, Evelina more consciously responds to the sexual danger inherent in Sir Clement's uninvited grip. Because she experiences pleasure and arousal when Lord Orville embraces her hand, Evelina has a clearer sense of the type of physical violation that Sir Clement's uninvited grasps carry with them. Female characters throughout the century learn to exert a level of agency over their bodies by either granting or withholding their touch. In contrast to these novels, however, a discussion of hands is all but absent from some of the most popular conduct manuals of the period, which only reference hands in metaphors of marriage. Responding to this deficit, eighteenth-century novels depict the dangers ungoverned manual intercourse posed to female characters in order to educate their female readership about the eroticism inherent in touch and the appropriate behavior for managing it. But of course, this education conveys the fact of the eroticism to a wide range of readers.

### **III. Theoretical Contexts: Phenomenology, Language, and the Politics of Haptic Exchange**

Victorian interest in mapping and policing the human hand grew exponentially throughout the century. In 1833, the surgeon and anatomist Charles Bell published his well-known treatise, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments, As Evincing Design and Illustrating the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God*, in which he argues that the perfection of the human hand proves evidence of God's existence. Sir George Murray Humphrey, an anatomist and physiologist, delivered two lectures published as a compilation in 1861, *The Human Foot and the Human Hand*, in which he not only distinguishes the anatomical differences between the two, but also dedicates an entire section to understanding the human hand as an organ of the will. The pseudo-scientific practices of hand-phrenology and -psychonomy popularized these anatomical findings. Richard Beamish's 1863 publication, *The Psychonomy of the Hand*, published recent anatomical discoveries about sensory receptors in the fingers that



identified them as existing in the same density as in the lips and tongue. Beamish's study established hands as erotic appendages in need of management, but also connected the surface, shape, and size of the human hand with individual character. In contrast to eighteenth-century conduct manuals that remained silent on the management of hands, nineteenth-century etiquette books dedicate entire sections to handshaking, identifying not only types of handshakes but also attributing to each specific qualities, pressures, durations, and circumstances that signified specific meaning. I assert that, in part, this shift responded to eighteenth-century novelistic depictions of the eroticism inherent in manual intercourse. It should be noted, though, that, as we see in novels, the functions of touch could not always be contained or explicated by etiquette despite its extreme detail in delineating certain kinds of touch. Therefore the novel continues to serve a didactic role in Victorian culture, edifying female readers about the social dangers of unregulated touching; however, such didacticism also backfires, introducing a wide readership to manual eroticism and instructing female readers in how to claim a level of authority over their bodies through their hands. Additionally, through Victorian pseudo-scientific and conduct treatises, the hand became an emblem of humanity that bore individual character on its very surface and needed to be managed. My second chapter, "Regulating Touch: Etiquette, Reciprocity, and Manual Intercourse in the Victorian Novel," offers a detailed description of these burgeoning discourses that were aimed at cataloging and policing hands. Novelists employed and responded to these discourses in their usage of manual intercourse, often transgressing these traditional codifications as a way of expressing female agency and commenting on desires to taboo for speech.

Chapter Two explores manual intercourse as a nonverbal modality through which characters communicated their passions, reciprocated desires, and negotiated the power

dynamics of their romantic relationships. As Claudia Benthien asserts in her study of skin, “many kinds of touch do not *mean* something; they already *are* something (for instance affection, desire, or anger)” (227; italics original). I argue for a consideration of the ontology of manual intercourse not just an exploration of its representational significance. This chapter explores what those touches *are* in Victorian literature. Hands may have a metonymic function within novels when read in terms of what they symbolize to readers,<sup>12</sup> but when characters’ hands touch other objects, other bodies, other hands in literature, that touch generates feelings within the body of that character and then conveys those feelings to the body touched. I argue that representations of touch and the physiological and psychical responses characters have to those touches function as moments of haptic exchange through which characters negotiate their social and sexual relationships and gender positions rather than merely symbolizing a sexual encounter. Touch in novels highlight exchange. This chapter offers a model for reading manual intercourse as a form of communication that exceeds phallogentric language in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), novels that repeatedly detail moments of tactile contact as they occur between characters’ hands. Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon, and Margaret Hale each assert a level of social agency through touch, refusing to be silenced by the patriarchal structures to which they are beholden. Edward Rochester, Gilbert Markham, and John Thornton respectively each conveys a level of respect for and deference to these women by learning to engage in reciprocal touch where neither party dominates. Characters employ manual intercourse in intense moments of emotional distress to convey what language fails to represent adequately.

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<sup>12</sup> See Helena Michie’s *The Flesh Made Word* (1990) for a discussion of the metonymic associations with female hands, especially pp. 97-99.

Nineteenth-century conduct manuals and articles about handshake etiquette provide a lens through which handshakes as a medium for communicating emotion can be read as Capuano shows; however, more than detailing types of touches and what they signify, these texts also theorize the communicative character of touch and its potential to exceed language's limitations. One contributor to *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* (1846) suggests in "Hints on Hand-Shaking" that "one of the greatest advantages of the fashion of hand-shaking consists in the very fact that it admits of infinite variety as an expression of feeling" (83). No limitations exist on what handshakes can express: "[...] soul does communicate with soul through the body; that thoughts and feelings fly with swift and invisible wings forth from the gratings of one prison-cage [flesh] and in through those of the other, even though the said bars should not be touching. [...] how potent likewise actual touch. The history of years may sometimes be told in one touch of the hand" (84). Though published in 1846, almost a century before Maurice Merleau-Ponty published his foundational *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), this quotation articulates a sophisticated understanding of the type of emotional and psychological exchange that touch renders possible. In the introduction to their edited collection *Thinking through the Skin* (2003), Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey explain that "Skin opens our bodies to other bodies: through touch, the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter" (6). The Victorian notion that "soul does communicate with soul through the body," or its skin more specifically, prefigures these phenomenological understanding of self and other or self and world engaging and exchanging through touch or vision understood through a tactile model.<sup>13</sup> For Victorians, the openness skin-to-skin contact facilitates establishes a space for

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<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty introduced the idea of haptic visuality in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. He suggests that vision is an interactive rather than passive sense as we typically conceive of it. Haptic visuality understands vision as touching with our eyes—we see, we see ourselves seeing, and what we see implants itself on us. Thus, Merleau-Ponty theorizes touch in order to explain the active process of vision, once again giving primacy to the

exchange wherein two parties can communicate desire apart from the restrictions placed on them by social mores. In other words, as we see with Jane, Helen, and Margaret, the haptic exchange manual intercourse facilitates offers female characters a nonverbal mode of asserting agency over themselves in a patriarchal society that otherwise denies them expression.

“Hints on Hand-Shaking” alludes to what phenomenologists would later term the reversibility, or double sensation, of touch. As with furling, when we are touched, we not only register the external sensation of that touch but also the interior sensations aroused when we embrace it. Both participants simultaneously experience themselves being touched by another and touching another back—the reversibility phenomenologists associate with touch—and thus they experience themselves feeling. Merleau-Ponty’s work develops the notion that touch facilitates the opening up of one body to another, or to the flesh of the world more generally.<sup>14</sup> He argues that “[t]he handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching”; this reversibility expands the individual’s consciousness by rendering it aware of not just self-feeling but itself feeling and being felt within and by the world (*Visible and Invisible* 142).<sup>15</sup> The reversibility of touch suggests a potential for a non-hierarchical relationship, whereas bowing, for example, performs hierarchy. Of course, how one shakes

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visual as a higher order sense.

<sup>14</sup> The concept “flesh of the world” comes from Merleau-Ponty, who explains that “[t]he flesh is not, matter, is not mind, is not substance. [...] [It] is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being,” what he later refers to as a “texture.” Thus, for him, flesh does not just identify human skin but rather a palpable connectedness that exists between a human and the world, another body, or her/himself. I employ it to suggest that touch invokes more than somatic experience.

<sup>15</sup> For Merleau-Ponty this expansion of the consciousness marks the difference between the objective and phenomenal body: the former, the material body as perceived in the world, and the latter, the body perceiving itself as it appears in the world. In *The Book of Skin*, Steven Connor offers a clear example of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of both the double sensation of touch and the awareness of the phenomenal self it makes possible: “If you touch your skin—and think how hard it is to think without touching your skin, forefinger to lip, say—then you feel yourself and you feel yourself feeling. You are simultaneously an object in the world and a subject giving rise to itself as it advances to meet the world in that object” (41).

hands and how one uses etiquette to interpret the social politics of gesture remains variable; in other words, the extent to which a handshake is reversible or reciprocal varies based on the form it takes. Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin* (2004) queries the role of the skin as the boundary or meeting point between two phenomenal bodies in the moment they touch. He explains that when a touch occurs between two bodies it facilitates emotional exchange between them precisely because "touch is unlike the other senses in this, that it acts upon the world as well as registering the action of the world on you" (Connor 263). Conceptualizing touch as a form of language, Merleau-Ponty's early work claims that "the tactile perceptions gained through an organ[, in this case the hand,] are immediately translated into the language of the rest," a language that the other organs of the body can understand (*Phenomenology of Perception* 369). Developing the skin's role in this process, Connor's work suggests that "The skin mediates this process of translation understood, not in the fixated terms of surface, boundary or container, holding apart self and world, [...] but rather as a milieu, mingling and manifold" (Connor 282). Thus, whether touched by oneself or another, the skin experiences a somatic connection through which it registers sensory experience and then communicates the feelings that experience generates to the rest of the body. However, I will suggest that we as literary critics gain more from understanding this process apart from language—as exceeding language.

Erin Manning's *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007) challenges the clear divide that early theorists such as Merleau-Ponty established between the touching and the touched. Manning argues that touch challenges the inside/outside and self/other dichotomies, "creating not a self and an other, but a third space, a reciprocal-body space that challenges the limits of both self and self as other" by recognizing the body's extension into the world (Manning 52). Thus, a "reciprocal-body space" functions as a mutually created space that opens

when one body reaches out to touch the unknowable and feels that touch embraced; this reciprocated touch creates a mutual space and time (what Manning terms “space/time”) in which both bodies exist together at once (58).<sup>16</sup> When a hand touches another’s hand and skin enters into contact with another’s skin, the flesh in that moment enters into a reciprocal-body space wherein the surface of the body opens itself up to somatic exchange with that of another. Again, consider furling, when one reader touches the body part created by another’s hand; both consent to and embrace the contact and exploration of desire the touch facilitates. In his recent book *The Finger: A Handbook* (2010), Angus Trumble identifies the finger as an agent of discovery that, in erotic encounters, “[m]ay either bring about the sudden collapse of that spatial distance or else recoil in horror if the overture is rejected” (187). Successful manual intercourse between characters in literature depends on one hand’s embracing another hand’s offered touch in order to facilitate the communication of desires and intentions beyond verbal expression. If the hands do not reciprocate the embrace, the touch or handshake may fail.<sup>17</sup>

The opening up of a reciprocal-body space renders both the touching and the touched vulnerable: the emotions and inner character of both parties become accessible in the moment of contact. “Hands are dangerous,” Manning explains, “for in reaching toward an other, they can undermine the hierarchical opposition between self and other, reducing this exchange to a moment of sharing that potentially exceeds the two individuals” (54). In other words, hands are

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<sup>16</sup> While I disagree with Manning’s assertion that all touch functions along the lines of Argentine Tango and thus expresses a number of political concerns linked with that specific mode of touching, I do find her concept of “reciprocal-body space” useful for articulating where and how manual intercourse happens.

<sup>17</sup> Even today, successful handshakes function as a gauge of social and political prowess. A recent *BuzzFeed* article by Miriam Berger was titled “15 Times French President François Hollande Messed Up A Handshake” (2014) and provided fifteen images that documented Hollande’s failed handshakes. *BuzzFeed* came across this story of failed handshakes in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, suggesting that the success of handshakes on the world’s political stage is a newsworthy current event in countries other than ours. See Franta for a full discussion of failed handshakes based on their historical origins.

the site of unregulated desire that opens the possibilities of gender, class, and racial crossing. Unlike language where only one can speak while the other receives and interprets that speech, touch makes possible a form of connection wherein communication emerges from a space of reciprocity and consent—neither party dominates nor disseminates but rather both create meaning together through their mutual embrace. However, this type of connection can prove threatening when uninvited and thus nonreciprocal. Consider the now iconic touch between Anne Catherick and Walter Hartright on the road late one night in Wilkie Collins’s popular sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1859). Though their hands do not touch, when Anne lays her hand upon Walter’s shoulder surprising him with her touch, which he perceives as quite intimate because they are alone on an isolated road, she undermines the traditional rules of etiquette and, in so doing, renders both herself and Walter vulnerable to each other in the passions her touch excites.<sup>18</sup> Margarit Shildrick makes an observation similar to Manning’s in her exploration of the economy of touch, asserting that “Not all tactile contact is benign, and the crossing of boundaries may be not so much the occasion of acknowledging shared vulnerability as a kind of corporeal colonization that exploits the specific vulnerability of the less dominant partner” (Shildrick 118). Another example, consider the handshake that occurs between Robert and Lady Audley during a clandestine meeting in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862): “She held out her hand; he took it loosely in his own. It seemed such a feeble little hand that he might have crushed it in his strong grasp, had he chosen to be so pitiless” (Braddon 145). Despite the loose grip, which suggests a lack of reciprocity and connection, Robert Audley

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<sup>18</sup> This touch between Anne and Walter has been written on extensively, and addressed most recently by Pamela Gilbert in a talk she gave at the North American Victorian Studies Association 2014 conference. See Andrew Mangham’s “‘What Could I Do?’: Nineteenth-Century Psychology and the Horrors of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*” (2007) for an interesting reading of the violent impulses that Walter suppresses. I would suggest that this touch also invites a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading whereby Walter enters into the Real in the moment of contact.

fantasizes about exerting his social dominance through a violent, physical exertion of power—a unidirectional, nonreciprocal touch. Manual intercourse in literature embodies this type of extension whereby a touch can violate or dominate as much as arouse, communicating erotic potential while simultaneously negotiating social power dynamics.

In spite of the fact that “I cannot touch you without your touching me in return. I cannot feel your skin without your feeling me,” touch is not always reversible or reciprocal (Manning 54). Reciprocity depends upon not only contact but consent, or what Manning terms “con-sent,” referencing the word’s original Latin roots: *consentire*; “*con*, with, and *sentire*, to feel, to think, to judge, etc.” (Manning 53; *OED*). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to consent, then, is “to feel together; to agree in sentiment”; its roots in physiology and pathology suggest that it designates “a relation of sympathy between one organ or part of the body and another, whereby when the one is affected the other is affected correspondingly” (*OED*). In this sense, touch functions as a responsibility (“response-ability”) in that it obligates the other to respond (Manning 51). However, touch does not always bring about the desired response, and thus each extension of the hand towards another body holds the potential to fail as in Charles Jeffry’s ballad “’Tis Hard to Give the Hand” (often subtitled “Where the Heart Can Never Be”).<sup>19</sup> The speaker of the ballad begins with a discussion of feeling—in this case, happiness, mirth and sorrow—as it relates to the body’s appearance: “And I can but deem it sin, / That the brow should wear a smile / When the soul is sad within” (“’Tis Hard” lines 6-8). What the soul feels the body should physically communicate, which the speaker translates into a question of touch as “’Tis hard to give the hand / Where the heart can never be” because such manual intercourse

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<sup>19</sup> See the frontispiece of this dissertation for the full ballad, which was published in both England and America sometime between 1845 and 1858, and continued to be republished until the late 1880s. Both J. E. Carpenter’s *The Book of Modern Songs* (1858) and the musical score published by E. H. Harding in New York in 1871 and 1874 credit Charles Jeffry’s as the poet and C. W. Glover as the composer.



risks communicating the soul's dissatisfaction (11-12). In a contemporary commentary on a revision of this ballad published in Edinburgh in 1885, a representative for the National Library of Scotland writes that "This is clearly a song dissenting against someone or something [...] emphasiz[ing] that it is difficult to show loyalty to something or someone when one feels that loyalty is not merited" (*The Word* par. 1). However, if one reads the anxiety over the proposed manual intercourse described in the ballad, which shifts from an expression of discontent at being compelled to offer a hand to an undesirable other in the first refrain to an outright refusal—"And I will not give the hand / Where the heart can never be"—in the second, then the ballad offers a humorous, though strident commentary on the power dynamics and sexual politics of arranged marriage from the female perspective through a description of the displeasure that would come from failed or nonreciprocal manual intercourse.<sup>20</sup>

Much like Luce Irigaray and Emmanuel Levinas before her, Manning introduces the question of ethics to the phenomenological understanding of the reversibility of touch.<sup>21</sup> According to Manning, the reciprocity of touch depends upon mutual exchange or one's acceptance of "response-ability" toward another's outstretched hand. When this acceptance

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<sup>20</sup> The speaker's refusal at the end of each stanza to engage in manual intercourse with the imagined, but unnamed, person to whom she is supposed to offer her hand suggests that the giving of a hand communicates acceptance of or resignation to a particular fate. I refer to the speaker as "she" because of the feminized position in which her hands are placed—they are to be given as objects. Additionally, in a longer study, one might analyze the illustrations that accompanied the various printings of both the ballad and the music it was put to (see the frontispiece and Figures 4, 5, and 6.) Each image depicts a woman of some sort engaging with another party, reinforcing my assertion that the speaker is female. The speaker explains that she has suffered long in silence as a result of her social position, "But I will not wear the chain," which alludes to the ball and chain or fetters commonly associated with marriage ("Tis Hard" line 18). Requiring that "in this"—referring to marriage—"I must be free," the speaker associates the freedom of her hand with the freedom of her choice and person generally, ending with her refusal to give her hand where her heart does not desire it (22).

<sup>21</sup> In his essay "Language and Proximity" (1961), Levinas considers the ethics of proximity, suggesting that language originally depended on contact and thus proximity, and that in that contact you have an ethical obligation to the other that you establish a relationship with. For Levinas, this contact "is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication," though he can only understand such communication based in contact through the metaphor of language (119). He theorizes tactile communication as a type of language, or rather the beginning of language, organized according to the standard phallogocentric structures that Irigaray's work identifies and critiques.



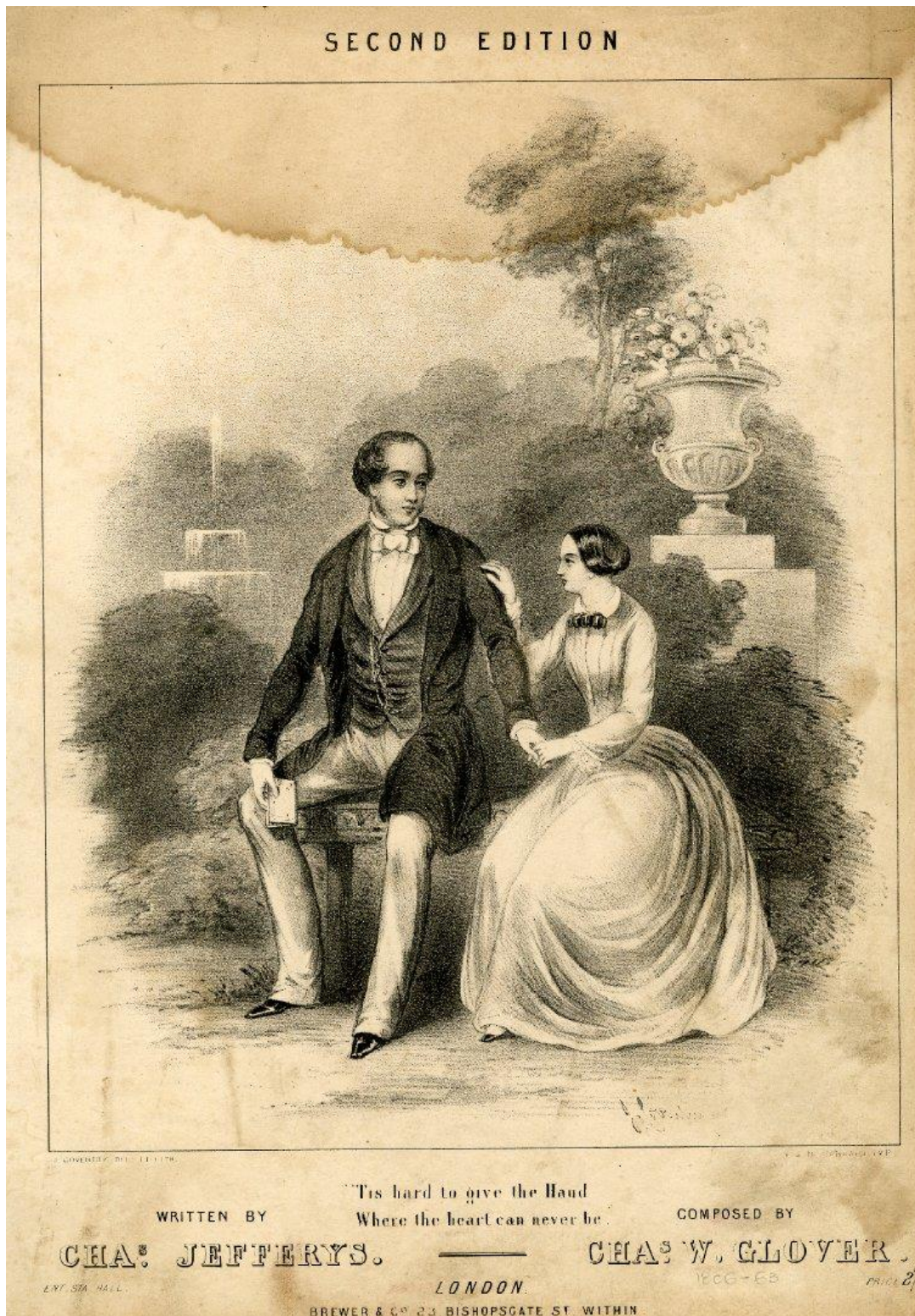
'TIS HARD  
TO GIVE  
The Hand

**Figure 4.** Published in an unidentified publication between 1840 and 1866. It depicts a woman thinking—perhaps deciding whether or not to give her hand. Accessed 04 April 2014. <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V103>



'TIS HARD  
To give the Hand.

**Figure 5.** Published in an unidentified publication between 1845 and 1859. Two women discussing something. Accessed 04 April 2014. <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V103>



**Figure 6.** Published as the cover to sheet music. Brewer and Co.: London 1856-1862. Print made by James Coventry. Accessed 04 April 2014.  
[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=3349195&partId=1&object=2146](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3349195&partId=1&object=2146)

occurs, one successfully reciprocates another's touch. When it lacks either consent or response, it functions non-reciprocally or what Manning terms a form of violent "unidirectionality," which we see often in the ungoverned, uninvited touches that populated eighteenth-century literature. However, when the other embraces your touch and thus both of you enter the reciprocal-body space, manual intercourse has the potential to communicate any emotion between two people (Manning 70). Novelists capitalize on this potential for expression and, as I show, employ touch to offer their characters the freedom to explore desires otherwise silenced.

Luce Irigaray theorizes a reciprocal touch based on responsibility and consent that does not adhere to the standard touching-touched dynamic. In her book *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984; trans 1993), Irigaray takes issue with the primacy Merleau-Ponty attributes to vision in *Phenomenology of Perception* and to the phallogocentric power structures that she sees as inherent in the touched-touching dynamic the double sensation of touch establishes. Irigaray imagines a form of touching modelled on the female body, which is always already in contact with itself,<sup>22</sup> a form of touching based in reciprocity and exchange rather than domination:

The hands joined, palms together, fingers outstretched, constitute a very particular touching. A gesture often reserved for women (at least in the West) and which evokes, doubles, the *touching of the lips* silently applied upon one another. A touching more intimate than that of one hand taking hold of the other. A phenomenology of the passage between interior and exterior. A phenomenon that remains in the interior, does not appear in the light of day, speaks of itself only in gesture, remains always on the edge of speech, gathering the edges without sealing them. This gesture, reserved for prayer (?) [sic.], could represent that of

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<sup>22</sup> Irigaray has been criticized for her essentialization of woman to her sexed body, which assumes not only that there exists an essential essence of woman but also ignores the multiplicity of sexes that scholars such as Anne Fausto-Sterling have shown exist. In spite of this, however, her work explicates how language restricts female expression and works to maintain patriarchal structures of power. Because women throughout history have had limited access to it and, having been largely excluded from universities and philosophical discussion, have not had a hand in shaping its continued development, Irigaray (along with Hélène Cixous) calls for a movement away from reason and logic touted by phallogocentric language and a movement towards writing from the place of bodily experience, which would ignore structures of reason in favor of the expression of individual feeling and experience.

the two halves of the universe applied one upon the other at different times of their becoming. (*Ethics* 161)

The hand as a singular instrument of domination has no place in this reciprocal gesture.<sup>23</sup> There exists no touching subject and touched object in Irigaray's figuration of an ethical touch but rather only subjects who caress each other. In this model, there is no way to distinguish which hand is touching and which one is touched as neither hand "takes hold" of the other. This gesture of prayer, this erotic caress modelled on the female labia, is a reciprocal form of touch that cannot be contained by or theorized as speech. As Shildrick explains in her study of the economy of touch in figurations of monstrosity, Irigaray considers the ethics of contact for "Her dream is of recognition and responsibility between subjects where neither is able to assimilate the other to its own self-image," a form of assimilation that is the norm with vision, grasping, and phallogocentric discourses (Shildrick 118; Irigaray 161, 178). Irigaray argues that in order to understand the reciprocal potential of touch "we must go back to a moment of prediscursive experience," a moment of communication and understanding that cannot be contained in language (151). This dissertation asks how we might discuss the communicative potential and character of manual intercourse as a nineteenth-century literary phenomenon without conceptualizing it as language and thus limiting it by our understanding of language. I argue that if we theorize tactility as language then we as scholars continue to privilege language as the only viable form of communication, repeating previous patterns in scholarship that have privileged reason above feeling, mind above body, man above woman, masculine above feminine, and Western European subject above those they colonized. To speak, people must have access to the dominant language and hold a social position that will recognize their speech. To touch,

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<sup>23</sup> I will develop the dangerous nature of *the* hand—singular—in my discussion of Martin Heidegger's figuration of it in "What Is Called Thinking?" in Chapter Four. The hand in its singularity participated in a masculinist historical tradition wherein the hand is viewed as an agent of human thought, of reason, not a medium of emotion or sentiment.

however, people need only reach out a hand; this is not to idealize touch and suggest that all touches are successful, but rather to point out the possibility for communication in the act of touch is not restricted by the same gender, race, and class politics as language. Manual intercourse functions as a form of both social and sexual intercourse that communicates without speaking and thus affords both parties an opportunity for unrestricted, unmediated expression. Speech transmits information through language from one party to another; manual intercourse, however, facilitates reciprocal exchange of information between and across parties—an unmediated flow.

Whether or not we interpret touch through the lens of language remains a constant question in Victorian hand scholarship. As Classen asks in *The Book of Touch*, “Do we learn a ‘mother touch’ along with a mother tongue? A tactile code of communication that underpins the ways in which we engage with other people and the world? No doubt we do. Our hands and bodies learn to ‘speak’ a certain language of touch, a language shaped by culture and inflected by individuals. We learn what to touch, how to touch, and what significance to give different kinds of touch” (13). However, she follows this comparison of touch and language with the assertion that “Touch precedes, informs, and overwhelms language” (13). Classen suggests that while we may learn a culturally determined code of tactile conduct, we can still communicate through touch even as we transgress that code. If we rearrange words in a sentence, it inhibits another’s ability to comprehend it; yet, if we hold a hand longer than custom dictates, it still communicates. This dissertation explores the insight that interpreting touch as a form of haptic communication rather than as a language of gesture can provide. In her chapter that deals expressly with hands and touch, Benthien makes an observation about the danger of

understanding touch as a form of language, as a sign that signifies recognizable and culturally specific, agreed-upon meanings. She explains,

In its broadest meaning, the concept of communication refers to messages and the transmission of information. [...] To be sure, individual gestures of touch—for example, placing a hand on the shoulder or arm of another person—can carry a diversity of meanings; however, nonconventionalized gestures cannot be decoded like linguistic signs. Moreover, many kinds of touch do not *mean* something; they already *are* something (for instance, affection, desire, or anger). They do not directly stand for something else, representative like language, but are without reference. A touch thus possesses communicative character only if it is understood as such. (227)

While Ferdinand de Saussure and deconstructionists more generally debunk the idea that a linguistic sign can ever be simply decoded, Benthien's conceptualization of tactile forms of communication highlights that hands that touch carry meaning rather than relying on any type of signifier to mediate it. Touch conveys in the moment of contact—it does not speak. Much as Benthien does in her study of skin as a permeable boundary that mediates contact and transmission between an individual self and the world, my approach treats literature “as sources and documents of a knowledge that is no longer directly accessible or extant” (2). Just as I earlier asserted that when hands are considered in their period-specific cultural context they do not merely function as metonymic stand-ins for more explicitly sexual parts of the body, I now argue that touches likewise do not simply represent erotic desires that cannot be addressed openly in language. Rather, when understood in light of eighteenth-century novels and nineteenth-century etiquette books, philosophical treatises, and scientific studies, touches in the Victorian novels I discuss possess a “communicative character” because they embody the deep-seated emotions, desires, and aversions that language fails to encapsulate. Literary touches figured as manual intercourse *are* what cannot be spoken.

#### **IV. Erotic Context: Illicit Sexuality and Monstrosity**

“Illicit Touch: An Affair of the Hand,” the third chapter of this dissertation, focuses on touches that transgress the traditional standards of social acceptability by not simply expressing erotic desire or revealing that people have sex, but also by expressing active female sexual desire as distinct from either domestic and reproductive duty. Illicit touches shocked Victorian readers not just because they reveal eroticism, but rather because they showed that women actively desired and sought sexual satisfaction. George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), Amy Levy’s *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), and Thomas Hardy’s “On the Western Circuit” (1891) all comment on the social restrictions placed on active female sexuality and the lack of options open to women who sought sexual pleasure for personal enjoyment rather than in fulfillment of social duty. In these texts, marriage and pregnancy prove to be the often unfortunate consequences of female sexual indulgence rather than the motivation for it. This chapter discusses several instances in which illicit touches rouse sexual attraction and sensually stimulate the body and mind of a woman who then seeks to address said stimulation on her own terms.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hands and skin were sexual parts of the body that communicated and negotiated erotic desires. As Shildrick explains, “The physiological and psychological processes come together such that the skin is less a boundary than an organ of communication, a passage or crossing point, both for the self and towards the other” (Shildrick 116). We see this most apparently in sexual touch. Nina Jablonski notes in her scientific study *Skin: A Natural History* (2006) that sexual arousal and pleasure are inseparable from the skin:

The skin is the largest sex organ of the human body, although we don’t usually think of it as such. Much of the pleasure of sexual intimacy comes from the exquisite expectation of touch and the delight and relief of skin-to-skin contact with another person, before, during, and after the sex act itself. Certain parts of the body are especially sensitive to sexual touch: this heightened sensitivity may result from a greater density of nerve networks closer to the surface of the skin. (Jablonski 119-20).



During the Victorian period scientists were just beginning to identify these nerve networks and note their density in the lips, tongue, and fingers. As a result, hands and their unregulated touches came to pose a distinct threat to the system of regulated desire; hands became sexual appendages and so could engage in illicit forms of sexual touch that would communicate carnal passions rather than merely representing or signifying sexual possibility. When Charles Raye slips his fingers inside of Edith Harnham's glove in "On the Western Circuit," it does not just foreshadow his future relations with her maid Anna (the woman whose hand he thinks he grasped), it is a sexual act that arouses her and begins the emotional affair that follows (aside from this caress and a kiss, Charles and Edith never physically consummate their mutual affection).

Each text this chapter considers represents female characters who indulge their desires as a threat to the stability of the social order who thus must be silenced, either through exile, death or marriage. These texts expose that there exists no place in civilized culture for such passions in women. Norbert Elias' foundational study, *The Civilizing Process* (1939; trans. 1969) identifies the importance of etiquette in the shaping of individual behavior in what we consider civilized cultures. In Elias' *The History of Manners*, volume one, he explains that etiquette's regulatory function contributed to the emergence of contemporary civilization by introducing the feeling of shame (Elias 169). Especially in regard to sexuality, individuals of both sexes learned to internalize etiquette as a form of self-restraint or 'civilized behavior,' rendering "social commands and prohibitions [...] increasingly a part of the self, a strictly regulated superego" (188).<sup>24</sup> Classen develops Elias's claim pointing out that "controlling touch is an essential means of establishing and maintaining an orderly world" (*Book of Touch* 259). However, the male members of society had access to more avenues of release than did female. While handshake

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<sup>24</sup> What Foucault terms "policing."

etiquette popular in nineteenth-century England encouraged this type of regulation, illicit manual intercourse consciously transgresses those dictates, challenging social conventions that associate being civilized with repression.

Handshake etiquette that regulated touch was essential not only to regulating non-reproductive female desire, but also to the division of the human from the nonhuman. Early writings about the handshake in Western culture explain that it began as a sign of friendly intent and transformed into a socially accepted means of civilized communication of both emotion and character between people, often men.<sup>25</sup> An article on “Hand-Shaking” in Charles Dickens’s popular periodical *All the Year Round* (1870) claims that “[t]he custom of hand-shaking prevails, more or less, among civilized nations, and is the tacit avowal of friendship and goodwill” (467). An article in another popular periodical asserts that “[w]ith the march of intellect, shaking has progressed likewise” (“On Shaking Hands” 213). In her contemporary scientifically based study of skin’s cultural history, Jablonski points out that “People in all cultures touch one another. But touching, which is a learned behavior in humans, isn’t necessarily the same from one culture to another; standards of permissible and desirable touching abound (think of all the different kinds of handshakes and hugs you’ve experienced), and they are often used to send social signals” (Jablonski 109). For the Western world, handshakes proved an emblem of civilization capable of communicating goodwill between two people and regulating individual impulse according to a set of socially accepted codes designed to ensure the maintenance of social and gender divides. The rules of etiquette offered handshakes as a controlled form of social intercourse through which humans could communicate emotion from their body to another’s. However, when

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<sup>25</sup> Etiquette books, handbooks that addressed hand-phrenology and -physiognomy, and even scientific studies commonly distinguished between male and female hands, labelling them not only according to their physical characteristics, but also according to the behavioral characteristics that people believed such physical characteristics signified.

monsters or monstrous characters in novels commandeer touch, traditional etiquette proves unable to legislate their manual intercourse, questioning the very essence of what counts as human by exploring nonreciprocal touches that prove unable to form tactile and thus emotional connections.

Chapter four, “Monstrous Touch: Race, Reproduction, and Uncontrolled Tactility,” turns to the question of race and its relationship to Victorian anxieties about the declining birthrate at the end of the century, linking that with concerns over erotic sexuality embodied, for example, in manual practices such as masturbation. Rising discourses in the fields of sexology, germ theory, and anatomy reveal the hand as an appendage that is always already open to contamination through touch and the physical intimacy that touches facilitate. This chapter explores dangerous, or non-normative, forms of tactile contact in *fin-de-siècle* speculative fiction that threaten to divert energy away from national reproductive duty and direct it towards self-gratification. Much as “Illicite Touch” in which manual intercourse associated with the free expression of female desire critiques reproduction as often an unfortunate consequence rather than a motivating force behind female sexual desire, this chapter shows through readings of monstrous touch an incompatibility in Victorian culture between erotic pleasure—*jouissance*—and reproductive duty. Monstrous touch functions as a perversion of manual intercourse that represents the threat of miscegenation and encourages indulgence of erotic rather than reproductive sexuality in Thomas Hardy’s “The Withered Arm” (1888), H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), and Robert Louis Stevenson’s short vampire tale “Olalla” (1885).

Within novels, manual intercourse functions as an outlet through which characters can acknowledge their emotional states and erotic desires to each other along with the reader while

still seemingly controlling their impulses by adhering to the dictates of social decorum. Additionally, manual intercourse engages a reciprocal-body space in which these characters can negotiate these emotions and desires in ways that may defy traditional power dynamics. Novelists employ manual intercourse precisely as an unspoken form of communication between characters that opened a reciprocal-body space in which they could freely express their own emotional states, navigate social relationships and the boundaries these relationships depended upon, and address topics too taboo for common speech—what Capuano terms “disavowed discourses.” Touch holds the potential to collapse or maintain social, political, or even personal boundaries, and novelists employed manual intercourse precisely to allow their characters freedom to explore. While the first three chapters of this dissertation situate Victorian perceptions of touch in relation to their historical, philosophical, and theoretical underpinnings, the last chapter argues that manual intercourse functions as a mode of social and sexual exchange through which novelists explored and commented on the perceived relationship between individual pleasure and national duty. By theorizing tactility as a form of language and ignoring contemporary phenomenology’s roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy and etiquette, scholars have overlooked touch as a primary mode of communication through which Victorian novelists challenged traditional gender ideology and the power structures inherent in it.

## Chapter I: Ungoverned Touch: Manual Intercourse in Eighteenth-Century Novels

Everything goes to prove, then, that the memory of ideas which come by touch must be much stronger and much more lasting than the memory of ideas which come by other senses.

—Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754), p.124

O my beloved *Pamela*! you have made me quite well. I'm concern'd to return my Acknowledgments to you in so unfit a Place and Manner; but will you give me your Hand? I did, and he kissed it with great Eagerness. Sir, said I, you do me too much Honour!—I am sorry you are ill.—I can't be ill, said he, while you are with me. I am well already.

Well, said he, and kissed my Hand again, you shall not repent this Goodness. My Heart is too full of it, to express myself as I ought.

—Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1741), p.255

'When once I had pressed the frail shoulder, something new—a fresh sap and sense—stole into my frame. It was well I had learnt that this elf must return to me—that it belonged to my house down below—or I could not have felt it pass away from under my hand [...]

—Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1848), p.312

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the hand proved a particularly charged medium through which individuals tactilely experienced the world and themselves within it. As these epigraphs suggest, tactile sensations imprint themselves on emotional and physical memory. The Abbé de Condillac emphasizes the strength of the affective nature of touch to which the epigraphs from Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* likewise attest. Novelists turn to manual intercourse as a means of expressing, though not fully encapsulating, emotional experiences and erotic desires that exceed language's capacity to represent. Mr. B embraces Pamela's hand when language fails him and Mr. Rochester can only describe his feelings and desire for Jane through the physical sensations that contact with Jane's shoulder excites. This chapter offers an archaeology of touch as depicted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, suggesting that hands that touch other hands within British literature embody, communicate, and negotiate the socio-sexual dynamics between characters that would otherwise remain unacknowledged, at least within literature.

Touching hands and touched hands run rampant and ungoverned in eighteenth-century

novels, revealing both characters' erotic desires and the lack of clear codes of conduct to police how characters express those passions. Andrew Franta notes that, within eighteenth-century novels, "each [handshake] serves to clarify the status of the relationship between individuals" (Franta 707). Developing this observation even further, I argue that characters negotiate their relationships with each other and with their own sexuality through manual intercourse. In this chapter, I explore questions of female agency and manual vulnerability in the novels of Eliza Haywood, Samuel Richardson, John Cleland, Francis Burney, Jane Austen, and briefly Charlotte Brontë in order to show how manual intercourse, and the dearth of rules governing it, transformed moving from one century into another. Ungoverned touches between characters' hands in eighteenth-century novels convey the dangers and pleasures of erotic desire in order to encourage female readers to guard their own hands as a means of regulating both social and sexual intercourse. As nineteenth-century etiquette books begin to offer more concrete rules to structure physical contact in social spaces, nineteenth-century novels begin to employ manual intercourse in more nuanced ways, focusing on how desire communicated through touching hands works to both establish and negotiate gender and social norms. This chapter shows that, within the novels of these periods, manual intercourse in any form holds the potential to convey human erotic desire and the dangers associated with it.

I will begin this chapter by situating eighteenth-century perspectives on human consciousness, experience, and communication in relation to the sense of touch. Hands that touch in literature participate in a non-verbal form of communication that registers itself both physiologically and psychologically in the bodies of those who touch or are touched. Since critics have yet to fully address it, I explore the link between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelistic depictions of manual intercourse—often represented as a type of handshake—in light

of its cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts in order to suggest that it accounts for what language fails to represent for the characters themselves. Eighteenth-century conduct manuals emphasized moral improvement, remaining silent on the subject of physical interaction. This chapter addresses how eighteenth-century novels responded to this lack of regulation by considering the function of manual intercourse in four sets of novels: those that address the preservation of female virtue, those that represent and comment upon sexual penetration, those that engage the materiality of female sexual pleasure, and those that explore conscious desire negotiated through handshakes.

### **I. Theorizing Manual Intercourse**

What do literary touches, whether actual or imagined, hold the capacity to convey? To answer this question, we might consider the physiological and philosophical significance of the hand and its touches during the eighteenth century, the period that saw increasing interest in both the hand's anatomical structure and its philosophical symbolism as a distinctly human appendage. Exploring the emergence of consciousness through the medium of physical sensation, the Abbé de Condillac in his *Traité du sensations* (1754), the first epigraph cited above, suggests that touch proves the strongest sense because the impressions we receive through it remain the longest in our memory. He further explains that “we pass to the knowledge of bodies only when our sensations [those of touch] produce the phenomenon of extension,” which we experience through “the hand [which] is the principal organ of touch” (Condillac 130). In other words, the skin surface when localized to the hand functions as a permeable boundary through which the individual self enters into contact with the world and those that populate it.<sup>26</sup> William Cohen explains in his most recent book *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*

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<sup>26</sup> Also, see the work of Merleau-Ponty and Anzieu; I will elaborate on these below.

(2009) that “the skin has physiological functions that situates it at the crossover point between the phenomenal world and all that is contained inside: the internal organs, the mind, the emotions, the soul” (*Embodied* 65). Tactile contact facilitates physical and psychological exchange. Handshakes offer a clear example of this touching-touched dynamic wherein the touching subject experiences a sense of interiority—the I or self—when reaching out to touch and the object touched experiences an exterior sensation—the non-I or not self—that simultaneously engenders an awareness of the self as distinct from that exterior, what phenomenologists term the “double sensation” of touch.<sup>27</sup>

Both Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1848) explore the hand as a site of exchange that opens one body—one consciousness—up to another. Desired or not, a character cannot deny the feelings another’s touch engenders in the flesh: “intimate tactile exchange affects both subject and object; if it touches an emotional interior, its vehicle is the skin” (*Embodied* 75). As both the *Pamela* and *Jane Eyre* epigraphs above demonstrate, the body experiences and expresses ineffable passion in moments of tactile contact. However, while Mr. B speaks of his overflowing heart and touches Pamela’s hand to convey the sincerity of his description, Mr. Rochester possesses an acute sense of the arousal his touching of Jane’s body generates within himself and, to an extent, worries about what his touch may communicate to Jane. Though both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels depict hands as agents of worldly engagement that leave the body open to exchange, representations of touch in eighteenth-century literature tend to stand in for both dangerous and pleasurable erotic encounters that characters cannot consciously acknowledge while those in

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<sup>27</sup> This understanding of the interior touching subject and the exterior touched object comes from Derridean and post-deconstructionist discussions of touch and the phenomenology of touch. See Mijatović for a full discussion of Jacques Derrida’s response to Jean-Luc Nancy’s work on touch.



nineteenth-century literature tend to more directly communicate characters' conscious feelings of erotic desire or discomfort with it as a means of negotiating gender and social power dynamics.

Within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature, the depiction of touching hands signifies to characters and readers alike the existence of a social, and often sexual, intimacy in need of management. Eighteenth-century philosophical writings describe touch as the sensation that produces the phenomenon of extension. In her discussion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of "double sensations," Elizabeth Grosz explains that hands can both experience "feeling (the dimension of subjectivity) and being felt (the dimension of objectuality)" (Grosz 100). As figured in phenomenology then, hands differ from the rest of the skin because, as Grosz explains, "each hand is in the (potentially reversible) position of both subject and object, the position of both phenomenal and objectual body" (100). Touching between hands communicates not just an individual's feelings but also holds the potential to establish or clarify power dynamics between two people, or literary characters as the case may be: the dominant subject and the subordinate, often passive, object. Not only do "skin sensations serve merely as analogies for psychic, unconscious processes" as Claudia Benthien asserts in her discussion of Didier Anzieu's psychoanalytic work, *The Skin Ego* (1985; trans. 1989), but hands that touch convey feelings and intentions from one body to another (Benthien 187). After all, "feelings are not disembodied," rather they are embodied and transferable (205). Heat. Cold. Pressure. Texture. Pain. Pleasure. Arousal. The hands' sensory receptors distinguish between these sensations, but the brain interprets those sensations as emotional states of being and translate those emotional responses into social dynamics. A forceful squeeze of the hand causes physical pain, but additionally the brain might understand such a gesture as a demonstration of power, a non-verbal performance of social as well as physiological dominance. Since hands function as

the primary mediums of tactile interaction with the world, their touches carry meaning. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists depicted manual intercourse between their characters as a means of embodying unacknowledged emotions, desires, and social dynamics.

## II. Eighteenth-Century Philosophy and Conduct

Eighteenth-century novels figured threats to female sexual purity through ungoverned manual intercourse, suggesting that society viewed the regulation of hands as a means of regulating erotic, often non-reproductive, sexual desire. Eighteenth-century philosophical treatises and literature often conflated touch and emotion, using the language of the one to describe the experience of the other: the term “feeling” simultaneously denotes a physical sensation experienced through touch as well as an emotional state of being (Benthien and Dunlap 202). In his influential treatise, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), John Locke links the formation of ideas and the emergence of consciousness with physical action and experience:

the Consciousness it [the mind] has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is *Self* to it *Self* now, and so will be the same *Self*, as far as the same Consciousness can extend to Actions past, or to come; [...] That this is so, we have some Kind of Evidence in our very Bodies, all whole Particles, whilst vitally united to this same thinking conscious *Self*, so that we feel when they are touch'd and are affected by, and conscious of Good or Harm that happens to them, are a Part of our *Selves*; *i.e.* of our thinking conscious *Self*. (Locke 288)

Locke here suggests that conscious thought emerges in relation to physical stimuli; the self becomes conscious to itself when it experiences the “Evidence in [its] very Bod[y]” of “when [it] [is] touch'd and [is] affected by” aspects of the world with which the body interacts. This passage relies on the language of tactility to describe the experience of conscious thought, which “extend[s],” “vitally unite[s],” “feel[s],” and “touch’[s].” In her *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (1993), Ann Jessie Van Sant further suggests that

Locke employs terms associated with touch to explain how the mind experiences the other senses, namely sight (Van Sant 89–90).<sup>28</sup> Contemporary phenomenology parallels Locke’s figuration of selfhood and consciousness as a partially tactile phenomenon.

Novels represent touch as embodying that which cannot always be articulated. The ‘sentimental’ novel of the eighteenth-century functions similarly, employing a language similar to Locke’s to explain emotional experience. In *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810* (2007), Stephen Ahern traces the etymological and critical roots of the term ‘sentimental,’ linking it with “*sensibility*[, which] denotes a physiological capacity of sensation or sense perception” (Ahern 16). Van Sant further develops this link between sensation and psychology in eighteenth-century affective theory, explaining that “psychological experience was prominently located in the body” (Van Sant 97). As a result, sentimental fiction relied on the language of sensibility, describing emotional states of being through haptic experience: “*feeling*,” “*touching*,” “[*h*]ard- and soft-hearted,” “*touching the heart*,” “*thrilling the nerves*,” and “*moving the passions*” (93, 94; italics original). Each term invokes a tactile sensation in order to fully characterize an affective state of being. Within eighteenth-century novels more generally, references to skin and hands in relation to touch “express emotions and states of being that language is incapable of grasping directly” (Benthien 211). When hands touch, they convey emotion beyond verbal expression as well as embody social dynamics that otherwise remain unrecognized.

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<sup>28</sup> In a paper presented at MLA 2013, Kevis Goodman explores how eighteenth-century medical discourse contributed to this philosophical discussion about the body-mind relationship by theorizing how the various physiological structures of the body mediated between this body-mind connection. Goodman points out that Scottish physicians Robert Whytt and William Cullen theorized nerves and muscles as continuations of the brain—“connecting medium”—that formed a system of communication that “extended beyond the individual body, for the movements of the sentient extremities, as Cullen put it, ‘form our connexion with the rest of the universe—by which we act upon other bodies, and by which other bodies act upon us’ (1:9)” (Goodman; qtd. in Goodman). Thus, even medical discourse conceives of physical sensation as a communal and tactile form of psychological engagement with the world.

Eighteenth-century novels reflect an understanding of touch that reveals how either touching hands or touched hands leave the body open to violation, both in the moral and physical sense of the term.<sup>29</sup> Robert Whytt’s development of nerve theory further linked the emotional with the haptic, the psychological with the physiological (Arikha 236-8). Following Locke’s *Essay*, philosophers moved away from Cartesian dualism in favor of sensualist philosophies that held that “[s]ensations belong to the soul [...] [which] only sees itself in its sensations” (Condillac 81).<sup>30</sup> Such philosophers theorized the relationship between the psyche and the nervous system, believing that “touch was the sense through which experience could be defined” (Van Sant 86). Condillac’s *Treatise on the Sensations*, written in response to Locke’s *Essay*,<sup>31</sup> conceives of touch as the sense through which a human body—represented in a sentient statue—consciously recognizes itself as distinct from the environment: “Placing its [the statue’s] hands on itself it will discover that it has a body, but only when it has distinguished the different parts of it and recognized in each the same sentient being. It will discover there are other bodies when it touches things in which it does not find itself” (Condillac 86). He further expands on his theory of embodied experience by distinguishing between “active touching and the passive sensation of touch” (Benthien 197-8, 186). According to Condillac, when the statue “touches a foreign body the ‘I’ which feels itself modified in the hand, does not feel itself modified in the foreign body.

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<sup>29</sup> Later chapters will further develop this question of openness to exchange in relation to exclusively Victorian texts. Through manual intercourse, social values, cultural norms, and the like permeate the body just as its qualities threaten—sometimes quite frighteningly—to penetrate into the social sphere.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the historical shift from humoral theory to modern medical practice see Arikha, especially chapter six, section nine: “Madness was no longer a matter of heightened passion that needed abating in order for reason to rule again, as humoral models had it [...] [Instead,] there were [believed to be] strict correlations between mental ailments[—psychological disturbances—]and cerebral disturbances[—physical disturbances]” (Arikha 245).

<sup>31</sup> Where Locke’s *Essay* neglects tactile sensation, using terms associated with it only as a means of describing psychic processes, Condillac’s treatise “considers one touch capable of giving us a sense of the reality of the body (seul le toucher est considéré comme capable de nous donner la notion de la réalité des corps)” (Condillac, *Traité Des Sensations: Première Partie* 8).

[...] As it formed its own body it now forms all other objects” (Condillac 88-89). The body that uses its hand to actively touch discerns itself as a touching subject, while it understands that which it touches as not itself and thus a passive object—the non-I or not self.

According to eighteenth-century philosophers,<sup>32</sup> hands actively touch and experience refined sensations capable of discerning objects; in contrast, however, the skin surface of the rest of the body passively experiences another’s touch, receiving and involuntarily registering sensations such as pressure, temperature, and pain. In other words, an individual only recognizes herself as a subject in the world when she uses her hands to touch an object distinct from herself, directly linking the hand with human consciousness. Those who actively touch possess subjectivity, while those who passively receive the touch of another are little more than objects of that touch. However, in either case, the skin surface responds to touch and therein lies the moral danger. Though eighteenth-century novels represent the dangers of touch in order to comment on characters’ sexual morality and warn readers to govern their hands in their own social interactions, eighteenth-century conduct manuals focus on behavior and personal sentiment above physical interaction.<sup>33</sup>

Eighteenth-century conduct manuals do not establish rules to govern manual intercourse but rather preach morality through denial of physical contact. Because hands that touch were believed to leave the body open to moral contagion, tactile contact needed to be denied at all costs. Within conduct manuals there existed no instructions on how to properly embrace the hand of another. Even when eighteenth-century conduct manuals explicitly mention hands, they focus

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to English philosophers, Benthien identifies the work of Johann Jakob Engel, specifically his “On several characteristics of the sense of touch” (1793), as among those that contributed to this conversation (Benthien and Dunlap 198-9).

<sup>33</sup> Even popular manuals such as John Bulwer’s *Chirologia; Or, the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644) do not explicitly address conduct associated with contact, but rather focuses on individual movement, outlining the gestures that should be used when giving a speech.

on individual improvement rather than how properly to mingle with the body of another.

Included in *The Young Gentleman's Parental Monitor* (1790), a popular pocketbook for young men, "Lord Chesterfield's Advice to his Son" encourages clean hands, but makes no mention of touch. After explaining the importance of clean teeth, the section continues:

Nothing looks more ordinary, vulgar, and illiberal, than dirty hands, and ugly, uneven, and ragged nails; the ends of which should be kept smooth and clean (not tipped with black), [...]; and every time that the hands are wiped, rub the skin round the nails backwards, that it may not grow up, [...]. Upon no account whatever put your fingers in your nose or ears. It is the most shocking, nasty, vulgar rudeness that can be offered to company. (*Young Gentleman's Parental Monitor* 38)

Mention of the body only matters insofar as it reflects a moral soul. The author's concern lies not with established codes of physical exchange, but rather physical appearance; the manual offers advice for the moral development of the individual, not interactions with the social community. Dirty hands embody vulgarity and indicate affiliation with the lower classes, at least according to upper-class perceptions of them. Those who possess dirty hands are "ordinary, vulgar, and illiberal," of the plebian rather than bourgeois class; clean hands function as a sign of one's cultivation. But, aside from indicating one's social status, why do clean hands matter? If the skin—the boundary between self and other—is permeable, then the touch of a dirty hand will bring with it contagion (both moral and physical disease). Steven Connor argues that the skin functions as a milieu, a concept with its roots in miasmatic theories of disease (Connor 282). The fear of tactile contamination and transmission of moral and physical contagion highlights that the skin functions not as a container but rather a site of connection. Novels address manual intercourse, establishing guidelines for both decorous and improper touches, yet nowhere in *The Young Gentleman's Parental Monitor*, comprised of three smaller conduct manuals, does it

mention any codes designed to govern manual contact.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*, published in 1793, does not offer a section explicitly addressing manual intercourse—handshakes, gestures, gloves, touch, etc. Focused more on temperament and conversation, two of the four conduct manuals that comprise this pocket library ignore hands and bodies altogether. Sarah Pennington's "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters" (1761) mentions hands only as a metaphor for marriage: "As a child is very justifiable in the refusal of her hand, even to the absolute command of a father, where her heart cannot go with it; so is she extremely culpable in giving it contrary to his approbation" (*Young Lady's Pocket Library* 37). Mentioned twice more throughout this manual, the hand functions as a metaphor for the female body and affection in marriage: the hand should only go where the heart will follow. The conduct of Clarissa Harlowe, another of Richardson's heroines, exemplifies this link, boldly declaring to her undesired suitor Mr. Solmes, "My hand and my heart shall never be separated," a legacy that we see reemerge in the Victorian ballad "'Tis Hard to Give the Hand (Where the Heart Can Never Be)" (c. 1850) (*Clarissa* 939). Both texts suggest that hands carry emotions with them and cannot enter into intimate exchange without desire. Pennington's advice, however, does not address how to properly bestow one's hand, or embrace the hand of another when passion is present; in other words, it offers no advice about how to conduct one's hand in the interest of morality. By contrast, eighteenth-century novels respond to this absence, employing manual intercourse to narrate embodied experience rather than to metonymically substitute for an abstract concept or absent body. Within novels, touch is reversible; whether a hand touches or is touched, it experiences sensation, desired or not. However, characters often unconsciously react to the

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<sup>34</sup> Even handbooks for men that address magic and gambling only mention hands in relation to the placement of hands in tricks, or the hands of cards one might play.

manual intercourse initiated by the hands of others, sensing the dangers associated with both pleasurable and threatening touches without consciously comprehending exactly what those dangers might be. Novels depict the threatening nature of manual intercourse as experienced by female characters, teaching their female readership to safeguard their hands in order to regulate erotic desire more generally.

Edward Moore’s “Fables for the Female Sex” (1744), also included in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library*, comes the closest to offering advice on governing one’s hands, depicting manual intercourse as dangerous precisely because it holds the potential to arouse even the purest maiden and unconsciously compel her to act on impulse in favor of personal gratification:

They [the Sirens] join’d her side, and seiz’d her [the Maid’s] hand;

Their touch envenom’d sweets instill’d,

Her frame with new pulsations thrill’d,

While half consenting, half denying,

Repugnant now, and now complying,

.....

Still down, and down, the winning Pair

Compell’d the struggling, yielding Fair. (*Young Lady’s Pocket Library* 68)

Even though this passage directly invokes touch and the desire it both conveys and engenders, it does not offer any rules for how to safely engage the hand of another. Instead, it represents touch as dangerous and corrupting—it “envenom’d” her body with “sweets instill’d.” This fable, “The Female Seducers,” acknowledges that touch holds the capacity to arouse the body even when uninvited, and therein lies the risk with which many female characters in the novels of the period have to contend. Though the Sirens “seiz’d” the Maid’s hand “[w]hile [she] half consent[s], half



den[ies],” ultimately the Maid’s body “with new pulsations thrill’d.” Pleasure overwhelms reason and thus “the winning Pair” conquer the “yielding Fair.” Interestingly, the young maid experiences physical pleasure at the hands of other females, suggesting that women can lead women into temptation, a topic that I will explore further in my reading of John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*. Even though the maid struggles against the physical pleasure in an attempt to uphold her spiritual virtue, she proves unable; the flesh corrupts the soul. The fable warns female readers of the perils of erotic touch and association with those of immoral character, but only offers denial of physical intimacy as the solution: “More delightful are my woes, / Than the rapture pleasure knows” (74). Ultimate pleasure comes from entrance into God’s kingdom in death.

Conduct manuals in particular, and society more generally, offer no specific rules to guide the physical interactions of men and women. Rather, women were left with one instruction: deny touch at all cost. In her foundational book *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Nancy Armstrong explains that novels pre-Richardson, meaning those written by women during the first half of the century, “had a reputation for displaying not only the seamy underside of English political life, but also sexual behavior of a semi-pornographic nature. On both counts, it was considered a vulgar form of writing” (Armstrong 96). Armstrong contends that contemporaries saw these novels “as a form of seduction” “designed to inflame the passions” (106, 274 n.1). In contrast to these vulgar books, later novels like Francis Burney’s *Evelina* and the works of Jane Austen were well-known examples of “polite novels” that conduct books declared were “truly safe for young women to read” because they “had the virtue of dramatizing the same principles sketched out in the conduct books” (97). This chapter considers the social influence that both earlier vulgar and later polite novels had on the reading populace, contending that novels of both types address the lack

of concrete advice in conduct books by openly addressing ungoverned physical contact in the form of hand-play: male characters often actively touch, while female characters are often the objects of such touches, yet both parties unconsciously register the desires of the other such that manual intercourse embodies those dynamics. Novels engage the philosophical conversation about tactile sensation and eroticism by employing manual intercourse to negotiate social, interpersonal, and individual boundaries; touch facilitates exchange, and manual intercourse embodies the psychical and emotional dynamics that such exchange communicates.

### III. Amorous Hands: Unconscious Complicity

Despite their absence from conduct manuals, hands proliferate as sexualized appendages in eighteenth-century novels that influenced writers of the Victorian era. Nancy Armstrong notes that eighteenth-century novels—particularly conduct and sentimental fiction—respond to conduct books by more directly addressing bodies and behavior.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, novels respond to each other. The early amatory fiction of Eliza Haywood invokes hands that touch to reflect and comment on sexual politics,<sup>36</sup> linking female restraint with virtue in order to suggest its absurdity and impossibility in a culture that encourages male exploits and demands female restraint. *Love in Excess; or the Fatal Inquiry* (1719-20), directly addresses female passion and desire through hand-to-hand contact.<sup>37</sup> Published the same year as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, *Love in Excess* matched its popularity but not its purpose; *Love in Excess* sought “to

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<sup>35</sup> She identifies Richardson's *Pamela* as an example because it “represented their [the characters'] struggle for possession of the female body in scene after scene of seduction, which he [Richardson] elaborated in minute detail,” the type of detail conduct manuals lack (Armstrong 109).

<sup>36</sup> The term “amatory fiction” designates a genre of fiction primarily written and read by women that addressed sexual love. It predated the novel and was popular during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Because of its ties to the female sex, critics long neglected this genre in their discussions of the rise of the English novel. See Ballaster for a full discussion of the politics associated with this genre of writing.

<sup>37</sup> As Rosalind Ballaster notes, Haywood differed from her contemporaries for her use of “[f]emale desire [a]s no longer a ruling metaphor in her fiction, but rather the subject and generating ground of its plot” (158).

engage the female reader's sympathy and erotic pleasure, rather than stimulate intellectual judgment" (Ballaster 170). In *Love in Excess*, inflamed desire often gives way to sudden hand-grasping,<sup>38</sup> which often communicates an impending sexual threat. The hand that touches dominates the hand that is touched, seizing it without permission through an exertion of power based in relations of class, gender, or both. In Haywood's amatory fiction, however, these moments when hands, usually a man and a woman's, touch embody the "conflict between, on the one hand, sexual desire and duty to self (in the drive to self-fulfillment), and on the other, duty to the larger community (in the drive to conform to expectation by satisfying only those desires that are socially sanctioned)" (Ahern 79). In other words, manual intercourse often embodies the unconscious struggle between the desires of the flesh and the duties of the spirit. Hands that touch are always already sexual and exemplify the struggle, especially felt by women, between upholding the expected virtue and succumbing to physical passion.

When the Chevalier D'Elmont acts on his passions with a sudden, vehement grasp, his chosen target sometimes rejects, sometimes embraces his initial overture, but in either case it opens the female body up to a sexual experience—it challenges the boundary between self and other by exciting the skin. As E. Moore's fable explains it, "touch envenom[s]" and with "new pulsations thrill[s]." Such grasps place D'Elmont in a position of power, giving him a literal hold over the female body he hopes to conquer. However, these touches likewise allow for female characters to engage with physical pleasure while maintaining their chastity: D'Elmont seizes women's hands, but those hands do not invite his touch. In other words, characters unconsciously react to the feelings such ungoverned touches engender. Unlike the Maid of

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<sup>38</sup> Ahern notes that "[a] ruling assumption of amatory fiction is that genuine passion cannot be expressed in words," and thus lovers "communicate with each other using a vocabulary of looks, gestures, and signs that cuts through the barriers that separate individuals from one another" (86, 87).

Moore's fable, as long as female characters do not initiate the touch and reject it when offered, virtue remains intact.

When D'Elmont reveals his passion for Melliora, he communicates his desire by "taking her hand and kissing it, 'Your hand,' said he, 'your lip, your neck, your breast, your all—'" (Haywood 110). D'Elmont provides us with a catalog of the female body that begins with the hand and slowly enumerates other erotic sites. He asserts dominance over Melliora by taking physical possession of her hand. He imagines proceeding from kissing her hand to kissing her lips, followed by her neck and then breasts, thus employing that hand to render the rest of her sexual body visible. He begins with her hand in the hopes of arousing the rest of her body, which he ravishes with his mind's eye.<sup>39</sup> However, Melliora reclaims control over her body, rebuking his advances having "spirit and resolution enough to withdraw her hand from his" (111). His touch titillates her desire, the physical experience of which frightens her since the duty of restraint lies with her. She responds based on feeling, proving no "yielding Fair." Melliora withdraws her hand and her body from D'Elmont's control. She rejects the proffered touch, rejecting the intimacy that such openness would facilitate. However, D'Elmont does not accept her refusal easily, "catching fast hold of both her hands, seeing her about to rise" (111). This time he seizes both of her hands in an attempt to reestablish that pleasurable connection and his control over her person. As Condillac explains, when a body experiences pleasure, "[i]t seeks to bring the pleasant object into touch with all parts of its body, [...] bent upon procuring the completest pleasure" (Condillac 94). For D'Elmont, these stolen touches represent the possibility of pleasurable physical exchange; because Melliora allows him to grasp her hands, he assumes

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<sup>39</sup> Ashley Montagu attributes a "tactile quality [to] vision [which] is apparent in the touching of another with the eyes" (Montagu 237). Merleau-Ponty also addresses the relationship between touch and vision as one of haptic visuality—the eyes touch and are touched by what they look upon, experiencing a double sensation like that of touch (*Phenomenology of Perception*). Thus, Melliora's discomfort at D'Elmont's envisioned freedoms responds to the haptic visuality of D'Elmont's gaze.

that she secretly desires him, hiding her enjoyment for the sake of propriety. Addressing this novel, Ros Ballaster explains about this novel that “[i]t is, after all, the men in these seduction scenes who interpret the woman’s body as desirous and submissive,” not the women, who instead experience terror at the violation (Ballaster 172). Melliora’s attempts to extricate herself from his grasp reflect her fear, which D’Elmont experiences as tantalizing since it prolongs his pursuit, but it also highlights the double-standard that women face: as the woman, it is Melliora’s social duty to legislate D’Elmont’s passion in order to preserve her own virtue. Thus, whether frightened or desirous, her only option is to deny D’Elmont’s advances by rejecting his caresses.

Melliora retains her virtue by reclaiming her hands and reestablishing the boundary that D’Elmont crosses, fearful that if she does not he might physically overpower her and force his point. D’Elmont’s manual intercourse embodies the “contemporary sex-gender system that saw the masculine as the locus of power” (Ahern 79). He repeatedly grips Melliora’s hand, taking advantage of his position as her guardian, until her virtuous denial finally overwhelms his passion. This hand-play continues throughout the duration of the novel until Melliora, assured of D’Elmont’s fidelity, finally succumbs to D’Elmont’s advances, allowing him to “[take] one of her hands, and [press] it between his, close prisoner in his bosom” (Haywood 251). Even a gesture that seemingly suggests that Melliora possesses some degree of agency, quickly reestablishes D’Elmont’s dominance by revealing Melliora’s hands as little more than “close prisoners” in his own, the objects of his vehement grasp.

Female characters in *Love in Excess* who announce rather than suppress their desire do so through hand-grasping similar to D’Elmont’s, but pay the price for asserting their desire. Ciamara, who falls instantly in love with D’Elmont upon seeing him, acts on her lust by pursuing a sexual relationship with him. Beginning with letter writing, it culminates one night when she

“[takes] hold of his hand, and press[es] it eagerly to her bosom,” a desperate act, not too different from D’Elmont’s earlier grasps. driven by the force of her passion (210). This scene reverses the usual encounter as D’Elmont proves the object of her passion, the one being touched. Ciamara takes the active position, claiming a phallic power through manual intercourse that proves unattractive to D’Elmont who prefers Melliora’s more passive cultivation of virtue, and thus he “struggl[es] to get loose from her [Ciamara’s] embrace” (211). Ciamara ignores feminine duty in pursuit of self-fulfillment. D’Elmont refuses the sexual intimacy that Ciamara’s aggressive clasp offers, and “her trembling hands by slow degrees relinquished what so eagerly they had held, every sense forgot its use, and she sunk, in all appearance, lifeless on the floor” (212). Ciamara’s gesture proves an empty threat for she cannot physically command D’Elmont’s submission, hoping instead that her bold gesture will enliven his passions enough to satisfy her lust. Not long thereafter, she once again attempts to seduce D’Elmont, “snatching his hand, and putting it to her heart, which fiercely bounded at his touch” (225). This scene, like the former, depicts hands as the initial appendages of sexual exploration. Ciamara’s hand holds D’Elmont’s, her touch conveying the fire in her heart; their hands function as milieus of their bodily passions. Following this, D’Elmont “gave his hands and eyes full enjoyment of all those charms,” exploring her naked flesh which, unrelenting, encourages his touch (225). In this scene, D’Elmont reclaims power as only he can satisfy Ciamara’s lust. However, such a society cannot brook Ciamara’s overt expression of desire, and thus Ciamara dies. Society has no place for women who have surrendered themselves to sexual desire. *Love in Excess* forecloses that possibility, critiquing a sex-gender system that allows no space for active female desire: only men may pursue.

Though *Love in Excess* does employ manual intercourse to reflect the double-standard

applied to male and female sexuality, it also depicts socially acceptable forms of female arousal, represented safely in figures like Melliora. D'Elmont's touch arouses Melliora's body without her intending that it do so. However, she only embraces her excitement once he declares his intentions to wed her. Just as Melliora struggles to maintain her virtue by restraining the passion that D'Elmont's touches excite, so too does Pamela. Published to almost instant fame both in England and Europe, Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela* highlights the danger that uninvited grasping represented to an eighteenth-century audience. One of Mr. B's earliest trials of Pamela's virtue occurs in the summer-house shortly after Mrs. Jervis has left. Pamela explains in a letter to her mother that "[she] saw some Reason to suspect" Mr. B for his manner of looking at her "shew'd not well" (*Pamela* 22). However, her suspicion transforms into terror when he seizes her hand: "I stood all confounded," she explains, "and began to tremble, and the more when he took me by the Hand; for now no Soul was near us" (23). On the surface, this sudden clasp reveals little more than Mr. B's desire to possess Pamela's body. Hands often functioned as the initial access point in sexual affairs, thus his grasping her hand expressed his desire for further penetration. However, if read in light of the struggles that follow, it embodies not simply desire but also the power dynamics of the relationship in which Mr. B possesses control.

Once Mr. B grabs Pamela's hand, the rest of the scene describes their struggles: he steals kisses while she attempts to free herself. No one exists to intercede on Pamela's behalf, and she has no hope of withdrawing her hand because he physically overpowers her: "At last I burst from him, [...]; but he held me back, and shut the Door" (23). Mr. B's forceful, violent grip denies her escape, both demonstrating his literal power over her body and conveying the extent of that power through his touch, painful in itself. In addition, however, when read as manual intercourse, this touch further embodies Pamela's struggle with her own physicality. When Mr. B

grasps her hand, the danger arises simultaneously from the violent force of the grasp and her fear of rape as well as from the desire communicated through it. Since touch is reversible, the moment Mr. B's hand touches hers she cannot help but feel the force of his passion even if she does not consciously intend to; the touch recalls her to her body, which she in turn must deny in order to uphold her virtue.

Joseph Highmore's widely popularized 1744 series of paintings offers a rendition of this scene, but highlights how this manual intercourse simultaneously embodies Pamela's sexual and social vulnerability, rendering her complicit in Mr. B's desire (see Fig. 7). Nancy Armstrong



**Figure 7.** Joseph Highmore, *Pamela and Mr. B in the Summer House* (1744).

explains that, “after declaring he was not actually writing a novel, he [Richardson] used fiction for redefining the desirable woman” (Armstrong 97). Highmore's painting attests not only to the popularity of Richardson's fiction, but also identifies the importance of this particular scene by



isolating and offering a visual rendition of it, suggesting that this touch may function as a pivotal moment for the “redefining” that Armstrong identifies.<sup>40</sup> Though the novel inflects Mr. B’s gesture with a degree of menace, the painting reinterprets it, offering it another level of complexity. Mrs. Jervis walks toward the door of the house in the left-center of the background, leaving Pamela and Mr. B alone without any interruptions. Pamela herself fills the right third of the foreground, driven into that position by Mr. B who dominates the frame. He stands directly at its center in front of the door, and forcefully holds Pamela’s hand, compelling her to remain where she stands. Her hand faces downward,<sup>41</sup> the thumb, palm, and fingers crushed together by his hand, which grips it; their hands do not embrace each other. Mr. B exerts his social superiority through his physical strength. Their palms do not touch, reflecting no intimacy, or, at the very least, Pamela’s rejection of the sexual intimacy that his gesture offers. However, that does not necessarily indicate that she experiences no pleasure since tactile contact suggests exchange.

Aside from highlighting the power relations embodied in the grasp, this painting likewise emphasizes Pamela’s struggle to adhere to social dictates and deny any form of physical passion outside of marriage. Her left hand moves toward Mr. B’s hand with her palm out, a gesture associated with commanding another to stop. In contrast, however, in Highmore’s interpretation Pamela’s facial expression does not suggest terror but rather uncertainty and even pleasure. Her look affords a level of softness to the movement of her hand, which does not read as forceful but rather pleading. While Pamela’s left-hand appears to continue forward in attempt to dislodge Mr.

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<sup>40</sup> In Chapter Two of her dissertation, “Pamela on the Woodpile,” Nicole Garret points out that Richardson was extremely dissatisfied with nearly every illustration and continuation of *Pamela* because he felt that they often undercut the important spiritual message he sought to offer; according to Garret, Richardson writes *Pamela II* as a critical response to these continuations.

<sup>41</sup> Depending on how one reads the crease, Pamela’s hand could also be read as facing toward the viewer.

B's hand from her right, her delicate hand gestures with little force. Her body in its entirety seemingly moves away from Mr. B: though he grips her shoulders with his other hand, pulling her towards him, her lower-body slants away, implying that the rest of her person will follow that same movement. However, the color composition of the scene along with the close proximity of their bodies reveals a lack of urgency in her movement. While dark colors dominate the background, the foreground appears light and almost airy due to the pastels that comprise it. The lightness of the colors work to soften the scene depicted. Just as Pamela's tightly held hand reflects Mr. B's social and physical power over her, so too do the darker colors of the background suggest an underlying malevolence or a darker side to Mr. B's desire. Similarly, the bright colors along with the gentle nature of Pamela's rebellion against his grasp emphasizes her psychological struggle to uphold her virtue, her purity, though she finds herself physically vulnerable to his desire and social position.

Pamela cannot help but experience a physical sensation—whether pleasurable, painful, or some combination thereof—when Mr. B grabs her hand. Conduct books would have taught Pamela that she should suppress any desire that she feels; like *Melliora*, Pamela too finds that Mr. B's touches render her “[r]epugnant now, and now complying.” This touch embodies Pamela's psychological struggle with her own unacknowledged desire. In order to be virtuous, she must experience both Mr. B's and her own desire as frightening to prevent herself from succumbing to the physical sensation. Richardson's novel offers a prescription for managing unwanted, or improper desire: guard your hands. Touches generate awareness of sensation. Highmore's rendition of this touch suggests that Pamela unconsciously struggles to manage her own desire and Mr. B's by managing their touches. Thus, manual intercourse as depicted in Highmore's painting reveals Pamela's struggle with the fleshy sensations Mr. B's touch elicits

that contradict the spiritual dictates that demand female purity above all else.

Though Pamela does not always guard her hands successfully, she does not embrace Mr. B's touch until he actually asks for her hand, in both the literal and metaphorical sense. When Pamela returns during Mr. B's illness, she willingly gives him her hand and allows his "kiss[ing] it with great Eagerness" multiple times. Because "[his] Heart is too full of [Goodness], to express [him]self as [he] ought," Mr. B must rely on this gesture to embody the newfound sincerity of his affection. Pamela embraces his touch because it feels different than earlier ones—pleasurable. He offers her choice, asking, "will you give me your Hand," which renders the touch soft rather than violent; as a result, she gives it to him willingly, granting her hand only once her heart can follow. Aside from depicting her receptivity to his advances, this touch also embodies Mr. B's intention to marry Pamela and her amenability to his proposal. Shortly thereafter, she "had the Boldness to kiss his Hand," explaining that her "poor grateful Heart was like a too full River, which overflows its Banks"; her brazen kiss embodies her inner passion for the life that he offers, not necessarily him (*Pamela* 275). She acts on impulse without a full sense of the emotion her touch engenders within him. Pamela embraces the flesh in the form of Mr. B's hand only when she feels that she can do so virtuously. The manual intercourse depicted in both *Love and Excess* and *Pamela* reveals how characters negotiate unacknowledged desires through manual intercourse, a form of physical interaction capable of representing that which exceeds language.

#### **IV. Sexual Hands: Voice and Embodiment**

Where manual intercourse in *Love in Excess* and *Pamela* emphasizes the necessity of female restraint when confronted with physical desire in any form, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady* (1741-8) and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill; or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) employ manual intercourse to address not just desire, but sexual

penetration itself. Melliora and Pamela initially suppress their desire for their respective suitors, D'Elmont and Mr. B; desire in these texts remains unacknowledged until awakened by ungoverned touches that stimulate the body, recalling it to its physicality. Such manual intercourse manifests passions that the body can no longer contain. While these novels utilize manual intercourse to establish that forceful, roving touches embody unacknowledged sexual desire, *Clarissa* and *Fanny Hill* employ manual intercourse to address the act of sexual penetration. Hands that touch are always already sexualized appendages in that they hold the capacity to penetrate the boundary between self and other—the skin surface. *Clarissa* employs manual intercourse in order to address the socio-sexual dynamics of sexual penetration, and *Fanny Hill* utilizes it in order to explore the relationship between erotic and reproductive sexuality in men and women. However, both work to establish that hands that touch carry with them the possibility of sexual contact.

Richardson's *Clarissa* achieved instant fame upon its publication for its representation “of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, [...] but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, [...] may, by conquering some calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform” (from Samuel Johnson's Review [1750], qtd. Bowers and Richetti 765). Following and expanding upon the success of his earlier epistolary novel *Pamela*, *Clarissa* similarly functions as an example par excellence of eighteenth-century conduct fiction.<sup>42</sup> *Clarissa* relies on its epistolary form to represent the interior motivations of its characters. While analyses of the significance of Mr Lovelace's rape of Clarissa have been vastly

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<sup>42</sup> Though critics most commonly cite Richardson's body of work in discussions of conduct fiction, Richardson's debt to the earlier amatory fiction of writers such as Haywood has been documented. Specifically referencing Haywood's *Love in Excess*, the Broadview abridged edition of *Clarissa* asserts that “Richardson may well have been drawn to the amatory novel tradition precisely because of its association with female writers and its fixation on subject matter associated with women” (Bowers and Richetti 13).

different,<sup>43</sup> critics who have written on *Clarissa* all agree on one thing: “the rape goes wholly unrepresented, as the hole at the centre of the novel towards which this huge mass of writing is sucked only to sheer off again” (Eagleton 61). Yet, Clarissa herself rebukes silence on the matter, claiming the reality of her experience when she asks Lady Betty Lawrence, Lovelace’s aunt, “[W]hy should I seek to conceal that disgrace from others which I cannot hide from myself?” (*Clarissa* 986). Though neither Clarissa nor Lovelace offers a blow-by-blow narration of the rape, its physical presence is undeniably expressed through the manual intercourse that occurs between them. In other words, Richardson and his characters sublimate the rape, figuring manual intercourse in its stead.

While the rape as an event functions as the “unrepresented” climax, the novel’s plot structure focuses on Lovelace’s pursuit of Clarissa’s ‘hand’: her vow, her writing, and her touch (see Fig. 8). Once Clarissa denies Lovelace her literal and metaphorical hand, he fixates all of his energy on obtaining it, continuing his pursuit even after “[t]he affair is over” (883). The manual



**Figure 8.** Francis Hayman, *Robert Lovelace Preparing to Abduct Clarissa Harlowe* (1753).

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<sup>43</sup> See Warrick Doederlein whose article offers a review of scholarship on *Clarissa* through the 1980s.

intercourse that both precedes and follows the rape embodies the political struggle for dominance over the female body that the novel comments upon. Just as Lovelace forges Clarissa's handwriting and coerces her promise of marriage, he continually grasps her hand in an attempt to establish dominance. Clarissa cannot protect herself. Though she tries to uphold her virtue, society itself leaves her unprotected and seemingly works to dispossess her of that virtue at every opportunity. Because eighteenth-century society recognized its women only as vessels designed to bear future generations, the nation depended on men to guide and control female physical interactions to ensure that women would fulfill their maternal social duties. Thus, women did not possess any real authority over their bodies or their progeny.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Clarissa, her body is a public body, controlled first by her family, then Lovelace, and then Clarissa's social subordinates who work in Lovelace's employ. Her fight to regain control of her person manifests in the smaller battles fought over possession of her hands, although neither party fully acknowledges to her/himself the significance of such battles. As we have seen before, manual intercourse communicates not just unspoken desire, but power. The manual intercourse that surrounds Clarissa's rape embodies her struggle to maintain control over her flesh. Unlike *Pamela*, *Clarissa* does not end in marriage, and Clarissa's unresponsiveness to the sexual encounter attests to her virtue.<sup>45</sup>

Scholars have discussed the tension between flesh and soul apparent in this novel,<sup>46</sup> and most suggest that Clarissa ultimately maintains a virtuous soul by denying the flesh. However,

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<sup>44</sup> See Kukla who links the emergence of a public female body to its medicalization and the national rhetoric linking the nation's success with reproduction.

<sup>45</sup> Lovelace drugs Clarissa directly preceding the rape and thus attributes her lack of enjoyment to her lack of consciousness, believing that she would betray pleasure should he rape her again without using drugs to make her compliant.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, John A. Dussinger's "Conscience and the Pattern of Christian Perfection in *Clarissa*" (1966), which links flesh with earthly existence in a reading of Clarissa's suicide.

Judith Butler's discussion of Cartesian dualism in her article "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?" (1997) complicates this binary figuration by considering the body when represented in text: "The hand is reflexively spectralized in the course of the writing it performs. It undoes its reality precisely at the moment in which it acts or, rather, becomes undone precisely by the traces of the act of writing it performs" (Butler 18). Butler further explains that "[t]he effort to excise the body fails because the body returns, spectrally, as a figural dimension of the text"; in other words, through the traces left by the hand, the body remains inherent in writing itself (14). Thus, with each letter that Clarissa writes, her body—her hand—returns. Her descriptions of the rape and events that led up to it as well as the letters themselves that carry the specter of her body with them recall the reader to the physical nature of her experience. I assert that her and Lovelace's manual intercourse, meticulously described in both of their letters, encodes the rape itself.

Because Lovelace cannot directly discuss genital penetration, he instead offers descriptions of his attempts to obtain Clarissa's hand. The first of these trials begins with his noticing her "bared shoulders and arms, [...] her spread hands crossed over her charming neck" (*Clarissa* 724). Lovelace actively watches the object of his voyeuristic pleasure, imagining that each protective gesture reveals her desire to be ravished. Already, his role as watcher places him in a position of power. He sees her hands as objects to be obtained, and exerts his power by seizing them. She reads the vehemence of his desire in his "trembling" touch, recognizing that such a grasp will lead only to further violent liberties. Following this unwelcome gesture, Clarissa "tore his ruffle, shrunk from [his] happy hand," happy in its unwelcome caresses of her own (725). He derives pleasure from establishing even momentary dominance over Clarissa's hand, while she reacts violently, attempting to escape his grasp and thus reclaim control of her

person experiencing such uninvited contact as a violation.<sup>47</sup> However, she frees her hands only to have them seized once more. Just as Lovelace's sly devices immure her within the house, so too does he try to dominate her hands: "weeping, she struggled vehemently to withdraw her hands, which all the while [he] held between [his]" (726). Reduced to tears, she struggles to reclaim control over herself, since legally Lovelace has none over her, yet it proves vain, for Lovelace's physical strength holds her fast. Their manual intercourse embodies the struggle of the novel itself. Lovelace gains control over Clarissa's hands, but struggles to keep it as she continually rebels against his devices. Her hands experience no arousal under his passionate embraces,<sup>48</sup> but rather recoil at the pain and horror of the sexual overtures such touches initiate. Though she experiences a type of boundary crossing, or penetration at his touch, she does not express any desire or openness to maintain such intimacy. Clarissa neither invites nor condones Lovelace's grasping of her hand; in fact, she continually tries to escape it and reestablish a physical boundary between them by moving away from him and withholding her hand to establish physical distance.

Clarissa narrates the events of her rape in a letter to her dear friend Anna Howe. The manual intercourse that directly precedes the vaginal penetration embodies the physical and psychological trauma that Clarissa experiences, especially when considered in light of the danger represented by Lovelace's uninvited grasps both following and prior to it. Since Lovelace drugs Clarissa prior to the rape, she only vividly remembers the events that lead up to it: "he snatched my hand two or three times, with a vehemence in his grasp that hurt me; speaking words of

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<sup>47</sup> Unlike Pamela's demure gesture as Highmore depicts it, Clarissa acts with great urgency, which is reflected in Hayman's painting.

<sup>48</sup> Some critics argue that Clarissa experiences some enjoyment and possesses some desire for Lovelace because of their earlier flirtations. While I am familiar with this vein of criticism, I offer an alternate reading that focuses on the violent nature of Lovelace's advances as read through manual intercourse.



tenderness through his shut teeth, as it seemed; and let it go with a beggar-voiced humbled accent, like the vile woman's just before; half-inward; yet his words and manner carrying the appearance of strong and almost convulsed passion!" (1010). As all of Clarissa's trials at Lovelace's hands do, her rape begins with a "snatched" hand, a physical invasion of her skin surface. Though unaware of the precise intention his clasp carries with it, she feels the "vehemence in his grasp" as a violation because the pressure of it hurts her. This grip embodies the trauma of the vaginal penetration that will follow. Lovelace uses his strength to establish authority over Clarissa's body by seizing her hand multiple times without its having been offered. Each time she pulls away—"I remember, I pleaded for mercy," she later explains—but he heeds neither her physical repulsion at his own touch nor her cries for mercy (1011). Though this touch facilitates exchange, Clarissa finds no pleasure in the raw and violent desire his forceful grasp communicates. She is the object of his touch and thus denied individual agency at his ever-grasping hands. He focuses solely on the reclamation of power that he believes she has stolen from him; his is an act of power, not desire.<sup>49</sup> The force behind his painful grasp establishes his physical superiority, demonstrating his control over both the situation and her body. Furthermore, the violence of the grasp reflects the violence of the penetration itself as well as his indifference to the pain she experiences. Like the "two or three" grasps, the rape, Clarissa explains, happened in "fits upon fits (faintly indeed, and imperfectly remembered) procuring [her] no compassion" (1011). Eventually, he "let it [her hand] go with a beggar-voiced humbled accent." After he achieves his goal—whether power exerted through a hand-clasp or through orgasm—he releases her, speaking almost deferentially though she knows the "convulsed

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<sup>49</sup> While some critics have placed the blame with Clarissa or suggested that Lovelace was overcome with passion, his premeditation and the violence with which he acts suggests that this is punishment to establish dominance—as are *all* rapes. If she desires it too, then it is consensual and thus *not* rape. For further elaboration, see Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975).

passion” his “words and manners [carry].” Neither Clarissa nor Lovelace may expressly describe the rape itself, yet their touches as described by both embody that very trauma. Lovelace takes pleasure in the authority his seizures of her hand carry with them, while Clarissa prays for death, realizing only too late that “[t]hat would have been too great a mercy!” (1011). For Lovelace, the actual rape proves largely unsuccessful because Clarissa betrays no enjoyment. She experiences his touches as violations of the boundary that her skin surface forms not as a pleasurable connection. She retains her virtue because she experiences no physical pleasure, and thus Lovelace gains no sexual power. As a result, he briefly alludes to the rape in a letter to Belford only to quickly move past it and, once again, attempt to gain her hand and reclaim the authority he has lost.

Lovelace’s continued hand-grasping, even after the rape, embodies his desire to regain phallic power over Clarissa. Lovelace explains to Belford that “[he] had ever confidence and vanity enough to think that no woman breathing could deny her hand when [he] held out [his]” (915). However, his touches fail repeatedly as Clarissa continually refuses to willingly accept the hand he holds out. The day after her rape, Lovelace, trying to assure her of the sincerity of his affections, “snatched her hand, rising, and pressed it first to [his] lips, and then to [his] heart, in wild disorder” (938). Once again, Lovelace snatches her hand without its having first been offered. Though he speaks of love and respect, his manual intercourse warns Clarissa that he intends to establish dominance with no concern for her own agency; she cannot help but feel the intensity of his violent passions that the touch carries, but she experiences repulsion, not arousal. In other words, she does not reciprocate his touch because she unconsciously recognizes the threat inherent in it and thus she works to maintain the skin surface as a boundary. Even Lovelace recognizes what his gesture communicates, knowing that in his touch “[s]he might

have felt the bounding mischief ready to burst its bars” (938). While he views his inability to control himself as a complementary action that reflects Clarissa’s siren-like powers over him, Clarissa experiences his touch as threatening another violation of her person, a brutal invasion that she neither enjoys nor desires. What Lovelace views as supplicating gestures of love and deference are actually designed to establish dominance by keeping Clarissa under his control and within his grasp. He snatches her hand, touching it, kissing it, physically demonstrating his control over it and her. His anger, however, stems from his inability to arouse her through physical sensation. Clarissa never claims to be asexual, but rather makes clear that the choice to give one’s hand differs from compulsion under duress. To return to an earlier example, Clarissa’s bold refusal of Mr. Solmes exemplifies her refusal to give her flesh where her spirit cannot follow: “My hand and my heart shall never be separated.” Clarissa’s actions demonstrate her familiarity with conduct manuals’ dictates that “a child is very justifiable in the refusal of her hand, [...], where her heart cannot go with it.” However, Clarissa’s actions also instruct her readership in how to maintain virtue when confronted by previously unacknowledged desire in the form of an undesired, ungoverned touch. She implores Lovelace, “Pray, Mr. Lovelace, don’t—don’t frighten me so,” but Lovelace takes pleasure in her pleas, noting his own position of power as “down she sat, trembling; my hand still grasping hers” (938). For Lovelace, as for D’Elmont and Mr. B before, Clarissa’s sitting and trembling suggests a victory, a succumbing to his authority. He reads her body’s movement as a sign of its inability to continue to hide her desire. However, Clarissa refuses to subordinate herself to Lovelace and cries out once more, “Let go my hand” (938).

Eventually, “quitting her hand, [and] bowing,” Lovelace releases her from his grasp (938). However, this proves but an empty performance for, as Lovelace earlier explains to

Belford, “never part with a power put into their hands, without the equivalent of twice the value” (934). Shortly thereafter, Lovelace explains, “I begged her hand over the table, to my extended hand; [...] But nothing gentle, soft, or affectionate, would do. She refused me her hand!” (939). Clarissa’s refusal outrages him, for his release holds no sway, and he gains no further control. She will not reciprocate his gesture freely. Clarissa’s denial holds power because it allows her to retain intellectual and sexual freedom, which her continued letter writing likewise reflects;<sup>50</sup> Lovelace possesses no legal rights to her body as he would if they married. Though Lovelace continually grasps her hand without invitation, she recoils in horror from such manual intercourse that seeks a non-reciprocal intimacy. In response, Lovelace threatens her, “You must, for your own sake, conceal your hatred—at least not avow it,” and then he explains, “I seized her hand” (940). The threat is inherent in the deed. Though he does not actually rape her yet in the sense of genital penetration, such a seizure would have suggested to the audience the very real threat of rape that Lovelace once again contemplates. Since what he considers his gentle caresses have no sway, he moves to a more threatening one, not followed by kisses. In this movement, he employs manual intercourse to communicate his power and remind her of her weakness. The grasp is a physical violation in itself. He then lets her go, requesting that she think more on it, and promising that he will not force her, yet his gesture reveals otherwise: if he can seize her hand, he can seize what else he likes.

Though initially apprehensive because she “suspected [his] over-warm behavior to her, and eager grasping of her hand two or three times,” ultimately, Clarissa reclaims her power over herself and control of the situation as she takes “a penknife in her hand, the point to her bosom,

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<sup>50</sup> Even Clarissa herself recognizes this as an act of resistance—she exerts a type of voice despite her imprisonment. I extend this further suggesting that her writing, which functions as a trace of her physical body, signifies her physical independence, her refusal to allow Lovelace’s actions to determine her emotions or experience of her physical person.

grasping resolutely the whole handle” (946, 950). Clarissa threatens to take her own life if Lovelace attempts to touch her. She commands that he “offer [not] to touch [her],” and he explains that he “could not seize her hand” (951-2). She denies him authority over her body, literally wielding power in her own hands. Lovelace’s recognition that he cannot “seize” her hand betrays his weakness. Lovelace loses power as a result of his inability to procure her hand. Clarissa now claims authority over herself by denying him that coveted touch, and rejecting the physical and emotional intimacy his previously forced touches offered.

Richardson’s *Clarissa* articulates a type of conduct that manuals ignore. The novel implicates society itself in Clarissa’s rape for it has left her without instruction. As Thomas Hardy’s *Tess* reminds us following her own rape nearly a decade later, women not taught “what to fend hands against” are left vulnerable (*Tess* 98-9). Conduct manuals warn that sex may “lead you into a dissipated state of life that deceives you under the appearance of innocent pleasure,” and thus should be avoided (*Young Lady’s Pocket Library* 5). Clarissa knows to refuse sex and deny touch, but not how to fully gauge which touches pose a threat to her chastity; she relies on reestablishing control over her hands because she is not fully conscious of how to employ them safely. Richardson’s novel elaborates on the threatening nature of uninvited, ungoverned touches, but still preaches the importance of denying touch and its pleasures: Clarissa remains virtuous because she does not take pleasure in the pain that Lovelace’s manual intercourse carries. However, like those novels before it, *Clarissa* employs manual intercourse to not only negotiate interpersonal relationships, but also to investigate the relationship between an individual’s flesh and soul in moments of skin-to-skin contact: touch generates consciousness of one’s physicality.

Perhaps no genre of the eighteenth-century novel better illustrates the direct link between

the hand and sexuality than does pornographic fiction. John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, the first pornographic novel written in English, proved quite popular in both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century circles, going through twenty editions by 1845 (Lutz Marsh 411).<sup>51</sup> A number of critics have suggested that Richardson's writing influenced Cleland's,<sup>52</sup> one such critic even argues that *Fanny Hill* retells *Clarissa*.<sup>53</sup> *Fanny Hill* highlights the erotic potential of hands, which function as sexual agents capable of impassioned desire in characters as well as readers. Sexual encounters in *Fanny Hill* often begin with the manual stimulation of the genitals, especially in Fanny's earliest experiences. Each touch the hand brings with it, each scene of manual intercourse, reveals hands as the foremost appendages of sexual exploration and eroticizes the pain such manual stimulation may cause. Antje Schaum Anderson suggests that *Clarissa* represents the absence of female sexuality while Fanny represents excessive female sexuality—or what we might call non-reproductive or erotic sexuality more specifically—where “female pleasure is dependent on pain” (Anderson 115). Where Anderson argues that “*Clarissa* is never implicated in either the pain or the pleasure of sexual intercourse so central to *Memoirs*' *Fanny Hill*,” I suggest that *Clarissa* does, however, achieve ultimate happiness through pain: her death, her pleasurable release, follows a series of traumatic trials (123). Lovelace penetrates *Clarissa*'s body—her flesh—but cannot access her soul. Manual intercourse in *Fanny Hill*, however, explores the physical experience of pleasure and the type of boundary crossing that such experiences entail.

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<sup>51</sup> For a compelling reading of the influence of Cleland's *Fanny Hill* on Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, see Lutz Marsh 411-15.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Antje Schaum Anderson's “Gendered Pleasure, Gendered Plot: Defloration as Climax in ‘*Clarissa*’ and ‘*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*’” (1995) and David Weed's “Fitting Fanny: Cleland's ‘*Memoirs*’ and the Politics of Male Pleasure” (1997).

<sup>53</sup> See Edward Copeland's “‘*Clarissa*’ and ‘*Fanny Hill*’: Sisters in Distress” (1972), which explores the extent of the similarity between the conventions employed in each novel.

Fanny explains the type of exchange that touch facilitates in a description of one of Miss Phoebe's "manual operation[s]": "the bare touch of her finger in that critical place, had the effect of fire to a train, and her hand instantly made her sensible to what pitch I was wound up" (Cleland 31, 38). As Moore's fable warns, here the corrupting touch of pleasure comes from a female hand. Fanny experiences arousal at Phoebe's touch, an arousal that spreads from the initial contact point throughout the rest of her body. Similarly, Phoebe experiences excitement, learning from her own tactile sensations the extent of Fanny's physical arousal; Phoebe's finger feels the warmth, moisture, and movement of Fanny's vagina, or so we can assume, and translates that to the rest of Phoebe's senses as pride in her successful arousal of Fanny's body. Their mutual excitement embodies the double sensation possible through touch. The exchange herein depicted negotiates the boundaries between self and other, demonstrating the permeability and malleability of skin. Just as Phoebe does, Fanny too experiences both her own and Phoebe's pleasure through the reciprocal exchange that Phoebe's touch enables. Though Fanny and Phoebe's hands do not interact with each other directly, this description makes clear that hands that touch communicate desire from one body to another, rendering them sexual appendages that sometimes invite or engage in non-reproductive, distinctly erotic sexual activities.

Touching tends to represent active sexuality, often linked with masculinity, while being touched lends itself toward a more passive sexuality, often linked with femininity;<sup>54</sup> men are subjects and women are the objects of their lust. However, as will be seen, such gendered activity is not necessarily bound to the sexed body that would seemingly coincide with it. Even in the case of Fanny's relationship with Phoebe, Phoebe possesses power over Fanny because her

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<sup>54</sup> In her book *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007), Erin Manning seeks to complicate this reductive construction, which she understands as a vestige of Cartesian dualism. However, since this chapter focuses on how those of the eighteenth century understood touch, an awareness of this seemingly binary construction proves relevant to understanding the power dynamics embedded within manual intercourse.

“hands, which like a lambent fire ran over [Fanny’s] whole body, and thawed all coldness as they went,” offer sexual pleasure, reflecting Phoebe’s dominant position within the brothel as well (14). Through the use of her hands, Phoebe assumes what Judith Halberstam terms “female masculinity” by taking up the active role both touching Fanny as well as teaching Fanny how to touch.<sup>55</sup> Phoebe’s hands convey warmth to the rest of Fanny’s body through their gentle caresses, but Fanny soon discovers that with pleasure, or perhaps more rightly penetration, comes pain. Phoebe begins “to insinuate, and at length to force an introduction of a finger into the quick itself,” following that with “hands [that] were now busied in feeling, squeezing, compressing the lips, then opening them again, with a finger between, till an Oh!” from Fanny expresses hurt, “where the narrowness of the unbroken passage refused it [the finger] entrance to any depth” (14, 15). Even Fanny’s own attempts at active sexual expression through digitation begin with pain before giving way to pleasure: “I stole my hand up my petticoat, and with fingers all on fire, seized, and yet more inflamed that center of all my senses; [...] I breath’d with pain: I twisted my thighs. Squeezed, and compress’d the lips of that virgin slit, and following mechanically the example of *Phoebe’s* manual operation on it, as far as I could find admission, brought on at last the critical extasy [sic.]” (31; italics original). Fanny endures the pain that her fingers bring to the small “theater, [that] did not yet afford room enough for action,” and receives a reward for her fortitude, “the melting flow [...] spent with excess of pleasure” (32, 31). Where Clarissa’s earthly tortures result in the pleasure of death, Fanny’s painful encounters result in physical pleasure: orgasm (*le petit morte*). Thus, Fanny’s masturbatory experience begins “with pain,” but culminates in “at last the critical extasy [sic.]” Fanny’s homoerotic and autoerotic indulgences

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<sup>55</sup> See Halberstam for a full discussion of female masculinity; she exposes the difference between masculinity and maleness and explores why society views queer female masculinity as threatening, while heterosexual female masculinity—exemplified in the popular examples of Linda Hamilton from *Terminator 2* (1991) and Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* (1979)—are more acceptable.



soon generate a desire for “more solid food,” displacing any homoerotic tensions with heterosexual longing (40).

Most of Fanny’s heterosexual encounters begin with a similar description of penetrative pain, often equating such female pain with both male and female pleasure; male characters achieve orgasm by inserting “that stiff horn-hard gristle, [and] battering [it] against th[at] tender part,” while the female characters achieve the same once they realize that they enjoy the assault, the penetration.<sup>56</sup> Masculine sexuality is active and powerful, embodied in touches that are forceful but pleasurable, while female sexuality is passive, receiving the pain and pleasure that those tactile acts offer. Male characters offer their hands or penises, and female characters receive them and thus sexual fulfillment: “the fiery touch of his fingers determines me,” Fanny explains of Charles’s touch, which directly precedes her first experience of sexual intercourse, “[...] my thighs disclose of themselves, and yield all liberty to his hand” (84-5). Not only does Fanny yield to Charles’s hand, losing all vestiges of her own active sexuality, but she faints from the pain of intercourse such that she literally becomes a passive receptacle of Charles’s ejaculatory pleasure. When she wakes up, however, she explains that, in spite of the pain, she feels pleasure because of the satisfaction that their encounter brought him.<sup>57</sup> *Fanny Hill* depicts a male fantasy in which penis size reflects one’s moral constitution, and male sexual aggression in heterosexual intercourse leads to female satisfaction.<sup>58</sup> Similarly to Richardson’s *Clarissa* in which Lovelace assumes that Clarissa will enjoy his raping her once the initial shock and pain

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<sup>56</sup> This sadomasochistic type of relationship was popularized by the Marquis de Sade who “reveled in the prolonged torment and rape of Clarissa and based his novel *Justine* (1791) on the perils of Pamela” (Halttunen 308).

<sup>57</sup> She eventually marries Charles and has a child, suggesting that true female erotic sexual pleasure culminates in fulfilling one’s reproductive destiny.

<sup>58</sup> See Anderson for a detailed articulation of the relationship between pleasure and pain in the construction of female sexuality.

dissipate into pleasure, in *Fanny Hill* real pain, like real consequences, does not exist.

Clarissa denies her flesh because each time Lovelace's touch recalls her to it she experiences a physical and psychological violation, while Fanny embraces hers because the touches she experiences bring pleasure after the initial pain. These novels depict a number of different types of touches, and among those discuss the types of emotions that each carries with it. Manual intercourse in each embodies a sex-gender system that places men in a position of power that closely allies them with their flesh, while it places women in a position of subservience that charges them with upholding social morality. Women must either deny the physical to uphold spiritual duty and achieve ultimate pleasure in God, or else embrace the pain of physical contact as a precursor to the pleasure that will follow. In either case, hands function as a point of mediation between bodies and the unacknowledged desire they house.

#### **V. Decorous Hands: Trusting the Flesh**

In dialogue with the works of Richardson and influential for novelists such as Jane Austen, Frances Burney's *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) offers a direct commentary on both male and female social conduct, focusing extensively on manual intercourse. Similarly to both *Love in Excess* and *Pamela*, *Evelina* too exposes the double-standard that emphasizes female restraint in the face of male desire: women must restrain their hands, while men are free to touch. However, *Evelina* more openly explores the pleasures associated with manual intercourse when it communicates longed-for attention. In contrast to both *Fanny Hill* and *Clarissa*, pain no longer functions as an aphrodisiac, a gateway to ultimate pleasure. Instead, *Evelina* must learn to trust her flesh, the physical sensations that tactile contact arouses. When male characters forcibly seize her hands, terror alone, not pleasure, follows.

While a number of critics have focused on the lighthearted, feminine nature of *Evelina*,<sup>59</sup> Susan Staves discusses Evelina's "painful, real, and powerful" experience of violence every time she finds herself alone (Staves 368).<sup>60</sup> While desired manual intercourse brings pleasure, it generates anxiety if not fear when it violates boundaries. Unlike other novels that establish female virtue as the denial of the physical, *Evelina* explores the intuitive nature of skin: it opens itself willingly to desired touches, while recoiling with disgust at tactile violations.

In the "Preface," the unidentified editor of *Evelina* explains the purpose of the novel as "[t]o draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times" (Burney 9; italics original). The editor further explains that to do this s/he has constructed "*a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record*" (9; italics original). In other words, without exposure to the world, Evelina cannot learn how to properly conduct herself in it, especially since, as we have seen, conduct manuals avoid discussion of manners associated with physical interaction. Through the character of Evelina herself, the novel comments on conduct, specifically manual intercourse. Evelina's hands both literally and metaphorically come constantly under threat. In fact, the question of who will obtain Evelina's hand structures the novel's plot. Though Evelina must protect her hands in order to maintain her virtue, she ultimately trusts her choice of a husband to her sense of touch: Lord Orville's manual intercourse arouses her while those of others either fall flat or generate disgust.

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the work of Thomas Babington Macaulay, William Hazlitt, and David Cecil.

<sup>60</sup> See especially Staves, p. 371.

Having been raised in an isolated community by the reverend, Mr. Villars, Evelina first comes into trouble because she has no familiarity with the customs of high society. The very first dance she attends in London begins the manual intercourse that continues throughout the novel: undesired suitors attempt to engage her hand, making it difficult for her to bestow it upon him whom she desires. Mrs. Mirvan, Evelina's chaperon, chastises herself, explaining that "she had taken it for granted that [she, Evelina,] must know such common customs" (35). However, in spite of her first experience, Evelina still experiences the same difficulty at the second dance she attends. Sir Clement Willoughby asks to engage Evelina's hand for the evening, but she refuses him, fibbing that she has already promised it to another. Sir Clement pursues her all evening until she finally implies that her desired suitor, Lord Orville, has engaged it. When Sir Clement confronts Lord Orville, Sir Clement "suddenly seize[s] [Evelina's] hand, saying 'Think, my Lord, what must be my reluctance to resign this fair hand to your Lordship!'" (48). In response, Lord Orville does not hesitate, but rather "[i]n the same instant, he [takes] it of him [Sir Clement]" (48). In her embarrassment at the situation Evelina "ma[kes] an effort to recover it," but Lord Orville flatters her and "press[es] it to his lips ere he let it go" (48). This scene of manual intercourse embodies the struggle that takes place throughout the novel. Sir Clement and Lord Orville struggle to gain possession of Evelina's hand, while she fights to maintain control over it herself. Lord Orville often intercedes when Sir Clement grabs it, and Evelina often struggles to withdraw her hand in response to both feelings of disgust at Sir Clement's grasp and pleasure at Lord Orville's gentle embrace. Thus, manual intercourse in this novel ultimately reflects the importance of Evelina's trusting in the experience of her own flesh.

*Evelina* critiques conduct manuals for not offering clear social instruction,<sup>61</sup> and society

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<sup>61</sup> See Hemlow for a fuller discussion of this critique; the quotation that follows in this paragraph functions as an example of the novel's self-aware discussion of the failure of conduct books.

itself for keeping women ignorant of custom by denying them worldly experience. Following her initial experiences at these London dances, Evelina complains that “there ought to be a book, of the laws and customs *à-la-mode*, presented to all young people, upon their first introductions into public company” (84). Of course, conduct manuals exist, yet they do not directly articulate rules to govern physical interaction, begging the question, what form should such instruction take? Towards the end of the novel Mrs. Selwyn also comments that “young ladies [sic.] hearts and hands are always to be given with reluctance,” and thus young women cannot be trusted with deciding for themselves (377). While others of Evelina’s party, including Mrs. Selwyn, have been duped by Sir Clement, Evelina has always regarded him as a menace because she experiences his manual intercourse as threatening. His manual intercourse does not result in pleasure, and thus this novel critiques the social construction of female sexuality as reliant upon pain and the popular notion that female virtue is borne of denial in the face of temptation or physical trial.

Just as Melliora, Pamela, and Clarissa before her, Evelina too tries to safeguard her hand from unwanted advances, but to no avail. No matter how fiercely Evelina clings to the accepted codes of conduct—those that preach abstinence and denial—her hands continually come under threat, revealing the artificiality of decorum that demands female chastity at all costs while openly condoning male vice.<sup>62</sup> Throughout this novel, Evelina expresses great anxiety when Sir Clement, and other strange men, grasp her hands without her consent. On two separate occasions Sir Clement isolates Evelina, and threatens her chastity by threatening her hands. The first of these instances occurs when he has trapped her with him in his carriage. When he succeeds in grasping her hand, Evelina explains, that, “though I would fain have withdrawn my hand, and

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of Frances Burney’s familiarity with conduct manuals, see Hemlow.

made almost continual attempts; but in vain, for he actually grasped it between both his, without any regard to my resistance” (98). Sir Clement’s double-handed embrace implies an improper degree of intimacy between himself and Evelina. Throughout this scene, Evelina feels no pleasure or reciprocal desire, warning her female readership of the types of manual intercourse that foreshadow a greater violation. She experiences Sir Clement’s touch as a threat because the double-sensation of touch leaves her body open to experiencing the desire that he dare not fully verbalize. She rejects his familiarity, experiencing such closeness and the sensations it engenders as a breach of both physical and social boundaries rather than a welcome reciprocal exchange. He ignores her rebukes, holding her hand tightly between both of his. This gesture embodies his desire for complete domination and his utter disregard for her pleasure. Once again, their manual intercourse reflects the dynamics of their relationship: he holds her within his power while she has no one to intercede on her behalf—a scenario that recalls the trials of both Pamela and Clarissa. The burden of adhering to conduct rests with her while he continually ignores it, making constant sexual overtures through manual intercourse.

Similarly, later on during a trip to Vauxhall, Sir Clement finds Evelina separated from her party and once again tries to compel her to engage with him sexually through manual intercourse. Evelina explains, “[T]his most impetuous of men, snatching my hand, which he grasped with violence, besought me to forgive him, [such] that, merely to escape his importunities, I was forced to speak, and, in some measure, to grant the pardon he requested” (200). Thus, Evelina once again expresses her experience of the threat of rape. Sir Clement “snatches” her hand, violating her personal space and threatening her to such an extent that she feels that she must grant him her forgiveness in order to protect her person; Helen Huntingdon in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is similarly compelled at the hands of her husband to

offer her forgiveness under duress. This type of physical violation by Sir Clement continues throughout the novel and remains overtly violent in its description: “[he] frequently and forcibly seized my hand, though I repeatedly, and with undissembled anger drew it back” (312). While Lovelace’s manual intercourse carries “a vehemence [...] that hurt[s],” Sir Clement’s grasps employ “violence” and “forc[e]” in their “snatching” of Evelina’s hand. Evelina makes clear her dislike of Sir Clement’s overtures, yet he continually violates her person by grasping her hand uninvited, revealing his own sexual intentions. The rape of Evelina’s hands happens publicly and repeatedly in spite of her adherence to the codes of abstinence established in conduct manuals of the period. Thus, their manual intercourse embodies not just Evelina’s physical aversion to Sir Clement and his sexual interest, but also society’s failure: because women are not taught how to physically engage with the world, their bodies are literally left open to violation.

In contrast, Lord Orville’s touch, even when unsolicited, brings with it pleasure rather than pain; his touches respect the boundary that Evelina establishes rather than trying to permeate it. Much like Fanny’s experience of Charles and Phoebe’s caresses, Evelina feels pleasure when her hands make contact with those of Lord Orville. When he arrives at Mrs. Mirvan’s one morning to pay his respects to Evelina, she recalls in her letter, “he came to me, and took my hand, saying, ‘I *do* think, that whoever has once seen Miss Anville, must receive an impression never to be forgotten’” (73; italics original). She loses herself for a moment in a reverie of his compliment and his touch, but, she explains, “the instant I recollected my situation, I withdrew my hand” and “[h]e did not oppose me” (73). Arguably she recollects herself in the moment that her passion for him and his conduct reaches its zenith—she “fe[els] [her]self change colour” (73). Her body reacts positively to his embrace, which she later describes as “so elegant, so gentle, so unassuming” (74). She experiences discomfort when she becomes conscious of her

own arousal, fearing that should she continue holding his hand, he might discover her excitement. Evelina never experiences pain when Lord Orville touches her. Rather, their manual intercourse embodies her own struggle with the social codes of propriety that require that she appear passionless in order to maintain her virtue, and with her flesh that receives the sincerity of Orville's desire as pleasurable. Evelina finds it difficult to temper her passion, which increases her frustration that Sir Clement and other men can so freely express their desire for her directly to her while she must restrain herself according to custom. Because Lord Orville respects the codes of conduct, he uses manual intercourse to reveal to Evelina what he cannot respectably speak. Thus, his concern for her hand throughout the novel reveals his own desire for it.

Undesired sexual attention expressed through the vicious seizing of Evelina's hand reoccurs throughout the text, such that both Evelina and Lord Orville become conscious and protective of her hands. Just as Sir Clement's passion for Evelina overwhelms him, compelling him to act, so too does that of other men in the novel. Male lust gets projected onto the skin surface and then transferred through touch. Thus, the rape of Evelina's hand, seized without her consent or invitation, expresses the very real threat of the rape of her person. Even male characters charged with upholding the law prove threatening to women left to wander both physically and mentally unprotected in society. Walking down the street, Evelina finds herself accosted a by a young police officer simply because he finds her attractive: "You are a sweet pretty creature, and I enlist you in my service;" and then, with great violence, he seized my hand. I screamed aloud with fear, and, forcibly snatching it away, I ran up to two ladies, and cried, 'For Heaven's sake, dear ladies, afford me some protection!'" (234). The officer's sexual attraction to Evelina manifests in his ungoverned seizure of her hand. Evelina identifies his action as both "fierce" and "violent." His touch and the intimacy of the desire that it communicates through the



force exerted on Evelina's hands incite fear, not pleasure. Her flesh responds with repugnance to his touch; she does not desire such exchange. She turns to female strangers for protection, but these women are prostitutes, unsympathetic to her plight. Shortly thereafter, Evelina meets Lord Orville who, "taking my hand, asked 'Will Miss Anville allow me thus to seal my peace?' He pressed it to his lips, and took leave" (242). In stark contrast to her experience of the police officer's fierce grip, Evelina responds positively and passionately to Lord Orville's gesture, following it with an exclamation, "Generous, noble Lord Orville!" (242). His embrace excites her because he respects her right to determine the duration and nature of it. He acts the part of his social position, a nobleman.

Evelina compares Lord Orville's conduct to that of Sir Clement, highlighting the difference in their behavior: Lord Orville asks for consent, but does not force his hand. She considers Lord Orville to possess "a gentleness of manners, such delicacy of conduct, and air so respectful, that, when he flatters most, he never distresses, and when he most confers honour, appears to receive it!" (330). In contrast, she explains that Sir Clement "*obtrudes* his attention, and *forces* mine; it is so pointed, that it always confuses me, and so public, that it attracts general notice. Indeed I have sometimes thought that he would rather *wish*, than dislike to have his partiality for me known, as he takes great care to prevent my being spoken to by anybody but himself" (330; italics original). The manual intercourse between Evelina and Sir Clement embodies this description. He forces his hand upon her own in order to compel her to take notice of him. Furthermore, as when he first meets her at the London dance, he makes his attempts on her hand openly, often hoping that others will read their manual intercourse as signs of an intimacy that does not yet exist between them. Melliora and Pamela ultimately accept the hands of the men that once accosted theirs; for them, pleasurable touches proceed from painful trials.

For Evelina, however, pleasure comes from choice and the absence of fear; she desires to enter into social exchange with Lord Orville, and thus their manual intercourse only heightens her passion for him.

Mr. Villars, Evelina's guardian, instructs her in a letter that to manage her desire she must withdraw from Lord Orville's company. Mr. Villars commands, "awake to the sense of your danger, and exert yourself to avoid the evils with which it threatens you: [...] / You must quit him!" (309). Responding to Mr. Villars's instructive, Evelina tries to contain her desire for Lord Orville by denying him not only conversation since she cannot leave, but also her hand—her touch. She explains at one point that "he would have taken my hand, but I turned from him" (325). Her turn does not, in fact, reflect her distaste. She fears that if she engages in manual intercourse with him, she will succumb to her own passion for him and his arousing, gentle touch. Additionally, she feels guilt that she must react with such a degree of restraint since he has done nothing to merit such frigid treatment. Eventually, Evelina trusts to her own flesh and accepts Lord Orville's hand in marriage: she bestows her hand according to the dictates of both her flesh and her heart, giving her hand only where her heart may follow. The novel ends with Lord Orville's "pressing [her] hand affectionately to his heart, 'You are now,' (said he, in a low voice) 'all my own! Oh my Evelina, how will my soul find room for this happiness?—it seems already bursting!'" (404). Their manual intercourse here recalls but deviates from D'Elmont's final embrace of Melliora's hand. Lord Orville conveys the fervency of his passion for Evelina, which has reached its apex and "seems already bursting!" He speaks of his soul, yet he expresses his passion through physical interaction. In this moment, they consummate their affection for each other as Evelina reciprocates his gesture. Manual intercourse throughout embodies the difficult position that women, uneducated in the ways of the world, experience upon entering

into it. Society encourages Evelina to deny the flesh and trust to custom, which fails because not everyone adheres to it. Thus, Evelina learns to trust her flesh—and the spirit embodied within it—above social custom.

Like *Evelina*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, published in 1815, employs manual intercourse to narrate sexual desire, but does so with an emerging degree of consciousness about how tactile sensations may communicate desire. As Armstrong points out, in contrast to the novels of Richardson, those of Austen "concentrated on the finer points of conduct necessary to secure a good marriage [...] rather than on the will and cunning it took to preserve one's chastity from impending rape" (Armstrong 134). Pointing to the contrast between the characters of Pamela and Emma in particular, Armstrong notes that "Through her [Emma's] perception of her own emotions, she abandons the careless promptings of culture that would throw her into the arms of Frank Churchill and learns to listen to a desire all her own" (164). In other words, unlike earlier female characters, Austen's possess an acute awareness of conduct and what it signifies; thus, they can more actively deploy it or deviate from it. Emma's manual intercourse highlights this shift in consciousness because she actively engages in manual intercourse to communicate what conduct deems too taboo for speech rather than just reacting to the undesired, ungoverned touches of others. Within *Emma*, manual intercourse conveys more than the power relations associated with sexual intention. The narrator of this novel focuses on handshakes in moments of possible romance. By the early nineteenth century, etiquette books establish codes to govern manual intercourse that function because people learn to police each other and themselves, legislating not only individual bodies, but ultimately society itself through them. Hand-to-genital contact as depicted in *Fanny Hill* has shifted such that hand-to-hand contact mirrors the same

level of sexual intimacy. While *Emma* is a book about friendship,<sup>63</sup> its central question concerns who will, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, gain Emma's hand.

Early on, *Emma* establishes itself as a novel interested in the joining of hands and the considerations that determine a successful match, and not just in a matrimonial sense. Beginning with the marriage of Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston, Emma asserts that "when he [Mr. Elton, the parish priest,] was joining their hands to-day, he looked so very much as if he would like to have the same kind of office done for him!" (Austen 10). Though the term 'hand' functions metonymically in this statement, hands throughout the novel appear in moments of embodied exchange. Characters consciously engage in manual intercourse as a means of navigating relationships and reconciling their own experiences. Emma spends the first third of the novel trying to join the hand of her friend, Harriet Smith, to that of Mr. Elton, Harriet's social superior. Emma ignores her step-brother Mr. Knightley's criticism of the match along with his pronouncement that Mr. Elton desires wealth and status in his chosen mate. Emma misreads Mr. Elton's affections, refusing to recognize that his actions demonstrate interest in her, not Harriet. This affair culminates in Mr. Elton's proposal to Emma, which she receives as unexpected and unwelcome. As Mr. Elton begins his declaration, Emma finds "her hand seized—her attention demanded, and Mr. Elton actually making violent love to her; availing himself of the precious opportunity, declaring sentiments which must be already well known, hoping—fearing—adoring—ready to die if she refused him" (110). She realizes in this moment that not only has she misunderstood his previous actions, but finds herself affronted by the ardency of his affection. He intentionally takes her hand as an indication of the intimacy with her for which he

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<sup>63</sup> Ruth Perry, for example, explores the significance of female friendship in her article "Interrupted Friendships in Jane Austen's *Emma*" (1986), suggesting that this text reflects Austen's interest in female community rather than simply marriage, and Bruce Stovel similarly discusses the importance of Emma's search for friendship in his article "Emma's Search for a True Friend" (1991).

longs. His grasp conveys his “hoping—fearing—adoring,” but she does not return his feelings. His forwardness in taking her hand without her first offering it offends her, and momentarily frightens her as she grows increasingly aware of the depth of his passion for her. It offers an intimate exchange that Emma does not reciprocate. In this instance, Emma holds the position of power in her ability to either accept or reject the hand—the intimacy—that Mr. Elton offers. Unlike the threatening ungoverned touches in earlier novels that we have considered, Mr. Elton’s pleasure depends on Emma’s receptivity to his gesture. She rejects it and him through it, reestablishing the boundary between them by breaking contact. Mr. Elton desires to join both spirit and flesh, relying on touch to convey emotion that he has suppressed. However, Emma ultimately reclaims her hand and denies him access to her heart and body.

Similarly, Emma understands her relationship with Frank Churchill through their manual intercourse, which proves only that of friendship and not that of romance. Though Emma initially suspects that her relationship with Churchill might take a romantic turn, when he first leaves to return to his sick aunt, Emma realizes that for her there exists no romance between them. She explains this when he leaves and their social intercourse concludes with “[a] very friendly shake of the hand” (223). The narrator follows this by reinforcing Emma’s conceit that “[t]heir affection was always to subside into friendship” (225). Simply put, Emma is mindful that his touch does not excite her. She experiences no arousal when their hands meet, no intimate emotional exchange. The handshake offers neither Emma nor Churchill access to the inner emotional state of the other; for example, Emma does not realize that Churchill and Jane are engaged. In other words, the “friendly” clasp communicates a level of intimacy and affection, but no romance, no arousal on either end. Where Mr. Elton’s uninvited grasp repels Emma because of the excess of desire it bears, Churchill’s clasp offers the friendship to which he cannot

verbally admit. Churchill bestows a near inappropriate amount of attention on Emma in order to mask his engagement to Jane. Though Churchill does not tell Emma of this plan, he later indicates in a letter, which we can read as an extension of their manual intercourse, that he knew that only friendship existed between Emma and himself. What he feels unable to communicate in speech, he communicates to Emma through their manual intercourse.

Through touch, Emma grows increasingly conscious of her affection for Mr. Knightley. Emma and Mr. Knightley's relationship develops in-line with the handshakes in which they engage. Their first handshake is a gesture of reconciliation that follows their disagreement about whether or not Mr. Elton intends to marry Harriet. Emma experiences a great deal of concern when Mr. Knightley expresses an opinion different from her own, and thus, as a sign of good faith, she asks, "Come, shake hands with me" (85). Emma asserts a level of agency when she asks for his hand because she knows the social significance of such a handshake, and attributes the desired function to its completion: his embrace reassures her of his favor. Though the gesture itself signifies a level of friendship or, at least, amity, she asks for it in order to reaffirm their intimate connection. She consciously reads it not only as a sign of goodwill, but also personal fondness. With each shake, Emma and Mr. Knightley reveal aspects of themselves to each other. When read in light of Emma's other offered shake, Emma's desire for physical, intellectual, and emotional intimacy proves all the more apparent.

After Emma insults Miss Bates while on a day-trip to Box Hill, Mr. Knightley scolds her for her rudeness and apathy, expressing his disapprobation by denying her his hand. Initially, Emma tries to make light of her insult, but Mr. Knightley refuses to assuage her. Emma fears losing his good opinion, and thus "she looked out [from the carriage] with voice and hand ready to show a difference; but it was just too late. He had turned away" (324). Where Emma

previously offers her hand to Mr. Knightley to assure herself that they can remain intimate friends even while they disagree, this time she offers her hand as a sign of deference, an apology intended to communicate the embarrassment that she feels at having failed to uphold Mr. Knightley's expectations for her. Interestingly, she experiences little actual sorrow for her mistreatment of Miss Bates; instead, her regret comes from her distress over Mr. Knightley's lost opinion. When she offers her hand, she feels his lack of return instantly; in other words, she experiences his absence both emotionally and physically: "She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed [...] Never had she felt so agitated, so mortified, grieved at any circumstances in her life" (324). She cannot adequately articulate the shame she feels, and he denies her the opportunity to communicate it to him through touch; she has no means of expressing herself. Their previous conciliatory shake reestablished their intimacy, while this absence denies even the possibility of intimate exchange. Emma feels this rejection deeply.

In between these two instances, Mr. Knightley offers his hand to Emma in an embrace that suggests a level of intimacy that requires that they both deny the impropriety of such a touch, and thus simultaneously revealing the possibilities inherent within it. Mr. Knightley "offer[s] his hand" to Emma, engaging her for a dance (285). Though a seemingly friendly gesture, Emma's response when their hands touch implies that the clasp offers more than just friendship. Emma responds with a statement that begs Mr. Knightley to affirm that "[they] are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper" (285). He confirms this, vehemently replying, "Brother and sister! No, indeed" (285). In order to legitimate their manual intercourse, both must deny that it represents any type of sibling affection that would render it incestuous and thus improper. This denial suggests an openness and awareness to each other, a mutual recognition of the erotic possibilities inherent in their manual intercourse. Their

need to disavow it as sibling-like suggests that it possesses possible romantic potential, for siblings would only pose a problem if amorously involved. This embrace builds on their earlier conciliatory gesture, facilitating a greater degree of physical and emotional intimacy.

Both Emma and Mr. Knightley's respective hands function as the seat of their mutual, but unspoken desire. Emma experiences Mr. Knightley's uninvited clasp only as pleasurable—arousing.<sup>64</sup> Dancing precariously on the edge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conduct, the handshake between Mr. Knightley and Emma after he learns of Emma's having gone to apologize to Miss Bates, reveals that Emma, at least, consciously experiences a level of sexual arousal communicated through Mr. Knightley's hand: "He took her hand;—whether she had not herself made the first motion, she could not say—she might, perhaps, have rather offered it—but he took her hand, pressed it, and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips—when, from some fancy or other, he suddenly let it go. Why he should feel such a scruple, [...] when it was all but done, she could not perceive" (332-3). This passage offers Emma's interpretation of Mr. Knightley's touch, which begins with "a little movement of more than common friendliness on his part" as she interprets it (332). However, this moment of contact carries with it something more than platonic affection; they have already denied their sibling relationship in affairs of manual intercourse. Their unexpressed desire finds release through conversion into this rather sudden handshake. As Emma quickly explains, taken off guard by such a sudden expression of passion from Mr. Knightley, she knows not who initiated the embrace. Her evident frustration at his release of her hand, at his succumbing to his better judgment, his sense of propriety, suggests that the hand in general, and the female hand in particular, functions as a clear site of sexual

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<sup>64</sup> Stovel suggests that "Emma is unaccountably disappointed at Mr. Knightley's" gesture, but in doing so implies that her disappointment stems from Mr. Knightley's not allowing her to have offered her hand rather than his not completing the gesture itself (Stovel par. 12). In contrast, William Deresiewicz sees the handshake, "like the word 'friend' itself, playing with, stretching, manipulating, making ever more complex and ambiguous" (Deresiewicz 122).



exchange. She knows what the handshake could have entailed, the pleasure it might have brought. Emma has opened herself up to the embrace, to the double-sensation. She assumes that Mr. Knightley “certainly” intended to kiss her hand and that he stopped because he “fel[t] such a scruple,” though the narrator offers no indication of Mr. Knightley’s perspective or experience. This description reveals Emma’s emergent consciousness of her own desire. Mr. Knightley “took her hand, [and] pressed it,” awakening her to her own sexual subjectivity in that moment. She is not just being touched, but she actively embraces his touch in return until “he suddenly let it [her hand] go.”

While hand-clasps often appear ungoverned in earlier eighteenth-century novels, here, Mr. Knightley proves a character more like Lord Orville who tries to adhere to social custom before gratifying individual desire. Mr. Knightley himself must stop the action, even if “[t]he intention [...] was indubitable” (333). This touch communicates both their inner passion and their struggle to restrain that passion without using a word. Benthien explains, “sensual and emotive touches are understood as nondiscursive, invisible traces that, nevertheless, inscribe themselves on the skin” (Benthien 220). This touch functions nondiscursively, “their bodies speaking a language of their own, [and] saying things their possessors do not fully understand” (Deresiewicz 122). Mr. Knightley’s desire has left its trace on Emma’s skin, inflaming Emma’s own. When Mr. Knightley proposes, Emma experiences the pleasure of tactile sensation, much as before; however, they complete this gesture whereas Mr. Knightley breaks contact during the previous. After he proposes, “she found her arm within his and pressed against his heart,” a gesture similar to that of Evelina and Lord Orville (366). Emma experiences a “flutter of pleasure” while Mr. Knightley embraces her hand (367). Much as the previous uninvited, uncompleted handshake awakens her desire, this one realizes it: “She was his own Emma, by

hand and word” (373). In addition to completing that earlier handshake, it likewise makes up for the embrace that Mr. Knightley denies Emma, who has her “voice and hand ready” to make amends while at Box Hill. The novel ends “join[ing] the hands of Mr. Knightley and Miss Woodhouse” (418). Emma and Mr. Knightley join hands when married, allowing for the ultimate completion of the handshakes they have employed to negotiate their relationship throughout the novel. Their manual intercourse negotiates the boundary between sibling affection and erotic desire that exists between them.<sup>65</sup> While they cannot speak their desire, they can communicate it through manual intercourse.

## **VI. Conclusion: Manual Intercourse, a Conscious Engagement**

Much like Emma before her, Jane Eyre also proves conscious of the eroticism that touch both communicates and engenders, as does her employer and later husband Edward Rochester. As the next chapter will show, by the nineteenth century, and in response to the prevalence of ungoverned touches in eighteenth-century novels, etiquette books begin to address appropriate forms of physical contact in social settings, often highlighting handshake etiquette. I will suggest that this burgeoning consciousness among nineteenth-century characters about what their manual intercourse can convey emerges as a result of the increased discourse both about the regulation of handshakes within etiquette books and about the anatomical structure of the hand and what the hand’s physiology might convey about an individual’s personality. I will conclude this chapter by returning, once again, to the final epigraph that begins it wherein Mr. Rochester seemingly describes a unidirectional conveyance of arousal as his own hand touches Jane’s body for the first time; however, contextualizing the touch reveals that, as with Pamela and Mr. B or Clarissa and Lovelace, Jane’s body likewise registers and responds to Rochester’s touch, but in contrast

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<sup>65</sup> For an elaboration on this idea, see Deresiewicz, chapter four, especially pp. 120-3.

does so with an understanding of what it embodies.

As Rochester describes it, when he leans on Jane for the first time, his body experiences “a fresh sap and sense” that arouses him and causes anxiety at the prospect of losing the touched object that excites such a sensation, for, as he explains, “It was well I had learnt that this elf must return to me [...] or I could not have felt it pass away from under my hand.”<sup>66</sup> He does not worry about losing sight of Jane, but rather about losing a pleasurable physical connection. This touch arouses him and he realizes this instantly, describing their haptic connection by referencing the jolt that his system experiences in the moment that his hand makes contact with her shoulder. Jane, however, describes this as “an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense; yet it marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life” (C. Brontë 115). Bidden or not, Jane experiences the effects of Rochester’s touch, and recognizes its significance even as she denies its impact. She feels his “heavy hand” and the “stress” his pressure places on her body, yet in this moment she does not experience the force of his desire as he does. Her youth and vigor embodied in the support she offers invigorates him while his heaviness weighs her down.

This first reciprocal contact between them embodies the pleasurable possibilities of their relationship that their later manual intercourse will further develop, but it also embodies the current power dynamics of that relationship: he is the touching subject, both an older male and her employer; and she is the touched object, both a younger female and a governess he employs. She experiences his physical force just as he recognizes his social power by claiming authority over her body. He releases her from his grasp only upon learning that “it [this elf] belonged to

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<sup>66</sup> According to the *OED*, the word “elf,” which Rochester uses to describe Jane in this scene, identifies “a class of supernatural beings, [...] supposed to possess formidable magical powers, exercised variously for the benefit or injury of mankind”; a species “inferior” or “subject” to that of fairies, also “a more malignant being, an ‘imp,’ ‘demon’”; “a tricky, mischievous, sometimes a spiteful and malicious creature”; “a diminutive being”; and sometimes a term “applied to a child.” These definitions suggest that aside from the arousal and energy excited by this touch, there may also be a dangerous quality to it; Rochester’s use of the term simultaneously points to Jane’s social inferiority while recognizing a power within her that exists beyond his ability to control.

my house.” Not only does this moment of contact and connection between them embody what the characters cannot verbally acknowledge, but the rest of the novel, as I will suggest in the next chapter, further explores the struggle between the spirit that enlivens and the flesh that encumbers through the manual intercourse in which they engage. Unlike *Melliora*, *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *Fanny*, and *Evelina* who unconsciously react according to the pain or pleasure that their respective suitors’ manual intercourse generates, and in contrast to *Emma* who arguably fantasizes about what Mr. Knightly intended by his handshake, this text suggests that both Jane and Mr. Rochester recognize the desire inherent in the touches that they exchange. The rest of this dissertation will consider how Victorian novels responded to the increasing regulation of hands initiated by eighteenth-century novels and popularized by nineteenth-century etiquette books.

## Chapter II: Regulating Touch: Etiquette, Reciprocity, and Manual Intercourse in the Victorian Novel

From the opening visions of the fantastic imagery from Bewick [...] to the final lush and dense scene of Ferndean, we follow Jane's eye in seeing, Jane's touch in feeling, the work as she lives through it. Our eyes are turned less to the conceptual issues, more to the way it feels to be Jane, to the nature of her reactions to the work we share with her.

—John Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* (1984), p. 96

Victorian novels are frequently about women's hands: hands that stand for hearts, and hands that are won and offered by themselves. The hands that are offered with hearts, that represent in themselves something higher, constitute one of the centers of value in the nineteenth-century novel. They form a synecdochal chain where the heart presented by the hand is in itself a synecdoche for more obviously sexual parts of the body that enter into a heroine's decision about whom to marry. Asking for a hand is an entrance into the female body, the touch of a hand frequently the first touch between lovers.

—Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word* (1987), p. 98

How do characters' hands, especially female characters' hands, that touch in Victorian literature complicate our critical understanding of them as purely synecdochic symbols that stand-in for sexual parts of the body that authors could not name? As John Maynard's early study of Charlotte Brontë and sexuality astutely suggests, we gain access to a different layer of the text if we consider "the way it feels to be Jane." This understanding of feeling relies not so much on vision, but rather touch; it comes from an awareness of the emotions and conscious responses that her material engagement with the world around her engenders in her body, and mind by-proxy, with her hand functioning as the primary medium of such engagement. Helena Michie establishes that hands "constituted one of the centers of value in the nineteenth-century novel." I elaborate on this claim by suggesting that, aside from their synecdochic significance, hands convey emotion and desire through touch, a form of communication in itself. For example, the first time that Edward Rochester and Jane Eyre shake hands (on the night that Bertha sets fire to his bed) they grow physically conscious of each other's desire and of their own desire for each other. Touches such as this one in Victorian novels function as events that often initiate not only

sexual relationships between characters but further facilitate characters' negotiation of the power dynamics of those relationships.

This chapter considers what manual intercourse reveals about female social plight when read in light of handshake etiquette, focusing on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-5). After briefly situating popular discourses on hands and handshakes, I will offer a reading of each of these three novels, arguing that the manual intercourse that occurs throughout them not only embodies characters' sociopolitical situations, but also allows for the negotiation of those positions in a way that encourages social change both on the individual and national levels. Manual intercourse drives the marriage-plot of each novel, which often ends in the acceptance of a hand, highlighting the importance of sexual consciousness, desire, and respect in heterosexual marriage and opening a space for marriage without the sacrifice of individual subjectivity or personal pleasure.

## **I. Etiquette, Handshakes, and Haptic Communication**

Those writing on social etiquette, anatomy and physiology, hand-phrenology or hand-physiognomy, evolutionary science, and even germ theory in the latter half of the century, all contributed to the growing body of knowledge about the social and biological functions of the hand, and the increased interest in the hand as the seat of human consciousness.<sup>67</sup> Such

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<sup>67</sup> For discussions of the hand and etiquette see *The Habits of Good Society* (1859?), a popular but anonymously written etiquette book that Michael Curtin notes appeared during the 1850s and again unchanged in 1890; Sarah Stickney Ellis's series of conduct manuals *The Women of England* (1839), *The Daughters of England* (1842), *The Wives of England* (1843), and *The Mothers of England* (1844); and John Ruskin's essay "Of Queen's Gardens" published as part of his *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) collection. For a discussion of the anatomical hand see M. Le Capitaine C. S. D'Arpentigny's influential *The Science of the Hand (La Science de la Main)*, translated in 1889, and Sir George Murray Humphrey's *The Human Foot and the Human Hand* (1861). For a discussion of hand-phrenology and -physiognomy see *The Hand Phrenologically Considered*, published anonymously in 1848, and Richard Beamish's *The Psychonomy of the Hand* (1865), based largely on the work of M. D'Arpentigny. For a discussion of the hand's evolutionary significance see Sir Charles Bell's *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowment* (1833) and Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Finally,

discourses often intersected in popular pseudo-scientific texts like Richard Beamish's *The Psychonomy of the Hand* (1843),<sup>68</sup> which popularized nerve theory by linking it with discourses on hand-physiognomy to claim that "the human Hand affords of those physical, intellectual, and moral endowments, by virtue of which Man claims superiority" (Beamish v). In the introduction, Beamish references the work of Georg Meissner who discovered in the early nineteenth century that the sensory receptors in the fingers and palms of the hands differed from those in other parts of the body, affording the hands a more refined sense of touch; according to Meissner's research, "[u]nlike the nerves of feeling, which perceive only pressure and temperature, and are common to the whole surface of the body, the nerves of touch are endowed with the superior function of conveying to the brain the conception of form, size, weight, and local position, and are limited in their distribution to the hands and feet" (Beamish 2).<sup>69</sup> Elaborating further, Beamish explains that "[Albert von] Kölliker, however, states that he found it [Meissner's corpuscle] also on the red edges of the lips, and on the point of the tongue" (2).<sup>70</sup> *The Habits of Good Society* made a similar observation, linking nerve theory not merely with physiological understandings of the hand, but its social management as well: "Next to those of the lips, the nerves of touch are most highly developed in the fingers" (*Habits* 324). In other words, popular etiquette books and handbooks on hand-physiognomy and hand-phrenology rendered it common knowledge that these sensory receptors—later termed "Meissner's corpuscles"—appear most densely in areas of

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Louis Pasteur's germ theory of disease was accepted by the medical community during the 1870s and generated awareness that hands could spread disease through touch.

<sup>68</sup> Republished in 1865.

<sup>69</sup> Meissner originally refers to these receptors as *tastkörperchen* and discovered them with Rudolf Wagner in 1852 (Cauna 27). Referencing Meissner, Beamish considers "[t]his marked difference in the development of the corpuscles of touch between man and the lower animals, entirely coincides with the difference which has been found to characterize the *brains* also of man and apes" (Beamish 8; italics original).

<sup>70</sup> See Cauna for a discussion of tactile corpuscles that notes a link between these corpuscles and the skin of the genitalia discovered during the early twentieth century.

the body associated with sexual arousal. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century and especially within novels concerned with etiquette and the social position of women, the regulation of hands functioned more generally as a means of regulating desire.<sup>71</sup>

Scholars such as Nancy Armstrong and J. Hillis Miller have already shown how novel writing functions as a political act capable of influencing social structures, especially those interested in gender relations and etiquette. In her study tracing the development of the English novel in relation to the emergence of female subjectivity, Armstrong claims that “At issue in novels of the 1840s was [...] the nature of the problem that marriage was supposed to resolve,” suggesting that “these novels revised the entire concept of sexual desire that organized earlier [eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century] domestic fiction” (163). In other words, early Victorian novels began to explore the relationship between individual subjectivity, national duty, and sexual desire. Armstrong explains that not only did these novels “[root] subjectivity in sexual desire,” but more specifically “in one’s ability to channel such desire toward socialized goals. It made the welfare of the social group depend, before anything else, on the regulation of the individual’s desire” (164). In this way, novels functioned as a popular and entertaining form of social instruction. Hillis Miller’s study of speech act theory in the work of Henry James, *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (2005), suggests that writing functions as a form of conduct in several ways, stating that the first part of his title—“Literature as Conduct”—“can refer to the way writing literature is a form of conduct, or to the representation of conduct within literary fictions, or, using *conduct* as a verb, to the way literature may conduct its readers

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<sup>71</sup> As Norbert Elias explains in *Power and Civility: The Civilizing Process, Volume II* (1982; originally published 1939), conduct regulates impulse because “[a]s more and more people must attune their conduct to that of others, the web of actions must be organized more and more strictly and accurately” such that “the more complex and stable control of conduct is increasingly instilled in the individual from his earliest years as an automatism, a self-compulsion that he cannot resist even if he consciously wishes to” (*Power and Civility* 232, 233). In other words, conduct functions through instilling a fear of difference much like Michel Foucault’s concept of “self-policing” detailed in *Discipline and Punish* (1975).



to believe or behave in new ways” (2). This chapter considers how novels contribute to discussions about etiquette, represent conduct, and instruct readers about how to regulate desire through the management of hands and their touches.

Articles in popular periodicals and etiquette books alike had plenty to say about what handshakes held the potential to convey, ideas that were, as we will see, picked up by popular novelists of the period as well. In the 1830s, a writer for *The Country Miscellany* recognized that “[i]f presence of a third party should make reserve necessary, it is easy to convey an idea of what we feel by shaking hands” (“Shaking-Hands,” *CM* 206). Touch functions as a haptic form of communication that bodies can convey in the reciprocal-body space created in the moment when skin touches skin and the flesh responds accordingly. In his reading of the one-fingered handshake that occurs between Becky Sharpe and George Osbourne in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), Peter Capuano suggests that “the Victorians were fascinated by the hand, precisely because through its movements they could illustrate if not articulate the disavowed discourses (manual labor, sexuality, gender insurrection) that were so often the batteries of middle-class anxiety” (Capuano 176). Nineteenth-century popular opinion believed not only in the handshake’s ability to communicate unspeakable emotions, but further in its capacity to verify individual character. As the writer of the popular etiquette book *The Habits of Good Society* affirms, “A warm heart, I am persuaded, gives a warm shake of the hand, and a man must be a hypocrite, who can shake yours heartily while he hates you” (323-4). Handshakes express a person’s inner sentiment and character through the feeling their touch engenders in another’s body. The writer of “Hand-Shaking” in *All the Year Round* calls this “the physiology or philosophy of hand-shaking”: “Every man shakes hands according to his nature” (467).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The writer of “Hand-Shaking” in *Bits for Boys* (1890) reiterates this sentiment: “There is nothing that shows character more clearly than a shake of the hand.”

While this chapter will focus mainly on the lover's clasp, the squeeze, the cordial shake, the improper grasp, and the refusal, etiquette books outlined a plethora of shakes all meant to indicate something specific about an individual's character. *The Habits of Good Society* offers an exemplary illustration of the detailed nature of the nineteenth-century turn toward cataloguing and regulating touch in the form of handshakes:

First, there is the case where two hands simply take hold of one another.  
[...]  
Next, there is the case where one hand is laid clammily in the other, which slightly presses the fingers, not going down to the palm. This is a favorite mode with ladies, especially young ladies. [...]  
Next, there is the terribly genteel salute of the underbred man, who with a smirk on his face, just touches the tips of your fingers, as if they were made of glass; [...] and there is love who seizes it to press it tighter and more tightly, and sends his whole soul through the fingers.  
But the styles are infinite [...]. (324-6)

The complete passage (excerpted here) details twenty-ones styles of handshakes, some not even mentioned in other essays about handshake etiquette.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, this passage demonstrates how etiquette books gendered handshakes; it, for example, only attributes two types of shakes specifically to women—the limp, clammy shake with just the tips of the fingers and the bell-ringing one of “milady”—while the other nineteen refer to various types of “men.” People who shook hands acted publicly, and thus, more often than not, etiquette books directed their lessons on styles of shakes to men, warning women that “Ladies, [...], seldom ever shake hands with the cordiality of gentlemen; [...] They cannot be expected to show persons of the other sex a warmth of greeting, which might be misinterpreted” (“Hand-Shaking,” *AYR* 467).

Much as eighteenth-century novels warned, nineteenth-century etiquette books demanded

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<sup>73</sup> Ones not mentioned, for example, are the digital (one finger) and retentive (long with awkward pauses) shakes identified in *Bits for Boys*. Other essays on etiquette identify similar types of handshakes, but give them specific names such as the *pump-handle*, the *pendulum*, the *tourniquet*, the *cordial grapple* or *John Bull*, the *Peter Grievous touch*, and the *prude major* and *prude minor* (often attributed to women). See “Shaking-Hands” in *The Country Miscellany* and “Shaking-Hands” in *Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal* for further discussion of these specific types of shakes.

that women guard their hands by policing their own manual intercourse. However, unlike eighteenth-century conduct books, nineteenth-century etiquette books and essays in popular periodicals provided both women and men of the Victorian period with clearly delineated types of handshakes that men often engaged in and the meanings attributed to each one; thus, Victorian women had some idea of what types of manual intercourse they could respectably engage in and what types they needed to protect themselves against. As the rest of this chapter will show, novelists employed the “deep-toned language” of manual intercourse precisely as an unspoken form of communication between characters that opened a reciprocal-body space in which they could freely express their own emotional states, navigate social relationships and the boundaries these relationships depended upon, and address those “disavowed discourses” too taboo for common speech. Tactile contact holds the potential to collapse or maintain social, political, or even personal boundaries, and novelists employed manual intercourse precisely to allow their characters freedom to explore.

## **II. Manual Intercourse in *Jane Eyre*, a Conscious Engagement**

Though manual intercourse does not dominate *Jane Eyre* (1848) as it does other novels, Jane’s hands, their touches, and her increasing awareness of what those touches indicate function as events that drive the story and the sexual relationships on which its plot pivots.<sup>74</sup> Who do Jane’s hands touch? Who reciprocates that contact? And, how does Jane herself experience the feelings such contact engenders? Jane struggles throughout the novel to reconcile her own physical desire with her social duty, with custom; this struggle appears in handshakes that occur throughout the novel. Manual intercourse or the lack thereof within the novel embodies the

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<sup>74</sup> While the trend in scholarship has focused on the relationship between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, her double, a reading first popularized by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), I wish to consider Jane’s development specifically in relation to the characters that she touches.

reconciliation of Jane's perceived spiritual and moral duty on one hand and her interest in material pleasure on the other.

Jane first grows conscious of her sexual-self and that self's fleshly desires when Edward embraces her hand on the night that she saves him from burning to death in his bed.<sup>75</sup> Though others have read this scene in light of the elemental relationship between Jane and Edward, water and fire respectively,<sup>76</sup> I would like to consider it in light of the handshake that occurs after she has doused the fire. As Jane moves to leave, Edward stops her:

‘At least shake hands.’

He held out his hand; I gave him mine: he took it first in one, then in both his own.

[...] Strange energy was in his voice; strange fire in his look.

[...] ‘Go, then, Jane; go!’ But he still retained my hand, and I could not free it. I bethought myself of an expedient.

[...] he relaxed his fingers, and I was gone. (150-1)

Reading their manual intercourse in this moment through handshake etiquette highlights how this somatic encounter blurs the boundaries between the professional and the personal. He encloses her hand in both of his own, touching her palm and the back of her hand simultaneously. Such a clasp suggests extreme intimacy because of both the form and the duration of the handshake, and, as a result, Jane experiences Edward's emotional and physical presence through the sensations that she feels his hands engender within her own.

Edward initiates the parting clasp of lovers as Jane tries to leave, requesting, “At least shake hands” (150). Though he couches the gesture in gratitude for Jane's having saved his life, his offering Jane his hand while they stand alone at night already crosses the boundary of propriety: he acts on impulse, ignoring custom. However, unlike Sir Clement's similar grasp of

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<sup>75</sup> While the novel itself often refers to male characters by their last names and female characters by their first, I choose to refer to all characters by their first names throughout the rest of this dissertation.

<sup>76</sup> See Eric Solomon's “*Jane Eyre: Fire and Water*” (1963).

Evelina's hand, Edward's embrace arouses Jane without immediately threatening rape. He asks for her hand and she gives it to him willingly, though perhaps with some initial apprehension. When Jane acquiesces to Edward's request explaining that "He held out his hand; I gave him mine," he immediately sandwiches it "first in one, then in both his own" in order to somatically express his feelings of intimacy and indebtedness to her (150).<sup>77</sup> Jane has never before experienced such an embrace, such physical closeness with another person.<sup>78</sup> In fact, growing up, Jane learns to deny physical wants and desires based on her treatment by Mrs. Reed, her aunt and guardian, and the teachings of Mr. Brocklehurst who runs Lowood school with the goal to "mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh" (64).<sup>79</sup> While living first at Gateshead and then at Lowood, Jane learns that pleasure comes from upholding one's spiritual duty.<sup>80</sup> Jane's physical

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<sup>77</sup> As one etiquette book notes, "The most cordial way of shaking hands is to give both at once, but this presupposes a certain or uncertain amount of affection," which one should restrain in polite society (*Habits* 327).

<sup>78</sup> The manual intercourse that occurs between Jane and Helen Burns, or Jane and Miss Temple does not hold such emotional weight because it is always brief. Additionally, Jane has never experienced such physical intimacy with either the Reed children or Mrs. Reed herself. Even when Jane attempts to establish such a connection with Mrs. Reed while on her deathbed, Mrs. Reed refuses: "My fingers had fastened on her hand which lay outside the sheet: had she pressed mine kindly, I should at that moment have experienced true pleasure. But unimpressionable natures are not so soon softened, nor are natural antipathies so readily eradicated: Mrs. Reed took her hand away" (C. Brontë 230-231).

<sup>79</sup> While I will not address this in detail, Brocklehurst's goal bespeaks an earlier view of sexuality associated with Christian theology that separated an individual's soul from its skin—the soul was housed in the body, but desire was of it. As Kerwin Kaye explains,

The very word "sexuality," for example, was first coined only in 1879. Prior to the idea of "sexuality," philosophers and theologians had spoken of "carnality" and the sins of "the flesh." [...] The idea of *carnality*, on the other hand, presumed that sexual impulses rose *directly from the flesh* imposing themselves within the psyche like an unwanted visitor. [...] When sexual impulses are seen as originating in "the flesh," those desires are perceived as having nothing to do with one's personality. When one has a "deviant" desire, therefore, it is not because one's "inner nature" inclined in that direction. In fact, early Christian theologians presumed that all manner of sins were pleasurable and that "the flesh" was inclined toward all of them. *Anyone*—not just "homosexuals"—might enjoy same-sex contact for example. The idea that some people were unlike others—that some people had an inner inclination to be "heterosexual" while others were innately "homosexual"—simply did not arise. (Kaye 115)

<sup>80</sup> As Helen Burns, Jane's fellow inmate at Lowood, explains, "you think too much of the love of human beings; you are too impulsive, too vehement: the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures feeble as you" (69). Helen suggests that ultimate satisfaction and love come from one's relationship to God, not other human beings. As St. John will later, Helen extends the hand of God as a supplement for the human hand denied.

encounter with Edward's hands compels her to reassess these teachings. The duration and pressure of Edward's handshake communicates his desire for sustained physical contact with Jane, which changes the nature of their relationship precisely because it employs conduct to explore rather than temper desire.

Jane recognizes a "[s]trange energy" and a "strange fire" not just in Edward's voice and look, but also in the duration of his clasp. Sandra Gilbert explains in her article "'Jane Eyre' and the Secrets of Furious Lovemaking" (1998) that "[C. Brontë] endowed her main characters—hero as well as heroine—with overwhelmingly powerful passions that aren't always rational and often can't be articulated in ordinary language" (Gilbert 357). Through manual intercourse, the emotions and physical desires that Jane and Edward share but cannot verbalize find release. Edward has initiated an affectionate parting clasp most commonly exchanged between lovers. The article "On Shaking Hands" in *The London Saturday Journal* (1841) describes the emotional closeness such a clasp facilitates, "the warm grasp in which he holds the hand of his preserver [the person to whom he has bared his soul] is such as none can know, save those who have felt it; in it is expressed all the thoughts that agitate his soul, and the thrill is long remembered" (213). Edward's grasp expresses a similar emotional intensity. Edward holds the hand of his "cherished preserver," as he actually terms Jane, and speaks to her about "thoughts that agitate his soul": "You have saved my life," Edward explains, "I have pleasure in owing you so immense a debt" (C. Brontë 150). While he speaks of gratitude, his grasp communicates passion and vigor. Jane experiences new sensations that originate in the sensory receptors of the hand that Edward holds. Her nervousness throughout this scene suggests both a discomfort with her body and the arousal that his touch engenders within it. As she becomes increasingly conscious of them, these unfamiliar sensations generate anxiety, especially when Edward holds onto her hand while

telling her that she may leave. Edward retains Jane's hand for the duration of their conversation, holding it much longer than a simple cordial grasp necessitates.

Jane experiences discomfort in this moment largely because of the duration and the "thrill" that it incites ("On Shaking Hands" 213). An essay in *The Country Miscellany* (1837) also identifies the parting clasp of lovers, breaking down what its various components specifically communicate: "The reiterated pressure significantly tells us that we *must* part, that we had rather be *still united*, that we will not allow separation to become *forgetfulness*, and that we hope to *meet again*" (206; italics original). Each exertion of pressure, each refusal to part hands communicates a desire for connection. Though Jane does not initially return the pressure, she experiences Edward's desire in her own flesh: she retains his hand, indicating an openness or receptivity to the sentiment that his touch communicates. In this instance, neither Jane's hand nor Edward's stands as a synecdoche for their genitals nor a metonymy for their sexuality. Rather their manual intercourse communicates a complex network of emotional and physical responses to each other that then initiates the relationship that follows: Edward's offered hand expresses his gratitude; Jane's acceptance of it, her pleasure at having saved him; his second hand, his feeling of closeness with her, which crosses the line from platonic into personal; her first attempt to disengage her hand, her discomfort with such closeness because she feels herself receptive to his advances, but vulnerable both socially and financially; his retention of her hand, his openness to her as well as power over her; her second attempt at disengaging, her need to maintain the boundary between them because of what the touch has aroused within her and of her disadvantaged social position; and his release, his longing for another meeting.

Though the moment he relaxes his fingers she disappears, she retains the physical memory of the shake as pleasurable: "I both wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester on the day

which followed this sleepless night: I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye” (C. Brontë 153). This handshake arouses Jane’s desire for Rochester and opens both her mind and body up to the possibility of physical pleasure. Touch necessitates openness and exchange. Though earlier heroines unconsciously reacted against the uninvited exchange that takes place when hands are grasped without invitation, here Jane recognizes the intimacy of their handshake and seeks to reestablish it later. Her anxiety stems from her enjoyment of a new physical experience: arousal.<sup>81</sup>

This touch resonates with Jane long after it ends because of the depth of her intimacy with Edward established in that moment. As Jane explains it, that night when she returns to her room “[she] was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy” (151). She recognizes a new sensation, but she likewise struggles with that recognition. She fears embracing her own physicality because her desires contradict custom. Thus, she trusts that “[s]ense w[ill] resist delirium: [that] judgment w[ill] warn passion” (151). Edward leaves Thornfield directly after the incident and returns a few weeks later with a party of people that he plans to host. When Jane first sees him after his lengthy absence, she immediately begins to think about the last time she saw him, the night they shook hands. She meditates on the connectedness that she felt the moment their hands embraced: “he, holding my hand, and looking down on my face, surveyed me with eyes that revealed a heart full and eager to overflow; in whose emotions I had a part. How near I had approached him at that moment!” (174). Unlike Jane’s eighteenth-century predecessors, she possesses an acute awareness of the intimacy inherent in Edward’s manual intercourse, and responds pleurably, seeking to reestablish that

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<sup>81</sup> While Maynard cites this scene in his study of Jane’s sexual maturation, he does not spend much time on it, noting how “her aroused imagination is driven down by her conscious faculties,” eliding the touch altogether (118).



sense of connectedness.

Edward's handshake communicates his desire to Jane precisely because it defies custom; Jane knows that his clasp is passionate and not casual because an acquaintance would never offer to shake her hand in private at this time of night. Though Jane suggests that she recognizes Edward's emotions through his eyes, their connection begins with skin-to-skin contact. She distinctly remembers that he held her hand throughout their verbal exchange. The touch itself conveys emotions that their conversation does not address, just as we saw when we looked at Edward's description of his first encounter with Jane. Jane's participation in Edward's emotional state comes from what her reciprocation of the handshake suggests to him: an openness, a receptivity. Jane's climax comes when she realizes "[h]ow near [she] had approached him at that moment," a nearness that reflects an emotional intimacy facilitated through physical connection, and not simply proximity. She could literally feel his silent desire because, as she explains, "I understand the language of his countenance and movements," which suggests that she read not just Edward's face, but also the emotion his manual intercourse carried (175).

Edward's invocation of hands in his initial proposal to Jane emphasizes his desire for continued physical intimacy with her. Edward's description of the arousal he experiences upon first meeting—first touching—Jane further emphasizes the link between the physical and emotional that contact facilitates. When Edward proposes to Jane, he offers her his flesh, spirit, and wealth, linking physical and emotional exchange to economic: "I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions" (254). He follows this by confessing to Jane, "I love [you] as my own flesh" (255). As we have seen with eighteenth-century conduct manuals and

novels, one should only offer the hand where the heart can follow.<sup>82</sup> However, Edward's use of the term 'hand' does not just function metonymically, rather it also indicates the level of intimacy and exchange that Edward seeks with a life partner. Maynard argues that Edward's later "Byronic overreaching comes not from the need to carry about a bleeding conscience but from his intense need for a fulfilled relationship with Jane" (110). Edward's marriage proposal addresses the type of fulfillment he seeks. He offers Jane his wealth, his love, and his body, but with his body—his hand—comes his touch, which facilitates physical, emotional, and psychological connectedness as we have seen. Manual intercourse brings bodies together such that one skin surface feels the presence of the other, creating a permeability through which such contact conveys and receives emotion. Throughout the rest of the novel Jane struggles with how to mediate between this newfound physical desire and her spiritual duty, which comes to a head when Jane learns that Edward has a wife.

While Edward resides at Thornfield, he represents the passions of the flesh, begging Jane to remain with him though he cannot legally marry her. However, after discovering the secret of his wife Bertha, Jane refuses to cohabit with Edward. Struggling with her own desire to remain with him, she explains, "Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour" (C. Brontë 317).<sup>83</sup> Jane consciously suppresses desire for Edward in favor of "keep[ing] the law given by God; sanctioned by man" (317). Laws and custom cannot legislate feeling but they can

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<sup>82</sup> As Chapter One notes, Richardson's *Clarissa* boldly declares to her undesired suitor Mr. Solmes, "My hand and my heart shall never be separated" (*Clarissa* 939). "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters" (1761) similarly states that "a child is very justifiable in the refusal of her hand, [...] where her heart cannot go with it" (*Young Lady's Pocket Library* 37). Finally, the Victorian era Broadside Ballad "'Tis Hard to Give the Hand (Where the Heart Can Never Be)" reinforces this same sentiment.

<sup>83</sup> Maynard points out that "It is not that she couldn't disagree with convention, only that she disqualifies herself to do so under her present passion" (129). Maintaining her self-respect requires adhering to the law even if one's desire demands otherwise.

legislate one's conscious responses to such feeling; Jane refuses Edward's proposition because he has bound his spirit to another though he offers his flesh to her. She does not want half of him.

The rather violent manual intercourse that follows Jane's rebuke embodies the inner conflict that she experiences between her physical desire and her soul's duty; she struggles to maintain her integrity in the face of temptation. She must painfully break with her body as from Edward in order to adhere to convention and maintain her self-respect. Infuriated by her denial of him, Jane explains that Edward "crossed the floor and seized my arm, and grasped my waist" (317). He attempts to physically dominate Jane by drawing her to himself in a grasp that she cannot escape. She divides her experience of this grasp into physical and psychological struggle: "physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace—mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety" (317). She explains that "his gripe [sic.] was painful," and though her flesh weakens under it, she still retains possession of her soul, her mental faculties that will allow her to deny Edward's pleas and uphold God's dictates (317). Edward's grasp grows increasingly violent as he contemplates the power of his hold, "'A mere reed she feels in my hand! (and he shook me with the force of his hold) I could bend her with my finger and thumb, and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her?'" (317-8). His hold reflects the power that he possesses over Jane's person, a power literally embodied in the force of his grip. However, Edward has no access to her spirit, and does not desire the one without the other for "what good would it do"? Exasperated, he cries out, "'And it is you, spirit—with will and energy, and virtue and purity—that I want: not alone your brittle frame'" (318). Her body devoid of passion, incapable of experiencing pleasure under his hand, will not gratify him. As Maynard claims, "Rochester really doesn't want her to be submissive; her independence has always been her attraction to him" (113). Edward recognizes

that “seized against [her] will, [she] will elude the grasp like an essence—[she] will vanish ere [he] inhaled [her] fragrance,” and with that “he released [her] from his clutch” (C. Brontë 318). In contrast to Lovelace who continually violates Clarissa’s body by violently and invasively grasping her hand, Edward loosens his hold, recognizing that Jane cannot be held against her will because her spirit cannot be dominated though her body can. Jane’s spirit eludes his hold; in his figuration, Jane turns into air—Eyre—in his clutch.

The novel’s structure pivots around Jane’s relationship with her own body, a body that eludes even herself for a while. As she secretly leaves Thornfield in the night, she stops in front of Edward’s door explaining, “My hand moved towards the lock: I caught it back, and glided on” (320). Her hand moves without her mind’s consent. Jane’s mind must police her body, which otherwise would act on desire. Her hand’s movement embodies this conflict and thus, in this moment, she views her hand and mind as separate entities; one must dominate the other. Her hand, her flesh, desires to enter the room and to console Rochester with her physical presence, but her mind restrains that impulse in order to maintain her sense of independence and integrity.<sup>84</sup>

St. John Rivers, in contrast to Edward, represents the spirit, denying flesh altogether; one might argue that his ascetic self-denial and religious fervor positions him as a figure of muscular Christianity, a form of masculinity predicated on self-denial and physical restraint.<sup>85</sup> St. John disavows his body’s experience of arousal around Miss Rosamond Oliver, calling it “a mere fever of the flesh,” and bids Jane to do the same in regards to Edward: “Don’t cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh” (375, 391). Unlike Edward who offers his hand along with his

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<sup>84</sup> Maynard similarly argues that “Jane asserts her integrity by rejecting Rochester,” thus upholding her spiritual and moral duty (130). However, Maynard does not consider the role that touch plays in this struggle.

<sup>85</sup> See *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (1994), edited by Donald E. Hall, for a diverse discussion of muscular Christianity’s various resonances in Victorian literature throughout the century.

heart, when St. John proposes to Jane, he offers the hand of God in lieu of his own: “Jane, come with me to India: come as my help-meet and fellow-labourer” (402). He follows this with a divine command, “God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. [...] you shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (402). St. John does not see Jane as flesh but rather as soul to claim in service of God. He does not ask for her hand as Edward initially did, and the marriage of their bodies and souls—hands and minds—that he offers is rather a legal arrangement that will facilitate his missionary aims. For St. John, pleasure has no place in this marriage, just duty to the Lord and to His savage children who so desperately need saving.

Jane consciously rejects St. John’s proposal because they are not physically attracted to one another—they carry no passion for each other. She informs him that she will gladly embrace her duty to both God and St. John, who saved her when she was without any resources, but that she will not accompany him on his mission as his wife. In other words, she will not perform the physical duties of marriage where there exists no passion because to do so would violate both the social and spiritual conventions of Jane’s understanding of marriage. Jane demonstrates her awareness of the type of physical duty to St. John marriage would entail, asking herself, “Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit is quite absent?” (405). She decides she cannot; she will not have sex with a man whom she does not love and who does not love her. Shortly thereafter, when Jane offers her hand to St. John in a shake of reconciliation, she notes “[w]hat a cold, loose touch he impressed on my fingers!” (411). His grasp is icy and unfeeling, unpossessed of the warmth of either filial or platonic affection. In contrast, Jane feels “[w]hat a hot and strong grasp [Edward] ha[s]” at the moment their wedding ceremony gets interrupted

(289). Her memory of this prevents her from accepting the cold, unfeeling, and “counterfeit sentiment [St. John] offer[s]” (408).

Unlike St. John, Edward does not want Jane’s flesh devoid of her soul; in other words, he will not experience pleasure at touching Jane’s body unless they move beyond the physical, sharing an intimate emotional and psychological connection as well. Jane breaks from St. John in the literal sense at the moment she hears Edward’s voice mysteriously call, “Jane! Jane! Jane!” (419). In his final attempt to convince Jane to accept his proposal, Jane notes that St. John “laid his hand on my head,” praying that God might give her strength to resist the sins of the flesh (418). Jane almost succumbs to St. John’s prayers as “[she] stood motionless under [her] hierophant’s touch” (418). She explains that “I grew pliant as a reed under his kindness”—a metaphor Edward used to describe how Jane felt in hand when he refused to break with her—and that as soon as he feels her judgment wavering, “[h]e pressed his hand firmer on my head” (419). In this moment, Jane’s body registers the difference between St. John’s touch, which brings only the passion of God, and that of Rochester, which offers human affection. She explains that it felt “*almost* as if he [St. John] loved me,” carefully delineating her use of the term “almost” because “I knew the difference—for I had felt what it was to be loved” (419; italics original). Following this realization, her body reacts to Edward’s ghostly call: “My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake” (419). Jane recalls her mind to her body in the moment that it registers Edward’s voice. She has a distinctly physical reaction to his call as her body reawakens and desire reanimates it. In both the literal and figural

sense, “[Jane] broke from St. John” (420). She rejects his hand, again maintaining her integrity, and instead seeks out that of Edward. When Jane leaves St. John, she determines that her spiritual satisfaction comes from doing her duty to herself; while she denies her own wants, while she denies the flesh, she cannot experience happiness, but only the shell of a life as St. John lives his.

Staying at Ferndean after his disfigurement, Edward represents a mediation between the body and the spirit. Not only does Edward desire Jane’s hand and heart, but he likewise explains, ““Oh, I longed for thee both with soul and flesh!”” (447). Jane seeks “a pleasurable physical as well as spiritual intimacy, erotic as well as intellectual communion” (Gilbert 368). Her rejection of St. John and embracing of Edward indicates the balance that Jane finds within herself. Hands bring Jane pleasure because their touches allow for emotional intimacy; through manual intercourse Jane consciously navigates the boundaries that exist between herself and the world, forging intimacy with Edward that satisfies her desire for both emotional and physical exchange.

At Ferndean, she and Edward engage in a touch that inverts their first handshake, with which I began this section. Upon Jane’s return, Edward, who is nearly blind, pleads, ““I must feel [...] be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!”” (C. Brontë 433). Narrating, Jane explains,

He groped: I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.  
“Her very fingers!” he cried; “her small, slight fingers! If so, there must be more of her.”

The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder—neck—waist—I was entwined and gathered to him. (433)

Despite Maynard’s claim that, in this moment, “their relationship becomes at once physical as it hardly ever was at Thornfield,” it in fact reestablishes the tactile intimacy that began there the night that Edward “took [her hand] first in one, then in both his own” (Maynard 142; C. Brontë 150). Here, Jane claims his offered hand and he responds by tactilely affirming her identity and

exploring the rest of her body with his hands—also suggesting the level of physical intimacy that existed between them before. Just as with Emma, manual intercourse awakens Jane to her desire for Edward and affirms their passion for each other, to each other.

Through manual intercourse the novel navigates Jane's platonic and romantic relationships, establishing a direct connection between the spirit and the flesh. Both Jane and Edward only experience happiness when their bodies and spirits have coalesced into a common flesh; in Christian doctrine, God does not require complete physical denial as a precondition for spiritual ascension. Jane's manual intercourse with both Edward and St. John embodies the tension that she experiences between the desire of her flesh and that of her spirit, moving away from the muscular Christianity version of both masculinity and self-denial as evidence of faith for which St. John stands. Manual intercourse within this novel does not always adhere to handshake etiquette, allowing exploration into desires beyond verbal expression. Unlike Emma's experience of Mr. Knightley's touch, Edward does not regulate his manual intercourse with Jane, instead he employs it to test the limits of their relationship; St. John pushes this to the opposite extreme, policing his hands to the point that he denies the cultivation of any romantic intimacy with either Miss Rosamond or Jane through touch. In the case of Jane and Edward, manual intercourse facilitates the haptic communication of erotic energy and mutual respect between them, leading to a marriage that proves both reproductive—fulfilling one's duty to the nation—and pleasurable—fulfilling one's duty to oneself. The latter two sections of this chapter will similarly explore manual intercourse as an event that leads to marriage while suggesting that it also opens a space for marriage and reproductive futurity without completely sacrificing female subjectivity, often rooted in the conscious experience of physical desire and erotic pleasure.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Lee Edelman first introduces the concept of reproductive futurism, in *No Future: Queer Theory and Death Drive* (2004). He suggests that one cultural anxiety pertaining to homosexuality is the drive to pleasure—



### III. Handling Helen: Female Agency in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Characters in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* frequently communicate with each other through manual intercourse, which manifests variously as outright handshakes, gentle caresses, clandestine touches, and violent grasps. While at least one critic has identified the significance of the hand to this novel's plot,<sup>87</sup> even she only addresses the hand's symbolic function rather than considering how hands may engage with each other as a means of furthering the story. Melinda Maunsell reads the hand's synecdochic significance, arguing that "[h]and encounters are crucial; they anticipate the action which is to follow; moreover, this theatre of mime reveals the underlying power transactions between Brontë's protagonists" (Maunsell 45). While Maunsell emphasizes Helen Huntingdon's "artistic hand" as a symbol of character, social status, relationships, and even future events,<sup>88</sup> she does rightly suggest that "hand encounters" within the novel exemplify the power dynamics that exist between the characters (46, 48, 49). In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, manual intercourse reveals the material limitations of the marriage contract prior to institutionally-codified reform measures and helps the reader imagine how resistance on the individual level can lead to national reform.

In 1855, the political activist Caroline Norton explains in her *A Letter to Queen Victoria* that "A married woman in England has *no legal existence*: her being is absorbed in that of her husband" (Norton 661). This statement reflects the political and structural inequality that Anne

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*jouissance*—that ignores the assumed 'natural' drive to reproduce. Heteronormativity focuses on children as the future validating procreative sex above sexual eroticism.

<sup>87</sup> See Melinda Maunsell's "The Hand-Made Tale: Hand Codes and Power Transactions in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (1997).

<sup>88</sup> This assertion proves problematic considering that books on hand-psychonomy (or phrenology as it was sometimes termed) would have distinguished between a male and a female artist's hand, which Maunsell never acknowledges. In chapter four, "Reading the mind: physiognomy and phrenology," in her book *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), Sally Shuttleworth notes both Charlotte and Anne's familiarity with these two practices and how their knowledge might have influenced both *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In light of this reading, it would stand to reason that Charlotte and Anne might also have had some familiarity with hand-phrenology (variously called hand-psychonomy, chirology, and chironomy).

Brontë's 1848 novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,<sup>89</sup> addresses through Helen Huntingdon's experience of domestic abuse at the hands of her alcoholic husband, Arthur. Helen's social and political inequality is embodied in her manual intercourse with Arthur and other male characters. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to question the novel's validity as a feminist (or even profeminist) text. Such scholarship poses two questions: First, to what extent is Helen's narrative subsumed, and thus her voice silenced, by that of Gilbert Markham, which frames it? And, second, to what extent is Gilbert actually reformed by the end of the novel? Touch functions in this novel as a nonverbal form of communication and thus suggests that the novel values alternative means of expression, not just voice exerted through language. If language tends to privilege those who already possess social and political power, as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have theorized,<sup>90</sup> then what or whom do we as scholars overlook in our analyses if we only recognize agency in linguistic acts? I will suggest that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* employs manual intercourse not only to embody the sociopolitical struggles that Victorian women faced as objects under their husbands' control, but also to negotiate an alternative nonlinguistic field of communication wherein both men and women possess equal agency over themselves.

A. Brontë claims in her "Preface" to the novel that the sex of the author holds no bearing on content, and it would be a poor story indeed if it did:

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<sup>89</sup> Ian Ward notes the parallels between Norton's life and the story of Helen Huntingdon, but explains that the oddity comes from the fact that "there is no evidence that Brontë knew of Norton's travails, at least not in any detail," though Norton was a prominent political figure of the time, making it hard to imagine that the Brontës would not have been familiar with her (Ward 154).

<sup>90</sup> See Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) for a discussion of language's failure to represent female experience, and Irigaray's "This Sex Which Is Not One" (1977) and "When Our Lips Speak Together" (1977) for a discussion of female experience as always multiple and simultaneous rather than monolithic as, she claims, male experience is. Phallogocentric language refers to a linguistic system that privileges reason and male experience precisely because patriarchy dominates the Western linguistic tradition (Cixous 879). Thus, my choice to refer to all characters by their first names reflects my resistance to an aspect of these phallogocentric language structures.

As little, I should think, can it matter whether the writer so designated is a man, or a woman, [...] I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be. All novels are, or should be, written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man. (A. Brontë 11)

Likewise, I suggest that we as critics should not allow the sex of the novel's speaker to determine the novel's merit as a (proto-)feminist text. If we assume that married women already understood the social injustices that they faced, then we might read Gilbert Markham's narrative, written for his brother-in-law, as an attempt to educate a male readership and Helen's diary as an archive of female experience designed to expose a younger female readership to the realities of married life. In her book *The Novel of Purpose* (2007), Amanda Claybaugh explains that, "[w]hile charity takes place between donor and recipient," for the Victorians "reform takes place within an individual's own heart and mind," and that reform begins with reading (25). Considering both the form and content of A. Brontë's novel in light of this understanding of reform, the novel suggests that social change begins by changing individual perception and generating awareness through shared experience.

During this time, popular belief held that the family unit depended for its success on a wife's complete deference to her husband's authority. The public feared that if the wife possessed any property or controlled her own finances she would engage more readily in the public sphere, diverting her attention from the home, denying her husband access to her body, and opening herself up to the social ills of public life.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, a wife's docility ensured her chastity and thus her ability to act as the moral center of the home, ensuring the nation's future.

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<sup>91</sup> Public opinion feared that women would begin having sex for pleasurable rather than reproductive purposes, which would threaten the nation's welfare. If women do not have procreative sex, then who will populate the nation and rear its citizens?

The novel offers space for female agency without the disintegration of the family unit, embodying it in Helen's manual intercourse with Gilbert.<sup>92</sup> By ending in marriage, it promises reproductive futurity even in the face of social change, suggesting that reform starts in the private sphere with the education of both men and women about the value of experience.

Very early on, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* establishes its interest in gender politics. During their first formal social encounter, Helen Huntingdon (living in hiding from her husband under the assumed name of Helen Graham) and Gilbert Markham, a neighboring farmer, discuss parenting practices and the education of children in the ways of virtue. Gilbert asserts that boys acquire virtue by facing temptation and resisting it, while girls achieve virtue through chastity. Helen challenges these assumptions, confronting him with his own hypocrisy, ““You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience,”” she asks, ““while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others”” (A. Brontë 36). Culture encourages boys to experience the world and learn from succumbing to temptation as well as resisting it; however, that same culture shelters, nurtures, and leaves girls ignorant of all of the social dangers that they may face as they enter society.<sup>93</sup> Aside from the question of virtue, this conversation also alludes to women's social position more generally: young women do not learn how to protect themselves, or even how to recognize temptation, because their guardians mediate their experiences. As we see with Helen's marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, both an alcoholic and a

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<sup>92</sup> Jesse Reeder's recent article “Broken Bodies, Permeable Subjects: Rethinking Victorian Women's ‘Agency’ in Gaskell's *North and South*” poses a thoughtful critique of feminist scholars' past and continued mobilization of female political “agency” among characters in Victorian novels. She builds on a critical conversation begun in 2000 by Amanda Anderson's article, “The Temptation of Aggrandized Agency: Feminist History and the Horizon of Modernity.” While I will address Reeder's criticism of scholarship on *North and South* in more depth in the next section, I think it important to acknowledge the emerging critical conversation about the politics of reading female agency in Victorian novels. In spite of this emergent view, my project generally, and use of the term “agency” in this section in particular, explores “agency” as a physical and tactile exertion of control over one's own body that has political resonances within a text, while at the same time not being solely a political state.

<sup>93</sup> As we saw with heroines—such as Melliora, Evelina, and Clarissa—of eighteenth-century novels, to remain ignorant leaves one vulnerable.

philanderer, however, this leaves women unprotected as they not only have no legal rights over themselves once married, but they also have no ability to recognize or respond to undesirable social situations that leave them vulnerable to abuse.

After Helen's initial conversation with Gilbert about parenting and virtue, her son, little Arthur, exclaims, "Mamma, you have not shaken hands with Mr Markham!" (37). At little Arthur's prompting, she thus "held out her hand," and, Gilbert explains, "I gave it a spiteful squeeze; for I was annoyed at the continual injustice she had done me from the very dawn of our acquaintance" (37). This "spiteful" shake embodies the social dynamic between them as Gilbert understands it at that moment. They live in a patriarchal society, which automatically places Helen in a weaker social position. Gilbert's squeeze exerts his physical superiority over her, reminding her that, in a literal sense, women are the "weaker sex." As Ruskin notes, "the man's power is active, progressive, defensive. [...] But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering" (Ruskin 660). In the Victorian mind, Man possesses strength while Woman offers care. Helen, however, steps outside of this reductive figuration. She engages Gilbert on an intellectual field, discussing not only gender politics but also parenting philosophies. She neither cowers nor concedes to his opinions, which she views as incorrect. Thus, because he feels emasculated, Gilbert seeks to reclaim power in the only way society has taught him. Helen has bested Gilbert verbally, forcing him to retreat to a non-verbal field on which he can reassert his dominance through physical pain; simply put, she has hurt his ego by asserting a type of female masculinity—intellectual prowess—so he hurts her body in order to reestablish his masculine position of dominance. A popular publication of the time explains this type of handshake as follows:

the squeeze, a method of salutation that men with strong and large hands are very apt to give, more especially when they meet with a small and delicate one, on

which they exert their prowess. That a savage delight is theirs, as they see the poor victim writhing in their grasp, kicking like one under the electro-magnetic torture, and gesticulating like a bear when learning a minuet! (“On Shaking Hands,” *LSJ* 213)

This gendered handshake that often occurs between men depends on a larger, stronger, more masculine hand painfully grasping a smaller, delicate, more feminine one. Furthermore, the squeezer takes sadistic pleasure, enjoying the assertion of physical power over another who cannot adequately fight back. This handshake establishes a clear master-victim power dynamic that Gilbert uses to put Helen back in her social place. If read in light of the political struggles of women like Helen who were trapped in loveless, even abusive marriages, this shake embodies women’s lack of political power, and their husbands’ enjoyment of their political privilege. Helen does not initially offer to shake Gilbert’s hand, in a sense protecting her body from this very type of abuse. However, little Arthur reminds her of the rules of civility, which as we see, maintains the social status quo while leaving women vulnerable to those who possess more social power. As Norton explains, married women have no protection under the “law” in England for “*As her husband*, he has a right to all that is hers,” which includes her body, but “*as his wife*, she has no right to anything that is his” (Norton 663; italics original).<sup>94</sup> Though Helen and Gilbert are not married at this moment, their handshake embodies male privilege and cruelty, and women’s lack of social protection. This proves the first and last time that Gilbert ever shakes Helen’s hand in such a way. Their manual intercourse ultimately teaches him not only how to read her desire, but also how to recognize her agency within their relationship.

In order to understand the deep significance of Helen and Gilbert’s interchange discussed

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<sup>94</sup> Norton points to an issue that existed even one hundred years beforehand when William Blackstone explained it thusly, “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law-french a *feme covert*” (qtd. in Harman 353).

above, I now turn to the manual intercourse that transpires between Helen and her husband, Arthur Huntingdon, during their initial courtship, and that between Helen and Arthur's acquaintance and neighbor, Walter Hargrave, thereafter.<sup>95</sup> Arthur illustrates his intemperance early on in his relationship with Helen by refusing to observe the rules of etiquette, designed to regulate the desires and appetites of the middle- and upper-classes. Helen, however, has not been prepared to recognize these signs of excess. Helen and Arthur's first touch occurs unsolicited: "I felt my hand that hung over the arm of the sofa, suddenly taken up by another and gently but fervently pressed," Helen explains (A. Brontë 132). Unlike Edward who at least asks for Jane's hand the first time they shake, Arthur grabs Helen's hand while it hangs over the back of the couch and holds onto it for awhile, requiring that she walk with him as he questions her about whether or not she loves him. "And he again pressed my hand," Helen explains, "but I feared there was more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour, and I felt he had no right to extort a confession of attachment from me when he had made no correspondent avowal himself" (133). While the pressure he exerts does not sound explicitly painful, Helen makes clear that it expresses more than cordial affection. Because Helen was not educated in the ways of the world much like Clarissa and Evelina before her, she senses but cannot fully recognize the extent of the power that Arthur's touch actually embodies. In contrast to the pressure that Edward exerts while holding Jane's hand, which conveys sexual passion and longing, Arthur's lengthy grasp instantiates his desire to possess, or more rightly own, Helen's body; the pressure he exerts communicates his physical power, which Helen herself cannot match. Additionally, his taking her hand and retaining it without her first having offered it, physically demonstrates his lack of

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<sup>95</sup> The novel begins with Gilbert's narrative of his first interactions with Helen while she is in hiding from Arthur. Then, Helen gives Gilbert her diary, which narrates her previous experiences as a married woman. For this reason, Helen's experiences with Arthur occur first chronologically, though they appear nearly midway through the novel itself.

restraint.

Aside from exerting his physical dominance, Arthur illustrates his awareness of the power of spoken language. He holds onto Helen's hand, trying to coerce her into entering a verbal contract by openly declaring her feelings for him, especially since custom detailed that men should declare their intentions first. Helen demonstrates a level of comfort flirting with him tactilely, but expresses discomfort when he enacts power over her hand in order to move the flirtation onto a verbal field of play. As their manual intercourse leading up to his proposal continues, it becomes ever more domineering as he tries to extort a verbal confession from her. She explains that Arthur "forcibly possessed himself of my hand; but I hastily caught it away" (151). He never allows Helen the freedom to offer him her hand, which further signals the lack of agency that women were afforded in marriage generally. Fathers often awarded their daughters' hands. Helen, however, has no clear father figure and thus has the unique opportunity of choice.<sup>96</sup> Because Helen's aunt pressures her to entertain the suit of the old Mr. Boarham, whose name says it all, Helen's interest in the young, vibrant Arthur grows. She encourages Arthur's advances because she finds herself attracted to him but does not know how to constructively channel that attraction through touch without leaving herself sexually vulnerable.

As in these interactions, Arthur continues to try to extort confessions of love from Helen by applying pressure—sometimes painful—to her hand. Shortly before Arthur proposes to Helen, he tries to make her jealous by demonstrating affection for Helen's eligible acquaintance, Anabella Wilmot. When Helen responds by becoming distant, he throws himself on his knees and tries to grab her hand in a handshake of reconciliation. However, Helen communicates her

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<sup>96</sup> Though her aunt and uncle act as her guardians, and Helen makes it clear that Arthur will need to ask their permission, Helen possesses an unusual amount of say, especially since she refuses her aunt's desire that she marry Mr. Boarham.



dissatisfaction by denying him her hand. Whereas manual intercourse holds the potential to open a reciprocal-body space, the refusal or withdrawal of the hand that touches closes it, erecting a firm boundary between self and other that denies communication. “Shaking-Hands” in *All the Year Round* explains that “[t]o refuse pointedly to shake hands with one who offers you the opportunity in a friendly manner amounts to a declaration of hostility” (468). While this comment refers to a handshake between men, it has similar implications when a woman refuses to shake the hand of a man with whom she is intimately acquainted. The article goes on to explain that following such a quarrel “the acceptance of the hand offered is alike the sign and the ratification of peace” (468). In both instances, each party makes a conscious choice whether to engage or not engage as a sign of either hostility or friendship. While Helen’s fervent denial of her hand expresses her anger toward Arthur, she never offers him her hand in recompense; he takes it. Once again, Arthur forces intimacy, refusing to recognize Helen’s authority over herself. They prove unable to enter into a reciprocal-body space because Arthur seeks domination, not exchange. Furthermore, both his manual intercourse with Helen and his conversation generally function as manipulative tactics designed to make Helen feel jealous enough to betray her love through an emotional outburst.

Even when Arthur proposes, Helen never gives him her hand in a literal sense nor does she directly respond, “I love you,” to his confession of love for her. Unlike Edward who asks for Jane’s hand offering his own and his heart with it in return, when Arthur asks Helen whether or not she loves him, she notes that “though he took my hand once more, and half embraced me with his other arm—I was scarcely conscious of it at the time” (A. Brontë 151). Arthur continually avails himself of her hand and does not worry about Helen’s own emotional or mental state. He desires to possess her, without needing her to be aware of what that entails.

Following this, Helen, overwhelmed by Arthur's proposal, asks him to leave, to which he responds, "I will, this instant,—if you'll only say you love me" (152). Helen replies only, "You know I do" (152). From the start, Arthur looks for a partner who will suffer his forceful grasps silently and Helen does not assert herself either vocally or tactilely until too late, after they are already married. Arthur expresses his joy throughout the scene by exerting great force over Helen's little frame, "nearly squeezing [her] to death in his arms" and then "again he caught [her] in his arms, and smothered [her] with kisses" (152). During his proposal, Arthur dominates Helen physically, repeatedly catching her body in his arms and overwhelming it with his passionate excesses. Helen never explicitly notes a mutual exchange in her description of this event; she asserts a boundary between them that will remain until marriage by neither embracing Arthur nor even directly reciprocating his, suggesting a lack of connectedness between them. In explaining the ethics of reciprocity, Erin Manning uncovers the tyranny of such contact: "[i]f I attempt to subsume you through touch, I will not reach you. Instead, I will inflict the worst kind of violence upon your body: your body will react only as the recipient of my directionality" (Manning 60). Unlike Jane who has to consciously suppress her desire to tactilely connect with Edward, here Helen receives Arthur's tactile gestures without actively participating in them. Manual intercourse continues to drive the story as Helen and Arthur employ it as a means of navigating the initial stages of their relationship and to establish the power dynamics that will structure it in the future: Arthur rules and Helen receives.

Not long after they marry, Helen and Arthur's manual intercourse changes, embodying Helen's general dissatisfaction with her husband's behavior and his declining sexual interest. The first instance of the shift in the somatic nature of their relationship occurs when Arthur

openly pokes fun at Annabella Wilmot's mercenary interest in his friend, Lord Lowborough.<sup>97</sup> Helen openly expresses her shock and displeasure at Arthur's treatment of their friends, and he, once again, attempts to mollify her concern by relying on his domineering but seemingly apologetic manual intercourse: he "held me by both hands, asserting that he would not let me go till I had forgiven him" (A. Brontë 178). As before, he tries to manipulate her through physical domination; he speaks of regret, but relies on physical power to assure forgiveness, subsuming Helen's concern in his own desire for reconciliation. In this sense, Arthur employs a unidirectional touch designed to ensure his ends without offering any real reciprocal communication. Helen tries to teach Arthur, explaining that he should ask forgiveness for his reprehensible conduct from Lowborough himself. Arthur offers Helen an empty promise that he will do just that, and after "kissing both my gloved hands" to seal it, she explains, "he let me go" (179). The significance of this scene lies in their lack of physical contact. Gloves mediate this embrace, preventing any actual transmission or interpenetration because neither skin ever comes into direct contact with the other. In this sense, gloves have a prophylactic function,<sup>98</sup> suggesting that not only has their ability to communicate lessened, but their sexual relationship has likewise diminished. Helen's body remains closed to Arthur's advances—custom expected women to remove their gloves when shaking hands with men whose hands were ungloved, especially with their husbands—and Arthur has no sustained interest in penetrating that boundary. Helen begins to claim power over her body by denying Arthur the right to touch it, silently but haptically and authoritatively registering her dissatisfaction with his behavior and shifting the power dynamics

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<sup>97</sup> His first name is never given.

<sup>98</sup> I will elaborate on the analogous function of gloves and condoms in Chapter Three. As Valerie Steele asserts in *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (1996), "It does not take too Freudian an imagination to see the similarities between a hand and arm inserted into a long rubber glove and a penis sheathed in a condom" (Steele 134). The term "glove" as a euphemism for "condum [sic]" was noted as early as 1826 in a treatise on contraception (McLaren 52).

within the domestic sphere.

In chapter twenty-seven, “A Misdemeanour,” Arthur engages in illicit manual intercourse with Annabella Lowborough (previously Wilmot); the touch of their hands proves the “misdemeanor” the chapter title identifies, establishing Arthur’s affair as a criminal act and thus linking it with women’s need for the legal reform of marriage; a woman could not sue for divorce from an unfaithful husband at this time, so A. Brontë’s chapter title suggests, perhaps, her political view. As Helen watches Arthur and Annabella, she spots Annabella “seated there, listening with what seemed an exultant smile on her flushed face, to [Arthur’s] soft murmurings, with her hand quietly surrendered to his clasp” (208). Arthur follows this initial clasp by coolly glancing at the other occupants of the room, making sure that most were not paying attention and “then ardently press[ing] the unresisting hand to his lips” (208). However, Helen sees this and her reaction suggests the depth of the betrayal of such manual intercourse. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the parting clasp of lovers often lingers and ends in a “burning kiss” seared into the lady’s hand. Helen recognizes the emotional intimacy Arthur and Annabella communicate to each other through this clasp. Annabella both accepts her “response-ability” by not resisting and actively encouraging Arthur’s touch, and “con-senting” or feeling with him. This differs from his manual intercourse with Helen, which often seeks to dominate her rather than enter into any type of sexual exchange. Arthur employs his usual tactics to assuage Helen when he realizes that she has seen this illicit clasp, “laughingly grasping [her] hand between both of his; but [she] snatched it away, in indignation—almost in disgust for he was obviously affected with wine” (209).

Though brief, this exchange is complex.

Helen’s repulsion at Arthur’s grasp embodies her respect for herself, and her growing consciousness that his clasp offers only insincerity. Similarly to Edward’s manual intercourse

with Jane, Arthur sandwiches Helen's hands between his own. However, rather than communicate anything along the lines of affection, sorrow, or sincerity, this clasp embodies the power dynamics as he perceives them: Helen possesses no agency within their marriage. He encapsulates Helen's hand as a demonstration of ownership and control; he owns her body and need not be sincerely apologetic because, as a woman, Helen can only choose between forgiving him wholeheartedly or living in torment. Caroline Norton explains in her *Letter* that "if she [an English wife] has once forgiven, or, in legal phrase, '*condoned*' his offenses, she cannot plead them; though her forgiveness only proves that she endured as long as endurance was possible"; and, furthermore, "she cannot divorce the husband *a vincula*, however profligate he may be" (Norton 662, 663; italics original). Thus, for Helen who has already forgiven Arthur multiple times for his indiscretions, whether she forgives him again or not proves irrelevant because, either way, she must remain with him by law and continue to suffer his abuses. Additionally, Helen has no legal right to any of their property. As Barbara Leah Harman explains, "[t]he consequence of the wife's ability to own property is thus her right to control access to her home and her body—in other words, the consequence is her sexual freedom" (Harman 355). Thus, Helen's rejection of Arthur's offered manual intercourse in this moment communicates not only her dissatisfaction with his behavior—his alcoholism has become linked in her mind with infidelity—but also her refusal to allow him sexual access to her body.

After the company, Annabella included, disperses, Arthur and Helen head to their room where Helen erects an even clearer physical and emotional boundary between herself and Arthur by denying him her hand (one that he metaphorically owns in marriage). Harman summarizes the state of women's rights within marriage at the time: "Women are unable to act in their own right because they are unable to differentiate themselves from their spouses and thus to make their

actions, and their selves, distinct and visible” (Harman 353). For Helen, manual intercourse thus functions as a haptic field of expression in which she can differentiate herself and her desires from those of Arthur. Initially, he tries to laugh off his manual intercourse with Annabella, however, when his empty speech has no effect on Helen, he “did not venture to touch [her] or speak”; instead, he cautiously “lean[s] his hand on the arm of the chair” when he finally does speak to her (A. Brontë 209). In this moment, he fears to reach out in his usual way, claim her hand, and attempt to avail himself of her forgiveness. His hesitation reveals that the power dynamics of their relationship have shifted; Helen has achieved a level of authority over her own person. For the first time in the history of their marriage, Helen extends her hand as a means of communicating her emotional state, commanding him, “Feel my hand” (209). She offers her hand as proof of her inner calm and lack of jealous feeling; however, she explains that when “I gravely extended it towards him—but closed it upon his with an energy that seemed to disprove the assertion, and made him smile,” allowing him to, once again, feel in control (210). Arthur interprets Helen’s “energy” as an indication of her emotional vulnerability, revealing his ignorance of Helen’s body both emotionally and physically, and illustrating the continued failure of their manual intercourse: even when their hands meet, they cannot communicate effectively. Reversing their usual manual intercourse, Helen, “still tightening [her] grasp,” warns him not to press her too far (210). As the conversation ends, “gently taking [her] hand” and looking up with an innocent smile, “he begs [her] forgiveness” (211). This exchange, however, proves uncharacteristic of their previous relationship. He neither extorts forgiveness from her nor presses her hand with any violence, rather accepting her authority in this moment by “gently,” almost questioningly taking her hand to indicate his regret. Even this, however, proves an empty gesture as he concedes to Helen’s authority over her body, but neither over him nor his property.

Shortly thereafter Arthur returns from one of his town visits (i.e., his alcoholic escapades) having drunk too much, and Helen's attempt to reestablish intimacy through manual intercourse fails entirely, revealing his lack of interest in her as a partner; he views her as his property and mother of his child,<sup>99</sup> nothing more. Helen tries to demonstrate her sincere concern for his health by "clasping his nerveless hands between [her] own" (229). Significantly, Helen describes his hands as "nerveless," or without sensation. Throughout this dissertation, I contend that the increased regulation in manual etiquette emerged as a byproduct of a better understanding of how sensation functioned, specifically in relation to the nerves of the hand. While a fair amount of that anxiety gets displaced onto management of the female hands, here we see another version. Helen physically experiences Arthur's lack of feeling through her own tactile sense. His body does not respond to her body, to her touch. As a result, he withdraws his consent such that no emotional exchange or communication occurs between them. While he recognizes that she has taken his hand and experiences the pressure of the gesture, he responds with no emotion, saying only, "Well, don't squeeze my hand so frantically" (229). He invalidates her worry when he proves unable to recognize the sincerity of her concern. The dulling of his haptic sense towards Helen specifically embodies his ignorance of her pain as well as his sexual apathy towards her as his wife. She reaches out to him in an attempt to reestablish a connection, but he does not register her embrace as reparative, only frantic. Much like their earlier clasp mediated by Helen's glove, here even direct physical contact proves unable to facilitate meaningful emotional exchange. Her fervent pressure meant to indicate affection and worry, he reads as nothing more than a frantic squeeze intended to scold him for his intemperance and register her anger; he experiences her vibrant concern as monomaniacal religious zealotism rather than

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<sup>99</sup> Though I do not make much of it here, Laura C. Berry gives a thorough reading of the role little Arthur plays in this narrative and the themes of child education and custody.

wifely care. Helen recognizes his disinterestedness in this moment, and pulls away from his hand as well as the hands of all others that approach her as an object—acquirable property—rather than a subject.

Helen's manual intercourse with Walter Hargrave further illustrates her increasing exertion of agency over herself in her refusal to exchange her body for male protection. She entered into such a covenant once when she married Arthur, but has since learned from having succumbed to such temptation, and refuses to repeat her earlier mistake. She no longer recognizes herself as property and thus asserts individual agency through manual intercourse. Walter openly pursues Helen after she has discovered her husband's affair with Annabella. One night when Helen and Walter find themselves alone in the library, Walter declares his affection for her and asks her to leave her husband and rely on him for protection. During his confession, he continually tries to establish tactile intimacy with her, which she refuses. Helen rebuffs his initial advances, "snatching away the hand he had presumed to seize and press between his own" (316). Much like Arthur's first handclasp, Walter's too comes uninvited but also undesired. He rebels against the rules of decorum by grabbing her hand, which suggests that, like Arthur, Walter's interest lies in satiating his own lust whether or not Helen reciprocates it. He sees Helen as an object to acquire and does not recognize her feelings. After all, an object possesses no emotional state, existing only to gratify the owner's pleasure. Furthermore, this clasp proves similar to Arthur's 'apologetic' ones, communicating Walter's sense of power over both Helen and the situation. Following Helen's removal of her hand from his grasp, he replies, "I must not be denied!" "and seizing both my hands, he held them very tight," she narrates (316). Again, much like Arthur's early grasps, Walter's also seek to dominate and control Helen. The violent nature of both Walter's exclamation and seizure of Helen's hands recalls the danger inherent in



such grasps depicted in eighteenth-century novels. Walter's grasp threatens not only Helen's sense of propriety, but also her sense of safety in that it threatens rape. Helen responds by crying for him to let go of her, "[b]ut he only tightened his grasp" (316). At this point, Mr. Grimsby, another of Arthur's friends staying at Grassdale Manor, sees Helen and Walter's manual intercourse and misinterprets what he sees.<sup>100</sup> Walter uses the opportunity to try threatening Helen into accepting his embrace: "He [Mr. Grimsby] will report what he has seen to Huntingdon and all the rest, with such embellishments as he thinks proper" (316). Helen, however, refuses to allow Walter to coerce her into another undesirable situation and thus she forcefully rebukes him "at length releasing [her] hands [from his], and recoiling from him" (316). This rebuke embodies the boundary that she has established between herself and the men who would dominate her through the social and political power they possess by virtue of their sex.

Helen ultimately asserts that she will be beholden to no man, claimed by none as property; she will rule herself. Thus, as Walter approaches her yet again, she explains, "I snatched up my palette-knife and held it against him" (316-7). Rachel K. Carnell has already noted the similarity between A. Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-8), suggesting that "Helen escapes Clarissa's fate in part because she is able to teach Gilbert the one thing that Clarissa never manages to teach Lovelace: how to read his moral obligation from her narrative distress" (Carnell 16). However, I contend that A. Brontë offers an even more complex revision of Richardson's novel. This scene between Walter and Helen in

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<sup>100</sup> This recalls "the misdemeanor" that occurs early on between Arthur and Annabella, emphasizing the sexual nature of hands and their touches. Except, in this instance, Arthur would have reason to divorce Helen and claim control over not only all of the property she brought into the marriage, but also their son, little Arthur. The Custody of Infants Act of 1839 "allowed a wife who was separated from her husband to petition the court and, provided she was of good character, to gain access to her children" (Berry 34). However, if Arthur divorced Helen for adultery or even suspected adultery, the court would deny her such a privilege.

which she grabs a palette-knife directly invokes that between Lovelace and Clarissa in which she grabs a penknife to similar ends. Compare Helen's reaction to Walter's advances with Clarissa's reaction to Lovelace's; Lovelace narrates it in a letter:

But she turned to me: Stop where thou art, Oh vilest and most abandoned of men!—Stop where thou art!—Nor, with that determined face, offer to touch me, if thou wouldst not that I should be a corpse at thy feet!

To my astonishment, she held forth a penknife in her hand, the point to her own bosom, grasping resolutely the whole handle, so there was no opening to take it from her. (*Clarissa* 950)

Rather than threaten to take her own life as Clarissa did, Helen threatens to take the life of her attacker. She rejects the intimacy that Walter seeks to force and, in so doing, establishes authority over herself by establishing a physical boundary that denies him access to her body. Helen learns to protect herself, and ends her relationship with Walter. Unlike Clarissa who verbally instructs Lovelace to stop, Helen explains that she physically expresses this same sentiment through her gesture, her grabbing of the palette-knife and pointing it towards Walter. Helen employs manual intercourse when her voice fails her or another fails to listen to it. She learns to assert her agency by controlling whose hands have access to her own and how they will engage with them. She seeks equality with and not domination by men, and thus she only bestows her hand on one man in this novel.

Helen's relationship with Gilbert differs quite starkly from that with both Arthur and Walter. I now turn to the manual intercourse that transpires between Helen and Gilbert both while she is in hiding and following Arthur's death.<sup>101</sup> Laura C. Berry has noted that "Gilbert Markham's likeness to Arthur Huntingdon is often elided in order to read into Brontë's ending a conjugal equality, and thus to make Anne Brontë's novel a proto-feminist one" (Berry 45, n. 19).

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<sup>101</sup> Gilbert's narrative frames Helen's diary. As a result, the novel begins in the present while Helen is in hiding, jumps to Helen's past relationship with Arthur, and then jumps forward once again to conclude both Helen's relationship with Gilbert, and her relationship with Arthur, who dies.

She elaborates further, explaining that “Markham has throughout the novel maintained an undercurrent of volcanic fury that is often eroticized; thus he is not psychologically so different from Huntingdon” (45, n.19). While I agree that Gilbert’s character bears similarities to that of Arthur, the trajectory of Gilbert’s manual intercourse with Helen embodies his ability to learn, and his ultimate respect for Helen as an individual rather than as property, a position Arthur does not assume even on his deathbed. Arthur eventually dies, Helen explains, “*with my hand fast locked in his*” (A. Brontë 394; italics original). Near the end, she notes that “*I gently disengaged my hand from his [...] a convulsive movement of the fingers, and a faintly whispered ‘Don’t leave me!’ immediately recalled me: I took his hand again, and held it till he was no more—and then I fainted; it was not grief; it was exhaustion*” (394; italics original). He holds her hand until his dying breath, clinging to her vitality, sapping every ounce of her energy to preserve him from the torment he presumes awaits him. She remains his property, that which he can use without reciprocation. Arthur never makes amends and only laments the pain he feels as death arrives, not those intemperate acts which led him to this point.

Though, as we already discussed, Gilbert initially employs manual intercourse much as Arthur did to establish his superiority over Helen, the nature of it changes throughout their acquaintance, transforming their relationship into one where each possesses an equal level of self-agency. Julia Fuller’s recent article “Redemptive Nursing and the Remarriageable Heroine in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Diana of the Crossways*” supports my reading of Gilbert as changed, arguing that “The nursing plot helps to allay the fears [about Gilbert’s similarity to Arthur] by inflecting Helen’s second marriage with a mutual concern for care-taking that was absent from her marriage to Arthur. Helen and Gilbert’s relationship is characterized as ‘the unity of accordant thoughts and feelings, and truly loving, sympathizing hearts and souls’”

(par.11). While we reach similar conclusions, I would argue that the mutual sympathy between them emerges in response to their tactile relationship rather than Helen's nursing of Arthur, which comprises only a small section towards the end of the novel. Furthermore, while an interesting reading, I take issue with her suggestion that the narrator ever places Helen in the position of needing redemption.

After Gilbert reads Helen's diary and learns the details of her history with Arthur, he tempers his own impulses, allowing Helen to direct their manual intercourse. When he arrives at her house after reading it, he notes that "She gave me her hand, without turning her head" (A. Brontë 351). She initiates the contact, but still acts with a level of reserve, which reflects her distrust of men because of her previous experiences with Arthur and Walter. Her embrace embodies her openness to Gilbert's advances, and he responds—or reciprocates the offered "response-ability"—with recognition of her agency by respecting the boundary that she still maintains. He explains, "It might be deemed a breach of trust, I thought, to convey that lily hand to my lips, so I only gently pressed it between my own," much like Edward the first time her holds Jane's hand (352).<sup>102</sup> Unlike Arthur who unreservedly kisses both Helen and Annabella's

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<sup>102</sup> Gilbert continually struggles with his desire to openly express his affection to Helen. This instance recalls three earlier moments prior to his reading her diary in which Gilbert does not as successfully restrains himself. I contend that he learns from Helen's record of her treatment as property at the hands of Arthur and Walter, and changes his behavior accordingly. The first happens when Gilbert brings Helen a book as a gift; Gilbert explains that, when he makes to leave, Helen "frankly placed her hand in mine; and while I held it there, I had much difficulty to refrain from pressing it to my lips;—but that would be suicidal madness" (A. Brontë 71). Following this, Helen offers him a moss rose to give to his sister, Rose, and Gilbert explains that

Instead of taking it quietly, I likewise took the hand that offered it, and looked into her face. She let me hold it for a moment, and I saw a flash of ecstatic brilliance in her eye, a glow of glad excitement on her face—I thought my hour of victory was come—but instantly, a painful recollection seemed to flash upon her; a cloud of anguish darkened her brow; a marble paleness blanched her cheek and lip; there seemed a moment of inward conflict,—and with a sudden effort, she withdrew her hand, and retreated a step or two back. (85)

Though he does not expressly discuss his desire to kiss her hand, this gesture continues their manual intercourse, which culminates in Gilbert's profession of love: "[a]nd starting from my seat in a frenzy of ardour, I seized her hand and would have pressed it to my lips, but she as suddenly caught it away" (96). Gilbert learns to temper his impulses from Helen's reactions on these occasions, as well as from what he reads of her reactions to similar uninvited grasps by Arthur and Walter.

hands, Gilbert restrains his desires to allow Helen the space to negotiate her own, pressing her hand to indicate his affection for her without expectation of return. Following his affectionate press, Helen verbally acknowledges her reasons for not telling him the truth about her past and current position as a married woman. Gilbert offers a nonverbal response:

Now, I raised her hand to my lips, and fervently kissed it again and again; for tears prevented any other reply. She suffered these wild caresses without resistance or resentment; then, suddenly turning from me, [...] I knew by the contraction of her brow, the tight compression of her lips, and the wringing of her hands, that meantime a violent conflict between reason and passion was silently passing within. (352)

Because convention prevents Gilbert from declaring his affection, he turns to manual intercourse to express the depth of his love and his understanding of her conflict, sentiments that exceed language and thus can only be communicated haptically. Their manual intercourse embodies their struggle with the social structures that bind Helen to Arthur—who has not yet died—and her and Gilbert’s desire to break free and reimagine those structures as an equitable partnership. Only after the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act did the law state “that a physically abused wife was granted the power to leave her husband and live, under the terms of an ecclesiastical separation, as *feme sole*”; thus, Helen struggles with asserting a sexual identity outside of her legally recognized marriage (Ward 159).

Unlike Arthur, Gilbert comprehends both what Helen’s hands and her body communicate, and he reacts accordingly, respecting the boundaries that she feels necessary to impose. He knows from their initial touch and Helen’s receptivity to his kisses that she is open to his advances, but he also understands when her initial willingness transforms into restraint that Helen struggles with duty and morality, which bind her to her husband. Helen’s withdrawal of her hand highlights her inner conflict with her current position as a wife with no legal existence apart from her husband, and her desire as a woman for a romantic connection that will bring her

intimacy and pleasure not based upon domination. Gilbert then tries to verbally engage her, explaining that Arthur has violated the covenant of marriage, but Helen cannot hear it. Her exchange with Gilbert ends with Gilbert's declaration that "when that profligate scoundrel has run through his career, you [Helen] will give your hand to me—I'll wait till then" (354). He respects her ethical dilemma and waits for her to offer herself, never presuming to take her.

By the end of the novel, Helen's husband Arthur has died, freeing her to act as her own agent. Gilbert has learned to temper his responses according to the sentiments that her manual intercourse communicates. Furthermore, Helen emerges as an active participant who no longer just withdraws her hand when emotionally overwhelmed, but rather asserts her own desires by not only offering her hand to Gilbert, but also claiming Gilbert's hand as her own. Fearing that Helen might remarry, Gilbert travels to the Grove, the Hargrave residence, only to discover that Helen's brother Frederick has married,<sup>103</sup> not Helen. Gilbert then travels to Staningley, where Helen resides, to express his love for her and see whether she returns his affections. When he arrives at Staningley, however, Gilbert feels inadequate standing in front of the gates of such a grand park; he realizes in this moment the extreme class difference between himself, a farmer, and Helen, a noblewoman who lived as an artist to support herself and her child while in hiding.<sup>104</sup> In addition to his feeling of inadequacy, for he cannot provide her with any more

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<sup>103</sup> As other scholars such as Carnell and Tess O'Toole have noted, Gilbert's intemperance manifests in his relationship with Frederick Lawrence. I suggest that he controls himself with Helen, even if his relationship with Frederick remains somewhat explosive. Additionally, one might expand this to offer a reading of the displacement of Gilbert's desire for Helen onto the hands of Frederick:

I loved him for it [his blood] better than I liked to express; and I took a secret delight in pressing those slender, white fingers, so marvelously like her own, considering he was not a woman, and in watching the passing changes in his fair, pale features, and observing the intonations of his voice—detecting resemblances which I wondered had never struck me before. (364)

However, such a reading is beyond the scope of this chapter. In particular see O'Toole for a reading of the relationship between these men.

<sup>104</sup> See Antonia Losano's "The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (2003) for a comprehensive reading of the significance of Helen's art and profession as artist.

substantial fiscal comforts, Gilbert begins to question whether he should disrupt Helen's peace of mind by reminding her of his fidelity, which he fears she might not value enough to accept the hand of one so far beneath her status, "for what could have brought me hither," he muses, "but the hope of reviving her attachment with a view hereafter to obtaining her hand?" (416). He aspires to be worthy of her hand and also recognizes her authority to bestow it on him whom she feels worthy: he desires to hold her hand, not own it. Unlike Arthur and Walter, Gilbert does not look upon Helen as property.

When Helen arrives in front of Staningley in her carriage, she recognizes Gilbert and acknowledges their intimacy by offering her hand. Gilbert explains that "A hand was silently put forth from the carriage window. I knew that hand, though a black glove concealed its delicate whiteness and half its fair proportions, and quickly seizing it, I pressed it in my own—ardently for a moment, but instantly recollecting myself, I dropped it, and it was immediately withdrawn" (418). Helen and Gilbert's physical positions in relation to each other embody the class anxiety Gilbert experiences: she is literally seated above him in the carriage. However, by extending her hand to him through the carriage window, Helen tactilely recognizes an intimacy between them. Though gloved, Gilbert knows her hand instantly, not acknowledging the glove's ability to conceal or mediate. The black gloves act as both a token of her widowhood and an emblem of her freedom. She now owns herself and can give herself to Gilbert precisely because her husband has died. Unlike Helen's gloved manual intercourse with Arthur, when Gilbert embraces her hand, he fears that she may experience his ardent passion too intensely in spite of the fabric and so releases it as an act of deference to her right to control the nature of their manual intercourse, setting the terms of their intimacy. Thus, manual intercourse again drives the story, determining the outcome of their relationship by opening up a space for the sincere

communication of emotion—the reciprocal-body space in which both respond to and feel with the other’s touch.

As this reunion scene continues, Helen employs manual intercourse to communicate her receptivity to Gilbert’s advances. When Gilbert goes to leave because of his uncertainty about Helen’s desire, Helen responds by asking, “‘Are you going already?’ [and then] [...] taking the hand [he] offered, and not immediately letting it go” (423). Helen asserts a level of agency in this moment. Though she takes an offered hand, she holds onto it longer than she should, which, according to essays on handshake etiquette at the time, embodies the desire of parting lovers: “Who can tell the thrill of ecstasy they feel, as they clasp each other’s hands, and linger on the last good night” (“On Shaking Hands,” *LSJ* 213). Ultimately, Helen assumes control over her own hand, holding onto Gilbert’s and allowing him to respond by holding onto hers. The reciprocity of this touch suggests a mutual exchange that recognizes both parties as touching subjects as well as objects of the other’s desire; neither is property that the other can own. Gilbert finally asks Helen, “‘Would you give me your hand too, if I asked it?’” (A. Brontë 424-5). In contrast to both Arthur and Walter before, each of whom presumes to take Helen’s hand without acknowledgment of her feelings, Gilbert asks for her hand, learning throughout the course of the novel that he gains nothing by trying to acquire it by force.

Gilbert’s deference to Helen’s authority over herself reveals the novel’s position that within marriage women can and should have the right to assert agency over their own bodies. When Helen offers her hand for the first time, she enters into a reciprocal-body space with a man who recognizes her as an equal partner of the embrace and not simply an object of it. By joining Helen and Gilbert’s hands in marriage, A. Brontë’s novel allows its readers to imagine a world in which reproductive futurity and social reform can coexist. As Jane similarly reminds us of her



and Edward's reproductive and sexual bliss at the end of her story, so Gilbert explains to his brother-in-law at the novel's end, "I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived together, and how blessed we still are in each other's society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us" (429). Hands in this novel actively touch other hands as a means of negotiating the material historical limitations of characters' interpersonal relationships. Helen and Gilbert's manual intercourse allows Helen a way of asserting agency and Gilbert a way of recognizing that agency outside of language and the standard social codes that structure it.

#### **IV. Tactile Negotiation in North and South**

Much like A. Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-5) employs manual intercourse as a means of negotiating the social problem of "women's work." Though many critics agree that the place of paternalism in industry and women's philanthropy prove the central concerns of the novel,<sup>105</sup> there exists less consensus about the significance of the novel's "happy ending," the marriage between Margaret Hale and John Thornton. While some critics suggest that their marriage ultimately reinscribes Margaret into the domestic sphere in a traditional female role,<sup>106</sup> others offer more unconventional readings of the marriage as either a model to replace paternalism or Gaskell's mode of critiquing separate spheres ideology.<sup>107</sup> According to Sarah Dredge, *North and South* advocates "the idea that through personal relationships greater understanding occurs that can inspire structural change" (Dredge 93). In other words, social change begins with the individual. Gaskell's characters, like

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Harman (1988), Elliott (1994), Wainwright (1994), Parker (1997), and Dredge (2012).

<sup>106</sup> See Stevenson (1991) and Brown (2000).

<sup>107</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer was among the first to offer a radical re-reading of Gaskell's narrative purpose, asserting that "rather than conflating paternalism and capitalism, [Gaskell] wishes rather to dismantle the dichotomy in developmental terms, attempting to work free of the theoretical limitations in models of social order and gender even as she acknowledges their shaping force" (Bodenheimer 68). My reading elaborates on this perspective, exploring how Gaskell specifically employs manual intercourse to negotiate rather than completely overthrow these ideologies.

those in *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, communicate with each other and negotiate their social positions through manual intercourse.<sup>108</sup> I argue that the final embrace between Margaret Hale and John Thornton embodies this perspective and thus their marriage reflects John's acceptance and encouragement of Margaret as an active social agent.<sup>109</sup>

John's first attempt at manual intercourse with Margaret after she and her family move to the industrial city of Milton embodies Margaret's initial rejection of Milton's model of social relations and John's liberal-minded perspective on industrial relations.<sup>110</sup> As Andrew Franta explains in his article "Godwin's Handshake" (2007), "the handshake is a gesture that can go wrong. Handshakes can fail" (Franta 699). Since handshakes offer some type of mutually recognized agreement or communication, an unsuccessful handshake arises from its "repeated failure to effect what it promises [...] whether the offered hand is refused or a successfully completed handshake is unsuccessful in bringing about the agreement or compact it is intended to effect" (770). Thus, Margaret and John's inability to join hands successfully embodies the wider social conflict between paternalist and liberalist ideology: paternalism advocated a father-son relationship between mill owners and factory workers and encouraged female charity guided by male leadership, while liberalism emphasized individual rights and action, the notion that one

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<sup>108</sup> Stevenson notes Margaret Homan's observation that "[i]n a literary culture dominated by the symbolic order and its values, the word that women writers and their characters most often bear is the word of their own exclusion from linguistic practice" (qtd. in Stevenson 77). I contend that manual intercourse functions as a means of communication that does not restrict female characters to phallogentric language systems.

<sup>109</sup> Reeder takes issue with the scholarly deployment of the term "agency" in relation to Victorian female characters. In regard to Margaret, Reeder claims that "Gaskell's vision of Victorian womanhood is anything but agentic—her powerful protagonist achieves political ends only ambivalently and only by the deconstruction of hers and other female bodies" (par. 2). While Reeder's reading productively complicates feminist scholars' impetus to read agency, again, I want to consider agency as a physical and not necessarily political state. Additionally, her valuable reading of the somatic permeability of Margaret's—and other female characters'—body overlooks the breaking down of certain boundaries in relation to John's body that I suggest the novel similarly works toward.

<sup>110</sup> See Wainwright for a detailed discussion of paternalist and liberalist ideologies within the novel. I will define these political distinctions below.

can pull oneself up by one's bootstraps without relying on government help or intervention. After first meeting the Hales, John offers his hand to each member of the Hale family as "was the frank and familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it" (Gaskell 86). Thus, when he "made an advance to Margaret to wish her good-by in a similar manner," she did not return the gesture and John's offer of friendship fails precisely because it does not effect that which it intends (86):

She simply bowed her farewell; although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention. Mr Thornton, however, knew nothing of her sorrow, and, drawing himself up to his full height, walked off, muttering as he left the house—  
'A more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw. Even her great beauty is blotted out of one's memory by her scornful ways.' (86)

*The Habits of Good Society* notes that "as a general rule, an introduction is not followed by shaking hands, only by a bow" (327). Similarly, *Manners and Rules of Good Society* indicates that "A lady who does not shake hands when expected to do so is actuated by one or the other of the following reasons—she did not wish to shake hands with a certain acquaintance, and preferred to bow only, or she was not aware whether she should have shaken hand or not" (225). I will suggest that Margaret's reaction evolves from both reasons; while she clearly did not expect the offer, and thus may not have known how to respond, her preference for bowing is arguably affected by the social interactions that preceded the gesture. Prior to this encounter, the Hales and John enter into a political discussion, Mr. Hale arguing that the poor of Milton need help and guidance from their social superiors and John arguing that only individual hard work can bring Milton's workers financial success. Margaret interjects, critiquing John's liberalist perspective when she comments, "You consider all who are unsuccessful in raising themselves in the world, from whatever cause, as your enemies, then, if I understand you rightly" (Gaskell 84-5). To which John replies, "As their own enemies, certainly," and then goes on to invalidate

Margaret's sympathy for the poor's suffering, which John sees as "the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives" (85). John preaches the virtues of self-reliance and self-denial. Thus, when he extends his hand to Margaret, she rejects it because it embodies this philosophy both in body and gesture; John raised his social standing through his hard work, determination, and manual labor, and thus his body bears the scars of that labor and his gesture acts in accord with the frank customs of that working-class culture. At this point, Margaret still feels attached to her beloved Helstone's, a place that symbolizes paternalism and domestic ideology,<sup>111</sup> philosophical perspectives from which she later moves away. Margaret's inability to recognize the friendly intention behind John's gesture embodies her inability to see beyond her traditional way of thinking.

Additionally, Margaret's unconscious physical aversion to the unfamiliar custom further illustrates the gender politics concerning women's place in social work and emergence into a wider public sphere. As already noted, in most instances, a lady of class standing should offer her hand first and only to a previously introduced gentleman. Thus, John's frank gesture of friendship emblemizes Milton culture but proves an affront to Margaret who comes from a pre-industrial society. Although Margaret feels sorry that she did not recognize John's intention to shake hands, the narrator does not indicate that Margaret would have reciprocated his touch if she had, which contrasts with both Jane and Helen's reactions to uninvited touches. As Dorice Elliott notes, "Margaret's sexual, and potentially unruly, nature is constantly kept in check by the 'common rules' of courtesy or by the manners and conventions of class" ("Female Visitor" 46). Margaret's somewhat unconscious, impulsive denial of her hand illustrates her need to cling to her Southern customs in order to control herself. As Harman notes, "illicit sexuality in *North and*

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<sup>111</sup> Bodenheimer argues that paternalism and separate spheres ideology are inextricably linked (Bodenheimer 68).

*South* is just another name for female publicity” (Harman 371). In a sense, John’s offered handshake recognizes Margaret as a public individual, and thus causes her to react in accordance with custom, which, she believes, will contain unwanted desires and protect her sexual innocence, which Harman also links with Helstone (363). Margaret’s bow creates a physical boundary by denying John physical contact and thus the social intimacy that his extended hand and its touch would have offered. Not only does this first failed attempt at a handshake embody John’s desire to foster a friendship with Margaret and her desire to maintain a clear boundary that will keep him a platonic acquaintance, it also embodies the clash of cultures and ideologies as well as Margaret’s initial fear of emerging as a public, and thus sexual, figure. Remember Jane and Helen reach a new level of sexual awareness following their first tactile encounters with Edward and Arthur.

The manual intercourse that follows this initial shake further embodies the political discord between paternalism and liberalism in relation to industry as well as growing social concerns about middle-class women’s roles in public industry—philanthropy.<sup>112</sup> After a heated debate about the current political conflict between the “Milton manufacturer[s]” and their “hands,” John and Margaret once again engage unsuccessfully in a handshake (Gaskell 124). Margaret argues in favor of paternalism, claiming that ““God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent,”” which John denies (122). ““You are just like all strangers,”” he says to Margaret, ““who don’t understand the working of our system”” (123). Margaret responds by explaining, ““I am trying to reconcile your admiration of despotism with your respect for other men’s independence of character”” (123). For John, his absolute rule exists during business hours as a means of protecting his own financial interest; once the workday ends, he respects his

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<sup>112</sup> See Parker for a discussion of Gaskell’s own philanthropy, which she extends into the realm of literary philanthropy.

workers' independence so long as they do not seek to encroach upon his own by requiring he spend his money differently. This discussion reflects an ongoing tension in this novel between the role of the middle- and upper-classes in the lives of the working-classes. While John holds to his liberalist model, Margaret moves from a view of paternalist charity to a notion of community that views all as interconnected and thus beholden to a communal future.<sup>113</sup> After Mr. Hale silences Margaret, John seeks to reconcile with her, "I spoke hastily to you once this evening, and am afraid, rather rudely. But you know I am but an uncouth Milton manufacturer, will you forgive me?" (124). Margaret replies, "Certainly," [...] smiling up in his face, the expression of which was somewhat anxious and oppressed, and hardly cleared away as he met her sweet funny countenance, out of which all the north-wind effect of their discussion had entirely vanished. But she did not put out her hand to him, and again he felt the omission, and set it down to pride (124). In this instance, unlike a character like Arthur who grabs Helen's hand and demands forgiveness, John waits for Margaret to offer her hand in a handshake of reconciliation, but she does not. Interestingly, he feels the absence of the gesture acutely. Throughout the novel, both up to this point and following it, John carefully notes and fantasizes about the touches that either do or do not occur between Margaret and himself. His desire to sustain a tactile connection with Margaret moves beyond the physical and intellectual attraction that he feels for her, and reflects both his and the text's desire to find a way to establish a connection between people that represent such disparate perspectives on the current political situation. In other words, both have to learn how to open their bodies to reciprocal engagement without rendering themselves infinitely permeable or vulnerable. Again, Margaret's refusal to shake hands embodies her

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<sup>113</sup> Bodenheimer notes that "Gaskell's revision of paternalism is a theory of interdependence that cuts across class lines by defining adulthood as an acceptance of responsibility both for dependence and dependents" (Bodenheimer 61).

rejection of John's perspective but also an authoritative refusal to silence herself in act as her father does in voice. Much like Harman, I argue that the romance (or private) narrative proves inseparable from the social problem (or public) one (Harman 374). Gaskell's novel questions not just the relations between masters and men in industry, but also where women and women's work fits into that sphere of existence.<sup>114</sup> The narrator emphasizes John's awareness of the omission and the deep significance it holds for him. While Margaret adheres to polite speech in her pleasant acceptance of his apology, she communicates through her lack of handshake that she experienced their discussion as a slight and did not fully accept the verbal apology that he offered. Wainwright argues that "it is in the process of making choices, according to both Gaskell and Mill, that the individual begins to strengthen his own powers of reason and his capacity to feel" (Wainwright par. 21). Margaret makes a conscious choice in this moment to keep her hand private and thus she begins to emerge as a distinct individual self. Manning also suggests that to touch, to make a decision, functions as a political event because "[i]t is a moment of responsibility, a tempered instance of reaching-out, a touching of that which I do not yet know, a touching of an other in a reciprocal engagement with the unknowable" (Manning 49). Thus, to decide not to touch also proves a political decision that maintains, rather than collapses, the distinction between self and other; one's refusal to touch likewise refuses to engage with the unknowable.<sup>115</sup> Margaret refuses to assume the traditional female role that would require her to both verbally and physically affirm John's social superiority. Such acts of individual agency and development continue to occur in moments where Margaret must choose

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<sup>114</sup> See Stevenson's article on the historical significance of the Preston Strike in which she argues that "what 'must not be said' in *North and South* is that women work for money as factory laborers and as authors" (Stevenson 67).

<sup>115</sup> Much like the Abbé de Condillac in his *Treatise on the sensations* (1754), Manning links the emergence of an individual self with touch, which, she suggests, was the original sin precisely because it was the moment of human decision (Manning 49).

whether or not to shake hands.

Chapter twenty, “Men and Gentlemen,” directly links manual intercourse with questions of not only industry but masculinity, for John finally “shook hands with Margaret” when she attends the dinner party that he throws (Gaskell 160). The failed initial manual intercourse between Margaret and John embodies not only Margaret’s ignorance of Milton customs but also her skepticism about John, whom she sees as “not quite a gentleman” (65). Thus, her initial rejection of his hand also conveys her rejection of him as a “gentleman,” a concept that holds specific meaning within the novel. Margaret acts according to the custom of polite society when she shakes John’s hand upon entering his party: “a host and hostess should shake hands with every stranger introduces to them at their house” (*Manners* 226). The narrator explains that “[h]e knew it was the first time their hands had met, though she [Margaret] was perfectly unconscious of the fact,” merely enacting her social duty (Gaskell 160). John has kept careful track of their touches precisely because of what they communicate. For him, the act initially recognizes him as a gentleman, one worthy of the embrace of a lady; however, Margaret’s unconsciousness of this being their first touch reminds John of her lack of interest and thus recalls him to his class position as a tradesman (though a “sagacious and strong” one) in her eyes (65). As Patricia Ingham explains in a footnote, early in the novel “[Margaret] relies on a conventional definition of gentleman depending on birth, property and appropriate (or no) occupation” (427, n. 5). Thus, even though they successfully engage in a handshake, their manual intercourse itself fails because Margaret does not respond with any type of fellow-feeling; she does not open herself up to John. The gesture facilitates no exchange, mutual recognition, or reciprocity between them. Margaret experiences no emotional intimacy with John, nor he with her, and she comes away with no understanding of John’s perspective on class. The handshake itself embodies this



struggle between convention and modernity: Margaret clings to social custom without even realizing it, while John employs custom in the hope of forging a new, more intimate connection with Margaret.

In addition, John's acute awareness of their touch and description of Margaret's body that follows further exemplifies his rejection of gentlemanliness as Margaret conceives of it in favor of traditional middle-class masculinity as well as the novel's commentary on the increasing social anxiety over the heightened visibility of the female body in the public sphere. Their manual intercourse is a public act, but a safe one because it adheres to social etiquette. If, as Norbert Elias and Dorice Elliott independently suggest, etiquette functions as a social restraint designed to control unruly impulses, then Margaret's customary but indifferent shake tempers John's desires. Manning explains that one cannot control the senses and that touch has the potential to generate unruly sensations (Manning 86). Thus, one can infer that custom, designed to mediate tactile contact, seeks to channel unruly desires into more acceptable outlets. John rejects the term "gentleman" in favor of "man," explaining to Margaret, "I take it that "gentleman" is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as "a man," we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself—to life—to time—to eternity" (Gaskell 163). John views gentlemen as feminized men because they can only define themselves relationally, meaning that people's individual actions hold no bearing on how others socially perceive them. Margaret experiences this shake as a gentlemanly gesture, one adhering to custom and devoid of any personal sentiment. However, in spite of what the gesture itself may suggest, she denies John access to a reciprocal-body space by only consenting to contact, not exchange—she neither feels with nor responds to him. Ingram explains that John's "denial of any wish to define or to be a gentleman means John knows that

Margaret and others like her would not regard him as one. Like other rising men he wishes to substitute wealth for birth and property as a measure of status” (437, n. 6). John identifies himself as “a man,” an individual who need not always adhere to the customs of polite society. Thus, for him this handshake opens possibility. Margaret previously controlled her sexual self by denying John access to her body, yet, in spite of the safety of this controlled public space, John sexualizes their handshake; it leads to his increasing awareness of Margaret’s body. Etiquette proves unable to mediate John’s desire because his tactile sensations exist in excess of social regulation. Thus, his manliness and individuality emerge from the somatic.

While Sarah Dredge identifies Margaret’s sexualization with her verbal entrance into the men’s conversation during dinner, John sexualizes her well before that point, recalled to his body and thus his desire the moment their hands make contact. Their handshake, combined with John’s observation that follows, embodies Margaret’s difficult position as a public female body: How can she act socially without being thought sexually illicit?<sup>116</sup> John follows their shake with a catalog of Margaret’s body, not unfamiliar from those that we saw D’Elmont profess in Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719-20); it begins with noting Margaret’s hand and their handshake, and then catalogs the rest of her visible person, ending at the appendage with which it begun:

the curving lines of the red lips, just parted in the interest of listening to what her companion said—the head a little bent forwards, so as to make a long sweeping line from the summit, where the light caught on the glossy raven hair, to the smooth ivory tip of the shoulder; the round white arms, and taper hands, laid lightly across each other, but perfectly motionless in their pretty attitude. (Gaskell 160)

He starts at her head, reading her engagement with the speaker she listens to in the expression on her face; interestingly, he also notes the redness of her lips, a trait later associated with

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<sup>116</sup> Harman and Parker both address this question.

voluptuous sexuality in novels such as *Dracula* (1897),<sup>117</sup> and that her lips are slightly parted, which suggests an openness, or a space that links the mouth directly with sexuality. David Sonstroem suggests that, within art, open mouths that reveal a hint of teeth signify a loss of control or sexual impulsiveness (Sonstroem 359, 374). He claims that in the naïve, the innocent, the open mouth symbolizes “unguardedness, vulnerability, as well as incipient sensuality,” and that in the sensualist it represents the woman’s “essentially unrestrained nature” (356, 359). Here, John takes Margaret in as he would a painting, which suggests that her open mouth signifies his own perception of her as a sensual being. From her lips, he notes the posture of her head, beginning with its “summit” and following her hair down to her shoulders. Though gold hair often held the express connotations of sexuality,<sup>118</sup> hair that was not tightly bound held a similar suggestion and, here, Margaret’s hair is loose enough or shaped in such a way as to span the length of her neck and lead the eye to her shoulder. John details the “smooth ivory tip” of her shoulder, which would suggest its visibility; much like hands themselves, any apparent portion of skin would have held an erotic quality as that which should not have been directly visible (See Figs. 9 and 10).<sup>119</sup> From her shoulder, his eyes move down her body following her arms, which he describes as “round” and “white”: plump and pure. These lead him once again to her “taper hands,”<sup>120</sup> those emblems of both social and sexual contact. Here, she touches no one but herself,

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<sup>117</sup> See Christopher Craft’s “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” *Representations* No. 5 (Autumn 1984), pp. 107-133, for a full discussion of this trait.

<sup>118</sup> See Elizabeth Gitter’s “The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination” *PMLA* 99.5 (October 1984), pp. 936-954, and Galia Ofek’s *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009, for a complete discussion of women’s hair in the Victorian imaginary.

<sup>119</sup> Margaret wears common evening attire influenced by French fashions of the period. This reveals Margaret’s own exposure to fashionable society when she stayed with her Aunt Shaw and cousin, Edith. The figures above offer a somewhat period specific visual illustration of the type of evening wear that John here describes. The first depicts specifically Englishwomen’s attire (circa. 1856), while the second is a fashion plate originally published in a French periodical (circa. 1855).

<sup>120</sup> This term is used at least twice to describe her hands.



**Figure 9.** (On the left.) Cunnington, C. Willett. *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century: A Comprehensive Guide With 1,117 Illustrations*. Courier Dover Publications, 1937. Print. The caption (not included here) reads: “1856. Evening Dresses[.] Of pink satin with lace flounce[.] Of lilac taffeta, skirt trimmed with puffings[.] Of white moiré brocaded with blue; white cashmere sortie de ball[.]”

**Figure 10.** (On the right.) “Evening dresses, ca. 1855.” *Les Modes Parisiennes*. Fashion Plate Collection, University of Washington Libraries. Special Collections Division. 6 May 2013. Web.  
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/u?/costumehist.131>

and her hands remain “perfectly motionless in their pretty attitude.” They possess a quality, a character of their own that draws John to them; they are not active but rather, like Margaret herself, passive and unaware of him. This catalog renders her body a sexual one, an object of his gaze that he desires to turn into an object of his touch.<sup>121</sup> However, manual intercourse does not function as a means of exchange when unidirectional, or imagined without a response. A reciprocal embrace requires a reversible handshake in which the object touched most often proves a phenomenal subject aware of its experience. The narrator explains that “Margaret was so unconscious of herself, and so much amused by watching other people, that she never thought whether she was left unnoticed or not” (161). Margaret’s unconsciousness of John’s vision recalls her unconsciousness of their earlier handshake and the depth of his feelings for her.

<sup>121</sup> Here, John engages haptic visuality; he touches Margaret with his eyes, but she does not return his look, complicating even the directionality of his gaze.

Though the handshake technically succeeds in that they complete it, it fails in that Margaret still remains oblivious to John's desire for her. She offers no response to his embrace and thus it fails to effect what it offers, to establish an intimate connection between them.

Margaret's gestures resonate with John throughout the novel. Though not expressly a scene of manual intercourse, Margaret's embrace to protect John from the rioters during the strike scene sheds light on the earlier and following scenes of manual intercourse that occur between them. As I have mentioned above, their ability to meet successfully in a handshake embodies greater political struggles that this novel addresses. However, during the riot, some of those political distinctions break down, and contact happens freely, without thought or prejudice. After goading John into leaving the safety of his home at the mill to speak to his workers, Margaret notices the frenzy of the mob of men that stand before him, so she runs down, feeling both guilt for shaming John into that position and desire to save both him and the workers from the inevitable backlash that a violent outburst would incite. As one of the rioters makes to throw a stone, "She only thought how she could save him [John]. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond" (177). John feels Margaret's protective gesture keenly, but also misinterprets it according to his own desires: "Everything seemed dim and vague beyond—behind—beside the touch of her arms around his neck—the soft clinging which made the dark colour come and go in his cheek as he thought of it" (185-6). The description of Margaret's initial clasp offers seemingly little of the erotic; she acts instinctively, the narrator notes, turning her body into a protective cover. John, however, proves unable to locate the motivation behind Margaret's embrace in spatial relation to the greater event, suggesting that he experiences this protective move as Margaret's physical declaration of her love for him because of the powerful effect it has on both his mind and body. In a sea of rioters,

his mind and body register only “the touch of [Margaret’s] arms around his neck,” at which he blushes. He views this momentary physical contact as an opening, an entering into the reciprocal-body space in which she has consented to the embrace and he has accepted his “response-ability” by returning it. This gesture, however, does not initially offer the reciprocity that John thinks, thus it fails in that he still misunderstands Margaret’s intention. While Dredge reads Margaret’s embrace as one of “disinterested philanthropic concern,” both Bodenheimer and Harman suggest that Margaret’s act embodies something of sexual interest, even if unconscious or repressed (Dredge 87; Bodenheimer 66; Harman 368). Similarly, I contend that her action suggests a choice and an emerging independent public self. Margaret runs down out of guilt, but also because she cares enough about John to protect him. Again, a moment of touch embodies a collision in which Margaret’s interjection into the social renders her necessarily sexual. According to Harman, this scene questions the place of women in the social sphere by illustrating a “rivalry between Thornton and Margaret: Who shall occupy the public stage? Who shall take command? Who shall protect whom? Who shall speak? Who shall act? Who shall really ‘appear’?” (Harman 367). Bodenheimer also claims that Margaret’s protective maternal gesture publicly threatens John’s masculinity. This scene questions female public agency by employing the embrace as a means of embodying the power dynamics as they exist between John and Margaret. Manning claims that “[a]ny reaching toward is a crossing of a malleable border from gender to gender”; tactile gestures reveals the malleability of gender definitions (Manning 107). This scene questions whether or not John can embrace Margaret as a socially active partner and public member of society without automatically feeling emasculated and thus needing to diminish her actions by sexualizing her intentions and rendering them referential.

Margaret actually enters into a greater sense of consciousness about her relationship with

John following this scene and begins to consciously rethink her stance on paternalism and domestic ideology. When she recognizes the erotic potential her gesture held, she struggles with her gendered position as a lady and her desire to act publicly. She knows that people might misinterpret her embrace as an act of personal affection rather than one of female charity. She mulls over the events, recognizing that “it is no wonder those people thought I was in love with him, after disgracing myself in that way” (Gaskell 188). She laments her carelessness, ““Oh how low I am fallen that they should say that of me!”” but tries to mollify herself with the thought that ““If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman’s work”” (188). The question of women’s work arises here and remains throughout the novel. While she protests any sexual motivation, she recognizes her vulnerability as a woman to such a reading by the public, and struggles with acknowledging any affection for John without others automatically translating that acknowledgement into sexual desire. Jesse Reeder contradicts the traditional critical reading of the strike scene as Margaret’s exertion of female political agency for a feminist cause, pointing out that “the notion of agency is radically attenuated by the fact that women’s efforts both result in and *depend upon* the woman being penetrated and broken by such an intervention” (par. 16; italics original). She further argues that, unlike Margaret and other female characters, “John Thornton has the luxury of keeping his emotional tortures private” (par. 22). Rather than consider the political cause of the strike scene and how Margaret responds to that, however, I would like to explore Margaret’s intervention as an event in the development of both her romantic relationship with John and her relationship with her own body and sexuality. Additionally, while John’s tortures may remain private in the sense of not being open to public scrutiny as Margaret’s actions are, I will also argue that through manual intercourse the narrator renders John’s emotional torment intimately public to

the reader.

John confronts Margaret with her fear that her actions will be read as sexual when he proposes to her, believing her act one of deep, if unacknowledged, affection. The narrator explains that “[h]is heart beat thick at the thought of her coming” while he waits for her in the Hale family parlor (Gaskell 191). As he waits, he contemplates the feel of her body for “[h]e could not forget the touch of her arms around his neck, impatiently felt as it had been at the time; but now the recollection of her clinging defence [sic] of him, seemed to thrill him through and through,—to melt away every resolution, all power of self-control, as if it were wax before a fire” (191). Unlike Margaret who holds that she experienced that gesture as one of duty, an example of “woman’s work” that saved a man from “a cruel, angry action,”<sup>122</sup> John remembers her “clinging defence” as arousing, an action that physically demonstrated that her concern for his safety outweighed her concern for her own. John translates her public gesture into a sexual gesture and openly acknowledges his perception of it as such when he proposes. However, by confronting Margaret with his ardent passion and his belief that she shares it, Margaret is forced to contend with her social position as a gendered subject. Though arguably Margaret disavows her attraction to John when she denies having any motivation other than social duty, she also seeks to retain a level of individual agency by claiming her grasp as a political act—a form of women’s work—rather than allowing it to be discounted as simply an expression of female affection. All of the previous failed scenes of manual intercourse coalesce in a tactile embrace that forces Margaret to confront the reality of John’s desire for her and her emergence as a

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<sup>122</sup> Bodenheimer rightly suggests that “the idealistic invocation of a myth of passive virtue covers up the act of impulsive emotion” (Bodenheimer 66).



sexually viable subject.<sup>123</sup>

John's manual intercourse with Margaret when he professes his love for her and then proposes embodies separate spheres ideology, which Margaret ultimately rejects. He makes his proposal "to one whom I love, as I do not believe man ever loved woman before," and then "[h]e held her hand tight in his. [...] [but] [h]e threw the hand away with indignation, as he heard her icy tone; for icy it was, though the words came faltering out, as if she knew not where to find them" (192). John possesses himself of Margaret's hand when he believes her vulnerable to his advances. According to *Habits of Good Society*, "love [is the shake] who seizes it [the lady's hand] to press it tighter and more tightly, and sends his whole soul through the fingers" (325). Thus, the tightness of John's handshake would have communicated to her the veracity of his declaration and the depth of intensity of his love for her. However, it also reveals his position on gender relations. Margaret opened herself to public humiliation when she embraced him at the riot, and thus the proposal offers Margaret a way to preserve her virtue. As Elliott suggests, marriage ensures modesty, but significantly, Margaret refuses marriage for such a reason ("Female Visitor" 46). Margaret rejects domestic ideology when she rejects the private position as wife that John offers her. Like A. Brontë's Helen, Margaret too refuses to sell herself for protection. Custom no longer contains her unruly sexuality nor dictates her role in the public sphere.<sup>124</sup> Recognizing that she does not return his embrace, John rids himself of her hand to sever the connection and try to harden himself against the rejection that he senses will follow; the iciness of her manual intercourse would have communicated her lack of interest before she even

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<sup>123</sup> Elliott and Harman read Margaret's rejection of Captain Lennox at the novel's start as both her rejection of the domestic ideology that he offers and her rejections of sexual maturity (Elliott, "Female Visitor" 37; Harman 363). I would note that manual intercourse is prominent throughout that scene as well

<sup>124</sup> Citing the work of historian Denise Riley, Elliott identifies this shift as the emergence of a social sphere, which existed between the public and private spheres and was associated with both middle-class male professionals and females who engaged in women's work ("Female Visitor" 26-8).

opened her mouth to reply. As a writer for *The London Saturday Journal* asks of his male readers, “Who, in the heyday of his youth, has not felt all his hopes blighted, and his dreams of future happiness destroyed, by a formal shake from the hand of a lady in whose company he had been, and in whose heart he fondly thought he had secured a place?” (214). John reacts with indignation to Margaret’s formality. She even turns to maternalist ideology in order to identify her protective embrace as one of duty and strip it of any erotic potential: ““that any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield, with her revered helplessness, a man in danger from the violence of numbers”” (Gaskell 193).<sup>125</sup> In contrast to the earlier three distinct scenes of manual intercourse, this one ends with John’s “rejecting her [Margaret’s] offered hand, and making as if he did not see her grave look of regret, he turned abruptly away, and left the room” (194). This time, John denies Margaret the reconciliation that she longs for. The reconciliatory handshake that she offers fails to meet its mark and John withdraws, this time leaving her acutely aware of the lack of physical connection. Once again, we see the novel employing manual intercourse as a means of negotiating the relationship between characters from different backgrounds. Margaret and John’s political perspectives have not yet come together, just as their hands have not yet met successfully.

Though Margaret does not leave herself emotionally open to John’s touch, she does prove open to tactile communication with her brother Frederick. She engages in manual intercourse with Frederick in order to communicate both her sisterly affection and the great burden of her

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<sup>125</sup> The text and Margaret repeat this many times, ““It was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same. We all feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger”” (Gaskell 192). The excessive protestation of the emotion behind the action suggests, along with Bodenheimer, that Margaret disavows her desire for John, though I suggest that she does so as long as John denies her act’s political significance and views it only as a demonstration of womanly concern. This gesture need not be mutually exclusive of either affection or political agency.

mother's declining health and her father's declining finances without having to speak of it.<sup>126</sup> As Margaret walks with Frederick to the train station from which he will leave, "[her] hand lay in Frederick's arm. He took hold of it affectionately" (257). Here, Frederick takes up Margaret's hand with a non-sexual sense of fraternal affection. She allows him to do so in order that he may understand and share in her emotional burden, for as "Frederick held her hand in his, and looked with wistful anxiety into her face, reading there more care and trouble than she would betray by words" (257). The affective quality of their manual intercourse exceeds even our interpretation. Margaret and Frederick experience this as a moment of connectedness in which Frederick senses and takes into himself some of the worry that Margaret has had to assume.<sup>127</sup> She touches him and he assumes "response-ability" for that touch's entering successfully into a reciprocal-body space. Though an intimate moment between them and one of connection that offers Margaret a sense of camaraderie and relief, it happens outside near the train station, rendering it a public moment that leaves Margaret once again vulnerable to public scrutiny.

John, who oversees their touch from his carriage, misinterprets it as one of passionate love as opposed to platonic affection:<sup>128</sup> "He could not forget the fond and earnest look that had passed between her and some other man—the attitude of familiar confidence, if not of positive endearment" (302). John sees only the wistful look of longing in Margaret's eyes as she bids a

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<sup>126</sup> I realize that this is an odd term given that they are siblings, but "intercourse" need not always designate sexual exchange. In fact, during the 1800s, people commonly employed the term to designate communication: "In Mr. Thornton's case, as far as Margaret knew, there was no intervening stage of friendship. Their *intercourse* had been one continued series of opposition. Their opinions clashed; and indeed, she had never perceived that he had cared for her opinions, as belonging to her, the individual" (Gaskell 195; italics mine). Here, "intercourse" designates verbal exchange, not sexual penetration; this was its common usage.

<sup>127</sup> Bodenheimer points out that Mr. Hale's choice to leave the church signifies the breakdown of the paternalist structure because he also abdicates his responsibility as head of the family, placing the burden on Margaret (Bodenheimer 56).

<sup>128</sup> This also happens in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* when Gilbert oversees and misinterprets a touch between Frederick Lawrence and Helen. (Oddly, both brothers bear the name Frederick.)

final farewell to her brother, noting the familiarity with which she embraces his hand—a form of familiarity and confidence denied to John from the first day of their meeting. Interestingly, his witnessing their touch recalls to his mind Margaret’s touch on the day of the riot, and with that “[h]e lashed himself into an agony of fierce jealousy[, ...] mock[ing] at himself for having valued the mechanical way in which she had protected him from the fury of the mob” (303). The tenderness inherent in Margaret and Frederick’s clasp to him confirms Margaret’s claim that she acted from a sense of duty, not affection, and also reveal John’s own emotional vulnerability. John must recognize her protective embrace as an assertion of public agency and a declaration of woman’s work in addition to an admission of love before their touches will succeed. However, John instead sexualizes her actions, refusing to acknowledge that it is possible for her to act publicly while remaining respectable.<sup>129</sup> He misinterprets her manual intercourse with Frederick, and allows it to color his understanding of Margaret’s previous manual intercourse with himself, illustrating his discomfort with female activity in the public sphere.

After both of Margaret’s parents die, she stops by John’s place to bid the Thorntons farewell before returning to Helstone, and John employs manual intercourse to establish an emotional boundary between himself and Margaret. When Margaret and her Aunt Shaw leave, “[a]s it [the carriage] drove up, he [John] and Margaret stood close together on the door-step, and it was impossible but that the recollection of that day of the riot should force itself into both their minds” (361). Once again, Margaret and John find themselves in close proximity to each other. Unlike previous occasions where John alone proved acutely aware of their somatic interactions, here, the narrator explains that Margaret also distinctly remembers the touch that occurred

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<sup>129</sup> Though John defends Margaret to his mother and lies to the police inspector, he does so to protect her, thinking that she has fallen. Thus, I read his reaction as, once again, a sexualization of her behavior to account for her publicity.

between herself and John on the day of the riot, which suggests that it has come to hold significance for her as well. John contemplates the proposal that followed this event, and steels himself to Margaret, “‘No!’ said he [to himself], ‘I put it to the touch once, and I lost it all’” (361). Interestingly, John measures both risk and reward in matters of love by touch. He opened himself to Margaret both physically and emotionally when he held her hand and offered her his, but she rejected it. In so doing, however, she also rejected a way of life that would keep her ‘protected’ but still firmly entrenched within the domestic sphere. As a result, when he says goodbye to Margaret, “there was no tone of regret, or emotion of any kind in his voice with which he said good-bye; and the offered hand was taken with a resolute calmness, and dropped as carelessly as if it had been a dead and withered flower” (361). Again, Margaret’s shake of reconciliation fails because John does not reciprocate it. He refuses to tactilely open himself up to Margaret’s touch, fearing that she will reject him once more. John refuses to recognize meaning in any tactile sensation, or even sustain their parting handshake long enough for Margaret to communicate the depth of her sincere regret for how she treated him. *The London Saturday Journal* describes the cold shake as what happens when “[o]ne extends his hand, the other does so too; the thumbs are pressed lightly on the fingers; they part again, and all is over” (214). Here, Margaret extends her hand, John calmly but coldly accepts it and then drops it as fast. There is no retention, no pressure that would indicate any sense of fellow-feeling or “consent,” as Manning terms it. They touch but establish no connection. In the past two instances of manual intercourse that have occurred between them, Margaret initially presented John with a similar type of rejection. Just as she refused to shake his hand during their first few encounters, and then shook it aloofly at his party, so too has John refused her hand, and now shook it with the same indifference with which she once approached him. When Margaret extends her hand,

she recognizes him as her social equal, however, John's lack of response suggests that he cannot yet accept her as a social activist that works openly in the public or social sphere.

Much like Jane and Edward recreate but invert their initial handshake at the close of the novel in Ferndean, while in the South at Margaret's beloved Helstone John and Margaret once again come together in an embrace that mirrors that of the riot scene, embodying not only their mutual affection for each other, but also John's open acceptance of Margaret as an equal partner and an individual social agent. John, who has lost money because of his workers' strike, arrives in Helstone to meet with Mr. Lennox for business and sees Margaret again. She has inherited a fortune from her guardian, Mr. Dixon, who adopted her after the death of her parents and then died himself, and decides that she will act as John's investor. When she reveals this to him, he once again proposes, but this time Margaret accepts, shielding her face with her hands. John responds to Margaret's embarrassment by recreating the touch that meant so much to him: "After a minute or two, he gently disengaged her hands from her face, and laid her arms as they had once before been placed to protect him from the rioters" (Gaskell 425). Margaret and John finally connect in a tactile physical sense, opening their bodies and their hearts to each other, finally entering a reciprocal-body space. I argue that John uses this final embrace to haptically communicate his recognition that Margaret's investment—in both the financial and marital sense—constitutes a political act in her choosing to financially support his entrepreneurial endeavor and one of affection, suggesting that he has accepted Margaret's capacity to act as both a social activist and his wife. In contrast, however, some scholars have read this scene rather pessimistically as Margaret's reintegration into the domestic. Catherine Barnes Stevenson, for example, claims that "while it is clear at the novel's end that Margaret intends to use her money to improve industrial conditions and to stay actively interested in social causes, it is also clear

that in the future she will be firmly entrenched in the domestic context. In fact, the final words of the novel firmly instate Margaret and John Thornton within the familial rather than the social order” (80). Pear L. Brown largely agrees, citing and affirming Christine L. Krueger’s “conclusion that the marriage signals Margaret’s resignation to a woman’s traditional role” (qtd. in Brown 351). Brown reads this reinscription of Margaret as Gaskell’s critique of “the high price a middle class woman must pay to fulfill the roles of moral arbiter, class mediator, and assimilator” (Brown 355). And, more recently, Reeder suggests that the text positions female agency as predicated on the deconstruction of the female body and subjectivity with it, arguing that it was this discursive construction of “woman” as a category that Gaskell’s novel actually comments on (par. 23-4). All of these views, however, only account for the traditional marriage plot in and of itself, ignoring what manual intercourse communicates. The novel ends with Margaret and John discussing their families’ likely reactions to their engagement. Margaret wonders how she will tell her Aunt Shaw to which John responds, “I can guess her first exclamation will be, “That man!”” Margaret follows this with, “Hush! [...] or I shall try and show your mother’s indignant tones as she says, “That woman!”” (Gaskell 425). While they do discuss the possible reactions of their maternal figures, they do not situate themselves within the family as Stevenson claims. In fact, their repartee suggests that the indignation of these maternal figures will bear little on Margaret and John’s future plans. They almost flout the once sacred notion of parental permission in this moment.

Beginning with Bodenheimer, other scholars have offered more radical perspectives on the significance of the end of the novel, views on which I would like to expand. Elliott reminds us that “the romantic marriage ending” has a practical function, “allow[ing] for a sense of closure and often offer[ing] a kind of compromise between the conflicting narratives of domestic and

political economy” (“Servants and Hands” 387). She suggests that the marriage between Margaret and John ultimately functions as “Gaskell’s metaphor for the newly constructed social sphere” (“Female Visitor” 49). Elaborating on this claim, Dredge views their marriage as symbolic of Gaskell’s political stance on women’s work and its place in the public sphere (Dredge 94). According to Pamela Corpron Parker, “Though ostensibly Margaret’s marriage vows will transfer all legal control of her property and capital to Thornton, it should be noted that Margaret doesn’t just give the money to Thornton but has her lawyer draw up a business contract that may act as a prenuptial agreement” (Parker 330). Thus, Margaret still retains a level of control over her property and thus herself. Harman focuses specifically on female sexuality, reading the ending as Gaskell’s commentary on the public female body, ultimately “legitimizing female public action and sexuality” (Harman 374). Interestingly, all of these critics speak generally about marriage and its figurative significance within the novel, none of them offering a close reading of any aspect of the final proposal and closing scene. I argue that Margaret and John’s final embrace, embodies these non-traditional readings and further reveals John’s own recognition of Margaret’s as a social body.

John recreates the embrace that occurred between himself and Margaret during the riot. In contrast to the earlier riot scene, this embrace occurs within the private space of the back drawing-room in Margaret’s once beloved Helstone in the rural South. The intimate nature of the space shields Margaret’s body and their embrace from outside, prying eyes. None but themselves interpret or participate in this moment. After Margaret reveals to John that she invested in him, she “sought to veil her luminous eyes by dropping her forehead on her hands,” a gesture of embarrassment, or even shame. (Gaskell 424). John calls to her to remove her hands from her face, each time moving closer to her until “she turned her face, still covered with her small white



hands, towards him, and laid it on his shoulder, hiding it even there” (424). Margaret acts with insecurity, struggling with her desire to act as a public individual and her sense of place as a woman in Helstone. When she chooses to invest some of her inheritance in John’s business and reject Mr. Lennox’s renewed advances, Margaret emerges as an individual distinct from the expectations of both her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith. Her choice to invest in John renders her a businesswoman as her acceptance of his proposal will publicly ratify her sexual maturity. John notes that “it was too delicious to feel her cheek against his,” but instead of turning her gesture from one of embarrassment over her public investment into one of private affection, he removes Margaret’s hands from her face (424). This manual intercourse, as his hands touch and remove hers, tells Margaret that she should not be ashamed of her public financial investment in his business nor in her public display of emotion, public in the sense of people openly knowing about it. In so doing, he begins to recognize Margaret’s public authority as an individual agent by encouraging her to let go of traditional feminine modesty and embrace the position that she desires.

John follows this by placing Margaret’s arms around his neck in the same protective pose that she once took to shield him from the rioters; this exchange holds both political and sexual significance. If we read John’s initial reaction to Margaret’s original protective embrace as an illustration of a rivalry for the dominant public position as Bodenheimer suggests, then his recreation of that embrace at the novel’s close embodies his acceptance and affirmation of Margaret’s social role. He positions her body to physically reflect her newly assumed role as partner; he does not propose to protect her virtue as he did before, and he communicates this to Margaret by placing her in the physical position that once protected him. His recreation of the embrace communicates his gratitude and humility towards Margaret who has invested in his new

model of industry that values a personal connection with laborers while recognizing their social independence.<sup>130</sup> His embrace recognizes Margaret's political and financial power. Margaret retains her hold finally entering into a reciprocal-body space with John. She not only consents to the contact, indicated in the fellow-feeling they both verbally express, but she engages her "response-ability" by embracing him. She decides to return his gesture, an individual political act and statement in itself. This tactile gesture further embodies their newfound sexual relationship as they enter into a close proximity that collapses all boundaries and distinctions between them. What Margaret once hailed as a "mechanical" gesture now proves an affectionate embrace. Their embrace communicates to each other and the reader that their marriage will not be a traditional one. Bodenheimer rightly suggests that "Margaret's most significant experience is to become a human agent in her own right—a process that means living with the doubleness of her actions, like the men who act and decide in the public sphere" (Bodenheimer 68). However, this final scene goes further suggesting that John too embraces Margaret's doubleness, her public agency. He recreates their earlier tactile encounter in order to express to her that he respects her as a public figure, even if that leaves her body open to public scrutiny.

Manual intercourse in *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *North and South* offers characters a means of expression when either voice or language fails them. These novels raise questions about women's social position and negotiate those questions through their characters' tactile interactions. Manual intercourse offers a reciprocal-body space that facilitates communication and understanding when successfully entered. When Jane and Edward enter that space through their later handshake at Ferndean, they find a balance between fleshly desire and spiritual duty, between individual sexual pleasure and moral and social integrity; when Helen

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<sup>130</sup> He negotiates with Higgins to finance a mess hall that the workers themselves are responsible for stocking and running, embodying a new ideology that is neither paternalist nor laissez-faire (Bodenheimer 58-9).

and Gilbert enter that space, they recognize each other as equal partners neither of whom will dominate the other in marriage, even if the law affords Gilbert political privileges—he rejects those privileges in favor of reciprocity; and, similarly, when Margaret and John enter a reciprocal-body space, he recognizes Margaret as an equal social agent rather than a woman in need of protection. Jane, Helen, and Margaret offer their respective hands, and thus sexual access to their bodies, only after they have achieved financial independence, rendering their tactile gestures ones of reciprocal desire rather than obligation and duty. The successful embrace that end these novels affirm the importance of manual intercourse throughout. Reading these novels through manual intercourse reveals how they offer alternative social models for female-male relations in which neither party need subjugate the other. The private nature of these final gestures suggests that, when engaged reciprocally, manual intercourse has the potential to transform, revealing that wider social change begins at home with the individual.

### Chapter III: Illicit Touch: An Affair of the Hand

I am ready to maintain that there are many females who never feel any sexual excitement whatever. Others, again, immediately after each period, do become, to a limited degree, capable of experiencing it; but this capacity is often temporary, and may entirely cease till the next menstrual period. Many of the best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little of or are careless about sexual indulgences. Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passion they feel.<sup>131</sup>

As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband's embraces, but principally to gratify him; and, were it not for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions.

—William Acton, *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1888; first pub. 1857), pp. 209-10

Dorothea had less of outward vision than usual this morning, being filled with images of things as they had been and going to be. She found herself on the other side of the door without seeing anything remarkable, but [...] advancing unconsciously a step or two beyond the projecting slab of a bookcase, she saw, in the terrible illumination of a certainty which filled up all outlines, something which made her pause motionless, without self-possession enough to speak.

Seated with his back towards her on a sofa [...] she saw Will Ladislaw: close by him and turned towards him with a flushed tearfulness which gave a new brilliancy to her face sat Rosamond, her bonnet hanging back, while Will leaning towards her clasped both her upraised hands in his and spoke with low-toned fervor.

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871), Bk. 8, Ch. 77

Arriving at the Lydgate house to deliver a letter to Rosamond's husband, Dorothea Causabon spies Rosamond and Will Ladislaw in an intimate embrace. In spite of the townspeople's "sullyng surmises" about Will's relationship with Rosamond, Dorothea has, up to this point, maintained her belief in Will's principled character and love of herself (*Middlemarch* 771). The manual intercourse that Dorothea witnesses leaves her stunned and speechless because it confronts her with the possibility of Will's misconduct and the reality of Rosamond's desire. The unmarried Will sits alone with Rosamond who Dorothea knows is both unsatisfied in and unstimulated by her current marriage. He looks into Rosamond's lovely, tear-stained face and

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<sup>131</sup> [Author's Note] The physiologist will not be surprised that the human female should in these respects differ but little from the female among animals. We well know it as a fact that the female animal will not allow the dog or stallion to approach her except at particular seasons. In many a human female, indeed, I believe, it is rather from the wish of pleasing or gratifying the husband than from any strong sexual feeling, that cohabitation is so habitually allowed. Certainly, during the months of gestation this holds good. I have known instances where the female has during gestation evinced positive loathing for any marital familiarity whatever. In some exceptional cases, indeed, feeling has been sacrificed to duty, and the wife has endured, with all the self-martyrdom of womanhood, what was almost worse than death.

passionately clasps her hands conveying his concern for her sorrow. Dorothea interprets the romantic intimacy of Will's gesture both in the reassuring contact his hands offer to Rosamond's and in the proximity their bodies share on the sofa. Such proximal contact between an unmarried man and a married woman without her husband's presence violates social mores and leads Dorothea to misinterpret their manual intercourse as amorous rather than consoling.

Dorothea alights on an illicit touch: manual intercourse that consciously transgresses social convention by acknowledging women as active sexual agents. Unlike the characters Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon, and Margaret Hale who the novels position as awakening to their sexual desires through manual intercourse, female characters such as Rosamond are depicted as transgressive because they actively employ manual intercourse in service of desire, acting out of boredom, dissatisfaction, or a combination thereof. As the quotation from William Acton's once popular treatise suggests, proper ladies seldom experience sexual longing or pleasure; motivated by domestic and reproductive duty, these women submit to their husband's carnal urges without seeking sexual gratification for themselves. Rosamond and Will's illicit touch, however, shocks Dorothea because it confronts her with Rosamond's amorous intentions and intimates Will's susceptibility to them. The narrator's description suggests that Rosamond intends her touch to be suggestive and thrills in her momentary ascendancy over Dorothea who misinterprets what she sees. However, Rosamond's pleasure is short lived as Will grows indignant with her for having sullied Dorothea's estimation of his character. Rosamond's self-indulgent aspirations for Will's affection fall flat as he snaps, "I would rather touch her [Dorothea's] hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living" (778). Will criticizes Rosamond for initiating the illicit handclasp that put him in such a position and withdraws his hand as punishment for her

unconcerned response. Rosamond's desires are represented as transgressive, and thus silenced, warning readers of the consequences of female desire that places personal pleasure before duty.

This example from *Middlemarch* employs manual intercourse to show that there are consequences for female characters who actively seek self-gratification beyond what their social situation offers. Turning attention to George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), and Thomas Hardy's short story "On the Western Circuit" (1891), the rest of this chapter will establish the centrality of illicit manual intercourse to narratives that explore the options society leaves open to female characters who actively pursue erotic gratification for pleasurable rather than either domestic or reproductive aims associated with their social positions. In contrast to Acton's claims about female sexuality, these texts reveal marriage and pregnancy as consequences—sometimes unfortunate consequences—of sexual indulgence rather than the inspiration behind it. Reading manual intercourse suggests that what shocked Victorian readers was not that people were having sex, but that women who were bored might self-consciously decide to amuse themselves in nontraditional ways.

### **I. The Touch That Thrills in Adam Bede**

In "Hetty's Hankie" (2005), J. Douglas Kneale asks of *Adam Bede*, "What reader has not had to back up on first reading to establish just when, exactly, Hetty got pregnant? How did we miss that?" (Kneale 140). More productively, we might ask *why* do we miss what to Victorian audiences would have been quite apparent? The erotics and communicatory character of touch have been muted in our times. We belong to a predominantly visual culture that leaves little to the imagination. What cannot be spoken or shown in today's world? We understand that caresses excite pleasure and that a harsh squeeze of the hand registers discontent, but we no longer depend on depictions of manual intercourse to convey inappropriate or ineffable emotion. To

Victorian readers steeped in a haptic culture, however, the moment when Arthur and Hetty consummate their mutual attraction would have been unmistakable given the manual flirtation that precedes it. I begin with this question in order to highlight the centrality of manual intercourse to both plot and characterization in Eliot's *Adam Bede*.<sup>132</sup> Manual intercourse reveals not only Hetty's passion for Arthur, but also Dinah's for Adam. In contrast to most critics who view Hetty and her cousin Dinah as opposites,<sup>133</sup> I argue that manual intercourse positions both women as similarly sexually desirous; both pursue romantic relationships based on mutual physical attraction and the possibility of sensual pleasure. However, while the novel acknowledges Hetty and Dinah as desiring subjects it simultaneously renders visible that in a patriarchal culture there exists no place outside of marriage for active female sexuality.

Initially unaware of each other's affection for Hetty Sorrell, both Captain Arthur Donnithorne, the heir to his grandfather's estate in Hayslope, and Adam Bede, a carpenter, find themselves enamored of Hetty's ideal beauty and long to feel her caress. However, as the narrator explains, Arthur's youthful visage, dapper appearance, and opulent lifestyle captivate Hetty who, having grown up working in the dairy at her uncle's farm, longs for a life of lavish luxury as opposed to one of domestic drudgery, which is all that Adam can offer her. Much like Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* or Becky Sharpe in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-

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<sup>132</sup> Peter Capuano offers a reading of the importance of hands to Eliot's depiction of ethnicity in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) in Chapter Three of his dissertation *Novel Hands: Victorian Fiction and the Narrative of Manuals* (2011). Other scholars have similarly noted the importance of handshakes in Eliot's novels. Phillip Griffith's 1973 article "Symbols of the Arm and Handclasp in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*" offers a reading of Adam and Arthur's relationship through the narrator's description of their manual intercourse, and Margaret Homans points to the symbolism of Maggie's arm in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* in her article "Dinah's Blush, Maggie's Arm: Class, Gender, and Sexuality in George Eliot's Early Novels" (1993). Taken collectively, these critical works suggest that hands, and as I will argue their touches, feature significantly across Eliot's body of work.

<sup>133</sup> Rosemary Gould, for example, claims that "Dinah Morris, the heroine of the novel, is everything that Hetty is not—intelligent, loving, and moral. The contrast between them is similar to that between Dorothea and Rosamond in *Middlemarch*" (273). While I do not deny that Hetty and Dinah function as foils, I do argue that by the end, the novel encourages us to question to what extent that contrast has been maintained. Both women prove susceptible to desire, though they channel their respective desires differently.

8), Hetty is a character describes as aspiring to a life of sumptuous comfort and independence, imagining that her physical allure will entice Arthur to marry her. Unlike Rosamond and Becky, however, Hetty has no head for social distinctions and does not realize that marriage with Arthur, heir to the Donnithorne estate, is never a possibility, though the narrator suggests that the other members of the Hayslope community are well aware of this fact. Hetty, however, places absolute faith in her exquisite beauty, assuming that if she and Arthur consummate their mutual attraction, he must marry her. Though Hetty associates economic ascension with voluptuary pleasure, their illicit manual intercourse reveals that Hetty does not pursue Arthur solely for his pecuniary prospects as the narrator would have us believe. Arthur's youthful, stately physique physically arouses her, leading to the genuine sexual attraction and emotional investment evidenced in their manual intercourse.

Hetty's cousin Dinah Morris finds herself caught in a similar love triangle between Adam and his younger brother Seth Bede. Dinah, a plain, chaste, and religious woman, rejects Seth's passionate proposal at the start of the novel because God, as she explains, has called her to minister to her people and thus her heart is not free to marry. Despite Seth's assurances that he would not interfere with her ministry and would, in fact, give her more liberty by earning their living, Dinah views him as a Christian brother and maintains that God did not mean her to be a wife and mother. Towards the end of the novel, however, Dinah experiences physical attraction and its temptations for the first time. While unattracted to Seth, Dinah finds Adam sexually stimulating and eventually accepts his marriage proposal, leaving behind her Methodist preaching for a domesticated life. Deviating from traditional readings of the novel, I argue that, Dinah, like Hetty, indulges her sexual desire when she marries Adam, and that the novel laments the fact that Dinah, like Hetty, is ultimately silenced for that indulgence.



*i. Hetty's Affair*

Attesting to tactility's centrality to Victorian narratives of desire, the narrator begins the chapter entitled "Hetty's World" by establishing a relationship between tactile stimulation and arousal. Acknowledging the relationship between emotional passion and physical arousal, the narrator notes that some human souls "will not vibrate in the least under a touch that fills others with tremulous rapture or quivering agony"—a philosophical claim to which he later returns in his discussion of Dinah's attraction to Adam (106). I refer here to the narrator as a "he" because, as Gillian Beer so deftly argues, *Adam Bede* was the last book that Eliot published "while her pseudonym still held its secret," suggesting that Mary Ann Evans the woman intended her novel to be read as if written by George Eliot the man (Beer 39, 58-9). Similarly to Beer, Nancy Ann Marck suggests that Hetty's "persistence in the novel opens the question of the male narrator's power to affect our reading of Eliot's other female characters, inviting us to reconsider narrative authority and transgressive female desire" (Marck 467). Though she does not address the narrator's sex, Rosemary Gould points to the narrator's hostility towards Hetty during the first part of the book (Gould 266). Assuming the maleness of the narrator encourages us as readers to question the gender politics that may underlie the judgment that he passes on Hetty's desires and the 'happiness' of the ending with which he leaves us. Thus, we must ask why Hetty's soul does not tremble under Adam's touch as it does Arthur's even though the narrator implies that it should.

The narrator first introduces readers to Hetty in the Hall Farm diary through the eyes of Arthur. Arthur, the narrator explains, watches Hetty's voluptuous body working at shaping the butter and Hetty, the narrator makes clear, takes pleasure in Arthur's attention. From her position in the dairy and the physical task that she performs, Hetty is described as an overtly sexual

haracter whose allure arouses Arthur, and thus the narrator positions her as both a danger to Arthur and to the community he oversees. As Alice Carroll shows, Victorians viewed the dairy as a gendered space emblematic of fertility and maternalism. Thus, Hetty's position within the dairy immediately establishes her as fertile character, but as one who denies the maternalist aims the dairy represents; she is fertile with no desire to be a mother, rendering her sexuality dangerous. Additionally, the narrator notes that Hetty transgresses convention later that evening when she fantasizes about the luxuries life with Arthur would afford her and thus elevates her sensual desires above the practicality of encouraging Adam as her suitor.<sup>134</sup> Taken in by her aunt and uncle the Poyzers, Hetty would have few future prospects other than acting as a servant if she did not marry, making the hardworking Adam a viable prospect in both Mr. and Mrs. Poyser's eyes. However, Hetty is not attracted to Adam even though she "liked to feel that this strong, skillful, keen-eyed man [Adam] was in her power," and so pursues a physical relationship with Arthur, unaware that it can never result in marriage (*Adam Bede* 108). The narrator's descriptions of and moral judgment about Hetty characterize Hetty as a danger to her community not only because of her interest in sensual pleasures, but also because of the power she exercises over the male exemplars of her community with her beauty. Her beauty and her open sexuality threatens to unman them, and send her community into disrepair by doing so.

Through his descriptions of what he considers Hetty's mercenary motivations, callous treatment of Adam, and vanity, the narrator chastises Hetty for aspiring above her situation and employing her beauty to enthrall Adam with no intention of returning his affections. However, Hetty's fantasies about the feel of Arthur's touch reveals her interest in physical pleasure and

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<sup>134</sup> See Uglow and Pyle for readings of the place of female imagination in *Adam Bede*.

attraction in addition to financial security. She desires Arthur because she is attracted to both his physical appearance and social position whereas Adam, I suggest, does not arouse her:

Her cheeks never grew a shade deeper when his name was mentioned; she felt no thrill when she saw him passing along the causeway by the window, or advancing towards her unexpectedly in the foot-path across the meadow; she felt nothing when his eyes rested on her, but the cold triumph of knowing that he loved her, and would not care to look at Mary Burge: he could no more stir in her the emotions that make the sweet intoxication of young love, than the mere picture of a sun can stir the spring sap in the subtle fibres of the plant. (*Adam Bede* 109)

The only gratification that Adam provides Hetty is the satisfaction of knowing that he admires her above all others, of knowing that Mary Burge envies the power she has over him. His name, his presence, his loving gaze excites neither physical nor emotional passion. However, the narrator describes Hetty's lack of attraction to Adam as resulting only from his impoverished situation and her monetary aims:

She saw him as he was—a poor man, with old parents to keep, who would not be able, for a long while to come, to give her even such luxuries as she shared in her uncle's house. And Hetty's dreams were all of luxuries: to sit in a carpeted parlour, and always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful earrings such as were all the fashion; to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown, and something to make her handkerchief smell nice, like Miss Lydia Donnithorne's when she drew it out at church; and not to be obliged to get up early or be scolded by anybody. She thought, if Adam had been rich and could have given her these things, she loved him well enough to marry him. (109)

While Hetty's materialist aims throughout the novel are undeniable, this passage establishes a correlation between material wealth and authority. Hetty's desire to indulge in such luxuries comes from a more deep-seated lust for control over her life, a lust "not to be obliged to get up early or be scolded by anybody." We learn from Hetty's conversations with her Aunt Poyser when Arthur first visits Ha; Farm that she, Hetty, resents the responsibility her aunt places on her, especially when it comes to Totty, the Poyser's toddler. Hetty longs for a way out of her current social situation, which she assumes wealth will facilitate. Hetty seeks a position of social

authority in her fantasies of life with Arthur, not merely gratification of her vanity as the narrator would have us believe. Hetty does not find Adam attractive because he offers her the same life—the same gendered position that will keep her a laborer and domestic subject with no ability to gratify her own passions. She aspires to more than the life of her Aunt Poyser or that of Lisbeth Bede, Adam’s mother. In contrast to scholars such as Jay Clayton who view Hetty’s social aspirations as separate from her sexuality, I suggest that Hetty’s more carnal longings prove profoundly connected to her lust for luxury. In Hetty’s eyes, Arthur derives his sexual power partially from his class status; she sees him as worldly, experienced. Hetty craves the power that comes with wealth, but she also yearns for sexual stimulation, engaging the illicit manual intercourse that Arthur initiates in pursuit of both.

Rather than withdrawing from it as the narrator earlier seems to suggest, Hetty yearns to “vibrate” from a touch that fills her “with tremulous rapture” (106). The narrator implies that if Adam had been rich that Hetty “loved him well enough to marry him,” but this sentiment does not propose that his wealth alone would arouse in her a passionate attraction. Arthur is five years younger than Adam and wealthier, suggesting that his youth and opulence would render him more physically attractive than Adam who has spent his years performing hard manual labor. Though Arthur’s affluence undoubtedly contributes to his desirability, Hetty remembers her encounter with Arthur fondly because of the physical excitation she experiences:

[...] her inward life had consisted of little else than living through in memory the looks and words Arthur had directed towards her—of little else than recalling the sensations with which she heard his voice outside the house, and saw him enter, and became conscious that his eyes were fixed on her, and then became conscious that a tall figure, looking down her with eyes that seemed to touch her, was coming nearer in clothes of beautiful texture, with an odour like that of a flower-garden borne on the evening breeze. Foolish thoughts! (110)

Unlike Adam whose name, sight and gaze stir nothing in Hetty, she thrills in the nearly palpable memory of Arthur's voice, looks and presence. The sensual appeal of his opulent clothing and fragrant scent only further titillate her senses. Hetty's fantasies of Arthur acknowledge her sexual impulses and promise indulgent release rather than the tepid stability life with Adam would guarantee. Though Hetty and Arthur's manual intercourse reveals that what begins for both as physical attraction matures into a more passionate romance, Arthur knows that no matter his feelings he cannot marry Hetty because he will inherit his grandfather's property and stewardship of Hayslope. Therein lies the danger of Hetty's charm as the narrator describes it. Whereas the power of her beauty threatens to unman Adam by preventing him from finding satisfaction with more appropriate female partners like Mary Burge, it more radically jeopardizes the state of the whole Hayslope community because of Arthur's weakness to its allure. The narrator positions Hetty as a social threat to her community because she acts on her desire and aspires beyond her current social position.

Though the narrator never expressly describes Hetty and Arthur's copulation, Victorian audiences would have recognized the erotic nature of their relationship in the detailed descriptions of both their actual and imagined manual intercourse. The first time that Hetty and Arthur meet alone in Fir-tree Grove, Hetty cries because Arthur teases her about having feelings for Craig, the gardener. Hetty soon "felt an arm steal round her" in attempt to curb her tears (144). This first embrace begins their romance. Arthur follows this initial clasp by placing "his hand on the soft arm that was nearest to him, and stooping towards Hetty with a look of coaxing entreaty" (144). This embrace combined with the initial attention he pays to Hetty when he visits the Poyser farm encourages both her affection and marital fantasy. Arthur knows that he cannot marry Hetty, a restriction made clear later when Mr. Irwine, the parish rector, admonishes him to

“fall in love in the right place, and don’t get a wife who will drain your purse and make you niggardly in spite of yourself” (186). Arthur’s duty is to Hayslope and Mr. Irwine, along with the narrator, views Hetty’s beauty as a possible threat; she possesses the physical allure capable of coaxing Arthur into spending his inheritance irresponsibly and leaving his community destitute. Arthur engages Hetty in illicit manual intercourse that she reciprocates: “What a space of time those three moments were, while their eyes met and his arms touched her!” (144). Rather than rejecting his embrace, Hetty consents to it, indulging her own appetites. Arthur’s embrace spurs her attraction for him by reassuring her of his affection and suggesting the erotic trajectory of their relationship. Hetty interprets Arthur’s clasp as evidence of his love because no one in her community has educated her about the social politics of marriage. As I mention in the Introduction, Hetty has not read novels and thus, much as Hardy’s Tess, has not learned “what to fend hands against” (*Tess* 98-9). Hetty initially assumes that Arthur will marry her should pregnancy deem it necessary, unaware that his social position may restrict his marital prospects. For that reason, Hetty surrenders to her own desires once she learns that Arthur reciprocates them.

Realizing that he has impulsively embraced Hetty in response to her tears and fearing that his gesture may only inflame her passion for him further, Arthur attempts to regulate himself by tempering their manual intercourse. The narrator explains that after releasing her from his embrace, “He [Arthur] just pressed her hand, and said, with a look and tone that were almost chilling to her—‘I have been hindering you; I must not keep you any longer’” (144). By pressing her hand gently and then quickly breaking contact, Arthur employs traditional etiquette hoping to convey platonic affection rather than romantic desire. However, later that evening when Hetty and Arthur meet again in the grove, his weakness to both her beauty and her sorrow renders him

susceptible to his fleshly desires. Overwhelmed with the strength of his attraction to her, Arthur loses control himself: “His [Arthur’s] arm stealing round the waist again, it is tightening its clasp; he is bending his face nearer and nearer to the round cheek, his lips are meeting those pouting child lips, and for a long moment time has vanished” (150). Encouraged by his lack of self-control, Hetty reciprocates his clasp, his kiss, trying to maintain his interest and naively assuming that “he must love her very much—no one else had ever put his arm round her and kissed her” (165). In contrast to Arthur, Adam adheres to traditional etiquette, only offering Hetty his arm while walking or his hand in friendly recognition if the social situation calls for it; he never dares embrace her without her first consenting.

Hetty and Arthur’s manual intercourse intensifies as time nears the dance that will mark Arthur’s coming of age. We learn just before the dance that “his arm [is] no longer in a sling” (278). To a Victorian audience keyed into the hands and arms as sexual appendages, this bit of information suggests that as Arthur officially enters into manhood, he gains full control over his body’s erotic functions. Recognizing Arthur’s virility, Hetty grows excited at the possibility that he will take her hand and privately communicate his continued amatory interest while publicly acknowledging her as an intimate acquaintance: “How Hetty’s heart beat as Arthur approached her! He had hardly looked at her to-day; now he *must* take her hand. Would he press it? would he look at her? She thought she would cry if he gave her no sign of feeling. Now he was there—he had taken her hand—yes, he was pressing it” (310; italics original).<sup>135</sup> As the narrator describes it, Hetty believes that based on both the current social situation and their previous manual intercourse that Arthur “*must* take her hand,” the italics highlighting the fervency of and desire

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<sup>135</sup> Directly following this scene, the narrator turns his lens on Adam’s perspective, noting Adam’s awareness of the fact that he “had hardly ever touched Hetty’s hand for more than a transient greeting—had never danced with her but once before” and now “he might go up to her and claim her hand” (311). Hetty, however, has no interest in Adam’s embrace nor is she conscious of his desire to “claim her hand.”

behind that belief. However, whether or not he will press it as a means of indicating a deeper affection to her alone, Hetty remains less certain. In Hetty's view, if Arthur chooses to press her hand he will validate her belief that he loves her, suggesting that marriage is inevitable and absolving her of guilt or worry about sexual relations that may precede the event. Though most critics assume with the narrator that Hetty's interest in Arthur is purely fiscal, along with J. Hillis Miller I too argue that "She is really falling in love with Arthur" (Miller 23). Hetty reciprocates his manual intercourse rather than tempers it; she is not simply seduced by Arthur as other critics have suggested, nor is she simply interested in Arthur for his wealth as the narrator would have us believe.<sup>136</sup> Arthur's manual intercourse betrays his attraction to Hetty, giving her license to acknowledge her own. Holding Hetty's hand while dancing with her, Arthur whispers, "I shall be in the wood the day after to-morrow at seven; come as early as you can" (*Adam Bede* 314). Hetty transgresses traditional gender ideology by not saying no, by indulging her fantasy of social ascension, and by acting on carnal desires as opposed to moral dictates. Her community punishes her for what the narrator views as her indulgence.

To answer the question at the start of this section—where is the sex act in *Adam Bede*?—we must consider what Adam sees the day he spots Hetty with Arthur in the wood. Adam alights on Hetty and Arthur: "The two figures were standing opposite to each other, with clasped hands about to part; and while they were bending to kiss, Gyp [Adam's dog], who had been running among the brushwood, came out, caught sight of them, and gave a sharp bark" (324). Hetty and Arthur stand in proximal relation facing each other with hands embracing; Dorothea witnesses a similar sight when she discovers Rosamond and Will on the sofa. The narrator's recognition that their "clasped hands [are] about to part," suggests their engagement in a distinctly amorous clasp

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<sup>136</sup> Beth Burch, for example, offers a reading of *Adam Bede* as a rewriting of the Red Riding Hood fable wherein Arthur acts as the big bad wolf who tempts Hetty.



according to *The Habits of Good Society* (1859) published shortly after *Adam Bede*. Gyp's bark disrupts their interlude and they break contact in the presence of Adam to conceal, if possible, the extent of their affair. However, Adam understands the significance of their clasp and rejects the friendly hand that Arthur offers to register his disapproval of Arthur's behavior. The text represents Hetty and Arthur's manual intercourse as illicit because it gratifies their sexual urges but, in so doing, disrupts the patriarchal order.<sup>137</sup>

Adam separates Hetty and Arthur's hands forever when he forces Arthur to acknowledge his malfeasance by writing Hetty a letter ending their affair and thus affording Hetty a chance at a respectable marriage. However, as Hetty's previous manual intercourse with Arthur suggests, Hetty craves more from married life than a respectable man who will provide for her, a desire for which the narrator continually criticizes her, encouraging readers to view it as purely about material wealth and opulence rather than about personal pleasure and social satisfaction. Initially not believing what Adam says about the letter's contents, Hetty comforts herself before reading it "by looking backward to build confidence on past words and caresses" (349). She trusts the sentiment their manual intercourse haptically conveyed and her disappointment at reading Arthur's letter resigns her to life with Adam as an acceptable prospect. Even after Arthur abandons Hetty, she finds no physical excitement in her interactions with Adam: "It was nothing to her—putting her arm through Adam's; but she knew he cared a great deal about having her arm through his, and she wished him to care" (389). Her soul still does not vibrate under his hand. Even when Adam proposes to Hetty after she has genuinely come to care for him, Hetty experiences no excitement at his caress, highlighting that the social purpose of marriage is to shore up social relations and hierarchy. The narrator carefully notes their physical closeness in the moment that Adam proposes: "His right hand held her left, and he pressed her arm close

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<sup>137</sup> See Griffith for a reading of the symbolism attached to Adam's rejection of Arthur's gesture.

against his heart as he leaned down towards her” (390). Unlike Arthur whose gestures conveyed romantic passion, Adam’s communicate gentle affection—adoration rather than desire. Hetty accepts Adam’s embrace but does not fully reciprocate it; she cannot because she does not experience the same physical passion, caring for him more like a brother than a lover. As Adam lovingly holds her hand pressing it to his heart, Hetty thinks only that “She wanted to be caressed—she wanted to feel as if Arthur were with her again” (390). Her longing for the emotional and physical titillation that Arthur’s caress would excite suggests that her interest in Arthur extended beyond his pocketbook. Yet, the narrator criticizes Hetty for the fact that “Adam’s attachment to her, Adam’s caress, stirred no passion in her” (391). Hetty found her manual intercourse with Arthur liberating because it gratified her sensual desires. Adam’s embrace, however, subsumes Hetty rather than liberates her. He offers her a respectable life, but also one of domestic servitude with little possibility of erotic gratification. She will submit to Adam’s urges as her duty rather than because she actively reciprocates them. But, it is too late; Hetty’s sexuality has already marked her in the eyes of her community.

Hetty is the one punished for the inevitable “consequences” borne of her copulation with Arthur despite the fact that Arthur initiates their manual intercourse, knowing full well “the probable consequences of giving way to the emotions which had stolen over him to-day [...] of allowing himself any opportunity for such slight caresses as he has been betrayed into already” (151). Though Hetty chooses to abandon her child by Arthur in a field, reading their illicit manual intercourse reveals Arthur’s complicity in Hetty’s decision and suggests that Hetty is punished for the erotic indulgence that diverts Arthur’s attention away from his moral obligations as a leader of the Hayslope community.

Hetty's reputation is undermined not just by the consequences of her transgressive behavior with Arthur, but even more so by what the narrator and the members of her community say about her and her desires. The narrator tells us derogatorily that images of young children and baby animals "never touched Hetty with any pleasure," using the term "pleasure" to establish Hetty's erotic sexuality as a direct threat to her reproductive destiny (169). Pleasure, not maternity motivates Hetty's passions, which the narrator and her community looks on with disdain. Hetty challenges her gender role by consciously engaging her desire for Arthur and the life that he offers and ignoring first her familial and then her maternal duties. Marriage to Adam would fiscally benefit the Poysers. For Hetty, recognizable sexual satisfaction in marriage is deeply connected to her fantasy of social ascension: "Captain Donnithorne is very close to her, putting his arm round her, perhaps kissing her, and everybody else is admiring and envying her" (168). Rather than desiring that the members of her community admire and envy her newfound wealth and status alone, Hetty instead dreams of everyone "admiring and envying" the amorous passion she experiences in Arthur's capable hands. She imagines an erotic relationship rather than a normative domestic and reproductive one like that to which Dinah finally resigns herself. Hetty wants her family and the people of Hayslope to admire her beauty and envy her sexual happiness as much as her class ascent. For Hetty, enamoring Arthur means gaining a level of authority in her community, control over herself, and the right to sensual indulgence. As Gillian Beer points out, Eliot's "treatment of Hetty is also a radical challenge to stereotypical portrayals of virgins and fallen women" (Beer 69).<sup>138</sup> Hetty is not simply a victim taken advantage of by a

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<sup>138</sup> Beer suggests that Eliot offers a revision of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) by endowing Hetty with awareness and agency rather than rendering her an innocent, unknowing victim (Beer 70). In a different vein, Nancy Paxton argues that Hetty is Eliot's response to Miltonic musings on female beauty and Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinist argument that beautiful women produce stronger offspring. Rosemary Gould makes a similar case, suggesting that "Eliot wants to argue that childishness ought not to be an ideal quality in adult women, that the idealization of women as children causes great harm" (Gould 264).

seducer; she has agency and consciously, aspiring to more than her standard social prospects. The narrator's discomfort with Hetty's sexual and social aspirations, evidenced in her illicit manual intercourse with Arthur, calls attention not only to Hetty's desires, but also to her social vulnerability—her community does not educate her in the ways of the world.

Hetty's choice to abandon her infant—her rejection of motherhood as the appropriate channel for her eroticism—has received much critical attention over the years. At the time that Eliot wrote *Adam Bede*, infanticide was a popular topic of public debate not only because of the sensationalized trial of Mary Newell in 1858 for the murder of her three-month-old (*Adam Bede* was published only one year after), but also because of mid-century anxieties about the changing roles of women; commentaries on infanticide supported the ideal of self-sacrificing, nurturing womanhood, for what type of mother could callously kill her child (Hunt 71, 74). Despite the popularity of Newell's trial, however, Elaine Lawless shows that Eliot drew her inspiration for the story not just from recent news reports, but rather from an experience told her by her Methodist Aunt Samuel who spent a night in prison praying with a woman to be executed for murdering her child and not confessing it.<sup>139</sup> Margaret Homans argues that Hetty's self-interest poses a danger to her community, "her crime of infanticide surely qualif[y]ing her as monstrous" and demanding her excision from the novel (Homans 167). In a similar vein, Gould asserts that Eliot's modern perspective was not sympathetic to Hetty's plight, rather positioning her and other infanticidal "women as examples of what is to be eliminated from English society if it is to

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<sup>139</sup> Lawless cites Eliot's journal entry from 30 November 1858: "The germ of 'Adam Bede' was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel [...] [who] had visited a condemned criminal, a very ignorant girl who had murdered her child and refused to confess—how she stayed with her praying, through the night and how the poor creature at last broke out into tears, and confessed her crime" (qtd. in Lawless 251-2).

prosper” (Gould 268).<sup>140</sup> According to Gould, Eliot’s novel works to deter illicit sexuality by revealing how “the lack of restraint of unmarried lower-class women threatened the wealth and security of the entire country” (269). Aeron Hunt points to the frequency of premarital sex among “lower-class country girls and young working women” in Victorian culture, citing an 1856 article entitled “Infanticide,” which explains that in cases where the man refuses marriage if pregnancy occurs, infanticide proves a commonplace practice to ensure future marriageability (Hunt 73). Nancy Henry’s biography of Eliot suggests that “information about birth control was certainly available to Eliot and Lewes, [...] though not to Eliot’s rural mothers in fictions set in the early decades of the century” (Henry 119, n.19). Hunt further considers the economic dimensions of the infanticide debates of the time, which positioned the infanticidal mother as a “figure of degraded economic womanhood, [who] markets and speculates on her body’s sexual and reproductive potency” (Hunt 82). Deborah Logan claims that “Hetty’s falseness is distinguished by her lack of ‘maternal instinct’”—her refusal to perform remorse at her trial—“an apparently more serious charge than illicit sexuality” (Logan 118-9).<sup>141</sup> Yet, while the narrator’s hostility towards Hetty encourages readings that divorce Hetty from her sexuality, the text proves more critical of the society that produced such an erotic consciousness as Hetty’s and then condemns her for the consequences borne of its indulgence.

Hetty’s lack of maternal instinct, her lack of a public display of feminine remorse at either the death of her child or her sexual indiscretion, and her social aspirations render her a

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<sup>140</sup> Gould makes her case for the Eliot’s ‘modern’ view by suggesting that, in some ways, it anticipates the perspective that Matthew Arnold espouses in his “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864) where attempts to humanize a woman, Wragg, who murdered her child, but only does so because “he sees her existence as a problem, one that undermines his society” (Gould 264).

<sup>141</sup> As many critics have observed, Gould asserts that the charge of “unnaturalness has to do with Hetty’s sex [her gendered position], and yet not with her sexuality” (Gould 267). In other words, she is punished because she refuses to perform publicly feminine remorse over the death of her infant, not because of her affair with Arthur.

social threat because she places self-gratification above perceived communal welfare, what Marck reads as the dangers of Hetty's "female narcissism" (Marck 456). Even during her trial, she refuses to conform to societal expectations with an effusive performance of contrition, straying from the traditional fallen woman trope: "the unnaturalness of her crime stood out the more harshly by the side of her hard immovability and obstinate silence" (*Adam Bede* 474). Hetty denies public access to her psyche and sexuality. In contrast to Homans, Gould, and Logan, Harriet F. Adams offers a more sympathetic reading of Hetty, suggesting that Eliot consciously constructs the pregnancy as premature in order to force readers to contend with the fact that Hetty's sexual indiscretion (the event that led to her pregnancy) and not the infanticide was put on trial: "The underlying charge appears to be pregnancy, the indisputable sign of the unregulated and illicit sexual activity which is the unspoken crime" (Adams 66). I build on Adam's reading to suggest that the specter of active female sexual desire haunts both Hetty and Dinah in the novel and requires their silencing as its sacrifice; Eliot's novel reveals the cultural discomfort with female sexual desire interested in self-gratification above reproductive or marital duty.

Reading Hetty and Arthur's illicit manual intercourse reveals his clear complicity in her pregnancy and subsequent malefaction, as well as the erotic challenge that Hetty poses to female domesticity, to maternity, and to the patriarchal order through them. Interestingly, Adam questions Hetty's guilt and declares Arthur's complicity shortly after Mr. Irwine informs him of Hetty's crime: "'It's *his* doing,' he said; 'if there's been any crime, it's at his door, not at hers. *He* taught her to deceive—*he* deceived me first. Let 'em put him on his trial—let him stand in court beside her, and I'll tell 'em how he got hold of her heart, and 'ticed her t' evil, and then lied to me. Is he to go free, while they lay all the punishment on her...so weak and young?'" (*Adam*

*Bede* 444; italics original). As their manual intercourse shows, Arthur initiates his affair with Hetty the first time that he embraces her hand and follows that by placing his arm around her waist. He encourages Hetty's affection for him by gratifying her passions. Yet, it also reveals Hetty's own passions in her reciprocation of his gesture. Adam wants to think of Arthur as a seducer to preserve his idea of Hetty as a deceived victim, ignoring her desire and stripping her of subjective agency. Hetty, however, remains silent at her trial, refusing to allow society to view her as simply a victim; she refuses to testify in her own defense and refuses to perform remorse while sitting in the courtroom. Her unfeminine stoicism denies all in attendance access to her motivations and the satisfaction of pitying her.

Adam identifies Arthur's crime as deception, though importantly Adam sees that deception as directed at Adam himself, not just at Hetty. For this reason, Arthur must reconcile with Adam at the end of the novel as a means of restoring the patriarchal order. Despite Adam's early vociferous protests, he does not interfere with Hetty's trial or sentencing. Hetty finds peace in Dinah's hands, not those of Arthur, Adam, or God. Significantly, when Dinah visits Hetty in her prison cell the night before the verdict, Hetty accepts Dinah's embrace. They do not speak initially, but rather sit there while Hetty "clutch[es] the hand that held hers and lean[s] her cheek against Dinah's. It was the human contact she clung to, but she was not the less sinking into the dark gulf" (487). Dinah's warm touch encourages Hetty to confess her sin, but does not treat Hetty as a victim. Dinah holds Hetty culpable for her infanticide, but does not criticize her sexual indiscretions. Though I do not seek to recuperate Hetty as a moral character or merely an innocent victim of her social situation, I do suggest that Hetty's community vilifies her for indulging desires that challenge gender conventions by acknowledging her erotic passions. The text shows through Hetty's trial and Dinah's future marriage that there exists no place for female

sexuality in Hayslope apart from either marital or maternal duty. In revealing this, however, the text denaturalizes it, leaving readers unsettled by the “happy ending” that requires that Dinah leave her profession as a preacher and marry Adam in order to satisfy appropriately her desire for him.

*ii. Dinah's Marriage*

The narrator characterizes sexual passion in both Hetty and Dinah in terms of the sense of touch, yet he characterizes Hetty's manual intercourse with Arthur as communicating merely material desire while Dinah's with Adam has Divine Sanction. Like Jane Eyre who restrains her fleshly cravings in recognition of her spiritual dictates, Dinah too initially acts with temperance, forsaking her own desires in adherence to her spiritual calling. When Adam's mother Lisbeth realizes that he loves Dinah, she asks Dinah to remain with them. Dinah responds, “Your wish for me to stay is not a call of duty which I refuse to hearken to because it is against my own desires; it is a temptation that I must resist, lest the love of the creature should become like a mist in my soul shutting out the heavenly light” (520). She expresses a similar sentiment when Adam first proposes, identifying her fleshly desires as temptations designed to lead her away from her spiritual calling: “For in all other affection I had been content with any small return, or with none, but my heart was beginning to hunger after an equal love from you. And I had no doubt that I must wrestle against that as a great temptation; and the command was clear that I must go away” (555). Dinah describes this temptation as a tactile gesture, as a calling for proximal contact that we have learned from Hetty's experiences with Arthur means erotic contact. Dinah explains, “It seems to me as if you were stretching your arms to me, and beckoning me to come and take my ease, and live for my own delight” (555). Whereas Hetty experiences sensual pleasures as a form of social independence, Dinah's independence comes from her preaching.



Dinah knows that the only acceptable way of indulging her newfound erotic longing for Adam is marriage, which would tie her to her flesh. The restraint that Dinah exerts in this moment not only rejects fleshly temptation but also marital union in attempt to ensure that she will retain authority over herself; if she gives into her desires, she must give into marriage and thus sacrifice the independence that she maintains as an unwed, Methodist preacher.

Many critics have expressed dissatisfaction with Dinah's choice to marry Adam rather than Seth (a dissatisfaction, I suggest, that proves similar to the narrator's frustration that Hetty chooses Arthur above Adam, whom he notes is clearly the better match). Elaine Lawless argues that Dinah is silenced at the end of the novel because she gives way to her sexual urges: "Women, especially pious and devout women, must not allow themselves to experience sexual urges. Not even Hetty breaks this rule. She is not sexually attracted to Arthur Donnithorne; she is attracted by the fact that he is sexually attracted to *her*"—the Lacanian notion that all desire is desire for the desire of the other (Lawless 262; italics original). While I build on Lawless's claim that Dinah is, in fact, a sexual character, I suggest that the narrator views Dinah's marriage to Adam as a happy ending because she assumes the role 'natural' to her gender and that only by comparing Dinah's fate with that of Hetty might we discern how and why Eliot's text itself is more critical. Though I have already shown that Hetty was attracted to Arthur and did indulge her sexual urges in contrast to Lawless' claim, the difference between Hetty's experiences and Dinah's is that Hetty rejects the maternal calling that inevitably proceeds from those urges whereas Dinah not only embraces hers but further allows her hand to be subsumed in Adam's.

When Dinah initially rejects Seth's proposal, all that we are told about how she feels about it is that "Dinah pressed his hand with rather a sad look in her loving eyes and then passed through the gate, while Seth turned away to walk lingeringly home" (*Adam Bede* 42). Her

pressing of his hand communicates both her platonic sorrow at having hurt him and suggests that she retains the authority in their relationship. Contrast this tempered reaction with her reaction to Adam's proposal above. There is no desire in this description. She does not yearn to "live for her own delight" in Seth's arms as she later does Adam's, recalling Hetty's female narcissism albeit, according to the narrator's assessment, properly channeled. The narrator validates Dinah's attraction to Adam by returning to his earlier metaphor of the soul that vibrates under the right hand. Having entered Adam's office, Dinah hears a voice from behind her and, we are told, "It was as if Dinah had put her hands unawares on a vibrating chord; she was shaken with an intense thrill, and for the instant felt nothing else; then she knew her cheeks were glowing, and dared not look round, but stood still, distressed because she could not say good-morning in a friendly way" (536). Though Dinah only hears Adam's voice, its haptic effect signals to the reader the erotic nature of their relationship and their subsequent manual intercourse is composed of "the tremulous touches, by which two human souls approach each other gradually" (537). While the narrator describes Dinah and Adam's tactile communion as spiritual in nature because their souls connect on a deeper level, the passage alone highlights an erotic connection similar to that between Hetty and Arthur. However, Dinah must justify the indulgence of her desire by establishing it as possessed of divine sanction, and thus she later explains when she accepts Adam's proposal, "'Adam,' she said, 'it is the Divine Will. My soul is so knit to yours that it is but a divided life I live without you. And this moment, now you are with me, and I feel that our hearts are filled with the same love, I have a fullness of strength to bear and do our heavenly Father's Will, that I had lost before'" (580). According to Dinah's figuration, Adam's embrace, his love will now mediate her spiritual duty, directing it towards their children.<sup>142</sup> Dinah's desire

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<sup>142</sup> Though I have not made much of it, *Adam Bede* is set during the last few years of the eighteenth century, a century that saw much debate about the spiritual condition of motherhood. Nicole Garret explains that in

for Adam leads her to marriage, a socially and Divinely sanctioned covenant in which she can freely indulge that passion as the narrator represents it. Knowing full well the dearth of options open to women who indulge their carnal appetites outside of the bonds of matrimony, Dinah accepts that, by surrendering to her desire, she must also surrender herself to the patriarchal order. Eliot's novel reveals that female desire and female silence go hand-in-hand.

According to the narrator, by accepting and reciprocating Adam's gesture, Dinah opens her soul to his: "Those slight words and looks and touches are part of the soul's language, and the finest language I believe, is chiefly made up of unimposing words, such as 'light', 'sound', 'starts', 'music', — words really not worth looking at, or hearing, in themselves, any more than 'chips' or 'sawdust': it is only that they happen to be the signs of something unspeakably great and beautiful" (538). However, a touch is not merely a language composed of signs. Touches do not simply signify things "unspeakably grand and beautiful," they are the embodiment of such things and thus communicate human passion whether base or transcendent. The narrator suggests that Hetty and Arthur's manual intercourse does not represent romantic love in all its divine beauty as Adam's and Dinah's does. Rather, according to the narrator Hetty and Arthur's manual intercourse indulges eroticism—carnal desires that do not proceed from a Divine Will. However, reading the manual intercourse between these two sets of characters betrays that Dinah acts on desire and physical attraction even though she reassures herself and the narrator reassures us that such desire is Divine Will. What the illicit manual intercourse between Hetty and Arthur reveal in this novel is not simply sex, but rather the threat that unchecked female sexual desire poses to

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the eighteenth century motherhood was a spiritual calling that required male mediation: "masculine guidance is indispensable to female salvation [...] and her salvation is inextricable from the duties of Christian motherhood" (Ch. 1). Despite this, during the eighteenth century religious motherhood also functioned as a mode of resistance in that it began to reject this type of mediation as patriarchy grew ever more secular. In light of Garret's argument, one could suggest that *Adam Bede* might participate in this conversation to an extent, exploring the contemporary relationship between religion, patriarchy, and motherhood. Where Eliot revises eighteenth-century perspectives, however, would be in her vision of motherhood as a form of subjugation rather than a mode of resistance.

patriarchy with the unsettling ending functioning as a criticism of the fact. Dinah has no other option but to resign herself to the domestic sphere in order to avoid Hetty's fate. Hetty rejects those duties to which Dinah subjects herself in order to gratify her desire for Adam.

Reading *Adam Bede* through the lens of tactility reveals that there exists no place outside of marriage for active female desire in a patriarchal society—homoerotic relationships are never posited as an option; both women are silenced because they have no options. Unlike Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon, and Margaret Hale, who find marriage sexually liberating, illicit manual intercourse in Eliot's novel reveals the limits of marital union: one does not always have the luxury of marrying who one finds attractive, marrying into an equal partnership, or inheriting a fortune. Joan Bennett following Suzanne Graver argues that in George Eliot's early work "the central drama had sprung from a tension between the individual and the community; she had posed her characters with the problem of adapting their personal desires, noble or selfish, to the inescapable surrounding conditions represented by an organic society" (Bennett 84). I build on this idea by suggesting that female erotic desire functions as the tension between the individual and the community in *Adam Bede*. While the male narrator of the novel seems to offer his readers a 'happy' ending with the soul mates Dinah and Adam joined in matrimonial bliss, I argue that Mary Ann Evans' novel actively fuels skepticism about the 'happiness' that Dinah finds as Adam's wife. Though he arouses her body, he likewise stifles her once independent soul; she ends up housebound, assuming the place of Adam's mother in the domestic, and unable to preach or do anything other than agree with Adam's assertion that the new law that prevents women from preaching is a good one, ensuring their focus on familial obligations. Hetty's excision and Dinah's silencing suggest that marriage is the only acceptable avenue available to women in a patriarchal society for respectably acknowledging their personal desires. Because

they indulge their eroticism, Hetty must be sacrificed and Dinah must sacrifice her independence. The text suggests that, for Dinah, marriage is not a reward, but a sentence. By the end, Eliot's novel reveals Hetty and Dinah's similarly trapped, but it has no alternative path to offer.

## II. Sexual Tactics in *The Romance of a Shop*

Similarly to Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888) also invokes illicit manual intercourse as a means of conveying and commenting on the dangers of female erotic desire indulged outside of marriage (without marriage as the ultimate goal), though it offers a slightly more optimistic view. *The Romance of a Shop* relates the business adventures of Frances, Gertrude, Lucy and Phyllis Lorimer,<sup>143</sup> who are left with £600 on which to survive after their father dies. To avoid separation, the Lorimers decide to open their own photography shop.<sup>144</sup> Most articles written about *The Romance of a Shop* focus on the novel's investment in photography as a nonverbal mode of representation and the character of Gertrude whom several critics have claimed most resembles Levy herself. Deborah Epstein Nord's "Neither Pairs nor Odd: Female Community in Later Nineteenth-Century London" (1990) offers the first full-length study of Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* that reads the novel's gender politics through the lens of urban spaces and Levy's own female community. Following Nord, scholars such as Kate Flint and Daniel Wanczyk have read the novel's gender politics through the lens of photography as a rhetorical strategy through which the novel emphasizes the role of vision in public agency.

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<sup>143</sup> Frances is thirty-years-old and the eldest of the four sisters. She is also only a half-sister to the other three Lorimers on their father's side. Gertrude, Lucy and Phyllis are twenty-three-, twenty-, and seventeen-years-old respectively.

<sup>144</sup> As women, the Lorimers would either need to take up work as governesses or go and live in pairs with either family friends, the Devonshires, or relatives, the Pratts, who have invited them. In either case, they would end up separated and unable to earn a living wage that would afford them any semblance of independence. As Gertrude explains it, dissatisfied with these options, "But a business—that is so different. It is progressive; a creature capable of growth; the very qualities in which women's work is dreadfully lacking" (Levy 55).

Still others, such as Emma Liggins, Elizabeth F. Evans, and Emma Francis have highlighted the novel's use of space—particularly the urban city—in representing concerns about the social position of women during the 1880s, the decade during which women were beginning to attend college, work for a living, and act more publically in the world at large. However, rather than offer yet another reading of Gertrude or her photographic vision, I turn my lens, so to speak, towards the illicit manual intercourse and erotic desires of Lucy and Phyllis, the two youngest Lorimer sisters. Whereas Phyllis is ultimately silenced for indulging her passions much like Hetty and Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Lucy is validated for choosing to marry the man that excites her passion as opposed to the one who, economically speaking, would make the most respectable match. In contrast to those men in *Jane Eyre* and *North and South*, those traits never seem to go hand-in-hand. Rather than being subjugated by her marital and maternal duties as Eliot's novel represents Dinah, Lucy continues her photography even after she and Frank Jermyn marry, maintaining a level of personal and professional independence. While Levy's novel portrays Phyllis's death exposes the limitations of a patriarchal culture that cannot conceive of female sexuality for eroticism alone through Phyllis's death, it suggests that marriage can reward as well as penalize through Lucy's marital bliss.

While contemporary critical interest has remained in Gertrude and her photography, Phyllis and her affair with Sidney Darrell captivated Victorian reviewers who were outraged at Levy for Phyllis's conscious decision to divert herself by having an affair with a married—though unhappily married—man. Susan Bernstein's Broadview edition of *The Romance of a Shop* includes in its appendices a host of Victorian reviews whose authors were shocked and appalled by Levy's characterization of Phyllis. *The Jewish Chronicle* singles out Phyllis as “especially charming” of the four girls “to whom the author is singularly unjust” (Bernstein 195-

6). Writing for *The Academy*, George Saintsbury states simply that “The episode of Phyllis, the youngest sister, and her unscrupulous artist-lover is a little out of place and wants stronger handling” (197-8). An anonymous contributor to *The Spectator* more forcefully chastises Levy for the fact that Phyllis falls because she yearns for more sensual diversions, rather than because she was seduced by romantic longing: “he [the reader] will protest probably, and certainly we do, against [...] The easy and flippant way in which she [Phyllis] falls from virtue, not from passionate love, but because she was dull, is, it may be hoped, untrue to Nature. Surely there must be a series of downward steps before a girl sinks into a gulf like that” (197). In a review article for *The Graphic*, H.C. Brewer also mentions the scene “in which poor foolish Phyllis is parted from her despicable lover, who has magnetised her by the force of his selfishness and vanity” (198). However, rather than rebuking Levy for her perversion of feminine nature, he offers his praise of her unsympathetic characterization of the libertine Sidney Darrell: “We are glad that Amy Levy has not mistaken feeble-minded self-indulgence for manly strength, after the manner of lady novelists in general” (198). While their assessments of how Levy depicts Phyllis’s fall differ, all of these writers read Phyllis as a victim, either of her lover, the author, or both. None acknowledge the active role Phyllis, much like Hetty, takes in the affair in the interest of satiating her own desire. Instead, Phyllis’s characterization either must be untrue to nature or she must have been seduced to preserve the Victorian feminine ideal.

Only recently have Victorian literary scholars begun taking notice of Phyllis’s relevance to the plot, though often as a means of offering a fuller reading of Gertrude and visual language in the novel. Perhaps the first to address Phyllis’s story at any length, Bernstein suggests that Levy complicates traditional gender roles ascribed to women by depicting Phyllis as both beautiful and morally questionable, not just an innocent victim taken advantage of by an older

male lover. Both Elizabeth Evans and Emma Francis also offer readings of Phyllis's fall. Evans claims that Phyllis's "fall is symbolically represented in visual terms by her removal from the sisters' studio, where she helps to produce images, to the painter's studio, where she is an object for the artist's gaze" (Evans 38). However, this reading, much like those offered by the Victorian reviewers above, strips Phyllis of conscious agency in the affair by positioning her as either a subject in the Lorimer household or an object when away from it.<sup>145</sup> Francis similarly denies Phyllis agency, suggesting that by rendering Phyllis a stereotypical fallen woman Levy offers a more conservative critique of a certain type of social liberty afforded to women. In contrast however, much as Beer argues of Hetty, Bernstein asserts that "Levy challenges the typical fallen woman of Victorian fiction by refusing to frame her character as either innocent female victim or knowing temptress" (Bernstein 40). Phyllis's manual intercourse with Sydney reveals that she is not a stereotypical fallen woman; she is not seduced. She rather acts on her desire for sensual forms of gratification that her life with her sisters cannot afford her. Phyllis does not die because she falls but rather because of Gertrude's discomfort with her decadent sexuality that results from boredom.

In addition to Phyllis, neither Victorian reviewer nor contemporary scholar has as yet offered a full reading of Lucy. I suggest in what follows that a reading of Phyllis's sexual fall benefits from contextualization in relation to Lucy's successful romance, which, through a reading of her manual intercourse with Frank, I argue is also based in a more carnal attraction than has previously been acknowledged, but which the novel validates. Whereas the narrator offers a more optimistic outcome for Lucy whose eventual marriage to Frank incorporates erotic

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<sup>145</sup> Even though Evans notes that "Phyllis is unlike other late-nineteenth-century fallen women [...] in that she participates willingly and with full knowledge that her seducer is married," we still must question the political effect of positioning Sidney as Phyllis's "seducer," which suggests that she was, at least to an extent, taken advantage of (Evans 45, n. 30).



desire, professional liberty, romantic love, and reproductive duty, like Hetty and Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Phyllis acts on her desire in a way that transgresses social mores and threatens traditional Victorian gender ideology as the novel figures it.

*i. Lucy's Proposals*

Much like Phyllis and Sidney Darrell's, Lucy and Frank Jermyn's romantic relationship begins early on in the narrative through a series of handshakes and does not become public knowledge until later in the story. Frank is the struggling young artist who lives across the street from the sisters and becomes an intimate acquaintance of theirs. His romantic relationship with Lucy develops gradually, but is rooted in their initial physical attraction to each other. From the start, Lucy emerges as an independent soul. Shortly after she and her sisters open up their shop, she rejects the suit of Fred Devonshire, the wealthy son of a family friend, because she does not love him: "if you were the only man in the world, I would not marry you" (Levy 143). Through her rejection of Fred, the novel establishes her modern outlook on marriage; she desires ardent passion rather than platonic affection. As Fred leaves, he turns wounded, trying to reassert some sense of self-worth, "I'm not much, I know, but you won't find many people to care for you as I would have cared" (143). Fred knows himself a respectable match and chides Lucy for rejecting not just himself, but the wealth and comfort that he could offer her. As a poor working-class girl now, Lucy has no assurance of a better match. However, much like Hetty, Lucy desires and refuses to sacrifice those desires for economic security alone.

Lucy and Frank do not openly discuss their mutual attraction but rather negotiate its possibilities through their illicit manual intercourse, illicit because it openly acknowledges Lucy's sexual passions though she does not otherwise act on them. Most of Lucy and Frank's encounters happen in the presence of her sisters, restricting their ability to speak freely. Though

much earlier in the century, an article published about handshaking in *The Country Miscellany* in 1837 advises its readers that, “If presence of a third party should make reserve necessary, it is easy to convey an idea of what we feel by shaking hands” (206). Common knowledge by the 1880s, Lucy and Frank engage in a handshake as a means of communicating much deeper sentiments in the presence of the other Lorimers:

“Well then, good-bye,” said Frank reluctantly holding out his hand to each [Lorimer] in turn—to Lucy, last. “I am dining out to-night and to-morrow, so shall not see you for an age, I suppose.”

“Gay person,” said Lucy, whose hand lingered in his; held there firmly, and without resistance on her part. (Levy 123)

While Frank does his social duty by extending his hand to each of the Lorimer sisters in farewell, he strategically takes Lucy’s hand last. The narrator details the length and type of grasp, noting that Lucy’s hand “lingered,” “held there firmly” by Frank’s, and “without resistance.”

Importantly, Lucy both consents to and reciprocates the intimate gesture that Frank initiates. Despite the cordial nature of their speech, their manual dalliance conveys a deeper affection. However, Lucy and Frank have restrained that affection to manual intercourse, not affording their mutual passion any verbal outlet or more physical indulgence.

While this manual interlude goes unnoticed by Fanny and Phyllis, Gertrude is struck by the emotional depth that their proximal contact betrays: “Gertrude started, struck for the first time by something in the tone and attitude of them both. With a shock that bewildered her, she realised the secret of their mutual content; and, stirred up by this unconscious revelation, a conflicting throng of thoughts, images, and emotions rose within her” (123). Much as Dorothea who experiences a “terrible illumination of a certainty” when she oversees Will and Rosamond’s embrace, and as Adam when he sees Hetty and Arthur parting in the grove, Gertrude recognizes the illicit nature of the handshake she espies. While the narrator suggests that Gertrude starts in

response to the “tone and attitude of them both,” I want to emphasize that she does not necessarily mean the tone and attitude of their speech. Gertrude is not “bewildered” by their conversation, but by “the secret of their mutual content” conveyed through their lingering handshake.<sup>146</sup> Disturbed by this revelation, Gertrude fears the extent to which her sister may have indulged her attraction to Frank, revealing the social importance attributed to reputations. Gertrude witnesses an erotic touch, but registers it as illicit in its eroticism. The intimate nature of their handshake suggests to Gertrude that Frank may have tempted Lucy to yield to her sexual appetites. Gertrude’s reaction to Lucy and Frank’s manual intercourse reveals Gertrude’s own anxiety over her sister’s burgeoning sexuality, an anxiety she feels even more deeply for Phyllis.

Gertrude’s concern for Lucy’s virtue intensifies the next time that she sees Frank and Lucy embrace hands. Despite the fact that Deborah Epstein Nord, Kate Flint, and Daniel Wancyzk, among others, have read Gertrude as the novel’s “New Woman” figure, I would argue that Gertrude’s modern perspective has a limited scope. Initially, Gertrude asserts women’s right to economic independence by opening the photography shop with her sisters in direct opposition to her Aunt Carline who fears that in doing so they will lose their reputations: ““We have taken life up from a different standpoint, begun it on different bases. We are poor people and we are learning to find out the pleasures of the poor, to approach happiness from another side. We have none of the conventional social opportunities for instance, but are we to sacrifice all social enjoyment? [...] can we afford to be the slaves of custom. Our friends must trust us or leave us; must rely on our self-respect and our judgment”” (101). However, her perspective on women’s sexual independence grows increasingly conservative as her sisters seek out social enjoyment. In

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<sup>146</sup> *Manners and Rules of Good Society* was a popular etiquette book throughout the nineteenth century, having reached its 35<sup>th</sup> edition by 1913. It notes that “intimate friends hold the hand while the last words are being said,” which suggests that Frank’s choice to shake Lucy’s hand last and hold onto it while he makes his final goodbyes would in itself suggest a more intimate friendship between them than between himself and the other Lorimers (*Manners* 227).

fact, responding to Gertrude's concerns about Phyllis's modelling for Sidney, Lucy asks of Gertrude, "'Why are you seized with such notions of propriety all of a sudden?'" (141). Gertrude's reply espouses a near opposite position from the one she took with Aunt Caroline not too long before: "'I have no wish to put us to a disadvantage by ignoring the ordinary practices of life'" (141). Gertrude's reactions to both Lucy's manual intercourse with Frank and Phyllis's with Sidney, which I will address at length below, suggest that she still expects her sisters to marry and thus considers it important that their sexual virtue remain intact, reflecting Levy's own conflicting desire to ratify female work and financial independence without encouraging sexual irresponsibility. Gertrude recognizes the reciprocity implicit in Lucy and Frank's handshakes, but her reaction to that recognition suggests that she also regards such reciprocity as potentially dangerous. The narrator explains,

He rose reluctantly to go. "One day I hope you will see it [St. Colomb in Cornwall] for yourselves—all of you."

With which impersonal statement, delivered in a voice which rather belied its impersonal nature, Frank dropped Lucy's hand, which he had been holding with unnecessary firmness, and departed abruptly from the room.

Gertrude looked rather anxiously towards her sister, who sat quietly sewing, with a little smile on her lips. How far, she wondered, had matters gone between Lucy and Frank? (136)

Significantly, Frank holds Lucy's hand as he bids farewell to the Lorimers. While Gertrude views the gesture as having been unnecessarily firm, it is not actually the pressure but rather the ardent affection that it conveys that Gertrude perceives as unnecessary. Lucy, however, does not pull away from Frank's embrace at any point; he breaks contact, suggesting that Lucy not only consented to and reciprocated his embrace, but also that she did not experience in it any "unnecessary firmness" or displeasure. Lucy's reciprocation and sly smile lead Gertrude to query the extent to which their relationship has become sexual. The narrator authorizes Gertrude's concern a few paragraphs later, explaining that Gertrude "could not but be aware of the dangers

inseparable from the freedom which they enjoyed; dangers which are the price to be paid for all close intimacy between young men and women” (136). In other words, Gertrude as the elder could not help but remember Aunt Caroline’s fervent warning about the dangers a lost reputation poses to young, unmarried women. The narrator suggests that Gertrude possesses a knowledge to which her sisters do not yet have access. Gertrude knows “the price to be paid” for sexual indulgence. The “dangers” about which she worries are not those of sexual violation or contagion but rather those of sexual passion and impulse that might result in a lost reputation. Gertrude fears that, should Lucy have acted on her passion for Frank, she might suffer the same consequences and ruin that characters such as Hetty have.<sup>147</sup> However, Lucy is only guilty of acknowledging her desire, not acting on it.

When Frank proposes to Lucy but a few hours after she rejects Fred, he avers the depth of the sentiment their previous manual intercourse communicated. Over dinner, Frank informs the Lorimers that he will be going abroad to Africa the next morning to do a special for *The Woodcut*, the periodical that he works for, noting that undertaking the expedition will make “a immense difference in my prospects” (146). Though he speaks to the room, he keeps his eyes fixed on Lucy. Following this revelation, he leaps from his chair and asks Lucy directly, ““won’t you come and speak to me?”” (146). Once alone, Lucy asks Frank to explain his recent unkindness to which he responds, ““When it dawned upon me how things stood with you and me—dear girl, you told me more than you knew yourself—I reflected what a poor devil I was, with not the ghost of a prospect”” (146-7). His announcement affords the reader two revelations. First, that he and Lucy never openly spoke about their mutual attraction to each other just as they

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<sup>147</sup> At one point, Levy quotes from George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and, at another, *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868). Though we can only speculate as to whether or not she may have read *Adam Bede*, her reference to these novels reveals Levy’s familiarity with Eliot’s work.

did not act upon it; and, second, that Lucy communicated her emotional fondness for and her physical attraction to him through her embrace despite herself. Lucy was unable to mask her desire, though she was able to restrain it to tactile expression alone. Lucy responds to Frank's declaration by "clinging to the strong young hand" that held hers (147). Once again, Lucy haptically communicates what her morality prevents her from verbalizing. The strength of her hold reaffirms her passionate affection and her lack of concern about Frank's monetary prospects. She loves him and desires him, and that is enough. In contrast to their previous handshakes which have occurred in public view, for the first time Lucy and Frank embrace privately without the presence of a chaperone. Through her clasp, Lucy communicates her continued receptivity to Frank as a future sexual, romantic partner. While their illicit manual intercourse proves transgressive in that Lucy actively communicates her erotic passion and deep affection, unlike Hetty and, as we will see, Phyllis, Lucy does not act on that passion, continuing to restrain it until marriage authorizes its release. For this reason, Phyllis's manual intercourse with Sidney proves even more transgressive than that between Lucy and Frank; both Phyllis and Sidney recognize and act on their mutual attraction, conscious that they cannot marry.

*ii. Phyllis's Indulgence*

From the start of the novel Gertrude proves even more distressed over Phyllis's heightened sensibilities and desire for social intercourse than she is over Lucy's relationship with Frank. While Gertrude keeps a watchful eye on Lucy, she interferes with Phyllis, hoping that she can curb her desires by regulating her hands. Unlike the rest of her sisters, Phyllis often acts on impulse and openly acknowledges her dissatisfaction and boredom with observing life happen rather than experiencing it. Gazing out of the parlor window one day, Phyllis asks, "It is a little dull, ain't it, Gerty, to look at life from a top-floor window?" (106). Following Phyllis's

observation, “A curious pang went through Gertrude, as she tenderly stroked the nut-brown head” (106). Phyllis finds no joy in looking at that which she is physically removed from and thus cannot participate in; life, as she suggests, happens in the streets beyond the window. Much like Lord Alfred Tennyson’s *Lady of Shalott*, Phyllis too is “half sick of shadows” (Tennyson line 71). Phyllis’s dissatisfaction with looking springs from her sensual nature that desires to touch the world, to actively and physically engage with it. Gertrude fears that the freedoms granted her and her sisters by their social situation, combined with Phyllis’s sensual nature may lead Phyllis to partake of those social “dangers which are the price to be paid for close intimacy between young men and women” (Levy 136). However, Phyllis does not experience either her desires or her indulgence of them as dangerous; her concern lies with social freedom and sensual pleasure, not the respectability of her reputation.

Phyllis and Sidney’s relationship is a sensual one, often described by the narrator not just through a language of vision but through reference to all of the various senses, especially touch.<sup>148</sup> Though they have met once before at a social function, our first exposure to Phyllis and Sidney’s relationship is at the Oakleys’ party where, we are told, “He stopped in front of Phyllis and held out his hand” (114). While Sidney’s offered gesture would have been a great honor to a young man in Phyllis’s social position, the fact that he does so to a young, unmarried woman in a public setting suggests a level of attraction on his part. His gesture singles out Phyllis because of her beauty as someone worth his condescension as well as suggests that she is someone with whom he is already intimate. Ladies should only shake hands at parties with men to whom they have already been introduced and thus consider acquaintances. Sidney shakes hands with Phyllis

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<sup>148</sup> For example, in addition to my reading of manual intercourse that will follow, one might also read their secret affair through the scent of tuberose that reappears throughout the narrative, connecting Phyllis with the illicit desires of Sidney at whose house Gertrude first sees and smells the flower. “According to *The Language of Flowers* (1885),” a footnote explains, “the tuberose symbolizes dangerous pleasures” (Levy 107, n. 1).

again before he leaves and then has a private conversation with Lord Watergate, Gertrude's future husband, in which he observes as "[he] sat down to the piano, and ran his hands over the keys. 'She is a charming creature—Phyllis'" (117). Sidney caresses the piano's keys as he acknowledges his attraction to Phyllis, suggesting that the handshakes that he offered before may have possessed a more erotic quality than the narrator's eyes would have been able to discern.

Phyllis responds to Sidney's gesture by not just accepting his offered hand in gratitude for his recognition, but also by blushing: "Phyllis' flower-face brightened at this recognition from the great man" (114). Much as Arthur's attentions flatter Hetty's vanity, Sidney's flatter Phyllis's. Rejecting the possibility of any attraction on Phyllis's part, Gertrude initially explains Phyllis's flushed complexion as a result of her ill health; we learn early on that Phyllis suffers from consumption. However, as Constance Devonshire, a family friend, comments, "'She looks to me more delicate than ever, with that flush on her cheek, and that shining in her eyes'" (114). Conny reads Phyllis's "delicate," "flush[ed]" complexion and her "shining" eyes as evidence of attraction. To Conny, Phyllis's blush suggests that she finds Sidney's handshake arousing. However, Gertrude's and Conny's interpretations of Phyllis's complexion do not actually conflict. As Susan Sontag establishes in *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), during the nineteenth century diseases of passion such as consumption and tuberculosis were believed to afflict those with heightened sensibilities and even further to inflame carnal appetites already present. Phyllis's consumption marks her as the most sensual of the Lorimer sisters, and thus as the one most vulnerable to fleshly desire. As Conny's characterization of this moment suggests, Phyllis's response to Sidney's touch communicates her susceptibility to and interest in his offer of sensual pleasure. Like Hetty, Phyllis is not an unknowing victim of seduction. From the start, Levy's representation hints that Phyllis is already tainted by her conscious indulgence of her desire; by



contrasting Phyllis's relationship with Sydney with that of Lucy and Frank, Levy further positions Phyllis as fallen because she does not appropriately channel her impulses as does Lucy.

Sidney quickly takes Phyllis as his muse, asking that she model for his classical paintings, which Gertrude worries may entice Phyllis to indulge in more dangerous pleasures. Not long after he has begun painting her, Phyllis and Gertrude meet at Sidney's *conversazione* where he tries to restrain his passion for Phyllis who, we are told, "had not been very well of late" but "had blazed into a degree of beauty that startled even her sister" when she realized she could attend (Levy 149). Despite her physical allure, the narrator explains that "Darrell's greeting to both sisters had been of the briefest. He had shaken hands unsmilingly with Phyllis," a stark contrast to their previous encounter where he fondled the piano keys while recalling Phyllis's charm (150). After he shakes hands with Phyllis, "he and Gertrude had brought their finger-tips into chill and momentary contact, without so much as lifting their eyes, and Gertrude had felt humiliated at her presence there" (150). Before attending to Sidney and Phyllis's brief handshake, I turn to the silent struggle acknowledged between Gertrude and Sidney in this moment of tactile contact. Gertrude feels humiliated not because of Sidney's gesture, the coldness of which she reciprocates, but rather because she succumbed to Phyllis's desire to attend. In fact, Gertrude perceives her icy gesture as triumphant for, "In the brief flashes of intercourse which they had known, a drama has silently enacted itself; a war without words or weapons, in which, so far, she had come off the victor" (150). This silent drama between them often assumes a tactile form.

Gertrude and Sidney engage in what articles and books written on handshake etiquette consider a condescending, or contemptuous handshake. The popular etiquette book *The Habits of Good Society* (c. 1859) identifies this type of handshake as "a favorite mode with the ladies"

“where one hand is laid clammily in the other, which slightly presses the fingers, not going down to the palm” (*Habits* 325). An article published in *The Manchester Quarterly* but a year before *The Romance of a Shop* similarly characterizes the condescending shake as necessarily feminine in its passivity: “How lightly the fingers (sometimes three, seldom four, and never the whole hand) drop into your palm; you do the shaking, because the condescending fingers lie passive in your grasp, and the hand itself would tell you, if it could, how much it feels the ineffable sweetness of its own disposition, in even allowing you so great a privilege” (270). According to this article, minimal contact and complete passivity convey condescension from one party, usually female, to the other party, usually male. However, Gertrude and Sidney both enact this type of handshake. Their fingertips touch for a moment with neither party “doing the shaking.” The narrator explains that “They stood on a level platform of unspoken, yet open distaste; which, should occasion arise, might blaze into actual defiance” (Levy 150). Gertrude claims agency through her manual intercourse with Sidney Darrell; she is masculinized as he is somewhat emasculated, allowing them to stand “on a level platform.” Though she cannot verbally acknowledge her contempt, she can communicate it to him through nonreciprocal touches that refuse to recognize his social authority. Gertrude and Sidney haptically negotiate the power dynamics of their relationship, battling for dominance over not merely each other but Phyllis. Gertrude considers Sidney an egoist and a sensualist who thus poses a danger to Phyllis who has a sensual appetite. Gertrude believes that as long as Sidney fears her, Phyllis will remain safe from his tempting hands. The brevity of Sidney’s handshake with Phyllis would seem to attest to the accuracy of Gertrude’s belief.

Once Sidney is alone with Phyllis, however, his manual intercourse changes, no longer restricted by Gertrude’s watchful gaze. Sidney tells Phyllis that he plans to travel and thus will

be unable to finish her portrait. Phyllis gently chides him for being ungrateful for the time she has dedicated to his work. Her benign reproach, however, inflames Sidney's passion:

“Not ungrateful. Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Under cover of the crowd he had taken both her hands, and was pressing them fiercely at each repetition, while his miserable eyes looked imploringly into hers.

“You are hurting me.” Her voice was low and broken. She shrank back afraid.

“Good-bye—Phyllis.”

[...]

“We are going home,” said Gertrude, walking up to her.

“Oh, very well,” she answered, [...] “I am not well.” She put her hand to her side. “I had that pain again that I used to have.” (Levy 153)

Phyllis's desire has previously characterized their manual intercourse. The first time they shake hands, for example, the narrator focuses on Phyllis's physical response and that the handshake causes her to blush because it excited and aroused her. While it hinted at Sidney's attraction, what rendered it illicit was that it betrayed Phyllis's reciprocation of that attraction. This embrace, however, differs. Phyllis and Sidney spent a great deal of time together during her sittings, deepening their relationship's emotional intimacy. For the first time, Phyllis is confronted with Sidney's desire, and her fear comes from its fervency more so than the pain.

Phyllis's reaction to Sidney's passionate clasp suggests that their relationship has thus far restrained itself to manual intercourse alone much like Lucy and Frank's. However, to the astute reader, this illicit gesture signals the physical nature of their forthcoming affair. We have already established the erotic character of hand holding and its capacity to communicate explicit sexual desire. Sidney's illicit clasp, initiated “Under cover of the crowd,” functions as Phyllis's entrance into sexuality. The fierce and repetitive nature of his pressure mirrors the act of copulation itself to which Phyllis initially responds with fright. However, by the time Gertrude decides they should leave, Phyllis experiences a level of uncertainty over her response to Sidney's advances. After Sidney withdraws, Phyllis begins to feel ill. Though we might read Sidney's grasp as a

manual assault and Phyllis's ill feeling as a response to its violence, we might also consider her response in light of her sensual and consumptive disposition and Sidney's fervent passion. She explains her desire as a familiar affliction, "I had that pain again that I used to have." If Sidney's clasp inflames her consumption, and her consumptive nature alludes to her heightened sensibility, then we might also read Phyllis's reaction as indicative of desire inflamed by this new experience (a likely assumption considering that she later actively seeks him out). In other words, though Phyllis is initially frightened by Sidney's ardent passion, his open acknowledgement inflames her own sensibilities.

Not long thereafter Phyllis runs away with Sidney in full possession of the knowledge that he has a wife and cannot marry her. While she luxuriates in their relationship because of the sensual gratification that it affords her, we also learn that Sidney plans to take Phyllis to the south of Europe for her health, suggesting that he has come to care deeply for her. Gertrude, however, learns of their plan and of Sidney's marriage, and so she intercedes on Phyllis's behalf hoping to salvage whatever is left of Phyllis's reputation. When Gertrude arrives at Sidney's home, she intrudes upon a spectacle of sensuality and decadence:

Every detail of the great room, seen but once before, smote on her sense with a curious familiarity. [...] A wood fire, with leaping blue flames, was piled on the hearth, its light flickering fitfully on the surrounding objects; on the tiger-skin rug, the tall, rich screen of faded Spanish leather; on Darrell himself, who lounged on a low couch, his blonde head outlined against the screen, a cloud of cigarette smoke issuing from his lips, as he looked from under his eye-lids at the figure before him.

It was Phyllis who stood there by the little table on which lay some fruit and some coffee, in rose-coloured cups. Phyllis, yet somebody new and strange; not the pretty child that her sisters had loved, but a beautiful wanton in a loose trailing garment, shimmering, wonderful, white and lustrous as a pearl; Phyllis with her brown hair turned to gold in the light of the lamp swung above her; Phyllis, with diamonds on the slender fingers, that played with a cluster of bloom covered grapes. (171)

The eroticism inherent in this tableau of luxury, opulence, excess, and sensationalism assails Gertrude's senses. Sidney basks on the couch with an air of satisfaction while Phyllis, "yet somebody new and strange" to Gertrude, playfully caresses the grapes with her diamond-covered fingers, a tactile gesture reminiscent of Sidney's earlier one wherein he fondled the piano keys as he thought longingly of Phyllis's beauty—Phyllis has lost herself in a sensual reverie. Gertrude, who has battled with Sidney to maintain Phyllis's sexual innocence, now confronts Phyllis's sexual maturation. Like Hetty before her, Phyllis finds luxury erotic and she acts to satiate her own desire for pleasure rather than as a result of either maternal or domestic feeling. Gertrude witnesses Phyllis's desire, not just Sidney's. However, Gertrude cannot accept that Phyllis desires, and thus, as we were warned when Gertrude and Sidney last shook hands, the occasion has arisen wherein Gertrude's "unspoken, yet open distaste [...] might blaze into actual defiance" (150).

In contrast to earlier descriptions of Phyllis's manual intercourse with Sidney, her hands and her body all but disappear from this scene after its initial description. Gertrude wars with Sidney for control over Phyllis who shrinks from the line of confrontation, fearful of choosing between her own desire and her sister. Phyllis does not feel shame for her transgressive sensual indulgence but rather for Gertrude's judgment of them evinced in her eyes: "'Oh, Gerty, what shall I do? Don't look at me like that. My dress is there behind the screen; and my hat'" (173). As in *Adam Bede*, here too society, emblemized by Gertrude, mortifies Phyllis for indulging her sexuality apart from either reproductive or domestic aspirations; Phyllis does not feel remorse for transgressing feminine norms but rather for Gertrude's having caught her doing so. Gertrude claims authority in this scene initially through her vision and, later, through her subsequent manual intercourse with Sidney; however, the authority she claims brings with it Phyllis's

sacrifice, complicating standard readings of Gertrude as a New Woman figure—she declares her authority, but it is still patriarchal authority that requires that Phyllis be condemned for transgressing the standards of social acceptability by acting on her sexual desires.

Touch proves omphalic to “the silent battle [that] raged between them [Gertrude and Sidney]” after Phyllis’s initial response. Reacting to Gertrude’s violent intervention, Sidney cries, “‘Great heavens,’ [...] coming forward and seizing her [Gertrude’s] hands; ‘You shall not take her away! You have no earthly right to take her against her will’” (173). Sidney seizes Gertrude’s hands attempting to reestablish dominance over her and control over a situation that has, in a literal sense, gotten out of hand. However, Sidney has lost his power: “With a cold fury of disgust she shook off his touch” (173). “Gertrude knew,” the narrator informs us, “that she, not he, the man of whom she had once been afraid, was the stronger of the two”—Levy masculinizes Gertrude (172). Sidney, concerned for Phyllis’s health on this cold, snowy evening, pleads with Gertrude to think of Phyllis’s declining health and not let her own valuation of virtue cause her to act rashly; he even pledges that he will never try to visit Phyllis again. Gertrude, however, ignores Sidney’s pleas, placing propriety above all else. She strips Phyllis of any agency as she “deliberately draw[s] the rings from her sister’s passive hands” (173). Hereafter, Sidney “stretched out his arms” to Phyllis, encouraging her to rage against Gertrude’s cold justice and take solace in his embrace, “but Gertrude coming between them put her strong desperate grasp about Phyllis, who swayed forward with closed eyes” (173). Gertrude literally places herself between Phyllis and Sidney. While Levy’s representation of Gertrude as a masculinized female subject implies that she is a threat to the social order as an unmarried woman whose power emasculates men, even such a forward-thinking character as Gertrude proves uncomfortable with Phyllis’s self-conscious indulgence. Gertrude may threaten the libertine

Sydney's masculine authority, but she also acts on behalf of patriarchy when she prevents Phyllis from continuing to indulge her desires. Gertrude regulates Phyllis's hands by overpowering them and forcibly taking Phyllis from the warmth of Sidney's house in the dead of night, suggesting that, even nearly thirty years after *Adam Bede*, patriarchal society still proves more comfortable with the death of a sexually active woman than with her continued indulgence of that desire apart from either marital or maternal duty.

*iii. A 'Happy' Ending?*

While most scholars agree that Levy "opts for killing off the beautiful, 'fallen' sister and marrying off the remaining ones," I suggest that the text complicates this supposedly 'happy' ending by depicting Lucy as the only of the Lorimer sisters to retain a level of economic independence and by rendering Gertrude complicit in Phyllis's death (Nord 751). Lucy transgresses convention by rejecting Fred as a suitor and encouraging Frank's attentions despite his economic undesirability. In choosing Frank, Lucy chooses desire above financial security and social respectability. For that transgression, Lucy and Frank suffer briefly when Frank is lost in Africa and presumed dead. But, as Fanny reminds us in an attempt to comfort her sister, "'People always come back in books,'" and so Frank does (Levy 163). Though their romance initially violates the traditional codes of social acceptability, Lucy and Frank restrain their physical impulses, acknowledging their mutual passion only through reciprocal manual intercourse until the time of their marriage. Unlike Phyllis, Lucy finds a respectable outlet for her physical passions: she channels them into marriage. However, much as with Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon, and Margaret Hale, Lucy's happy marriage to Frank does not require that she sacrifice her sense of independence in order to satiate those desires. We learn of the Jermyns that

[Her] photography, however, has not been crowded out by domestic duties; and no infant with pretensions to fashion omits to present itself before

Mrs. Jermyn's lens. Lucy has succumbed to the modern practice of specialising, and only the other day carried off a medal for photographs of young children from an industrial exhibition. Her husband is no less successful in his own line. Having permanently abandoned the paint-brush for the needle, he bids fair to take a high place among the black and white artists of the day. (193)

Lucy and Frank enter into a marriage based on love and mutual respect as this paragraph explains it. While the fact they have children attests to their physical passion for each other, the fact that Lucy does not have to sacrifice her independent spirit for the gratification of that passion suggests that female desire can exist within the confines of the patriarchal order. In other words, women can marry for love without having to forfeit entirely their passions to their husbands and their children. Lucy's photography may have turned to children's fashion, rendering it compatible with her maternal duties, but she proves successful in it apart from her husband, suggesting that female sexuality, when channeled appropriately, need not require complete subjugation.

While Lucy's circumstance nearly rewrites Dinah's in the sense that she marries for love without sacrificing herself to it, there still exists no place for Phyllis's eroticism which, much like Hetty's, aspires to neither domesticity nor reproduction. Evans suggests that "The text is ambiguous about Gertrude's decision to take her [Phyllis] from the seducer's house, no matter the consequences to her sister's physical health," further asserting that, "Contrary to other commentators on this novel, I do not believe that Levy's portrayal of Gertrude is purely affirmative" (Evans 45, n. 29). Along with Levy's own contemporaries, many current Victorian scholars have attested to the authorial naiveté of Levy's first novel, complicating our ability to read the text as intentionally ambiguous. While I acknowledge Levy's inexperience, I also suggest that, whether intentional or not, the text betrays a level of uncertainty about where the fault lies for Phyllis's death—with her constitution, with herself, or with Gertrude? My reading



builds on Evans' assertions, suggesting that the text proves critical of Gertrude's decision to remove Phyllis from Sidney's house as much as of Phyllis's choice to abscond there in the first place.

The narrator informs us that, directly following Gertrude's removal of Phyllis from Sidney's house, "Phyllis' doom, as more than one who knew her foresaw, was sealed. The shock and the exposure had only hastened an end which for long had been inevitable. Consumption, complicated with heart disease, both in advanced stages, held her in their grasp" (Levy 174). Social mores, not Phyllis's remorse at her transgressions, kill her. The novel suggests that the "shock" of seeing Gertrude and the "exposure" to the elements that follows accelerate Phyllis's demise. Despite Gertrude's initial resistance to custom and propriety, she emerges as society's watchful eye that must police her sisters' desires, choosing to remove Phyllis from Sidney's house no matter the consequences. Following this allusion to Gertrude's complicity, the narrator then notes that Phyllis's death would have been inevitable anyway because consumption and "heart disease [...] held her in their grasp." Phyllis suffered from consumption from the novel's start revealing her susceptibility to carnal passions even prior to her indulgence of them. Phyllis was always already marked for death by her heightened sensibility. Her heartbreak over her loss of Sidney as well as Gertrude's disappointment further exacerbates her condition by inflaming her passions and thus her illness. From the very beginning, the novel represents Phyllis as having no place in this society because she is incapable of channeling her desires appropriately.

In contrast to Lucy who does not act on her passions until she confirms marriage as a possibility, Phyllis reveals that she did not care to marry Sidney as long as she could be with him. As she lies dying, Phyllis confesses to Gertrude, "'Sidney isn't as bad as you think. He went away in the summer, because he was beginning to care about me too much; he only came back

because he couldn't help himself. And [...] I knew he had a wife, Gerty; I heard him talking about her at the Oakleys, the very first day I saw him. She was his model; she drinks like a fish, and is ten years older than he is'" (176). Phyllis's confession reveals that she is no unsuspecting victim of seduction; she is an agent of desire. While Levy's novel seems to advocate the place of female desire in marriage, reading it through illicit manual intercourse reveals the novel's own limitations. Phyllis's sexual fall and her death suggest that respectable society still offers no place for the indulgence of erotic female desire for the sake of pleasure alone.

### **III. Transgressing the Glove in "On the Western Circuit"**

Unlike Hetty in Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Phyllis in Levy's *The Romance of a Shop*, Edith Harnham in Thomas Hardy's short story "On the Western Circuit" (1891), the title of which refers to a body of barristers in England and Wales who travel on one of six geographical Circuits, experiences unadulterated sexual longing not associated directly with a desire for luxury, opulence, wealth, or social ascension. Edith has already married an elderly though affluent wine-merchant to avoid life as a spinster, but he stimulates no passion in her; for Edith, marriage imprisons rather than liberates, gratifying her monetary aims and keeping her firmly within the domestic but without satiating deeper longings. In fact, she awakens to her deep-seated sexual nature at the hands of another man altogether, one whose youth and experience renders him a good lover as opposed to provider. In contrast to *Adam Bede* and *The Romance of a Shop* that criticize patriarchal culture's association of non-reproductive and non-domestic female desire with social danger unless channeled into marriage without ability to imagine an alternative, "On the Western Circuit" more overtly condemns the social restrictions placed on female sexuality by marriage and highlights the irony that the very men who labor to uphold patriarchal law are still subject to and thus often constrained by it.

In his study of “On the Western Circuit,” Martin Ray succinctly explains its rather complex plot as follows: “a young illiterate maid, Anna, becomes pregnant by a barrister, Charles Raye, and persuades her married employer, Edith Harnham, to write letters to Raye in Anna’s name, unknown to him” (Ray 201). While Ray’s concise description highlights Anna’s pregnancy and Edith’s deception, it neglects to mention the illicit manual intercourse that occurs between Charles and Edith, precipitating his liaison with Anna and arousing Edith to such an extent that she agrees to act as Anna’s amanuensis in order to maintain his romantic interest. Charles reaches for Anna’s hand while caught amidst a bustling crowd but mistakenly embraces Edith’s, and she neither corrects him nor rebuffs his caress. “On the Western Circuit” was revised by Hardy from its original serial publications and published as part of his collection *Life’s Little Ironies* in 1894. This illicit manual intercourse that Charles initiates functions as the central irony of this story; Charles unwittingly grabs the hand of the woman whom he will come to love through their correspondence—a hand that he can never legally possess—and inflames a desire in Edith that her marriage renders it impossible to fulfill.

“On the Western Circuit” faults Victorian society for placing marital law above both sexual desire and romantic love. The true tragedy of “On the Western Circuit” is not that Anna falls or that Edith fantasizes about adultery but rather that the social contract of marriage binds Charles and Edith to those whom they do not love and who cannot satisfy them either physically or intellectually. Kristin Brady’s study *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (1982) suggests that “the general themes of all the stories in *Life’s Little Ironies* (1894) involve the failure of modern marriage as an institution for formalizing and stabilizing sexual relationships, and the insidious

effects of social ambition on family life” (155).<sup>149</sup> Elaborating on Brady’s study decades later, Nada Al-Ajmi argues that “On the Western Circuit” pointedly establishes the dangers of “marital incompatibility and the consequences of sublimated sexuality” in order to express Hardy’s “rejection of women’s passive role in marriage” as well as his rejection of “marriage [itself] as the ultimate goal for women” (Al-Ajmi 44, 50, 49). Other scholars such as Tomoko Tachibana, Stéphanie Bernard, Marcus Kempf, and Simon Gattrell have also noted women’s sexual desires as one of the story’s prominent themes, though none have yet offered a comprehensive reading of those erotic desires that includes the illicit clasp that rouses Edith’s passion and foreshadows Anna’s sexual fall. Through a reading of the illicit manual intercourse between Charles and Edith, I argue that “On the Western Circuit” celebrates Edith’s desire for sexual and emotional passion and criticizes patriarchy’s legitimation of economic stability as a reason for marriage.

*i. Edith’s Caress*

Hardy originally published “On the Western Circuit” in bowdlerized form in *Harper’s Weekly* (November 1891) and in *English Illustrated Magazine* (December 1891), the editors of each requiring that he remove any erotic descriptions or adulterous references.<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, this indecent, highly erotic clasp between Charles and Edith remained uncensored in both versions; in fact, Hardy’s transformation of Edith from an unhappily married wife to a widow for these serials allowed him to introduce this erotic gesture as that which facilitates Edith’s sexual

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<sup>149</sup> A. F. Cassis pointed out in 1974 that critics often dismissed Hardy’s short stories as his lesser fiction (287). Brady’s study is one of several that have begun to fill this gap. Tomoko Tachibana also notes this dismissal, pointing to Hardy’s own statement that “he wrote them with only a light feeling between his best long novels” as evidence as to why they have received less critical attention (17). This view has begun to shift, and I continue in this vein, exploring two of Hardy’s short stories—one in this chapter and one in the next—that employ manual intercourse to comment on the relationship between female erotic and reproductive sexuality.

<sup>150</sup> See Ray for a full discussion of the bowdlerization of the text, and see Widdowson for a discussion of Hardy’s relationship with the editors of the serials in which he commonly published.

awakening and confronts her with her own carnality (Ray 205-7).<sup>151</sup> Martin Ray explains that Hardy's addition of this scene and the three subsequent references to it in the serial editions provided "a physical basis to Edith's fascination with Raye," meaning that her attraction for Charles was spurred by the physical desires his manual intercourse aroused within her rather than by visual attraction and speculative fantasy alone (207). When Charles mistakenly grasps her hand instead of Anna's, Edith for the first time experiences sensual pleasure after the initial shock of the encounter. Similarly to Phyllis who experiences fright at the ardent passion Sidney communicates when he grasps her hand "Under cover of the crowd," Edith too initially experiences uncertainty at the uninvited sexual intimacy Charles' clasp initiates (Levy 153):

Something had attracted the crowd to a spot in their [Edith, Anna, and Charles's] rear, and the wine merchant's wife caught by its sway, found herself pressed against Anna's acquaintance without power to move away. Their [Edith and Charles's] faces were within a few inches of each other, his breath fanned her cheek as well as Anna's. They could do no other than smile at the accident; but neither spoke and each waited passively. Mrs Harnham then felt a man's hand clasping her fingers, and from the look of consciousness on the young fellow's face she knew the hand to be his: she also knew that from the position of the girl he had no other thought than that the imprisoned hand was Anna's. What prompted her to refrain from undeceiving him she could hardly tell. Not content with holding the hand, he playfully slipped two of his fingers inside her glove, against her palm. Thus matters continued till the pressure lessened; but several minutes passed before the crowd thinned sufficiently to allow Mrs Harnham to withdraw. (*Ironies* 99)

Initially reminiscent of Lovelace's forceful grasps in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) or Walter Hargrave's violent clutches in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1849), Charles's grasp comes uninvited, immuring the "imprisoned hand" within his own. In contrast to these earlier,

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<sup>151</sup> Ray contradicts *The Sotheby Sales Catalogue* which claims "that 'both the mistaken holding of Mrs. Harnham's hand and the final glimpse of Anna and Raye appear to have been afterthoughts'" added to the final version published in *Life's Little Ironies* (qtd. in Raye 205-7). According to Ray, those additions were included in the story's original published versions because "now that she [Edith] is no longer a married woman, Raye can hold her hand" (207). The only textual variation in this scene (between its publication in serials and that in the collection) follows the embrace. The version published in *Harper's Weekly* reads, "She was so gently stirred [...] with the fascination of his touch," which Hardy revises for *Life's Little Ironies* to read, "with the tenderness of his idle touch" (*Harper's* 946; *Ironies* 99). The latter explains the reason behind Edith's fascination, on which I will later elaborate.

more violent gestures, however, Charles's clasp does not necessarily come unsolicited if we consider his earlier interactions with Anna. While for Edith, whose hand he mistakenly clasps, this embrace proves wholly unexpected and thus threatening because of its physical intimacy, for Anna, this gesture might not have been so alarming. Simon Gattrell asserts in his study of gloves in Hardy's corpus that "This is perhaps the most direct emblem of sexual connection that Hardy could find, though he tried to disguise for his magazine audience the thrust of his image through the adverb 'playfully'" (Gattrell 87-88). However, rather than "disguise" the eroticism inherent in Charles' gesture with the adverb 'playfully' as Gattrell suggests, Hardy's addition of it enhances the flirtatious character of Charles' manual intercourse. Consider the original typescript: "Not content with holding the hand, he ||playfully|| ~~put two~~ ||slipped two|| of his fingers inside her glove" (qtd. in Ray 206). Compare "put" to "playfully slipped." The former has a more forceful connotation whereas the latter suggests gentle teasing. In contrast to the fierce, repetitive pressure Sidney exerts during his explicit tactile encounter with Phyllis, Charles' playful, delicate caress of Edith's palm highlights the pleasure this unexpected manual caress holds the potential to excite.

Unlike her literary precursors who repudiate Lovelace's and Walter's sinister grips, Edith embraces rather than rejects Charles's unexpected caress because it excites pleasure, not pain. Despite her initial shock and discomfort, Edith soon finds herself fascinated by this unexpected gesture and the sensual thrill that the tactile stimulation offers. Charles acts on his carnal impulses, but, as opposed to coercing submission, his offered hand stimulates arousal—a new sensation for Edith. We get a glimpse of Edith's marital dissatisfaction in the scene that directly precedes this embrace. She sits at home in the dark, watching the bright lights of the fair with eager anticipation from her sitting room window while her husband openly expresses his distaste

for the festivities. Their divergent interests and her rejection of his half-hearted offer to accompany her to retrieve Anna highlight the emotional and physical distance that exists between them; they are socially and sexually incompatible. Though the narrator notes that “What prompted her to refrain from undeceiving him [Charles] she could hardly tell,” the events suggest that when Charles clasps her hand, Edith experiences emotional and physical intimacy for the first time and is entranced by it. In fact, when Edith spots Charles at church the next day she acknowledges her sexual dissatisfaction to herself, betraying her enjoyment of his uninvited caress: “She wished she had married a London man who knew the subtleties of love-making as they were known to him who had mistakenly caressed her hand” (*Ironies* 101).<sup>152</sup> Edith surmises Charles’ abilities as a lover from his caress alone, but in doing so betrays her yearning for sexual gratification at the hands of a man whose varied experiences have made him knowledgeable.<sup>153</sup> Though this illicit manual intercourse betrays that Edith desires, it does not construct that desire as dangerous to the patriarchal order as other critics have suggested.<sup>154</sup>

The story’s conflict comes not from Edith’s desire but from Charles’ decision to permeate the boundary imposed by Edith’s glove. During the nineteenth-century, gloves had a prophylactic function in both senses of the term. For the middle and upper classes, gloves protected hands from the physical and moral contamination that might come from contact with the dirt and grime of the street. “[Y]ou are always safer with them [gloves],” warn popular

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<sup>152</sup> This sentence appears unchanged in *Harper’s Weekly* and *The English Illustrated Magazine*, which further suggests that the adverb ‘playfully’ was not intended to disguise the sexual quality of Charles’ caress.

<sup>153</sup> The narrator even goes so far as to inform us that the fact “That he [Charles] had been able to seduce another woman in two days was his crowning glory though unrecognized fascination for her [Edith] as the she-animal [sic]” (107). Charles’s sexual prowess with Anna renders him even more attractive to Edith.

<sup>154</sup> Tomoko Tachibana, for example, identifies Edith’s desire as an “egoistic love for herself” that, along with Anna’s vanity, leads to Anna’s sexual fall (20, 22-23). In contrast, however, I suggest that the text does not fault Edith (or Anna) for their desires, but rather a society that offers her no functional mode of indulging her sexuality. As we see with Charles, men in a patriarchal society have avenues available to them for sexual release.

etiquette books such as *The Habits of Good Society* (*Habits* 168). Even Angus Trumble's contemporary study *The Finger: A Handbook* (2010) notes, "It was simply taken for granted that all people who could afford them invariably wore or, at least, carried gloves almost wherever they went" (Trumble 117). Gattrell's work distinguishes between the function of gloves worn by the lower and upper classes; while gloves were "for many working people a necessary form of protection [...] for the middle classes in town and country gloves could strongly be eroticized for they were the only item of clothing that could be removed with propriety in public to reveal the wearer's naked skin" (Gattrell 87). In spite of this erotic association, gloves had a protective function even for the middle classes: they were a second skin that mediated tactile sensation and thus protected hands from sensual as well as environmental corruption. Popular views held that hands functioned as erogenous zones because of the high density of sensory receptors housed in the fingertips and palm of the hand (Cohen 34-5; *Habits* 324; Beamish 2). For this reason, hands, especially female hands, required surface mediation to protect them from sensual stimuli that might generate tactile excitement. Gloves provided that mediation. Edith experiences unmediated contact when Charles slips his fingers inside of her glove, and she enjoys the tactile sensations excited by his caress.

Charles' audacious finger-play that follows his initial grasp both inflames Edith's carnal appetite, described by the narrator as a lust for both sexual and emotional connection, and foreshadows the unprotected sex that he will have with Anna a few pages later: "Not content with holding the hand, he playfully slipped two of his fingers inside her glove, against her palm." Though more commonly referred to as a 'sheath' or 'armour,' the condom was also termed a 'glove' by Richard Carlisle in his widely read treatise advocating birth control published in 1826 (McLaren 52). Angus McLaren explains in his contemporary study of nineteenth-century



contraception that Carlisle promoted three methods in *Every Woman's Book; or What Is Love? Containing Most Important Instructions for the Prudent Regulation of the Principle of Love and the Number of the Family*: “the woman’s use of a sponge as a crude diaphragm, the man’s use of the *baudruche* or ‘glove’, and partial or complete withdrawal” (52).<sup>155</sup> While condoms were effective and allowed both sexes to indulge their eroticism or carnal impulses without fear of either contagion or pregnancy, both male and female consumers noted a significant drawback to their usage: dulled sensation.<sup>156</sup> Though Gattrell argues that gloves functioned as “a second skin—a protection, yes, but one that yet lets sensation permeate,” I assert that in the Victorian literary imaginary gloves functioned similarly to condoms, mediating sensation as opposed to allowing it to permeate (Gattrell 88). To a Victorian readership, Charles’s motivation behind transgressing the barrier imposed by Edith’s glove would have been clear: pleasurable sensation. It does not take too salacious an imagination to associate Charles’s insertion of his fingers inside of Edith’s glove and against her palm with the insertion of his fingers or unsheathed penis into

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<sup>155</sup> For a full history of contraception during the nineteenth century see Angus McLaren’s *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (1978) and Robert Jütte’s *Contraception: A History* (2008), pp. 106-156. The condom debates began in the eighteenth century and continued well into the twentieth. Condoms were originally advertised as a form of protection against sexually transmitted diseases, namely the pox, not as a form of contraception. For this reason, medical professionals did not endorse their usage as they were associated with illicit sex—men who had sex with prostitutes feared contamination, not men who had sex with their wives. During the nineteenth century, neo-Malthusians began marketing condoms along with other methods of contraception to the lower classes. Condoms were the most expensive form of contraception available and thus were used almost exclusively by the middle and upper classes. McLaren notes the cost of various contraceptives as advertised in C. J. Welton’s *Catalogue of Female Preventatives* in 1894: “the ‘Interceptor’ which sold for three shillings or two for five shillings, the ‘enema syringe,’ and ‘Dr. Picot’s Ladies’ Safety Cones or Female Pessaries’ at two shillings six pence per box of twelve or five shillings for one that could be used repeatedly. Similar durability was claimed for the five shilling ‘Paragon Sheath: One of these will (with care) last for years. This is worn by the husband’” (222-3). Despite the fact that cost limited usage of condoms among the lower classes, it did not limit knowledge. The contraception debates raged during the 1890s, suggesting that Hardy as well as his contemporaries from all classes would have been familiar with condoms and their function.

<sup>156</sup> Condom users such as James Boswell noted muted sensation as far back as the early eighteenth century: “‘yet, by reason of its blunting the Sensation, I have heard some of them [Libertines] acknowledge that they had often chosen to risk a *Clap*, rather than engage *cum Hastis sic clypeatis* (with spears thus sheathed)’” (qtd. in McLaren 23; italics original).

her vulva.<sup>157</sup> Knowing that “the interspace of a hundred miles [...] would effectively hinder this summer fancy from greatly encumbering his life,” Charles’ interest in Anna lies in the sexual diversion she might provide him—he craves sensation, not intimacy (*Ironies* 102). However, the sensation Edith experiences when Charles’ fingers caress her palm arouses her, leading her to fantasize about the sexual gratification she might find in experienced hands like Charles’ as opposed to those of her husband. As the narrator later informs us, Edith’s marriage “contract had left her still a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred” (107). Unlike Eliot and Levy before him whose novels hint at the emotional dissatisfaction women faced in marriage based on fiscal security, Hardy depicts the harsh reality of marriage as Edith lives: in most cases it functions as a social contract, not an outlet for romantic desire.

ii. *Legally Wed?*

The narrator of “On the Western Circuit” openly criticizes society’s traditional view of marriage as the only respectable means of survival available to women. He explains of Edith: “Influenced by the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure, she had consented to marry the elderly wine-merchant as a *pis aller* [last resort], at the age of seven-and-twenty—some three years before this date—to find afterwards that she had made a mistake” (106). As we saw with Helen Huntingdon in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Edith has no legal recourse to address that mistake. Once married, the law binds her to her husband even if unhappily. Edith marries for economic, not romantic reasons: “Mrs Harnham did not care much about him [her husband]. [...]”

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<sup>157</sup> According to *Manners and Rules of Good Society*, when shaking hands “the fingers of the hand are held and gently shaken, but the palm is not grasped or even touched” (227). The dangers of palm touching remain in the cultural imaginary even today. Linda Lee and James Charlton explain in *The Hand Book: Interpreting Handshakes, Gestures, Power Signals, and Sexual Signs* (1949) that “When boys are with girls they tickle their palms. It is titillating because a positive response is supposed to mean that she will ‘do it’” (229). (Though perhaps anecdotal evidence, I remember being told this exact thing by my peers while in high school [2000-2004].)

[but] she was going to have a new hat for next Sunday that was to cost fifteen and ninepence” (96). Though Edith initially found this type of financial luxury satisfying, it soon loses its novelty and she finds herself unhappily married to an elderly man with whom she has nothing in common. At the age of thirty, Edith first experiences the pleasure of sensual arousal, noting that “There had been a magic in his [Charles’] wooing touch of her hand” (100-101). Edith desires, however, the text does not fault her for desiring as much as it faults a society that encourages women to discount passion in favor of social and financial gain.

As I mentioned previously, the illicit manual intercourse between Charles and Edith early in the story dramatizes the central irony of “On the Western Circuit.” Mistakenly grasping Edith’s hand on an erotic impulse (we might say, a slip of the touch), Charles encounters his soulmate when he ignores propriety and acts on desire. However, the same impulsiveness and impropriety that characterizes this illicit clasp leads to Anna’s pregnancy and forebodes that he will once again mistake Edith’s hand—though this time in the senses of handwriting and marriage—for Anna’s. Resigned to but dissatisfied with her marriage, Edith agrees to act as Anna’s amanuensis, “blam[ing] herself for not interfering in a flirtation which had resulted so seriously for the poor little creature in her charge” (106). Edith realizes that Anna and Charles consummated their earlier flirtation and, much like Adam in response to Hetty and Arthur’s affair, recognizes that “what was done could not be undone; and it behooved her now, as Anna’s only protector, to help her as much as she could” (106). However, while Edith begins their correspondence with no other thought than “to keep alive his passion for the girl if possible,” she soon luxuriates in the freedom of expression that writing to Charles facilitates and bypasses Anna altogether, carrying on an epistolary affair with Charles under Anna’s name (106). As the narrator explains, “the high-strung Edith Harnham lived in the ecstasy of fancy: the vicarious

intimacy engendered such a flow of passionateness as was never exceeded” (110). As with Hetty and Arthur’s affair, pregnancy proves the unfortunate consequence of Charles and Anna’s sexual indulgence, not the motivating force behind it; Anna succumbs to Charles’ advances flattered by his attention and too inexperienced to recognize a passing fancy. When Anna confesses her pregnancy to Edith and begs her to continue writing, Edith does her moral duty to Anna and continues corresponding with Charles, eventually securing a proposal. Aware that her private indulgence will now come to an end, Edith proclaims to herself, “I wish his child was mine—I wish it was!” (109). Yet, Edith’s admission betrays an erotic rather than a maternal desire. She wishes that she, not Anna, had had sex with Charles that night of which the pregnancy, like Hetty’s, would act as proof; she wishes that she, not Anna, might marry a man who stimulates her body, mind, and soul.

As a junior barrister, Charles is an emblem of the law, yet the law that he stands for hinders his amour with Edith by legally binding him to Anna and Edith to her husband. After Charles learns that Edith wrote the letters that stirred his soul to passionate excess, the final exchange between them invokes tactility to both communicate and validate erotic desire expressed against legal sanction.

But Raye went up to her, and took her unresisting hand. [...] “Why—you and I are friends—lovers—devoted lovers—by correspondence.”

“Yes—I suppose.”

[...] “Legally I have married her—God help us both!—in soul and spirit I have married you, and no other woman in the world.”

“Hush.”

“But I will not hush! [...] But, O my cruel one, I think I have one claim upon you.”

She did not say what, and he drew her towards him, [...] “If it was all pure invention in those letters [...] give me your cheek only. If you meant what you said, let it be lips. [...]”

She put up her mouth, and he kissed her long. (116)

Unlike the illicit manual intercourse that begins Charles' triangular affair, this time he consciously reaches for Edith's "unresisting hand," which confirms that she reciprocates his affection. They acknowledge each other as "devoted lovers" through this final embrace, sealing their mutual adoration with a kiss. Here, love not lust determines lasting passion. Charles and Edith have a deep emotional and sexual connection despite the fact that they have never lain together. In their case, emotional and intellectual compatibility inflame sexual passion, suggesting that desire encompasses more than merely physical indulgence. Though judicial law corporeally binds Charles and Edith to their spouses, Charles proclaims that a higher law has wed their spirits. While Charles relies on the concept of marriage to express the level of devotion he feels towards Edith, in doing so he also critiques the social contract of marriage by denying its authority over his soul and spirit; it might legally compel him to lie with Anna, but it cannot force him to love her. Edith laments when she returns home, "I have ruined him! [...] I have ruined him; because I would not deal treacherously towards her!" (117). To have saved Charles from "ruin"—marriage to an illiterate serving girl—would have ruined Anna, leaving her an unwed mother. Rather than depict marriage as the only respectable form of sexual indulgence, "On the Western Circuit" characterizes marriage as a binding legal contract that often hinders sexual expression because of its emphasis on social respectability: after learning of her deception, Charles experiences no passion for his new wife Anna though he upholds the legal contract he has entered into; Anna marries Charles to avoid the social stigma of her pregnancy, but his desire for Edith promises Anna little more than platonic affection; and Edith returns to her elderly husband, condemned to a life of only the memory of sensual pleasure experienced when Charles embraced her hands and kissed her lips—"I forgot I had a husband," Edith whispers to herself on next seeing the wine merchant (117).

Jay Clayton argues that, despite the fact that “Hardy has read *Adam Bede*,” Eliot’s corpus had little influence on his work (Clayton 37). However, as with Levy, familiarity may prove as relevant as direct influence. Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, Levy’s *The Romance of a Shop*, and Hardy’s “On the Western Circuit” each invoke illicit manual intercourse as a means of addressing female erotic passion experienced independently of marriage. Reading these texts through the lens of manual intercourse suggests not only that women actively desire sexual pleasure but also that such erotic desires originate from personal, physical longings rather than from maternal yearning or submission to wifely duty. Whereas *Adam Bede* and *The Romance of the Shop* depict societies in which there exists no option other than to excise Hetty and Phyllis for their sexual transgressions which threaten the patriarchal order and to reincorporate Dinah and Lucy into the domestic as a means of authorizing their romantic passions, neither Edith nor Anna are expunged from the text for their indulgences nor sexually liberated by their marriages. Offering a more stringent commentary than either *Adam Bede* or *The Romance of a Shop* on a society whose legal system still values marriages of economic convenience above those of lasting passion, Hardy’s short story consciously challenges marriage as a social contract that subjugates women and men to lives of domestic drudgery that often involve the excision of the erotic from domestic and reproductive modes of sexual expression. “Monstrous Touch: Race, Reproduction, and Uncontrolled Tactility,” the last chapter of this dissertation, considers how literary depictions of monstrous hands—and, of course, their touches—bring together Victorian anxieties about race and non-reproductive forms of sexual expression.

## Chapter IV: Monstrous Touch: Race, Reproduction, and Uncontrolled Tactility

With a savage oath he [Leo] rose from beside the corpse, and, turning, literally sprang at Ayesha. But she was watching, and, seeing him come, stretched out her hand again, and he went staggering back towards me [Holly], and would have fallen, had I not caught him. Afterwards he told me that he felt as though he had suddenly received a violent blow in the chest, and, what is more, utterly cowed, as if all the manhood had been taken out of him.

—H. Rider Haggard, *She* (1887), p. 225

Though Ayesha's hand, in the epigraph above, does not make direct contact with Leo's body, he still somatically experiences the powerful violence of the monstrous touch her outstretched hand gestures toward. Published to wide acclaim in 1887, Rider Haggard's *She* tells the story of the immortal witch-queen, Ayesha, who rules over the lost African civilization called the Amahaggar, waiting for the reincarnation of her dead lover Kilakrates, who has finally come to her in the body of Leo Vincy. In the epigraph, Leo reacts to Ayesha's having just murdered his Amahaggar wife, Ustane, in a jealous rage with a similarly projected—not literal—touch. Ayesha, who the text variously describes as a Queen, a “fiend,” an animal, and an Other, is driven by her lust for Killakrates above all else. Dangerous because of her sexuality and non-Anglo-Saxon origins,<sup>158</sup> Ayesha's hand and projected touch carries with it the taint of her monstrosity. Her extended hand renders Leo helpless, “utterly cowed.” The “violence” of the projected contact delivers a “blow” that strips the virile Leo of his “manhood.” The novel positions her sexuality as lascivious and excessive, and that passionate excess carried in her gesture unmans Leo, threatening his potential virility by elevating erotic passion above the domesticated female sexuality that places heterosexual reproduction above personal pleasure. Ayesha's touch reveals her monstrosity as well as warns the readers of the national threat her desire and lust for power poses. By the narrative's end, Ayesha's “most beautiful white hand

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<sup>158</sup> Ayesha's ancient Egyptian heritage alludes to her ancestors' African and Middle Eastern racial origins.

[...] with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails,” has “turned dirty brown and yellow [...] nothing but a claw now, a human talon resembling that of a badly preserved mummy” (Haggard 142, 291). Ayesha’s transformation into a “dirty brown and yellow,” ape-like rag—a clear demarcation of her imagined animal origins—delivers Leo from the power and allure her “beautiful white hand” once wielded; her monstrous hand alerts readers to the animalistic lower racial order carried in her blood, lurking beneath her whiteness.

The threat to English manhood that Ayesha’s monstrous touch poses is excised from the text in the devolution of her hand.<sup>159</sup> As H. G. Wells sardonically observes in his essay “Human Evolution, and Artificial Process” (1896), “A decent citizen is always controlling and disciplining the impulses of anger, forcing himself to monotonous work, and resisting the seduction of the sporting instinct and wayward imagination” (215). These impulses cannot always be restrained; they are the monstrous underside that lurks within. In her study of monstrosity, Margrit Shildrick likens the skin’s permeability to the unsecured body, suggesting that the monstrous is always already present: “What the monstrous in all its forms reflects is that the singular disembodied subject is in any case a construct of modernity that cannot be fully achieved, and that instead our necessarily embodied identities are never secured, and our bodies never one. Once the surface of our bodies is understood not as a protective envelope that defines and unifies our limits but as an organ of physical and psychological interchange, then the (monstrous) other is always there, ‘like my skin’” (119). This chapter explores how monstrous touches in speculative fiction of the 1880s and 1890s both disrupt and reify these cultural expectations by confronting human—or English—citizens with the baser impulses that monstrous others refuse

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<sup>159</sup> As Elaine Showalter explains in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1992), “She is about the flight from women and male dread of women’s creative, and reproductive power” (83).



to either control or discipline.<sup>160</sup>

Previous chapters have dealt almost exclusively with the socioeconomic and sexual politics of what I have termed ‘manual intercourse’ in novels and short stories spanning from the eighteenth century well into the nineteenth century. This chapter introduces race, in the Victorian sense of the term,<sup>161</sup> to those earlier studies, considering how moments of literary tactility manifest anxieties about England’s reproductive destiny during the *fin-de-siècle*. As I explain in the Introduction, manual intercourse functions in part as a pun designed to emphasize the erotic potential of haptic experience as well as specifically to designate moments when characters’ hands touch as a means of negotiating the social, political, and personal dynamics of relationships. In other words, a handshake only functions as manual intercourse when it reveals to readers the level of intimacy the embracing characters share along with any desires, sympathies, and aversions each character may feel but be unable to verbally express. However, not all manual intercourse depends on two character’s hands coming into direct contact.<sup>162</sup> In fact, by privileging the hand and its capacity to communicate via the transmission and experience of sensation, ‘manual intercourse’ codifies *human* somatic experience and the social codes that structure it. This chapter explores the dangerous implications of non-normative forms of tactile

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<sup>160</sup> Within contemporary literary criticism, “speculative fiction” functions as an umbrella term that generally includes the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror, along with any other types of fiction that incorporate the inexplicable or supernatural. I use this term because the texts that this chapter explores belong to a variety of genres but all incorporate fantastical elements.

<sup>161</sup> While the term “race” in contemporary Victorian scholarship often denotes discussion of an ethnic Other, Victorians used this term more imprecisely, often employing it interchangeably with “species” or “class” as a means of validating the superiority of Anglo-Saxon heritage in the age of imperialism (Bolt ix). Robert Knox, for example, states in *The Races of Man* (1850) that “Men are of various Races; call them Species, if you will; [...] it matters not” (2). I use the term to point to a hierarchy of different classes of human determined by skin color as a signifier of blood, and thus species’ origins.

<sup>162</sup> Teresa Brennan asserts in *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) that study of pheromones, a concrete mechanism of transmission, reveals that “no direct physical contact is necessary for a transmission to take place,” suggesting that the transmission of affect functions similarly (69).

contact (whether actual or imagined) that betray textual anxieties about individual human potential—“human” during this period meaning English and male—and national progress; it explores the monstrous.

## I. The Monstrous

Traditionally, monsters have been associated with bodies that pervert the natural human form as socially conceived.<sup>163</sup> However, beginning with Franco Moretti’s 1983 article, “Dialectic of Fear,” Victorian critics interested in monsters began exploring moral, and not just physical, qualities of literary monstrosity. In a psychoanalytic reading that looks at monsters as literary figurations that mark the return of the repressed, Moretti argues that “the monster metaphor, the vampire metaphor [...] makes bearable to the conscious mind those desires and fears which the latter has judged to be unacceptable and has thus been forced to repress, and whose existence it consequently cannot recognize” (81). In other words, the literary monster gives rhetorical form to the “impulses of anger,” the “sporting instinct,” and the “wayward imagination” that Wells’ argues society expects a “decent citizen” to control and discipline. While according to Aviva Briefel’s critical review of scholarship addressing Victorian gothic literature and monsters vampires have received the most scholarly attention, other monsters common in *fin-de-siècle* fiction include “sinister doubles, men whose souls are rotting but are beautiful in appearance, [and] repulsive animal/human hybrids, to name a few” (512, 510-11). Though this chapter takes

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<sup>163</sup> As far back as the latter part of the fourth century BC, Aristotle speculated about monstrosity in a section of *On the Generation of Animals* titled “Of Monsters” (Warwick 368). Peter Brooks’ “What Is a Monster?” (1993) suggests that during the nineteenth century the term “monster” referred to a body that deviated from the Western ideal of human. Non-literary, Victorian examples might include Saartjie Bartman (a.k.a. the Hottentot Venus) and Joseph Merrick (a.k.a. the Elephant Man). Margrit Shildrick’s *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (2002) extends theories of monstrosity by including “the feminine, or the racial other” to account for “those who are physically disabled or whose bodies radically disrupt morphological expectations” (2). She identifies monstrous bodies as “Those bodies that in their gross failure to approximate to corporeal norms are radically excluded” (2). While both Brooks and Shildrick emphasize that monstrous bodies deviate from corporeal norms, Shildrick suggests that by confronting us with the monsters that lie within such deviation transgresses the limits we impose on human subjectivity.

up the latter in Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, it attempts to push the limits of "monster" as a visual concept by considering how manual intercourse reveals—or we might say monstrates—assumed inner or moral monstrosity often associated with sexual deviancy that lies deeper than the skin's surface. Alexandra Warwick's recent "Ghosts, Monsters and Spirits, 1840-1900" (2014) establishes a contrast between the 1850s freak-show monster and the post-Darwinian monster, which, she claims, is more threatening because its "monstrosity is thought to lie within" (369).<sup>164</sup> According to Warwick, by the century's end, "the monster that is most feared is the invisible one; the man whose apparently normal exterior hides psychological deformity" (369).<sup>165</sup> This chapter suggests that speculative fiction reveals these invisible dangers to readers through undisciplined manual intercourse that conveys unseen monstrosity.

#### *i. Monstrous Bodies*

Contemporary theoretical perspectives on monstrosity view monsters as more than simple literary figurations, suggesting that their social position as boundary creatures reveals them as amalgamations of a variety of sociopolitical concerns that can be deployed to either engender and reify fear of difference or challenge it by rendering these contradictions publicly visible. In their edited collection *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* (1996), Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti offer several useful ways of thinking about monstrous bodies and how culture interacts with them. Drawing on Mary

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<sup>164</sup> Criminals would be included among these types of monsters largely because of the difficulty Victorians like Cesare Lombroso had classifying criminals and thus specific criminal qualities according to visual markers.

<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Lee Six and Thompson suggest that Frankenstein's monster's physical deformity "can be read as a manifestation of the latter's [Frankenstein's] inner monstrosity, sowing the seeds of analogous pairings of inner or moral with outer or physical monstrosity in later nineteenth-century characters" (239). However, they suggest that in the final years of the nineteenth century authors move away from this tradition, "whereby monstrosity, disturbingly, has become invisible and potentially ubiquitous, for it lurks within seemingly normal, respectable people and is grounded in anxieties concerning sexuality" (238). While I agree that towards the century's end fiction seems to show that inner monstrosity can lurk in anyone, it remains connected in some way to a physical—or, in some cases, genetic—deformity whereby the inner immorality is made visible.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Nina Lykke explains monstrosity as the monster's being "situated on the borderline between human and non-human" (Lykke and Braidotti 16). In other words, monsters are terrifying because they approximate the human form while simultaneously revealing its plasticity.<sup>166</sup> Rosi Braidotti elaborates on the concept, suggesting that the monstrous body is an uncontrollable body of contradictions: "It is something which evokes both horror and fascination, aberration and adoration. It is simultaneously holy and hellish, sacred and profane. [...] the simultaneity of opposite effects is the trademark of the monstrous body" (136). Braidotti uses the etymology of the term "monster" to argue that monstrous bodies display these contradictions, rendering them legible to viewers (136). Contemporary criticism on teratology has also made much of the word's etymology. "Monster" has its roots in the Latin words "*monstrer*" (to show) and "*monere*" (to warn). Thus a monster functions as both a sign (a Derridean monstrosity) and a warning (a monstrosity).<sup>167</sup>

According to contemporary theoretical writing about monstrosity, a monstrous body challenges our understanding of what is human by functioning as a sign of the limits of such a definition.<sup>168</sup> Consider Haggard's Ayesha who initially appears the most beautiful of human women desired by both Holly—the anti-woman misanthrope—and Leo—the beautiful lover of women. Yet, her sexuality and supernatural power render her frightening, so in order to

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<sup>166</sup> Many critics take Frankenstein's Monster as the originary literary monster, the monster *par excellence*. Peter Brooks' "What Is a Monster?" claims that the Monster's creation "takes place on the borderline of nature and culture" precisely because "the Monster is a product of nature—his ingredients are 100 percent natural—yet by the process and the very fact of his creation, he is unnatural, the product of philosophical overreaching" (Brooks 216-7). The Monster is simultaneously human and non-human in its composition, and therein lies its monstrosity—it exceeds simple classification.

<sup>167</sup> Offering a reading of Martin Heidegger's use of the hand as a sign in *What Is Called Thinking* (1954), Jacques Derrida's "*Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*" (1987) refers to the hand as a monstrosity (*monstrosité*)—a monster, a sign (Derrida 169). I will elaborate on the hand as a monster and monstrous in both the sense of sign and warning below.

<sup>168</sup> See Shildrick.

disidentify with what appears human on the surface, in death her monstrous origins are exposed as she devolves into an ape. Her devolution forces readers to confront their desire for that which they would also define themselves against. Additionally, it warns readers of the dangers of a female sexuality focused on erotic pleasure and of racial impurity; both threaten reproductive futurity by either directing male sexual energy away from reproduction or polluting the race both genetically and morally. By putting Victorian literary criticism in dialogue with contemporary theory, I argue that monstrous manual intercourse in late-Victorian literature similarly challenges these limits as racially defined, asking does “human” mean only Anglo-Saxon? Furthermore, these moments of tactile contact reveal characters’ inner monstrosity—often associated with sexual depravity—even when they appear human. Steven Marcus’s foundational study of Victorian sexuality, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (1964), points to the contradictory nature of the Victorian impulse to classify subcultures associated with sexuality as “‘foreign,’ distinct, exotic,” and necessarily “other” as Marcus’s title suggests, while “at the same time it was a human subculture” (xiv). This chapter explores the tensions that existed in the Victorian popular imaginary between reproductive and erotic sexuality, highlighting the relationship established between the immoral and the monstrous nature of non-reproductive sexual encounters depicted and described in literature and “other” as “foreign” to dominant culture. Monstrous manual intercourse represented in literature threatens national progress imagined as reproduction of the dominant white race. These monstrous gestures warn readers about the perceived dangers of sexual deviancy and instruct them to regulate their hands in order to ensure their and their nation’s survival and continued imperial dominance.

## ii. *Monstrous Hands*

Characters who offer monstrous touches in the texts this chapter considers do not necessarily possess monstrous bodies to begin with, though they often have some type of manual deformity that functions as a sign—a monster—of a previous or forthcoming social transgression. These monstrous touches are inextricably linked with the hands that offer them. Jacques Derrida's reading of 'Heidegger's Hand' in "*Geschlecht II*" establishes a clear correlation between the monstrous and the manual according to Heidegger's figuration: "he [Heidegger] always thinks the hand *in the singular*, as if man did not have two hands but, this monster, one single hand" (182; italics original). In fact, Derrida suggests that *the* hand (in its singularity) as Heidegger conceives of it possesses a grotesque quality but also reveals it as no prehensile organ but rather "the (monstrous) sign [*le monstre*], the proper of man as (monstrous) sign"; in other words, *the* hand signifies thought and thus belongs only to humanity—or "man," as both Heidegger and Derrida term it (168). Heidegger explains the hand as follows:

The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. [...] Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft. (Heidegger 16)

Heidegger suggests that humans utilize *the* hand as a monstration of thought. Specialized handicraft and writing demonstrate the complexity of thought that resides in the hand and thus renders it a sign—a monster—of human's superiority over their animal origins. Here, however, Heidegger conflates speech and thought in the hand as sign, privileging language above more tactile forms of communication. According to Christopher Johnson, in Heidegger's lecture, "the humanity of the human, that which sets it apart from the rest of so-called 'nature'—its

monstrosity—[...] reside[s] in the human hand” (Johnson 59).<sup>169</sup> Much like monsters, hands too exist on the border between human and non-human, bespeaking our baser evolutionary origins while concurrently signifying our evolutionary ascension; all hands grasp, but only *the* hand communicates thought through touch. Derrida points out that while Heidegger considers *the* hand and its relationship to Man and thought at length,<sup>170</sup> “nothing is ever said of the caress[—of touch—]or of desire. Does one make love, does man make love, with the hand or with the hands? And what about sexual differences in this regard?” (Derrida 182). I, of course, would answer ‘yes’ to this first question, pointing to manual intercourse in literature as an example of how exactly hands make love by either adhering to or transgressing codes of conduct that structure social intercourse. However, the second question poses an interesting complication to these largely heteronormative forms of manual engagement: How does biological sex difference affect one’s tactile and haptic experience? Derrida’s questions focus on how “man” expresses desire and/or “make[s] love” with his hand(s). Since “man” typically stands in for the human species and refers to the idealized Western image of man, such a focus elides the relationship between hands, desire, and thought in both females and races not of Anglo-Saxon origin. Victorian speculative fiction that invokes monstrous manual intercourse as a means of exploring the human question reveals social anxieties about racial origins, miscegenation, and erotic sexual desire by projecting them onto uncontrolled, undisciplined hand-grasps and caresses that threaten

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<sup>169</sup> The work of Charles Bell (1837), Charles Darwin (1859), Richard Beamish (1865), and T. H. Huxley (1893) among others establishes this same distinction.

<sup>170</sup> Heidegger uses the term “Man” to mean both human and also human intellectual; the gendering is intentional and points to the relationship between women and animals that I will address more fully later.

transmission of presumed uncivilized desires and impulses.<sup>171</sup>

During the 1880s and 1890s, imperialist expansion coupled with the emergence of the New Woman led to anxiety over the nation's reproductive future. English women were needed to repopulate the colonies, guard the bloodlines against miscegenation, and act as "a moral barrier against materialism and secularism" (David 182, 186). Braidotti and Brooks both discuss the link between the monstrous or non-human body, the female body, and the racialized body: out of fear of her birthing a monster, the pregnant female body had to be disciplined to ensure the fetus' protection against "maternal impressions"—the theory that a mother's emotional responses to either environmental or imaginative stimuli could transmit negative impressions to her child (Braidotti 139; Brooks 219).<sup>172</sup> Moretti's study notes that "one of the institutions most threatened by monsters is the family" (78). Textual descriptions of monstrous manual intercourse continue to rely on a similarly highly gendered and racialized discourse that renders legible social tensions about England's reproductive future. The rise of the New Woman, who "sought opportunities for self-development outside of marriage," threatened idealized domestic female sexuality by directing energy away from biological reproduction and toward erotic pleasure (*Sexual Anarchy* 39; David 162). "[T]he highly publicized decline in the national birthrate" led to a reevaluation of the traditional female role such that "medicine and science warned [New Women] that such ambitions [outside the home] would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility, and racial degeneration" (*Sexual Anarchy* 39). In other words, women who sought independence from or

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<sup>171</sup> A study on the cultural meanings attributed to ambidexterity and right- and left-handedness would be worthwhile in this context but exceeds the scope of this dissertation. Cesare Lombroso who referred to criminals and mad geniuses alike as "monsters" identifies left-handedness as one among many marks of degeneracy. See Stiles, pp. 325, 329.

<sup>172</sup> Braidotti establishes a direct link between the public nature of the monstrous and the maternal female body, while Brooks suggests that a monster often "eludes gender definition," which renders it a social threat (Brooks 219). Also see chapter five, "Dangerous Wombs," in Julia Epstein's *Altered Conditions: Disease, Medicine, and Story-Telling* (1995) for a full history of maternal impression theory.



satisfaction outside the home risked degenerating into monsters, or possibly passing on such monstrous inheritance to their progeny. Further, contemporary concerns about uncontrollable or unmanaged sexualities in men and women reflected anxieties about the New Woman, “the falling birth rate [...] urban degeneracy, [and] the dangers of non-reproductive or illicit/illegal sexual practices generally” (D. Mason 24, n.47).

According to standard Victorian codes, ‘normal’ sexuality in men and women expressed itself through marriage and procreative vaginal intercourse.<sup>173</sup> In his study of Victorian sexuality, Jonathan Ned Katz suggests that the concept of heterosexuality as the erotic sexual identity category that we understand today emerged at a particular historical moment: the late nineteenth century. As with the concept of “homosexuality,” “heterosexuality,” Katz claims, is not a natural, ahistorical category and, prior to the late-nineteenth century, did not mean sexual desire “directed exclusively and naturally at the other sex” (84-5). Rather, Katz explains, “lust in men was roving,” or at least considered to be roving according to the cultural imaginary (85). Thus, he suggests that the emergence of our modern concept of heterosexuality coincided with cultural attempts to legitimate the desire for procreation as natural and in order to direct male lust away from libidinous pleasure—wasted sexual energy—and towards procreative duty. As scholars such as Steven Marcus have shown, that this belief was even a common one is limited considering the emergent public discussions about prostitution and sexual dysfunction by mid-century. However, Katz’s claim is useful insofar as it encourages us to think about erotic and reproductive sexuality as two distinct identity categories determined by sexual practice at a specific historical moment during this period. If, as Katz claims, heterosexuality emerged as the “master from which all others deviated” at a given historical moment in order to naturalize and

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<sup>173</sup> See, for example, the writings of William Acton (though Steven Marcus shows how Acton undercuts that notion of ‘normalcy’ even as he seeks to establish it [see S. Marcus, Chapter One]).

normalize other-sex desire as both pleasurable and procreative, then prior to that emergence deviant forms of sexual would have been those based in eros—polymorphous eroticism that threatened to “waster” sexual energy, according to common belief (88). As Katz points out, popular systems of belief that sought to legislate eroticism asserted that “The human body was thought of as a means towards procreation and production: penis and vagina were instruments of reproduction, not of pleasure” (Katz 85). Though in practice this assertion was and is highly inaccurate, it does point to the difference between individual practice and public systems of belief encoded in discourse. English medical doctors, such as William Acton,<sup>174</sup> popularized this view of reproduction during early and mid-century, constructing figures like “the monster masturbator” as a threat to the welfare of the nation; energy should remain focused on work and reproduction in service of the nation, not on satisfying one’s individual lust (Katz 85). Marcus shows that even as Acton encouraged the male populace to restrain these sexual impulses he acknowledges the prevalence of the deviant practices, such as masturbation, that need to be restrained. Yet, what Marcus overlooks in his reading of Acton’s accounts of the dangers of masturbation that Katz’s distinction between pleasure and reproduction facilitates our considering is Acton’s fear that the masturbator will cease to participate or take an interest in the community at large.

Marcus cites two passages in his reading: one on masturbation in male youth and one on the relationship between masturbatory tendencies and male inmates of insane asylums. While Marcus focuses on Acton’s fear over the finite nature of male fluids and energy, both passages also note that young masturbators and asylum inmates withdraw from their fellow men and thus

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<sup>174</sup> In *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1875), for example, Acton asserts that “a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband’s embraces, but principally to gratification; and, were it not for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions” (62). As Acton constructs it, women’s desire is solely reproductive, not erotic.

community, suggesting that the danger of such indulgence comes directly from its interference with or direction away from one's ability or interest in contributing to social progress, not just a depletion of finite stores. Pleasure-focused sexual endeavors functioned as a direct threat to reproduction in the writings of Acton and others, suggesting that a tension existed between what were classed as natural exertions of sexuality and those that were considered more deviant because of their more singular focus and individual nature. By the end of the century, in the popular imaginary anything other than reproductive sex was deemed monstrous in its deviation from normality and its focus on pleasure, socially positioning English women as both British culture's moral center and protectors of the race. Monstrous manual intercourse often reveals characters' erotic desires, warns the readers against indulging such eroticism, and established a clear link between monstrosity, female sexual desire, and the body marked as racially, and thus morally, impure.

Focusing on *fin-de-siècle* speculative fiction, this chapter explores what happens when manual intercourse becomes monstrous, when both characters do not merely embrace each other in ways that consciously transgress social mores,<sup>175</sup> but when one character's hand makes contact with another's in a way that, whether reciprocal or not, threatens to disrupt the sexual, reproductive, and/or national order. Monstrous manual intercourse represented in Victorian literature poses a threat to individual potential and, through it, national progress imagined as "reproductive futurism." Often, novels invoke monstrous manual intercourse to embody a physical, psychological, or sexual threat to the party being touched and to reveal something monstrous about characters' unseen attributes (e.g., morality or heritage) to the reader. As Linda Lee and James Charlton's study of the social power conveyed by hands and gesture explains,

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<sup>175</sup> See Chapter Three.

“Hands are tempters:<sup>176</sup> intractable wayward, deceitful, clumsy hydra-headed monsters leashed to us by the wrist” (1-2). In this chapter, I offer a heuristic for reading monstrous manual intercourse as well as argue that monstrous gestures in speculative fiction at the century’s end are “grounded in anxieties concerning sexuality” and often speak directly to greater social fears about national progress resulting from the decline of biological reproduction at the time (Six and Thompson 238).

I begin with Thomas Hardy’s “The Withered Arm” (1888) to establish the difference between a monster and monstrous manual intercourse. While neither of the leading female characters—Rhoda Brook and Gertrude Lodge—is described as a monster physically speaking, throughout the course of the narrative each participates in a monstrous gesture that acts as both a sign and warning to the reader about the presumed dangers of nonnormative erotic desire. The rest of the chapter will further explore the sexual and racial dimensions of monstrous manual intercourse in a novella, two novels, and a short story written during the *fin-de-siècle*: H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896); Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897); “the other English vampire novel published in 1897,” Florence Marryat’s *Blood of the Vampire*; and Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Olalla” (1885) (Eldridge 10). As Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson suggest in “From Hideous to Hedonist: The Changing Face of the Nineteenth-century Monster,” nineteenth-century literature “present[s] the monster as an impediment to national, social, political, and scientific progress” (250). I argue that monstrous manual intercourse in the texts I examine here not only act as a similar impediment, but further reveal the way in which progress in these areas depends upon the stability of English womanhood and biological reproduction. In contrast to the

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<sup>176</sup> [Author’s Note] “Temptresses? In Latin the word for hand is masculine, but in French, Italian, and German (die Hand) the word is feminine. Spanish, peculiarly, gives the word a feminine article with a masculine-sounding ending on the noun: *la mano*.” As this suggests, gendering of the hand and its touches exceeds questions of monstrosity.

illicit manual intercourse discussed in Chapter Three, monstrous manual intercourse offers a more stringent warning about the cost of eroticism by bringing about fatality. Monstrous touch in each of these results in either the death of a child or threatens normative reproductive sexual practices, compelling Victorian readers to question how they define progress and its relationship to what is “natural,” or “human.”

## **II. Grasping Monstrosity: A Monstrous Marking**

Hardy’s “The Withered Arm” is a story about touch, monstrous touches that render legible characters’ moral monstrosity. This short story relates the fall of Farmer Lodge whose desire to pass on his farmlands to a legitimate heir as a sign of progress leads to the death of his young wife, Gertrude, and his illegitimate son, whose name we never learn.<sup>177</sup> While most scholars have focused on the spectral quality of the tactile encounter that occurs in a dream between Gertrude and Rhoda Brook, the mother of Farmer Lodge’s illegitimate son, my reading argues that the monstrosity of this imagined encounter materializes only if we account for Gertrude’s touching of the hanged boy near the narrative’s conclusion. Like Ayesha’s projected touch, Rhoda and Gertrude’s dream touch does not bring the two women into direct contact, but the imagined tactile contact does have a material, physical effect. Additionally, the second touch, which occurs in actuality, results from the first in attempt to counteract its physical effect. Both instances of perverted manual intercourse in “The Withered Arm” function as examples of monstrous touch, and, when taken together, suggest that the degeneration of the upper classes occurs from within. Gertrude’s withered arm embodies a loss of vital energy and the perceived social danger associated with such loss, which, I suggest, results from Sapphic desires and autoerotic practices.

Shortly after Farmer Lodge marries Gertrude and brings her home to Strickleford with

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<sup>177</sup> His first name is never given, so I will refer to him as Farmer Lodge or Lodge throughout.

him, a specter of Gertrude attacks Rhoda in a dream by waving its wedding-ring in front of Rhoda's face while sitting on her chest;<sup>178</sup> Rhoda fights back by grabbing "the confronting spectre's obtrusive left arm, and whirl[ing] it backward to the floor" ("Withered Arm" 1542). This confrontation enacts Rhoda's anger over Lodge's choice to marry one other than herself.



**Figure 11.** Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) housed at the Detroit Institute of Arts; [www.dia.org](http://www.dia.org), accessed 28 April 2014; Web.

The mark Rhoda leaves in Gertrude's skin suggests her desire to be Gertrude and alludes to the

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<sup>178</sup> This description recalls Henry Fuseli's famous painting *The Nightmare* (1781) in which a demon sits on the chest of a sleeping (or sexually exhausted) woman dressed in white (see Fig. 11). Hardy's construction, in a sense, reverses this image by positioning the respectable, pure Gertrude as the demon and the working-class, fallen Rhoda as the sleeping woman.

attraction she will feel for her, highlighting the danger Rhoda poses to Gertrude's marriage. The next day, Gertrude visits Rhoda and her son, and Rhoda finds in Gertrude's face the likeness of the specter and in her arm the "shape of her [Rhoda's] own four fingers" (1544). Gertrude's arm continues to wither throughout the rest of the story, and she tries "every quack remedy she c[omes] across" in the attempt to cure it, but cannot, suggesting that, while Rhoda might have placed the mark, Gertrude likewise participated in its creation. Finally, Gertrude acts on Conjurer Trendle's advice that she "must touch with the limb the neck of a man who's been hanged [...] / Before he's cold—just after he's cut down" (1549). The hanged man's neck that Gertrude ends up touching is none other than the illegitimate son of Rhoda and Farmer Lodge, both of whom witness the touch. Gertrude's shock leads to her death three days after. Following this, Farmer Lodge gives up his family's inheritance and his fantasy of passing on his family legacy, and dies peacefully two years later while Rhoda chooses to continue working as a milkmaid "until her form became bent, and her once abundant dark hair white and worn away at the forehead" (1556). Hardy's story does not end with Lodge remarrying after Gertrude's death, reinforcing the breakdown of the old social order and highlighting the importance of social adaptation in order to preserve the country way of life (S. Johnson 136; Brady 40). The monstrous manual intercourse throughout complicates the relationship between social status and moral purity by revealing Gertrude's potential for monstrosity.

From the start of Hardy's narrative, hands emerge as important signifiers of character. Rhoda, sending her son to observe Farmer Lodge's young new wife, instructs him to "notice if her hands are white; if not, see if they look as though she had ever done housework, or are milker's hands like mine" (1539). Rhoda wants to know whether Lodge chose another working woman, simply forsaking her, or whether he chose a woman of class standing, a chaste woman

with white hands never employed for hard labor and thus not open to public scrutiny or contamination. It is not Hardy's construction of white hands that determine Rhoda's query. As early as 1806, ladies' magazines explained the importance of hands to a woman's social valuation:

Next to the charms of a handsome figure, a woman has a right to be proud of the advantage of a fine hand and a perfect arm. A handsome figure may be found with an ill-formed body; on the contrary, a fine hand and arm scarcely ever accompany any but a perfect whole. From a sight of the hands alone of a female, it is possible to judge to what class she belongs. Thick fingers, a large and broad hand, announce obscure birth. ("The Ladies' Toilette")

Victorian readers would have understood a "fine hand and arm" to mean unblemished and unmarked, neither sunstained nor scarred from hard labor; unlike working-women, respectable ladies keep their hands covered by gloves while in public and thus protected from either social or physical contagion. Though published decades before "The Withered Arm," this article significantly notes the legibility of "a fine hand and perfect arm" both of which Gertrude ultimately loses. The shape and surface of a female's hand indicates "to what class she belongs" and can even "announce obscure birth," which suggests that the more elementary shape of the hand—"thick fingers, and a large broad hand"—signifies heritage, indicating that hands not only reveal the race to which one belongs but that their touches can contaminate fair skin. Additionally, this quotation reveals not only that the surface of one's hands functioned as a marker of one's social standing, but further as a marker of one's inner nature which shapes the outer body—namely the hands—based on what one chooses to do with them: "The hand is an implement bestowed on us by nature; [...] [and] assumes a different form, according to the purpose to which we apply it" ("The Ladies' Toilette").<sup>179</sup> Thus, the physical structure and

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<sup>179</sup> In this same vein, though much later, Cesare Lombroso suggests in *The Female Offender* (1895) that both female criminals and prostitutes often have tattoos on their arms, alluding to the fact that a marked arm on a woman usually indicates some form of criminal and/or sexual depravity.



surface of a woman's hands monstrate her heritage and profession.

Lodge and Rhoda extend the metaphor even further by believing that Gertrude's virginity can be read in the immaculate surface of her hands, which mark her "as the sexually 'untouched,' or more importantly, 'unbroken' girl" capable of bearing healthy children (D. Mason 30).

Rhoda's instructions to her son further betray that she identifies herself as a worker whose hands bear the material evidence—scars—of her manual labor and her status as a fallen woman, one who succumbed to her sexual desires and bore a child out of wedlock. Rhoda's hands are public hands that physically engage with the world and reveal her lascivious sexuality for all to see. By beginning with Rhoda's interest in Gertrude's hands, Hardy's tale both points to and criticizes the hypocritical cultural milieu that punishes women like Rhoda for their sexual indiscretions while embracing them in upper-class men such as Lodge. As we see in Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the laboring female body whether that of a virginal farm-working girl or a lascivious working woman is always a public body and thus always sexually vulnerable. Suzanne R. Johnson's 1993 articles on Hardy's short story reads it as "Hardy's most scathing indictment of the sexual hypocrisy of his culture," noting that "Hardy ha[d] always been acutely aware of how a woman's subordinate status leaves her vulnerable on both the sexual and social levels" (136, 131). Rhoda wants to know what Gertrude's hands look like both to determine Gertrude's character and social position and because she desires to possess such white hands.

Rhoda's grasping of Gertrude's apparition responds to what she, Rhoda, recognizes as the most threatening and attractive of Gertrude's attributes: her hand, which Lodge has figuratively taken in marriage. When her son reports back, Rhoda notes, "'You've never told me what sort of hands she had,'" to which he replies, "'I have never seen 'em. She never took off her gloves'" (1541). Ann Gagné suggests that "[b]y not taking off her gloves Gertrude is behaving according

to the rules of etiquette and simultaneously containing her tactility, or at least mediating it through her gloves” (Gagné 118). As I detail in Chapter Three, gloves have a prophylactic function precisely because of their ability to mediate tactility or, perhaps more specifically, protect one’s skin from coming into corporeal contact with another surface and thus unwittingly engaging in improper exchange. However, Gertrude’s never taking off her gloves reveals more than a staunch adherence to etiquette. On the surface, Gertrude performs social and sexual innocence by conducting herself according to custom. Wearing gloves in public, Gertrude presents the persona of a decorous lady who carefully protects her hands from any impurity, sexual or otherwise, by sheltering them from any interaction with the environment around her. In other words, Gertrude’s gloved hands advance a carefully controlled image of herself as a self-disciplined, chaste lady of social standing. Her gloves mark her hands as private hands meant only for her husband’s eyes and touch. However, Gertrude’s gloves also inhibit our vision for we, like Lodge and Rhoda, do not know what lurks beneath their surface until she removes them to reveal her withered arm; gloves conceal as well as protect.

Unlike Rhoda’s working class hand, which anyone and everyone has access to, Gertrude’s hand remains private, sheltered from the eyes and hands of any but Lodge himself. As the narrator explains, Gertrude’s first public interaction reveals the “shyness natural to a modest woman who had appeared thus for the first time”; Lodge marries the young, nineteen-year-old Gertrude to ensure that she will pass on her modesty and good heritage to the sons she will bear him (1541). Suzanne Johnson suggests that “Gertrude Lodge is the physical and social antithesis of Rhoda”; however, I would refine Johnson’s claim by further arguing that while Gertrude initially appears to be Rhoda’s opposite, the grip between Rhoda and Gertrude’s specter and the subsequent marking of Gertrude’s arm actually reveals to the reader that Gertrude “was always

shadowed by the necessity of the accident that would come to mark it” (S. Johnson 132; Connor 74). In other words, even though critics tend to victimize Gertrude, I assert that the text’s silence about Gertrude’s complicity in this initial momentary contact along with her touching of the hangman at the story’s end reveal that Gertrude’s class and heritage cannot protect her from the social and sexual vulnerability she faces as a woman; furthermore, Hardy criticizes Gertrude and Lodge’s placement of social progress above individual life. Gertrude’s withered arm that bears Rhoda’s hand reveals both women as possessed of desires that, if made public, would be rendered monstrous.

The first of the two important touches that structure this story, Rhoda’s grip marks Gertrude’s potential for monstrosity by marring Gertrude’s otherwise immaculate skin. Shortly after Gertrude arrives in Strickleford, Rhoda encounters a specter of Gertrude in a dream before they even meet. Rhoda’s dream, or nightmare vision more rightly, highlights the threat Lodge’s marriage to Gertrude poses to Rhoda and her son’s future prospects:

Rhoda Brook dreamed [...] that the young wife, in the pale silk dress and white bonnet, but with features shockingly distorted, and wrinkled as by age, was sitting upon her chest as she lay. The pressure of Mrs Lodge’s person grew heavier; the blue eyes peered cruelly into her face; and then the figure thrust forward its left hand mockingly, so as to make the wedding-ring it wore glitter in Rhoda’s eyes.

Maddened mentally, and nearly suffocated by pressure, the sleeper struggled; the incubus, still regarding her, withdrew to the foot of the bed, only, however, to come forward by degrees, resume her seat, and flash her left hand as before. Gasping for breath, Rhoda, in a last desperate effort, swung out her right hand, seized the confronting spectre by its obtrusive left arm, and whirled it backward to the floor, starting up herself as she did with a low cry. (1542)

Most recently, Dame Gillian Beer has read Rhoda’s seizure of Gertrude’s specter’s arm as a “dream touch” in which the reader is complicit (“Dream Touch” 3). Beer argues that not only do dream touches possess a visceral quality, but that reading acts almost as a form of dreaming in which we, as readers, can reach out and touch. She suggests that touch, like dreams, functions as

a threshold between waking and sleeping wherein confusion may occur; dream touches, she contends, are performed in the act of reading: *we* must touch the recently dead with Gertrude at the story's close (12). The imagination exists beyond social control and thus whether characters or readers imagine reaching out and touching, such projected material contact engages in an uncontrolled form of tactile exchange. Tactile contact, Beer contends, "reminds the Victorians (and ourselves) that touch is a matter not only of the surface of the body but of its dark interior" (12). In an article published two years earlier, Ann Gagné refers to it as a "telepathic touch, the ability to send and receive impressions at a distance," that proves unethical in its ability to enact violence "in all senses of the word" and elide responsibility on the part of the one who touches (Gagné 115, 116). Interestingly, both Beer and Gagné, along with most critics who write on "The Withered Arm," focus on the disembodied and symbolic nature of this spectral touch by paying careful attention to who overlooks whom in the nightmare vision that Rhoda has of Gertrude, and what Gertrude's subsequently withered arm symbolizes.<sup>180</sup> In contrast, I suggest that who overlooks whom matters less so than does the tactile encounter itself and what it carries with it, conveying between and revealing about these two women, suggesting that each possesses a profound interest in the other and craves some type of connection. The confused nature of the

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<sup>180</sup> Sophie Gilmartin suggests that this dream sequence comments on the way in which women value themselves based on how they are viewed by men (Gilmartin 341). Reading in a different vein, Romey Keys suggests that Rhoda actually overlooks herself in her vision, reading Gertrude's specter as a projected manifestation of Rhoda's own jealousy and Gertrude's "withered arm" as a symbol of "a sexual wound: Lodge's impotence" (Keys 115). Suzanne Johnson, however, takes direct issue with Keys' reading because Lodge has, in fact, fathered a son (Johnson 139, n.11). Instead, she suggests that Rhoda overlooks Gertrude not because she's jealous of Gertrude's position as Lodge's wife, but rather because Gertrude's arrival interferes with Rhoda's maternal role (139, n.11). By contrast, Gayla Steel questions Rhoda's having overlooked Gertrude at all, claiming that, if she did, "that power is involuntary" (Steel 87). Though Steel does read Gertrude's withered arm as a symbol of her barrenness, Steel goes on to argue openly against Rhoda's imagined projection, claiming instead that "Only he [Rhoda and Lodge's son] could have overlooked the young woman [Gertrude], because the dark Rhoda has not even seen Gertrude when she experiences the nightmare" (Steel 87). While I agree, as other critics have, that Rhoda overlooks Gertrude unintentionally, the text in no way suggests that Rhoda's son is actually the culprit. In fact, the son proves the ultimate recipient of the sins of all three parental figures the story sets up: his lot in life is determined by his father's rejection, his mother's poverty, and Gertrude's self-interest. Additionally, see Sophie Gilmartin's "Hardy's Short Stories" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, pp. 41-2 for a summary of earlier criticism on the tale.

nightmare leaves open the possibility that the dream may have originated with either woman. Gertrude explains that ““One night when I was sound asleep, dreaming I was away in some strange place, a pain suddenly shot into my arm there, and was so keen as to awaken me,”” describing herself as an unwitting victim (1544). However, the narrator suggests that, though Rhoda has the vision, “[f]or the first time Gertrude Lodge visited the supplanted woman in her dreams,” placing agency and intent with Gertrude rather than Rhoda (1542). The truth of Rhoda’s nightmare resides not in its origination but in the resulting effects of Rhoda’s grasp and what those effects reveal about both women.<sup>181</sup> This dreamlike or telepathic touch has a monstrous material effect: “She [Gertrude] uncovered her left hand and arm; [...] [there] were faint marks of an unhealthy colour, as if produced by a rough grasp. [...] she [Rhoda] fancied she discerned in them the shape of her own four fingers” (1544). Rhoda’s grip leaves a physical mark, rendering it more than merely dreamt or telepathic.

The first time that we, the readers, see Gertrude’s hand is only after it has been marked by Rhoda’s grip during the nightmare vision that she has of Gertrude; much like Rhoda and her son, we never see beyond Gertrude’s gloves until after this nightmare encounter. As Steven Connor explains in his monograph, *The Book of Skin* (2004), “The beginning of time, the beginning of culture, the beginning of sin, the beginning of difference, the beginning of mixture, the beginning of death: all these may be imagined in terms of the marking of a previously immaculate surface” (Connor 73). The marking of that which was once clean as now unclean simultaneously renders visible the potential for impurity that always already existed, questioning

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<sup>181</sup> In her detailed study, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (1982), Kristin Brady suggests that Hardy’s “The Withered Arm” has more of a folkloric than supernatural quality to it, largely because Hardy refuses to satisfy critics by offering a logical explanation for this dream touch, stating in Volume 123 (March 1928) of the *Fortnightly Review* that ““a story dealing with the supernatural should never be explained away in the unfortunate manner of Mrs. Radcliffe”” (22). This suggests that, for Hardy, the logistics of the touch were less important than the touch itself.

the ideal of purity. Rhoda's vision and subsequent monstrous grip marks Gertrude as, in a sense, ruined, retroactively revealing her potential for sin to Lodge and critiquing his choice in wife and the value he placed on class and heritage as markers of moral purity. Gertrude's marked arm ultimately turns "the young wife, in the pale silk dress and the white bonnet," into little more than the creature of Rhoda's nightmare "with features shockingly distorted, and wrinkled as by age" (Hardy 1542). Though Rhoda herself acknowledges when she first meets Gertrude after this vision that "[t]his innocent young thing should have her blessing and not her curse," by the tale's end Rhoda exclaims "'This is the meaning of what Satan showed me in the vision! You are like her at last!'", suggesting that the mark made legible Gertrude's true immoral character (1545, 1555). In their article on monstrosity, Lee Six and Thompson explain that "visible monstrosity can then be read as a symptom, a betrayal of inner evil to the outer world," claiming that in some instances "physical monstrosity [acts] as a sign and a warning" (240). But what is the "inner evil" that Gertrude's withered arm reveals? Diane Mason explains in *The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Literature and Medical Culture* (2008) that "[t]he ideal of virginity may, at its most basic level, appear to be relatively easy to define, as the sexually 'untouched,' or we might say 'unmarked' girl (30). Gertrude's moral monstrosity appears in the disfigurement—the withering—of her left arm and hand, the part of her body that bears the visual evidence of her marriage.<sup>182</sup> Gertrude's manual deformity suggests a personal fall and would have been associated with desire. It betrays the intimate nature of Rhoda and Gertrude's relationship, which began even before they met, and it alludes to Gertrude's having autoerotic tendencies in its withering and her inability to conceive a child.

Gertrude's withered arm functions as an impediment to her sexual relationship with

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<sup>182</sup> Only after Gertrude's arm is marked do we, the readers, have any reason to question the moral strength of her character or her heritage.

Lodge and appears in the text as a monster—an outward sign—of their inability to produce a legitimate heir and contribute to the future of their race both in terms of class and bloodline. According to late nineteenth-century medical treatises, manhood depended on masculine virility—a man’s ability to father an heir: “an heir remained a vital factor in many upper-class marriages of the period” (D. Mason 15). Gertrude’s withered arm directly threatens Lodge’s idea of masculine progress. The narrator describes the mark that results from Rhoda’s grasp as follows: “There was nothing of the nature of a wound, but the arm at that point had a shrivelled [sic] look, and the outline of the four fingers appeared more distinct than at the former time. Moreover, they were imprinted in precisely the relative position of her clutch upon the arm in the trance; the first finger towards Gertrude’s wrist, and the fourth towards her elbow” (“Withered Arm” 1545). Though not an open wound, the shriveling that renders the imprint of a hand ever more visible reveals to those who look that Gertrude has opened herself to taint. The residue of Rhoda’s grip reveals Gertrude’s body as publicly available, casting doubt on her inner chastity and even the purity of her heredity. When paired with this original encounter, the strong friendship that Gertrude and Rhoda form following their first actual meeting positions their homosocial bond as threatening to patriarchy in the form of both heterosexual union and reproduction.<sup>183</sup> However, Gertrude’s relationship with Rhoda threatens her relationship with Lodge, suggesting that their initial violent tactile encounter stages Rhoda’s rejection of heteronormative marriage that the wedding ring the specter wore symbolizes and the mark reveals a homoerotic bond between the two women. Gertrude’s arm withers, degenerating into a shriveled, animal-like appendage that recalls Ayesha’s mummified claw. Gertrude explains to Rhoda, “my husband says it is as if some witch, or the devil himself, has taken hold of me there,

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<sup>183</sup> No one has yet performed a Sapphic reading of this touch.

and blasted the flesh” (1545). Lodge reads the mark as indicative of depraved desire and thus is repulsed by it. Additionally, pallor, emaciation, and hair in the center of the palms were associated with excessive masturbation; Gertrude’s withered arm may also suggest masturbatory tendencies that Lodge would assume would have depleted her vital energy and thus her ability to conceive, rendering her an unattractive prospect. The narrator tells the reader just before Gertrude comments on Lodge’s disgust that “She [Rhoda] knew that she had been slyly called a witch since her fall,” which suggests that sexual impurity and witchcraft are inextricably linked in this small community (1544).<sup>184</sup> Continuing the previous conversation with Rhoda, Gertrude goes on to say,

“I shouldn’t so much mind it,” said the younger, with hesitation, “if—if I hadn’t a notion that it makes my husband—dislike me—no, love me less. Men think so much of personal appearance.”

“Some do—he for one.” [Rhoda replies.]

“Yes; and he was very proud of mine at first.”

“Keep your arm covered from his sight.”

“Ah—he knows the disfigurement is there!” (1545)

The above exchange between Gertrude and Rhoda reveals much about Lodge’s relationship with both women. Rhoda’s clear knowledge of Lodge’s interest in physical beauty—what we might also call immaculate surfaces—paired with Gertrude’s earlier statement about Lodge’s own description of the mark reveals that he desires beauty, imagined as white, untouched skin, as a signifier of purity, believing as the article about hands from the ladies’ magazine suggests that “a fine hand and arm scarcely accompany any but a perfect whole.” The narrator notes that Farmer Lodge “wooed [Gertrude] for her grace and beauty,” which explains Rhoda’s initial interest in how Gertrude’s appearance contrasts with her own; Lodge’s choosing of Gertrude reflects his

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<sup>184</sup> A witch’s touch held not only the power to seduce, but also the power to poison and injure. Additionally, people believed witches capable of touching with their eyes (*The Deepest Sense* 90-2). Though Rhoda is more overtly associated with witchcraft, by the end of the tale Gertrude’s touch ceases to nourish as it once did, and participates in the death of her husband’s son: witches were often associated with lower-class women who “subverted the traditional duties of womanhood” (91).



interest in a private body only for his consumption, thus ensuring racial and sexual legitimacy of any heirs (1548). As Gertrude focuses her energy more outside the domestic and more on curing herself of the mark, her arm becomes ever more withered as she depletes herself of energy for biological reproduction; the withered arm proves an impediment to heterosexual copulation. As Rhoda's pregnant body did her, Gertrude's withered arm marks her as a fallen woman who is connected with witchcraft, a touch of the diabolic that attests to nonnormative desire. However, unlike Rhoda who always possessed a public body, Gertrude's disfigurement "then signifies that the countenance was never really clear or innocent of marks" to begin with, but was rather always open to temptation—public view (Connor 74). Even immaculate surface may be marked beneath.

Gertrude's disfigurement and the concluding monstrous touch that comes of it function as a critique of domesticated sexuality focused only on reproduction. Her withered arm may signify a nonnormative desire that Lodge finds dangerous, but Gertrude's singular interest in recouping her lost reproductive sexuality proves just as dangerous to the nation's progress. Gertrude hopes that by touching the neck of a hanged man she will heal her arm and thus, she believes, her husband's sexual interest in her, reasoning that if he can no longer see the impurity, then it will not exist. The narrator never expressly explains what causes Gertrude's barrenness, whether she proves unable to conceive in spite of Lodge's attempts at coupling with her or whether her disfigured limb renders Lodge so disgusted that he refuses to engage in any form of procreative sexual activity. Much as Hardy refuses to give a factual explanation for the withering arm, he likewise refuses to clearly articulate what prevents Lodge and Gertrude from reproducing. At times, the narrator suggests that the fault lies with Gertrude's arm which reveals her barrenness because "she had brought him no child," implying that they have, in fact, tried to conceive

("Withered Arm" 1548). At other times, however, the narrative seems to convey through Gertrude's lamenting and wishing—"If I could only again be as I was when he first saw me!"—that Lodge has lost sexual interest in her because he believes her morally impure and she wishes to bring back his desire for her body in the hopes of once again having sexual relations (1549). In either case, the lack of manual intercourse—tactile articulation of attraction and desire—between Gertrude and Lodge drives Gertrude to seek out the touch of the dead.

The second monstrous touch in this story occurs at the narrative's end with Gertrude's "bar[ing] her poor crust arm; and Davies [the hangman], taking her hand, [and holding] it so that the arm lay across the dead man's neck, upon a line the colour of an unripe blackberry, which surrounded it" (1555). Gertrude's touch is, in a literal sense, monstrous in that she touches the neck of the hanged boy with her disfigured hand and arm, and that the touch itself requires death; Gertrude hopes that the young boy will not be pardoned and set free, though, according to Davies, "if ever a young fellow deserved to be let off, this one does," and then Gertrude herself dies from the shock that the touch results in (1553). Gagné suggests that "as her [Gertrude's] arm withers away; [sic.] so does her ability to touch the world, to touch her husband. Her husband's desire to touch her also withers away" (Gagné 122). If tactile engagement with the world, specifically tactile contact with another person that facilitates a deeper emotional exchange, renders one human, or not animal, as many believed and in the following section I argue Wells *The Island of Doctor Moreau* suggests,<sup>185</sup> then Gertrude's inability to do so renders her something else: a monster, an other, one who exists on a border between human and non-human, between moral and empathetic and immoral and apathetic. Lodge's prejudice towards Gertrude's

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<sup>185</sup> Though many other texts, including those of the nineteenth-century express this sentiment, *Topophilia* (1990) states it clearly: "The fundamental nature of the sense of touch is brought home to us when we reflect that, without sight a persona can still operate with a high degree of efficiency in the world, but without the tactual sense it is doubtful that he can survive" (Tuan 8).

disfigurement drives her to seek out a remedy that will allow her to appear normal once again. As a result, Gertrude reaches out to touch the hanged boy's neck seeking to absorb what is left of his vital energy rather than exchange any aspect of herself with him. Monstrous manual intercourse in this short story reveals the dangers of placing such value on reproductive sexuality; just as female sexual desire focused on pleasure is perceived as a threat to national progress in the form of reproduction, the short story suggests that so too does Gertrude's focus on regaining her reproductive sexuality Lodge believes lost.

Only when we, the readers, witness this second monstrous touch does the disfiguring mark on Gertrude's arm reveal what Rhoda's dream touch rendered legible as a warning: Rhoda's fear that Gertrude's arrival would result in Rhoda's son's being further ostracized by his father.<sup>186</sup> This final touch is monstrous because it reveals the lengths to which Gertrude, as a representative of a certain social class, will go in order to ensure the continuation of her and Lodge's family line. In fact, Gertrude's touching of Lodge's illegitimate son forces both Gertrude herself and Lodge to confront the monstrous nature of their drive toward reproduction: how Lodge's desire for a pure bloodline led not only to the death of Gertrude—who was no purer or less susceptible to sin, it turns out, than the lorn milkmaid—but also to the death of his only heir, and thus the family line and farmlands that he so desperately wanted to save. Gertrude's monstrous manual intercourse reveals the upper class fear of degeneration. When Gertrude touches the hanged boy, for the first time Lodge is touched by loss, forced to confront the monstrous situation of his creation. He initially rejects his son for his maternal lineage and then Gertrude for her visible degeneracy. Rhoda and Gertrude's monstrous manual intercourse reveals that the upper class drive for legitimacy, emblemized in Lodge, will lead to its

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<sup>186</sup> Rhoda warms up to Gertrude because of the kindness Gertrude shows to Rhoda's son.

disintegration.

Much as the monstrous touches in “The Withered Arm” do, each of the later texts that I consider at contain instances of monstrous manual intercourse that communicate dangerous, nonnormative forms of sexuality that threaten the nation’s reproductive futurity. While we will examine some “monsters” that touch, our focus will remain more on the monstrous, the sensibility of monstrosity that I here pair with moments of actual or imagined contact; one does not have to be a monster in order to give a monstrous touch. Rhoda and Gertrude are not positioned as visible monsters, though their monstrous encounter reveals nonnormative desires in both women. Rhoda’s grip reveals her desire for Gertrude, renders visible Gertrude’s potential autoerotic practices forcing Lodge to question his chosen wife and the difference between her and the working class milkmaid who fathered his son. Further, Gertrude’s touching of the hanged boy reveals the monstrous nature of what she has become to herself, the other characters, and the readers; she recognizes that her desire to touch—to reclaim her reproductive potential—contributes to and depends upon the death of Lodge’s illegitimate son. Monstrous manual intercourse within novels fails to establish a sympathetic connection between characters that will lead to reproduction and, instead, often results in the death of a child, leads to non-heteronormative forms of reproduction, or threatens to transmit erotic desire from one body to another, endangering individual potential and national progress that depend on female reproduction in the process.

### **III. ‘His is the Hand’: The Monster and His Monstrosities**

In turning to H. G. Wells’ 1896 novella, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, I note that scholars have yet to adequately consider the importance of hands to Wells’ dark tale of

vivisection.<sup>187</sup> Though *The Island of Doctor Moreau* relates the story of Edward Prendick's experiences on a remote island ruled by the vivisectionist, Dr. Moreau, and inhabited only by Moreau's servant, Montgomery, and his abhuman creations variously termed Beast Folk,<sup>188</sup> Beast People, Beast Men, and eventually Beast Monsters, I contend that Wells' novella is a story about hands: the godlike hands of Moreau, the deformed hands of the Beast People, and the "five-man," meaning five fingered, hands of Prendick (*Moreau* 119). When Prendick arrives on Moreau's island, he initially fears that Moreau vivisects men because of the increasingly humanlike cries that emanate from his laboratory, what the Beast People refer to as Moreau's "House of Pain" (118). After running away from Moreau's compound fearing for his life, Prendick soon discovers that Moreau vivisects animals, attempting to mold them into human-like form. Over the years critics have explored this novella as a commentary on male reproduction, the anti-vivisection movement, gender politics, race, evolution and social Darwinism, the developing scientific disciplines, theology, and transgressive desires.<sup>189</sup> Yet, whatever the subject, most scholars conclude that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* ultimately blurs the boundary between human and abhuman, questioning both which physical and intellectual qualities make us

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<sup>187</sup> While most articles on *The Island of Doctor Moreau* address the physical deformity of the Beast People, all of them elide specific discussion of the hands. For example, Michael Parish Lee's 2010 article on meat and animality in Wells's work points to the driving colonial discourse of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* that both works towards assimilation and points to the colonizer's "desire that the assimilated subject retain a degree of difference," localizing his reading to Moreau's transformation of the Beast People's physical form (Lee 264). However, nowhere in this discussion does Lee address the Beast People's deformed hands or how that deformity functions as ever visible evidence of their racialization.

<sup>188</sup> Though critics traditionally refer to the Beast People as "nonhuman," both Kelly Hurley and Neville Hoad offer alternative terms for addressing their racial status. Hurley identifies the Beast People as "abhuman"—invoking Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection—in order to denote a "not-quite-human subject," while Hoad refers to the Beast people as "unhuman," explaining that one must first be human to be "inhuman" while "non-human" can also designate inanimate objects (Hurley 55; Hoad 213, n. 5). I will refer to Moreau's creatures as abhuman "Beast People" throughout to highlight what, I argue, their monstrosity comes from: their blurring of what was once thought a clear boundary between human and nonhuman, and their expansion of reproductive possibility—Moreau procreates on his own without a woman.

<sup>189</sup> See, Benziman, Lansbury, Otis, Christensen, Glendening, Squier, Sutherland, and Hoad respectively for examples of each of these approaches.

human as well as what types of sensations and emotions retain the essence of that humanity in the face of scientific expansion.<sup>190</sup> Rather than focusing solely on developing this evolutionary reading, however, I will suggest that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* complicates the term “human” by challenging the clear distinction that science sought to erect between human and abhuman through the hands.

In this novella, monstrous manual intercourse makes visible the uneasy parallel in the Victorian mind between animal, woman, and racial other. The text depicts those with deformed hands and/or lacking tactile sensibility as abhumans, in either the physical or emotional sense, whose touches, much like Gertrude’s, threaten national progress because of their inability to facilitate the reciprocal tactile connection between individuals on which civilization depends. By the end of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Moreau dies having lost most of a hand to the puma, his last and most promising experiment;<sup>191</sup> the Beast People’s hands have reverted back to claws, hooves, and paws much as Ayesha’s do in Haggard’s *She*; and Prendick, left alone with the Beast People, begins to question his difference from them as the Ape-Man continually reminds him of their manual similarity, “assum[ing], on the strength of his five-digits, that he [i]s [Prendick’s] equal” (195). Moreau’s hands prove monstrous because they create a race of abhuman monsters incapable of engaging productively with each other or the three men—Moreau, Montgomery, and Prendick—who form the island’s human population. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* employs monstrous manual intercourse to criticize what Elaine Showalter terms “celebratory reproduction,” which denies the female role in reproduction, seeks to reproduce itself, and generates monsters that place their own impulses above national welfare (“Fables” 75).

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<sup>190</sup> Lee notes this as well, stating that most critics recognize that the novel “continuously works to render the distinction between man and beast uncertain” (261).

<sup>191</sup> See Otis for a discussion of the puma as a gendered social experiment in the vein of Eliza Doolittle.

As many critics have noted, the Beast People deify Moreau,<sup>192</sup> but what often escapes critical attention is that they do so by locating his power in his hand. We first meet the Beast People when Prendick runs away from Moreau's compound in fear, and it is during Prendick's interactions with them that we are first introduced to the Law, a performative hymn that each Beast Man must say upon entering the camp, which a missionary taught the Beast People by way of civilizing them. While it begins with a series of behavioral dictates that culminate in the question "Are we not men?",<sup>193</sup> the chant concludes with a hymnal recognition of Moreau's godliness:

'*His* is the House of Pain.  
'*His* is the Hand that makes.  
'*His* is the Hand that wounds.  
'*His* is the Hand that heals.' (*Moreau* 118; italics original)

The text's position on the relationship between religion and science has been a question ever since the novel was first reviewed. In June of 1896, for example, a reviewer for *The Guardian* explains his confusion, "Sometimes one is inclined to think the intention of the author has been to satirise and rebuke the presumption of science; at other times his object seems to be to parody the work of the Creator of the human race, and cast contempt upon the dealings of God with His creatures" (191). Contemporary critics have found little more clarity; Genie Babb in attempt to bridge this divide argues that "the *The Island of Doctor Moreau* critiques the attempts among

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<sup>192</sup> See, for example, Benziman p. 385, Lee p. 263, and Sutherland p. 6 who all address Moreau as a scientist who usurps, assumes, and/or parodies the power of God.

<sup>193</sup> The chant is said by the Beast People in unison while swaying and goes as follows:  
'Not to go on all-Fours; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?'  
'Not to suck up Drink; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?'  
'Not to eat Flesh nor Fish; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?'  
'Not to claw Bark of Trees; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?'  
'Not to chase other Men; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?' (Wells 117)

certain scientists [Wells' contemporaries] to square theism with science" (123).<sup>194</sup> In contrast to these critics, my interest lies in the hands' prevalence throughout Wells' text and their precarious position as both emblems of human thought and evolution for science and of God's intervention for theology.<sup>195</sup> I begin with this hymn to establish the centrality of the hand to the question of humanity and human ascension in Wells' novella.

The rhetorical structure of this lyric converts Moreau's hand into the Hand of God attempting to make men in his own image; Moreau's Hand, with a capital "H," possesses the power to "make," "wound," and "heal." Leon Stover notes in the critical edition of this text that this chant recalls Deuteronomy 32:39,<sup>196</sup> an old testament God: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." As God is the one true god with power to decide the fate of Moses' people, so too does this chant position Moreau as the one true god of the island who holds the fate of all his creations in the palm of his powerful hand. Devoid of governmental oversight, Moreau's hand holds ultimate power. In the eyes of the Beast People, Moreau's power as both scientist and creator comes from the dexterity of his hands and their ability to determine physical

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<sup>194</sup> See Nicholas Ruddick's *Ultimate Island: On the Nature of British Science Fiction* (Westport, CT 1993); Steven McLean's *The Early Fiction of H. G. Wells: Fantasies of Science* (New York 2004); Darko Suvin's *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction: On the Politics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven 1979); Gorman Beauchamp's "The Island of Doctor Moreau as Theological Grotesque," *Papers on Language and Literature* 15 (1979); and Anne Stile's "Literature in Mind: H. G. Wells and the Evolution of the Mad Scientist," *Journal of History of Ideas* 70.2 (2009).

<sup>195</sup> See Bell's *The Hand* (1833) for an example of the latter.

<sup>196</sup> It also resembles Job 5:18: "For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." This suggests that the power believed to reside in God's hands is a prevalent theme in the Old Testament linked with the idea of judgment. However, Deuteronomy 32:39 is spoken by Moses while warning his people of the judgment that God may visit upon them if they worship false idols, which is reminiscent of the Kanaka missionary who taught this chant to the Beast People in the hope of preventing them from falling into the same sin against which Moses warns his people.



reality on the island.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, just as none can “deliver out of my [God’s] hand,” on Moreau’s island “None escape”—a statement repeated by the Beast People at least eight times in the span of two pages (*Moreau* 120-1). The Beast People locate Moreau’s human superiority in his doctor’s hand that wields the scalpel, yet the text betrays a level of skepticism about Moreau’s evolutionary position. In 1893, Wells wrote an article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* titled “The Man of the Year Million” in which he, through the voice of one Professor Holzkopf, proposes a pattern of evolution for the human male:<sup>198</sup>

The coming man, then, will have a larger brain, and a slighter body than the present. But the Professor makes one exception to this. “The human hand, since it is the teacher and interpreter of the brain, will become constantly more powerful and subtle as the rest of the musculature dwindles.”

Then in the physiology of these children of men, with their expanding brains, their great sensitive hands and diminishing bodies, great changes were necessarily worked. (“Year Million” 3)

In Wells’ figuration the continued development and sensitivity of the hands prove essential to human evolution.<sup>199</sup> Yet, interestingly, as I briefly noted above, Moreau ultimately loses his hand to the puma largely because of his hands’ insensitivity and inability to either instruct or give material form to his thought. Moreau’s hands proves a monstrous parody of evolution; it carries no real power in that the puma delivers herself from it and the rest of the Beast People degenerate, suggesting that Moreau’s hands never possessed creative power to begin with.

Moreau lacks the gentle, care-giving touch required to complete the Beast People’s transformation into fully realized “humanised animals”; his monstrous hands engage in

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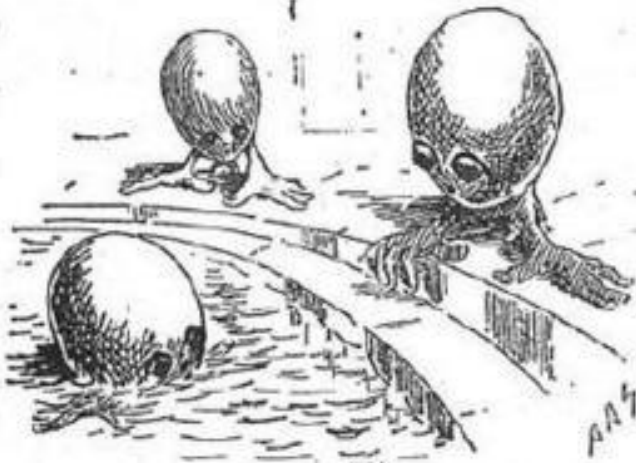
<sup>197</sup> As a side note, I might also mention that, similarly, Montgomery’s power comes from his ability to wield a whip with his hands, which the Beast People cannot do because of their deformity. The Beast People refer to him as “the Other with the whip”; though they also identify him as powerful because they believe he neither bleeds nor cries, he is primarily identified with the object his hands control (Wells 158).

<sup>198</sup> My sincerest thanks to Genie Babb who pointed me to Anne Stiles’ article, which begins with a reference to the *Punch* cartoon that pokes fun at Wells’ original article.

<sup>199</sup> See Fig. 12 for *Punch*’s parody of this evolved figure, though note that the abridged quotation from Wells’ article lacks the detailed descriptions of the importance of the hands.

## 1,000,000 A.D.

["The descendants of man will nourish themselves by immersion in nutritive fluid. They will have enormous brains, liquid, soulful eyes, and large hands, on which they will hop. No craggy nose will they have, no vestigial ears; their mouths will be a small, perfectly round aperture, unanimal, like the evening star. Their whole muscular system will be shrivelled to nothing, a dangling pendant to their minds."—*Pall Mall Gazette*, abridged.]



WHAT a million years hence,  
will become of the *Genus*  
*Humanum*, is truly a  
question vexed;  
At that epoch, however, one  
prophet has seen us  
Resemble the sketch  
annexed.

For as Man undergoes  
Evolution ruthless,  
His skull will grow "dome-  
like, bald, terete";

And his mouth will be jawless, gumless, toothless—  
No more will he drink or eat!

He will soak in a crystalline bath of pepsine,  
(No ROBERT will then have survived, to wait,)  
And he'll hop on his hands as his food he steps in—  
A quasi-cherubic gait!

No longer the land or the sea he'll furrow;  
The world will be withered, ice-cold, dead  
As the chill of Eternity grows, he'll burrow  
Far down underground instead.

If the *Pall Mall Gazette* has thus been giving  
A forecast correct of this change immense,  
Our stars we may thank, then, that *we* shan't be living  
A million years from hence!

Figure 12. *Punch*. "1,000,000 A.D." (25 November 1893). On Wells' "The Man of Year Million."

celebratory acts focused on individual gratification, not reproductive ones in the sense of heterosexual copulation. As Moreau himself explains, ““As soon as my hand is taken from them, the beast begins to creep back”” (*Moreau* 147). In other words, when Moreau’s creative touch is denied the Beast People, they revert to their former animal selves. Among others, Galia Benziman has read *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a fantasy of male birth,<sup>200</sup> suggesting that while male scientists may have the power to create, they fail at parenting—the sustained interest in the ‘child’ following birth. I suggest that the novella equates Moreau’s creative potential as a scientist with monstrosity, not only in his refusal to maintain a connection with his creations, but also in his self-termed ‘evolved’ lack of sympathy associated with his deadened tactile senses, and in the ultimate loss of his hand—his emblem of paternal authority.

Moreau’s hands are monstrous because of what they attempt to create, what those creations reveal about Moreau’s own character, and how he reproduces outside of the standard mode of procreation.<sup>201</sup> Moreau’s monstrous hands manifest his inhumane scientific interest in “the plasticity of living forms” on the bodies of the Beast People, revealing the moral questionability of his drive towards scientific progress imagined as a race of humanised animals (133).<sup>202</sup> Moreau’s hands, and what results from their touches, forces the reader to see and question dividing lines once thought fixed. The creation of the Beast People reveals the plasticity

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<sup>200</sup> See also Lehman and Showalter, “Fables” (1992).

<sup>201</sup> In “Human Evolution, an artificial Process,” Wells asserts that “the average man of our society is now intrinsically what he was in Paleolithic times,” except that the artificial codes of society have taught him to discipline certain impulses (215). Similarly, Moreau explains that he shapes both bodies and instincts because “what we call moral education is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into religious emotion,” much like the “decent citizen” of Wells’ essay (*Moreau* 136).

<sup>202</sup> A quotation that Wells transplants directly from his essay, “The Limits of Individual Plasticity,” published a year earlier in 1895.

of human and animal shapes, the slippery slope between ethics and intellectual curiosity, and the possibility of procreation apart from female birth. Moreau's attempt to create humans—meaning civilized approximations of English men and women—from animals threatens a type of miscegenation, a dangerous combining of races that results in the pollution of the superior. Moreau's monstrous hands create grotesque, abhuman amalgams that he then rejects for their inhumanity, pointing to Moreau's inability to cannot sympathize with the pain experienced by his own abhuman creations. In *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995), Lennard Davis asserts that “the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her. [...] This normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on” (41-2). While initially Prendick functions as that central normative character who can, at least, understand Moreau's scientific impulses, by the end we disidentify with Prendick as well as Moreau, positioning ourselves as normal and all other characters within the text as abnormal. We may despise Moreau for his cruelty, pity Prendick for his bad luck, and even empathize with the Beast People's pain, but this narrative reinforces the importance of our controlling our impulses to remain normal and avoid a fate like that which Moreau, Prendick, and the Beast People suffer. Where Moreau has lost his hand, we will keep ours; where Prendick has withdrawn from human contact, we will remain connected.

As a result of Moreau's failing, the Beast People end up with misshapen hands that lack the tactile sensitivity of human hands. While most critics have focused on the Beast People's acquisition of language as the mark of their humanity, and their loss of it as their regression into

animality,<sup>203</sup> I argue that by denying the Beast People’s tactile sensitivity the text always marks them as abhuman, a race apart. To deny their hands’ tactile sensitivity is to deny them consciousness.<sup>204</sup> If the hand expresses human intellect by acting on it as Heidegger conceives, then the Beast People are always already marked as abhuman even if their appearance and language can approximate it. The Beast People do not possess *the* hand—in the Heideggerian sense—but rather bestial hands that mark their racial inferiority.<sup>205</sup> Prendick notes immediately upon meeting the Beast People that they had “malformed hands, lacking sometimes even three digits” (*Moreau* 112). Later, he offers more details about that deformity, explaining that “though some surprised me by their unexpected humanity, almost all were deficient in the number of the digits, clumsy about the finger-nails, and lacking any tactile sensibility” (152). Though these creatures appear nearly human, Prendick establishes a clear distinction, a hierarchy evidenced in the shape of the hand. Much as Gertrude’s withered arm marks her as Other and prevents her and Lodge from reproducing, the Beast People’s deformed hands mark them as racial others born of celebratory reproduction. Their deficient number of digits monstrates their lack of a precision grip made possible by the opposable thumb, the emblem of human ascension, as Thomas Huxley explained.<sup>206</sup> Their clumsy fingers could thus be read through hand-phrenology as indicating an intellectual deficiency, usually associated with the working or criminal classes. Cesare Lombroso

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<sup>203</sup> See, for example, *Otis* p. 499.

<sup>204</sup> Interestingly, L. Davis argues in his study of disability that nationality and full citizenship is linked with language, and that, “Because people are interpellated as subjects through language, because language itself is a congealed set of social practices, the actual dysfunctionality of the Deaf is to have another language system” (78). Here, the Beast People have access to language and yet they are still positioned as outsiders, disabled by their manual deformity and lack of tactile sensitivity.

<sup>205</sup> See Christensen for a discussion of the Beast People’s racialization.

<sup>206</sup> In 1880, Thomas Huxley’s *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* hails the opposable thumb as that appendage on which our “carrying into effect the conceptions of the mind so largely depends” (Huxley 103). Huxley was one of Wells teachers at university.

notes in his 1876 study *Criminal Man* (trans. 1911) “that 4.1 percent of criminals have serious malformations of the hand including webbed skin between the fingers” (*Criminal Man* 307). In addition to manual deformity, Lombroso was also interested in physical sensitivity, often testing this by measuring tactile sensitivity in the hands. Lombroso “believed that physical insensitivity correlated with emotional and moral insensitivity” (401).<sup>207</sup> In light of such theories, the Beast People’s inability to experience tactile sensations denies them not only the capacity to fully experience the world, but also to engage in sympathetic manual intercourse with each other, a possible reason for their inability to form a sustainable community among themselves.<sup>208</sup>

Though the Beast People view Moreau’s hand as godly powerful, the text betrays a skepticism about Moreau’s power in its depiction of his inability to tactilely connect with any of the island’s inhabitants. He never touches either Montgomery or Prendick, and his scientific touch dominates the Beast People, literally shaping their bodies under his scalpel—he touches at a distance, using the scalpel to mediate between his hand and their bodies. His solipsistic form of tactility dominates rather than sympathizes and ignores the social codes that would seek to control it, rendering it monstrous and revealing Moreau as akin to the monsters he creates. Moreau’s hands prove unable to engage in any type of reciprocal manual intercourse, revealing a detachment from the fellow-feeling implicit in human connection—how the mind and body understand physical sensations experienced in the skin determines our level of connectedness

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<sup>207</sup> According to Lombroso’s research, “[a]ll travelers know that among the Negroes and savages of America, sensitivity to pain is so limited that the former laugh as they mutilate their hands to escape work, while the latter sing their tribe’s praises while being burned alive” (69). He “suspect[ed] that criminals are less sensitive to pain than the average man,” and further asserted that complete insensitivity to pain (analgesia) usually appears among the criminally insane (206). Thus, based on Lombroso’s theory of criminality, Moreau’s self—professed insensitivity to pain and the Beast People’s own lack of tactile sensitivity suggest that both possess criminal instincts. In other words, Moreau’s insensitivity to pain connects him with the animal nature of the Beast People rather than positioning him as more evolved, as Moreau would have us believe.

<sup>208</sup> While they live together in a city-like structure of their creation, there is always a sense of animal competition exemplified in their final devolution into their bestial selves. Without the Kanaka missionary, they cannot maintain their community.

with other bodies and the world more generally. As Moreau himself explains when Prendick questions him about the pain vivisection inflicts, “Sympathetic pain—all I know of it I remember as a thing I used to suffer from years ago” (141). In Moreau’s mind, truly evolved people do not experience either pain or pleasure, sensations seated in the body. “*His* is the hand,” but that hand offers only a distanced scientific touch that relies on the scalpel for mediation. Moreau denies the physical—the tactile in particular—and in so doing denies the subjectivity of his fellow creatures on the island who cannot be “human” because their base animal instincts—awareness of physical sensations associated with lower-order races—drives them. Though Moreau recognizes himself as a human set above through his ability to manually engage without establishing a sympathetic connection, the text employs monstrous manual intercourse to reveal psychological deformity and the threat to family life and national stability such scientific celebratory reproduction poses.

Since the Abbé de Condillac’s *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754), philosophers have theorized the sense of touch seated in the hand as the sense most directly linked with the emergence of human consciousness and subjectivity. Touch, mediated through the hand, makes us human because if we cannot feel, we do not know that we exist. While Cartesian dualism, popularized during the scientific revolution at the turn of the century, distinguishes intellectual thought from physical feeling, Wells’ text seems to question this figuration taken to the extreme in Moreau who hails the numbness to pain—the denial of the physical—as what distinguishes the truly human, or perhaps more precisely the most *evolved* human.<sup>209</sup> Pleasure and pain rely on physical contact, associating these sensations with the body, and women and animals by proxy. When Moreau explains his vivisection experiments to Prendick, Moreau asserts that “[t]he store men and women set on pleasure and pain, Prendick, is the mark of the beast upon them, the mark

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<sup>209</sup> The text questions this perspective, warning the readers of the dangers of insensitivity through its depiction of Moreau’s monstrous hands.

of the beast from which they came,” directly invoking *Revelations* (141). *Revelations* 13:15-16 explains the mark as follows: “And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads.” I argue that Moreau reads this mark specifically in the Beast People’s hands.

For Moreau, the experience of physical sensation marks the body as animal, as “beast” in both the literal and Biblical sense. Moreau’s ‘god-like’ hand fails to accurately shape the hands of the Beast People, to morph them into ‘human’ appendages, and thus fails to mold their minds. As it turns out, his are not the hands that “make,” “wound,” and “heal,” as the Beast People believe. He explains to Prendick, “The human shape I can get now, almost with ease, [...]; but often there is trouble with the hands and claws—painful things that I dare not shape too freely” (146). While Moreau denies his capacity to sympathize with the pain felt by his creations, he perhaps hypocritically refrains from spending too much time on their hands specifically because they are such “painful things.” Though Moreau claims to have evolved past pain, the Beast People’s hands function as evidence that he still recognizes and responds to extreme pain in others, highlighting the monstrous nature of his manual intercourse. Moreau’s reaction to the intensity of the Beast People’s pain and his inability to perfectly shape the Beast People’s hands signifies his own connection to the imperfections that he associates with the human body: he still retains a level of sympathetic awareness that prevents him from creating a perfectly realized human form from an animal body. In his discussion of disfigurement, Connor explains that “there is the mark of the sinner, mark of the beast, disfigurement of the body formed in the image of the Lord”; for both Gertrude and the Beast People, this mark appears etched into the very



shape and surface of the hands (Connor 82). I would suggest that the mark of the beast that manifests in the misshapen hands of the Beast People actually renders visible Moreau's own inner depravity as he is one of the three recognizable human creatures on the island;<sup>210</sup> the Beast People were modeled after Moreau's own form.

From the first moment that Prendick meets one of the Beast People, he confronts human plasticity as the Ape-Man refers to his hands as a means of identification. "His eyes came back to my hands," Prendick explains, "He held his own hand out, and counted his digits slowly, 'One, Two, Three, Four, Five—eh?'" (Wells 112). Throughout, the Ape-Man recalls Prendick to his own evolutionary origins by literally aping his hand and questioning the validity of the post-Darwinian racial hierarchy established by figures like Robert Knox. After Prendick's interaction with the Beast People and the Law, Montgomery returns to the Beast People's camp to introduce Prendick as "'The Third with the whip,'" which the Ape-Man argues with by explaining to Montgomery that "'He [Prendick] has five fingers; he is a five-man like me'" (158, 159). Unlike Rhoda who initially distinguishes herself from Gertrude based on Gertrude's gloved hands, Prendick has difficulty explaining to the Ape-Man how he differs because they possess the same number of digits and thus, in the Ape-Man's view, must be the same type of creature and share the same racial origins. Even after Moreau and Montgomery die, Prendick still has to contend with the Ape-Man who "assumed, on the strength of his five digits, that he was my [Prendick's] equal, and was forever jabbering at me [him], jabbering the most arrant nonsense" (195). The Ape-Man's insistence effectively complicates the clarity of the boundary between not solely human and abhuman but also that between races, forcing both Prendick and the reader with him to confront how it is that we determine those boundaries.

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<sup>210</sup> Interestingly, all of them have issues with touch, perhaps partially because they have been cordoned off from society and thus denied the ability to tactilely engage with other people, especially women.

While Prendick possesses the human hand in the Heideggerian sense of intellect and consciousness, his interactions and inability to establish a meaningful connection with the Beast People call his own humanity—social position as an English Anglo-Saxon male—into question. Similarly to Moreau’s inability to sympathize with his abhuman creations, Prendick can only sympathize with pain in these animals when he sees his own humanity reflected in them.<sup>211</sup> However, the deformity of the Beast People’s hands often highlights their racial difference and prevents Prendick from establishing any reciprocal tactile connection with them. L. Davis explains the fear of and attraction to the disabled through a reading of touch based in Didier Anzieu’s concept of the ‘skin ego’: “Touch represents a fragmenting of the body, a threat of mutilation, and a fear of losing one’s boundaries, one’s bodily integrity. In this sense, touching the creature, touching the disabled body is both an erotic-lure and a self-destroying gesture” (148). Much as Lodge with Gertrude once her manual deformity becomes visible, Prendick fearing contagion and degeneration recoils from tactile contact with the Beast People. The few times that Prendick’s hand comes into contact with one of the Beast People’s, he reacts with physical disgust at what he perceives as a monstrous gesture offered by one of a lower racial order. Speaking of the Sloth-Man, Prendick explains that “then something cold touched my hand. I started violently” (*Moreau* 115). Similarly, when he first meets the Sayer of the Law, Prendick notes how “He [the Sayer] put out a strangely distorted talon, and gripped my fingers. The thing was almost like the hoof of a deer produced into claws. I could have yelled with surprise and pain” (119). In both cases, Prendick’s violent reaction to physical contact with the Beast People and his descriptions of such contact emphasize his unease at what their seemingly monstrous

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<sup>211</sup> His concern for his own welfare after her arrives on the island comes from hearing human-like cries in Moreau’s lab—the puma’s as we later learn. And, Prendick arguably performs a mercy killing on the Leopard Man when he looks into its (or his) eyes and sees his own human fear reflected back.

manual intercourse forces him to confront: the indefinite racial boundaries between what is human, what is inhuman, and what is inhumane. Furthermore, the blurring of gender roles as the creatures recall Prendick to Moreau's solipsistic form of reproduction suggests that Moreau's single-minded focus on gratifying his scientific interests is almost masturbatory.<sup>212</sup> Prendick experiences their "cold," painful touches as evidence of their monstrosity, reading their inability to engage in reciprocal manual intercourse or recognize his own discomfort with their contact as evidence that they are insensate, like those criminal races that Lombroso identifies. Their handclasps are monstrous because their manual deformity engenders an unpleasant sensation on the surface of Prendick's skin that forces him to confront his own inhumanity, his willingness to accept the work that Moreau does on the island.

The closest Prendick comes to engaging in some form of tactile reciprocity comes after the death of Moreau and Montgomery, when he is left alone on the island and must live with the Beast People. Prendick tells how "something soft and warm and moist passed across my hand. / All my muscles contracted. I snatched my hand away" (191). The "soft," "warm," and "moist" "something" is the tongue of the Dog-Man who attempts to show both fealty and deference by kissing Prendick's hand. Prendick initially reacts with the same disgust, but then "extend[s] [his] hand for another licking kiss" (191). Far from being reciprocal, this moment of contact functions as one of domination, highlighted by the cultural rhetoric that links slaves and dogs; Prendick allows the abhuman Dog-Man to "kiss" his hand with its tongue as a sign of racial inferiority and deference. The reciprocity possible through manual intercourse requires that a hand touch another hand; only then can emotion be exchanged. Though the Dog-Man makes contact with

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<sup>212</sup> Additionally, Stover suggests that Montgomery's behavior during his first conversation with Prendick is a "caricature of supposed homosexual mannerisms" and, "[i]n this, as is his abnormally lanky body, Montgomery is meant to exhibit imperfection of human form" (Wells 66, n.13). Read in light of this, Moreau's ability to create without female participation may represent greater anxieties about all forms of queer reproductive possibilities. See Hoad for a further discussion of the text's queer anxieties.

Prendick's hand, the tongue does not hold the same social position as the emblem of human ascendancy and sexuality that the hand does. The use of the tongue establishes the animality of the Dog-Man who proves capable of effective contact only when his organ of taste—perhaps the sense most associated with the animal—is engaged. The boundary and hierarchy between them remains intact, which placates Prendick's sense of unease. Yet, the text also reveals Prendick's humanity as questionable precisely because he refuses to tactilely engage: while the Beast People's race denies them the capacity to engage successfully in manual intercourse because Moreau fails to shape their claws, talons, and paws into proper hands, Prendick rejects the Beast People's attempts at engaging their humanity through tactile contact just as he does with greater society when he returns home.<sup>213</sup> This lack of sensation and physical deformity apparent in the Beast People's hands evinces social tensions about the evolutionary place of the human race and the regulation of desire as a means of controlling reproduction and maintaining a social hierarchy. If one seeks procreation outside of biological reproduction, one will birth a monster that will only, in turn, birth further monstrous creatures that will lead to the death of the nation. While Moreau may be the embodiment of "patriarchy's resentment of reliance upon women for its reproduction," his attempt to 'single-handedly' create and control his own race proves a failure that validates women's creative powers in relation to reproduction (David 198). However, the procreative and moral power assigned to women applies only to English women as female Beast People give birth to monstrous creatures that cannot survive and the female puma dies when her violent actions mark her as beyond social control.

By the novella's end, Moreau has died with "[o]ne hand [that] was almost severed at the

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<sup>213</sup> The narrative ends with Prendick's explanation that "I have withdrawn myself from the confusion of cities and multitudes, and spend my days surrounded by wise books, bright windows in this life of ours lit by the shining souls of men" (*Moreau* 207). Prendick withdraws himself from any form of tactile contact with the people that populate his surroundings and thus from the reproductive pool.

wrist” by the puma, the female subject who escaped and exacted her revenge (*Moreau* 178). Galia Benziman, Coral Lansbury and most recently Thomas Cole have read this passage as the resurgence of the feminine in a novella that not only absents the female, but only depicts it to begin with as that which is subjugated and exploited by science,<sup>214</sup> embodied in the figure of Moreau himself. Showalter identifies the vivisector as “a fin-de-siècle scientist who attempts to separate reproduction from female sexuality” and “replac[e] sexual heterosexual reproduction with male self-creation” (“Fables” 72). If Moreau tries, like a god, to create human forms from nonhuman ones, then the female puma, who Showalter suggests functions as “a New Woman figure,” renders Moreau’s failure to create—or even reproduce—the human form visible (*Sexual Anarchy* 179). The puma emerges from Moreau’s House of Pain “not human, not animal, but hellish, brown, seamed with red branching scars, red drops starting out upon it, and the lidless eyes ablaze” (171). The puma’s “brown” skin and animal form establish a textual link between animality, race, and sexuality in this instance, developing that further with the mention of blood, which stands in for dangerous, uncontrolled female sexuality. Women who lost blood were believed to seek it out and suck energy from the bodies of others to compensate for its loss (David 46). In this moment, the text reveals Moreau’s hand and its touch as monstrous because it has created nothing but a scarred and terrifying mass, proving himself neither human nor animal, nor godlike. Moreau’s severed hand is a metaphorical presentation and literal embodiment—a monster—of his failure to either create as a god or reproduce as a woman. If his is the hand that “makes,” “wounds,” and “heals,” then the puma’s severing of it strips him of his power and locates the central question of the novel in the hand itself. Anne Stiles notes the Victorian association of genius with insanity and degeneracy, explaining that, to the Victorians, ““The man

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<sup>214</sup> Cole, following Showalter, reads the island itself as female, or at the very least feminized.

of genius is a monster,' claimed Lombroso" (325). The man of genius was all brain and, like criminals, lacked tactile sensitivity. His dulled tactile sensitivity marks his devolution. Moreau's severed hand evinces his degeneration and marks him as an unevolved specimen, just as he viewed his Beast People. Gertrude's monstrous touch depends on the death of a young boy in her attempt to reclaim her right to reproduce whereas Moreau's monstrous manual intercourse tries to contain sexuality by mastering reproduction through the creation of a new race. Moreau, his Beast People, and Prendick all fail to establish tactile connections and thus denied a national community because they cannot form lasting interpersonal relationships. To be human is to touch; evolved humans have hands.

#### **IV. Touching Monstrosity: The Masturbator's Monstrous Hand**

To say that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) has been written on widely would be an understatement, yet little attention has been paid to Dracula's body, his physical characteristics as described by Jonathan Harker during the initial pages of the novel. Rather than refuting earlier foundational readings of *Dracula* and its commentary on racial and sexual relations in particular, I would like to expand on what other critics have suggested about the novel's figuration of race and sexuality by exploring what we gain from reading one of Dracula's body parts in particular: his monstrous hand. As I mentioned earlier, Braidotti suggests that the monstrous body always functions as a textual body—a body that can be read for its contradictions (what Judith Halberstam terms a "technology of monstrosity") (Braidotti 136; Halberstam 88). Though Jonathan, one of the novel's heroes, offers several detailed descriptions of Dracula's face throughout the novel,<sup>215</sup> I suggest that he reads Dracula's monstrosity in his hands and their touches well before he recognizes Dracula's teeth and mouth as a threat. By privileging the

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<sup>215</sup> See pp. 21, 23-4, and 155.

monstrous manual intercourse that begin *Dracula*, I argue that the novel constructs Dracula as monstrous because he channels reproductive energy away from the nation by redirecting it, offering instead erotic sexuality focused on individual pleasure. Halberstam argues that, when reading *Dracula*, “the point really is not to figure out which so-called perverse sexuality Dracula or the vampire in general embodies, rather we should identify the mechanism by which the consuming monster who reproduces his own image comes to represent the construction of sexuality itself” (Halberstam 100). In other words, we as critics cannot reduce Dracula to simply a symbol of foreign sexuality, homoeroticism, lesbianism, or heterosexual competition as scholars have previously argued.<sup>216</sup> Rather, as a technology of monstrosity, Dracula embodies all of these and more, which I suggest the novel makes visible in the monstrosity that it associates with Dracula’s hands. Dracula’s hands are monstrous because they threaten to pollute the body and soul, and, through them, the nation with their touch.

A touch from Dracula’s hands threatens to contaminate the one touched with Dracula’s own lascivious nature. In Constance Classen’s edited collection *The Book of Touch* (2005), Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that “the fear of promiscuity was encoded above all in terms of the fear of being touched,” especially with the rising awareness of germ theory during the latter half of the century (290).<sup>217</sup> Monstrous touches contaminate, carrying with them the contagion housed in the body of the one who touches. Diane Mason suggests that the standard Victorian conception of masturbation likened it to vampirism: “Onanism, like vampirism, was thought to be a ‘contamination’ largely transmitted through bodily contact with one already

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<sup>216</sup> See Arata, Schaffer, Craft, McCrea.

<sup>217</sup> Germ theory postulated invisible microscopic contagion that penetrated the body and infected it via contact. Prior to germ theory which popularized the dangers of physical contact, popular perception held that contagion functioned through smell. Margaret Kennedy’s dissertation *Protecting the “House Beautiful”: Eco-consciousness in the Victorian Novel* (2013) suggests that novelists employed miasmatic discourse, which relied on synesthetic descriptions, in order to make visible invisible, environmental contagions.

‘infected’” (D. Mason 41). Popular belief held that frequent masturbation in both men and women resulted in the decline of one’s physical and spiritual health. Only the morally depraved indulged in self-abasement rather than directing those energies towards heterosexual reproduction. In men, medical treatises declared that masturbation impaired manliness by sapping virility, depleting the stores and the quality of semen, and finally resulting in impotency and sometimes death; Victorian convention held that true men fathered children (15-6). In women, medical professionals claimed that masturbation was evidence of a depraved sexual appetite that stripped one of sexual innocence, led to the loosening of the vaginal cavity, and often resulted in barrenness (32). We might read Gertrude’s withered arm, for example, as not merely evidence of her barrenness or Lodge’s impotence, but further as a monstration of sexual depravity associated with masturbation. Showalter similarly suggests that “[t]he female vampire represented the nymphomaniac or oversexed wife who threatened her husband’s life with her insatiable erotic demands” (*Sexual Anarchy* 180). Masturbation, in either case, directed sexual energy away from reproduction, the heteronormative form of sexual expression.

Dracula’s hands monstrate him as a masturbator, one focused on the erotic pleasure of ‘solitary vice’ symbolized by the female vampires that he creates rather than reproduction; his vampire brides and Lucy are versions of himself who threaten male virility with their insatiable hunger.<sup>218</sup> The emergence of homosexuality as an identity category during the *fin-de-siècle* questioned the standard drive towards reproduction by highlighting the erotic in sexual encounters. Masturbation, however, exists as a sexual act beyond classification as strictly homo- or heterosexual—it belongs to all sexes and sexualities. The monstrous hand, or masturbating hand as I will suggest, is monstrous in that it forces the reader to confront eroticism as a distinct

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<sup>218</sup> Common euphemisms for masturbation included ‘onanism,’ ‘secret vice,’ ‘solitary vice,’ and ‘self-pollution’ (Mason 1, 6, 16, 22).



sexual category that exists apart from reproduction, rendering visible the widespread social anxiety about the declining birthrate in England at the time. Rather than further explore the strictly homoerotic or queer potential of *Dracula*, I want to consider how Stoker employs the specter of masturbation to construct sexual identity at the start of the novel as either in service of pleasure or national progress. Jonathan's initial interactions with Dracula's hands highlight this construction.

Jonathan's description of the feel of Dracula's handshake mimics descriptions of masturbators' hands popular throughout the Victorian period and also highlight Dracula's manual abnormality. Quoting the work of Claude-François Lallemande, the British physician William Acton in his treatise *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857) locates the visibility of the disease of masturbation in male youth in the physical character of their hands and bodies:<sup>219</sup> "Habitual masturbators have a dank, moist, cold hand, very characteristic of great vital exhaustion; their sleep is short, and most complete marasmus comes on; they may gradually waste away if the evil passion is not got the better of" (qtd. in Acton 58).<sup>220</sup> Consider the similarity of Jonathan's description of Dracula's handshake shortly after they meet: "[...] holding out his hand [he] grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than living man" (Stoker 22). As in Lallemande's description of "habitual masturbators," here too Jonathan notes that Dracula's hands are as "cold as ice." One might even suggest that

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<sup>219</sup> Ivan Crozier offers a summation of critical inquiry into Acton's actual popularity in his article, "William Acton and the history of sexuality: the medical and professional context" (2000). While critics like Jeanne Peterson have offered other more popular and balanced medical professional, such as Jean Paget, as emblematic voices, Lesley Hall points out that though Paget openly argued that masturbation did no harm, he still characterized it as a debased and immoral practice (Hall 367).

<sup>220</sup> Medical treatises on masturbation commonly featured descriptions of cold, clammy palms. As D. Mason points out, "The hand played a crucial role in the medical discourse on masturbation" (100).

Jonathan's association of that type of coldness as indicating more a "dead than living man" suggests that Dracula's hands are also "dank" and "moist"—clammy as hands often are in death. Additionally, Jonathan records that Dracula rarely eats, most likely giving him an emaciated look associated with "marasmus"; he rarely sleeps, at least during the night; and he possesses an "extraordinary pallor" as if his life had wasted away (24).<sup>221</sup> Dracula's death-like clasp is a monster of Dracula's inner depravity linked with his abhuman race and the dangerous sexual appetite associated with it, warning Jonathan of the dangers of sexual indulgence. This semi-painful initial handshake causes Jonathan to question Dracula's identity as a human, projecting race-based fears about Dracula's immigration and possible pollution of English blood onto his monstrous hands. Jonathan notes of Dracula that "The strength of the handshake was so much akin to that which I had noticed in the driver, whose face I had not seen, that for a moment I doubted if it were not the same person to whom I was speaking" (Stoker 22). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, "human" in these texts equates to "English"; thus, Dracula's handshake reveals him as dangerous because it suggests a power beyond "human" comprehension. Dracula is a walking contradiction, a technology of monstrosity: he possesses physical strength and vitality, but feels dead to the touch and appears sapped of his vital energy.

Upon closer inspection a few pages later, Jonathan discerns even more about Dracula by reading the character of his hands and their touches. Not long after the handshake described above, Jonathan takes stock of the Count, explaining that

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in

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<sup>221</sup> Even when Jonathan and Mina see Dracula in London later in the narrative, she notes that "He was very pale" and had "a tall, thin" physique (Stoker 155). Earlier in the quotation that Acton cites, Lallemand comments that masturbators "become thin and pale, and irritable, and their features assume a haggard appearance," which includes "sunken eye[s]" and a "long, cadaverous-looking countenance" (qtd. in Acton 58). A pale face and haggard appearance were commonly associated with masturbators and signified not only the decline of their physical health due to a loss of vital energy, but also implied a moral and spiritual fall "(from grace to 'sin') which makes them pale or gives them their cadaverous appearance" (D. Mason 21).

the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the center of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. (24)

Expanding on the threat alluded to in the earlier image, here Dracula's hands render his monstrosity—his 'singular vice'—more apparent along with his link with animality—his lower racial order—and the baser instincts associated with it. Jonathan describes what chiromancers, hand-phrenologists, and hand-psychonomists termed an "elementary hand." According to *Chiero's Language of the Hand* (self-published in 1894), an elementary hand "naturally belongs to the lowest type of mentality. In appearance it is coarse and clumsy, with large, thick, heavy palms, short fingers, and short nails" (Cheiro 27).<sup>222</sup> The only difference between Jonathan's description of Dracula's hands and the description of the elementary hand just given is that Dracula has "long" and "fine" nails "cut to a sharp point." The anonymously published *The Hand Phrenologically Considered* (1848) addresses nails, situating them as analogous to claws in animals (68). Thus, an elementary hand with long nails speaks to "a higher type of organisation," and it also recalls the "hands of witches, demons, and sorcerers," who tend to have elongated fingers "armed with long nails or claws, like the toes of lower animals" (69, 68). Similarly to the Beast People's hands that can only approximate without ever duplicating human hands, Dracula's cold hands reveal him as less than human and thus a threat to the social order. His "coarse" hands, "squat" fingers, and claw-like nails render legible his animality, his lower-order intellect driven by instinct towards pleasure. Furthermore, Dracula's hairy palms, much like Gertrude's withered arm, warn both the readers and Jonathan of Dracula's and his masturbatory tendencies: growing hair in the center of the palm was an old wives' tale told to

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<sup>222</sup> See Fig. 13 for an illustration. Both phrenologists and psychonomists describe it similarly. See Beamish and *The Hand Phrenologically Considered*.



Plate I.—THE ELEMENTARY HAND.

Figure 13. From *Chiero's Language of the Hand*, p. 27. "The Elementary Hand."

children to keep them from masturbating excessively.<sup>223</sup> Thus, Dracula's cold clasp and coarse, squat, hairy hands construct his monstrosity as his interest in solipsistic pleasure, autoeroticism. As Connor notes, "Masturbation has acquired since the nineteenth century a reputation for selfishness and closure"; it is that 'solitary' and 'secret' vice, that form of 'self-pollution' that allows one to find pleasure in the self and thus threatens to close one off to other less pleasurable relationships (Connor 232). Dracula poses a racial threat similarly to Moreau in that his monstrous touches threaten celebratory reproduction in service to a pleasure-focused sexuality, which Dracula spreads contaminating the blood of others with his own; as Stephanie Demetrakopoulos explains, "sexual perversity (often simply identified as masturbation) w[as] thought to be hereditary" (Demetrakopoulos 108). Dracula's "reproduction" of himself specifically reproduces his desire for pleasure, contaminating the women he bites with both his blood and his appetites.

Following his description of Dracula's hands, Jonathan notes the monstrous feeling borne of contact with Dracula's hands once again: "As the count leaned over me," Jonathan explains, "and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder" (Stoker 24). Though a sentence later Jonathan specifies this "shudder" as "a horrible feeling of nausea," Victorian audiences could not have helped reading the erotic possibility encoded in the term "shudder," which often appeared alongside the words "excitement" and "pleasure" or stood in for ejaculation itself (24).<sup>224</sup> As I

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<sup>223</sup> Labrie notes the same in "Purity and Danger in Fin-de-Siècle Culture" (2002), also explaining that "the Darwinian ape, because of his lassitude, is inclined to masturbate" (266). This myth is erroneous; even Charles Darwin notes that "it is a significant fact that the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet are quite naked [in the human foetus], like the inferior surfaces of all four extremities in most of the lower animals" (*Descent* 25).

<sup>224</sup> Though Johnson's dictionary defines this term as "to quake with fear," it was popularly used in pornography and literature more generally to indicate an overwhelming reaction to erotic pleasure. Perhaps the most well-known use of the term is in William Yeats 1923 poem, "Leda and the Swan" in which "'shudder' describes the swan's ejaculation but also relates to Leda's fear" (Childs 208). A lesser-known example of its use during the Victorian period appears in the first volume of the pornographic magazine, *The Pearl* (1879), in a story entitled *Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It*: "'Ah! Oh! Rub harder, harder—quicker', she gasped, as she stiffened her limbs out with a kind of spasmodic shudder" (n.p.).

mentioned earlier, Lennard Davis suggests that “the disabled touch is seen as both contagious and erotic” (148). Dracula’s manual deformity marks his touch as Other, but Other in the sense of that which is both dangerous and desirable. Just as monsters are monstrous because they both horrify and fascinate, here Jonathan’s “shudder” constructs the feel of Dracula’s hands as monstrous because it indicates both physical fear and sexual excitement. Jonathan’s response to Dracula’s manual intercourse betrays the text’s fear that Jonathan may be corrupted by the vampire, or more rightly, his own fleshly desire for pleasure. What is terrifying is that Dracula may arouse the monstrous that already lurks within Jonathan. Kathleen Spencer explains that “in Dracula’s castle Jonathan is a man at risk” because “[f]or the Victorians, solitude greatly increased sexual danger: the solitude of privacy allowed one to indulge in masturbation” (Spencer 215). Dracula, as a technology of monstrosity, embodies a solitary sexuality focused on pleasure often associated with sexual deviants and racial hybrids.<sup>225</sup>

In their initial manual intercourse and throughout his stay at the castle, Dracula’s hands threaten to corrupt Jonathan, and thus England’s reproductive future, because they offer sexual pleasure without reproduction. In other words, Dracula does not threaten heterosexuality and the reproductive practices associated with it by producing female vampires who will then produce male ones, rather he threatens heterosexuality as an identity category defined by reproduction by reproducing his own autoerotic desires in the bodies of his female victims. In his article, “Dracula’s Band of the Hand: Suppressed Male Onanism,” J. Sellers claims that “[Jonathan] is a plausible onanist” based on his encounter with Dracula’s brides, inverting its traditional queer reading and highlighting Jonathan’s weakness to physical pleasure (150). Though commonly

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<sup>225</sup> See Young for a discussion of the intersection between nineteenth-century race theory and sexuality.

read as a scene of inverse penetration,<sup>226</sup> Jonathan's careful description of his experience of tactile sensations alludes to both oral and manual sex, neither of which leads to reproduction, only erotic pleasure. If we read Jonathan's neck as a metonym for his penis, then Jonathan does not want to be penetrated so much as brought to orgasm: "Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer—nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—" (Stoker 42-3). While Sellers correctly suggests that "Jonathan speaks of his sexual arousal as it relates to his hands," Sellers does not consider the role Dracula's own hands play prior to this scene in exposing Jonathan to autoeroticism (Sellers 18). As with Moreau's celebratory creation of the Beast People, the vampires that Dracula's monstrous hands spawn can only reproduce their own desire and feed on children and babies, establishing a direct link between autoerotic desire and the death of reproductive futurism.

Throughout the novel, the characters fear contamination by Dracula's monstrous manual intercourse. As the Crew of Light prepares to search Carfax Abbey, Professor Van Helsing warns Jonathan, Dr. Seward, Arthur Godalming, and Quincy Adams that "We must, therefore, guard ourselves from his touch" (Stoker 219). An example of why comes not long thereafter in Mina's own description of Dracula's restraining of her hands, pressing of her head against his breast, and forcing her to drink his blood: "I was bewildered, and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is a part of the horrible curse that such is, when his touch is upon his victim!" (251). Dracula's hands both seduce and contaminate those he touches. Mina's

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<sup>226</sup> Talia Schaffer suggests that Dracula can be read as a homosexual (or queer) specter because he physically interrupts his brides' feeding and then shouts, "How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!" (Stoker 43). Also, see Craft.

description not only explains the thrill and horror of such an attraction, but further reveals that the characters must open themselves up to such contagion, inviting it in, so to speak. The text suggests that Jonathan, Mina, and Lucy (Dracula's first victim) are vulnerable to his embrace because they already harbor carnal desires.

As a vampire, Lucy embodies pure desire, a lust for blood that Professor Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, Quincy, and her fiancée Arthur find monstrous. In *The Secret Vice*, D. Mason argues that the symptoms attributed to Lucy once she has become a vampire imply "that she is a masturbator," a habit that she suggests Lucy indulged in even prior to her becoming a vampire (36). Though Mason is the first to directly link Lucy's physical decline and what Stoker's novel positions as her moral fall into vampirism with masturbation, many critics have noted Lucy's promiscuous sexuality, which manifests early in the novel in her entertaining the marriage proposals of three different men. When Van Helsing, Seward, Quincy, and Arthur first encounter her vampire form they "could not see the face, for it was bent down over what we saw to be a fair-haired child. [...] [Lucy's] sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and [her] purity to voluptuous wantonness" (Stoker 187). As the mark left by Rhoda's grip calls attention to Gertrude's possible nonnormative desires, Dracula's monstrous embrace renders Lucy's lust visible, a lust that satisfies her alone and literally, the novel illustrates, threatens the life of this child and other children.<sup>227</sup> As does Gertrude's, Lucy's desire actively works against reproductive futurism, speaking to Victorian concerns about women who allow their passions to direct their energy away from the domestic. As the text represents her, Lucy has sacrificed both her sexual innocence and her maternal instinct to her carnality, and her newfound abhuman status marks her as a racial other whose impurity might be transmitted through contact. While I

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<sup>227</sup> She is the "bloofer lady" (child speak for "beautiful lady") as she is described by the children she feeds on (Stoker 160).



do not intend to flatten Mina's achievements, including the important role she plays in assembling the narrative documents and guiding the Crew of Light to Dracula, I do suggest that Stoker's novel betrays a level of discomfort with the power that she wields. Stoker's novel punishes her for her intellectual ambitions, her solitary vice, and positions her child, little Quincy, as her true achievement. Though Mina holds a more complex narrative position than Lucy, even she is not immune to Dracula's embrace. In her essay about the mad scientist in Victorian culture, Anne Stiles notes that "Henry Maudsley, a prominent English psychologist [...], famously contended that studious women developed their intelligence at the expense of their reproductive organs, thereby threatening the future of the race" (330). In order to be saved from Dracula's corrupting hands, Mina's New Woman-like desire to work must be redirected towards the domestic.<sup>228</sup>

Mina's purity comes under threat towards the end of novel, though Mina herself calls attention to her improper appetite earlier in the narrative as evidence of her achievement when she writes of herself and Lucy, "I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites," suggesting not only that Mina shares in what the novel figures as some of Lucy's more depraved tendencies but also directly linking her indulgence of appetite with anxieties about the New Woman (Stoker 86).<sup>229</sup> After Dracula forces Mina to drink blood from his breast, Mina bears the stigma of that interaction on her body much as Gertrude and the Beast People do. Dr. Seward describes her changed appearance in his diary: "Her face was ghastly, with a pallor

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<sup>228</sup> Showalter explains in *Sexual Anarchy* that "Doctors maintain that the New Woman was dangerous to society because her obsession with developing her brain starved her uterus" and threatened to leave her barren (40).

<sup>229</sup> In her chapter "Seismic Orgasm: Sexual Intercourse and Narrative Meaning in Mina Loy," Rachel DuPlessis comments that "[*Dracula*] is a distinctive contribution to the discussion of female sexual appetite and the new woman, issues that will become a large part of modernism, for one purpose of its narrative lies in separating the productive, striving, intelligent part of the new woman from the libidinous possibility of female independence or autonomy as represented by the sucking, phallic touch of Dracula and his recruitment of Lucy, who had been overloaded with polyandry, prostitution, promiscuity" (190).

which was accentuated by the blood which smeared her lips and cheeks and chin; [...] her poor crushed hands [...] bore on their whiteness the red mark of the Count's terrible grip" (247).<sup>230</sup> Mina has become "unclean," as she herself terms it (248). Dracula's monstrous manual intercourse has not only spread his contagion, but it has also revealed Mina's vulnerability to it. Like Gertrude's withered arm, Mina's marked hands embody her always present propensity for these monstrous desires that the novel fears in women. Unlike Jonathan who escapes, Mina allows Dracula's monstrous hands and the contagion they carry to touch her. The mark on her flesh that Dracula's hands leave monstrate her desire that the novel makes clear threatens to divert her energy away from her marital and maternal duties towards her own pleasure. I am not arguing that Dracula's manual intercourse turns Mina into a masturbator, though her pallor and stigmatized hands may suggest something along those lines; rather, I claim that Dracula reveals Mina's openness to passion by compelling her to indulge a socially taboo appetite, which depletes her energy, throws her sexual innocence into question, and threatens her ability to bear children. Following her encounter with Dracula, Mina decides that "'I must touch him [Jonathan] or kiss him no more,'" fearing that her sexual appetites indulged at Dracula's hands may contaminate Jonathan or even be passed on to a child if she should bear one (248).<sup>231</sup> Dracula's monstrous manual intercourse makes a child-eating monster out of Lucy and threatens to do the same to Mina; because the novel does not know how to incorporate Mina's drive to work and independent spirit, it positions those desires as a moral weakness that may leave her vulnerable to more dangerous temptations that will threaten the stability of the family.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> In addition, she also bears a scar on her forehead that disappears when Dracula dies.

<sup>231</sup> D. Mason notes that "what many physicians alleged to be at the root of both congenital and acquired manifestations of inversion was degenerate heredity" (78).

<sup>232</sup> Even his brides at the start of the narrative feast on a baby.

*Dracula* ends with the birth of Mina and Jonathan's child, little Quincy, which, if read as a response to the monstrous manual intercourse that the novel begins with, suggests that it represents an appropriate redirection of male and female sexual desire: reproduction in service of. Jonathan (and Mina) rejects Dracula's monstrous manual intercourse and the solipsistic pleasure that it offers, embracing instead heterosexual reproduction and duty in order to ensure England's future. Halberstam among others notes that the female body disappears by the end of the novel because "Men, not women, reproduce; the female body is rendered non-productive by its sexuality" (Halberstam 101). In other words, little Quincy is born of the Crew of Light—the men—and Mina disappears because Dracula turned her into a erotic rather than reproductive subject. However, I would suggest that unlike Lucy and the vampire brides who are violently eradicated from the text precisely because of their erotic sexuality that threatens reproduction, Mina is positioned as taking up her proper place in the background because she has sacrificed her erotic sexuality in order to reproduce. By the end, the novel flattens Mina's achievements by linking her professional ambitions with dangerous desires that render Mina vulnerable to moral contagion, and then allying those anxieties by reinscribing her within the domestic. To put it another way, while Mina's body fades into the background by the time of little Quincy's birth, I argue that it does so precisely because it has become a reproductive body—a vessel rather than a body of pleasure. When read in light of the dangerous pleasure-focused sexuality that Dracula's monstrous manual intercourse constructs, the novel's ending has reincorporated both Jonathan and Mina into their heteronormative roles as bodies that are sexual only when they procreate. As a technology of monstrosity, *Dracula* is a technology of pleasure that constructs pleasure as dangerous in a novel that works towards England's reproductive progress.

## V. Marking Monstrosity: A Touch of Death

The desire which women arouse is a monstrously dangerous thing that leaves the 'fortress of identity' shaken, engendering both mistrust of the body and sexual impulse as something bestial and primitive, and fear of retaliation and engagement by the female.

—Hillary J. Beattie, "Dreaming, Doubling and Gender in the Work of Robert Louis Stevenson: The Strange Case of 'Olalla'" (2005), p. 24

What the other texts have implied about the similar dangers nonerproductive forms of sexual expression and racial mixing pose, Robert Louis Stevenson's "Olalla" (1885) and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) render explicit. As Hillary J. Beattie notes of "Olalla," by the story's end, "The only safety lies in Christian renunciation of sexual pleasure and procreation, though it should be noted that it is the woman, not the man, who is made to renounce" (22). To preserve the future of the English race both Olalla, the eponymous heroine of Stevenson's tale, and Harriet Brandt, the sympathetic anti-heroine of Marryat's novel, must control their hands and their pleasurable though monstrous touches or risk depleting male potency and thus endangering the nation. In contrast to other instances of monstrous manual intercourse that this chapter has considered, Harriet Brandt's caresses in Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* leave no marks, no visible residue of contact or contagion, yet they reveal her inherited monstrosity by draining the vital energy of those she touches, embraces, and kisses. Similarly, Olalla withholds her embrace from the narrator for fear of contaminating those she loves or passing on her cursed heritage. Monstrous manual intercourse in *The Blood of the Vampire* is not restricted to the hands but rather occur when Harriet's hands engage in physical contact with any part of another's body. In "Olalla," monstrous manual intercourse assumes a variety of forms. Whatever form manual intercourse takes in these texts, it sap the vitality of children and Englishmen, warning female and male readers alike that one's duty to family and nation must supersede individual happiness and pleasure to ensure society's future progress.

Over the years, these vampire stories have received little critical attention and they have never been read alongside each other. Those who have studied Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* have inadequately addressed the place of tactility in psychic vampirism, Harriet's attribute which has received the most critical attention.<sup>233</sup> The few who have written on Stevenson's "Olalla" have focused on the nightmare from which it was drawn and its relationship to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and duality, overlooking the place of hands in what is ultimately a vampire story.<sup>234</sup> Unlike other vampire stories of the period, Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* tells the tale of a psychic vampire, the twenty-one-year-old Harriet Brandt who unwittingly absorbs the life force of all those she with whom she comes into contact. Robert T. Eldridge's 1998 article published in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* reads Marryat's novel "as a witty domestication of Stoker's extravagant horrors" that "stress[es] the primacy of heredity over environment" (12). In his book *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, published two years prior to Eldridge's article, H. L. Malchow suggests that Harriet's status as a hybrid reflects Victorian anxieties about a "penetration of the authentic and superior by the low, false, and alien" (171). In Harriet's case, she poses a danger because she can visually pass as English while possessing Jamaican blood. Though *The Blood of the Vampire* does read like an anti-miscegenation tract, it vilifies Harriet's parents while keeping her somewhat sympathetic, for, as Eldridge points out, "If she is a monster [...] it is not by her own choice" (12). Similarly, Olalla inherits her monstrosity. Olalla, born of an old Spanish aristocratic family, lives in an isolated hacienda with her mother who, we learn, is a vampire and her brother, Felipe,

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<sup>233</sup> In her article "'They Suck Us Dry': A Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Projections of Vampiric Women," Sian Macfie explains that "vampirism also came to be used metaphorically to refer to a social phenomenon, the 'psychic sponge.' [...] a woman who was perceived to be a drain on the energy, and emotional and intellectual resources of her companions" (60). Since Harriet drains energy through physical contact, she functions as an embodiment of this metaphorical understanding.

<sup>234</sup> See Massey, Beattie, and Melville.

who the narrator describes as lacking intelligence as a result of inbreeding and as possessed of a cruel streak. The narrative is told from the perspective of a British officer who, wounded in war, is sent to the hacienda to heal. There he falls in love with Olalla and though she returns that affection, she rejects his amorous advances, “obsessed by a fear that she, in time, will become a vampire too” (Melville 1). While Harriet initially indulges the sensual pleasure of tactility, she eventually follows the example that Olalla sets and contains her dangerous tactility by sacrificing herself to ensure the survival of the English race: “pain is the choice of the magnanimous” (Stevenson par. 142). While I will offer a reading of both texts, I will focus on Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* because it foregrounds Harriet and her experience whereas “Olalla” primarily addresses that of the British officer and narrator. *The Blood of the Vampire* pushes Olalla’s story to the extreme in the character of Harriet, the necessity of whose sacrifice is made more explicit.

*i. Handling Monstrous Heritage*

Harriet’s impulsive desires and unregulated manual intercourse threaten England’s reproductive future by endangering or outright squashing the potential of English males in order to reveal the importance of placing duty above pleasure. Harriet suffers from a cursed heredity that results from her “terrible parentage,” according to Doctor Phillips—the novel’s medical authority who resided in Jamaica for a time and knew Harriet’s father (Marryat 81). Harriet, he explains, was “bred of sensuality, cruelty, and heartlessness” as the bastard child of Henry Brandt, a sadistic vivisectionist who settled in Jamaica after his expulsion from the Swiss hospital for the extreme “barbarity” of his experiments, and a Jamaican half-caste “fiend” born with a lust for blood and torture that, rumor had it, originated from a bite that her slave mother received from a vampire bat during her pregnancy (85, 82, 83). Though ignorant of her parents’

crimes, Harriet has unknowingly inherited their appetites, carrying them in her blood: she is a “quadroon” with an innate hunger that focuses on “the gratification of her senses” and replenishes her vitality by “draw[ing] upon the health and strength of all with whom she may be intimately associated [...] render[ing] her love fatal to such as she may cling to!” (85, 95). Orphaned at a young age and housed in a convent after her parents’ were murdered for their wickedness during a slave revolt, Harriet craves physical and emotional intimacy with those around her; however, her heritage renders her a “half-breed monster”—a creature who “inherits the worst aspects of each of the incompatible worlds from which it has sprung”—whose fatal touch denies her the closeness that she craves (Malchow 172). Similarly to Lykke and Braidotti’s definitions of monster, H. L. Malchow suggests in his chapter, “The Half-Breed as Gothic Unnatural,” that “[b]oth vampire and half-breed are creatures who transgress boundaries and are caught between two worlds.” (Malchow 168). Harriet is at once human and vampire, visually English with a drop of Creole blood, and thus desirable, but threatening. Because she transgresses racial boundaries and her inherited wealth allows her to disregard the codes of English etiquette, Harriet emerges as a monstrous body out of and beyond social control though she is initially unaware of the taint that she carries.

*The Blood of the Vampire* imagines Harriet’s mixed-race origins resulting in a dangerous tactility, that endangers the potential of children and English males, threatening reproductive futurism and thus disrupting national progress. Sarah Wilburn reads *The Blood of the Vampire* as one of a number of *fin-de-siècle* novels to establish a relationship between gender and race by aligning both female and dark bodies with the occult. She suggests that the novel depicts Harriet’s sex as dangerous because early on it is likened to lesbianism and later it suggests miscegenation; Wilburn claims that the novel positions “mixed-race union as threatening in the

same way as same-sex union in terms of white nation building” (440). Sian Macfie’s study, “‘They suck us dry’: A Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Projections of Vampiric Women” (1991), similarly asserts that both the novel’s narrator and Doctor Phillips collude in the conflation of the non-Aryan, the lesbian, the working class, and the ‘masculine’ female with the vampire woman,” effectively rendering her a receptacle for dangerous Otherness as the upper-English classes conceived of it (63). However, these critics have yet to address how the novel mobilized this type of threat.

As I will show in *The Blood of the Vampire*, at the heart of “Olalla” lies the fear of degeneration, associated with the older order aristocracy, racial mixing, and female sexuality. Unlike *Dracula*, which positions men as the true protectors of the nation capable of policing eroticism and miscegenation,<sup>235</sup> and like “Olalla” before it, *The Blood of the Vampire* places responsibility for protecting the welfare of the nation with women—mothers and mothers-to-be—who must police themselves and the genes they carry. As Olalla explains it, she cannot escape her race, the blood that flows in her veins. Olalla’s hand marks the potential of her genetic monstrosity; it carries her legacy. She explains this heritage to the narrator, referencing the portrait of her ancestor that hangs in his bedroom and which first enthralled him, “There is my hand to the least line, there are my eyes and my hair” (Stevenson par. 111). Her similar facial features prove secondary to her hand, which carries her ancestor’s identity in its shape and her fate “to the least line.” Olalla continues, “The hands of the dead are in my bosom; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me; I am a puppet at their command; and I but reinform features and attributes that have long been laid aside from evil in the quiet of the grave” (par. 111). Olalla is bound by the hands of “the race that made [her],” and dreads binding her progeny to such a

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<sup>235</sup> In her study of Victorian vampires and addiction, Susan Zieger states that, by the end, “the Crew of Light remains in control of the national social body” (Zieger 230).



cursed legacy (par. 111). She fears the monstrous potential of her touch, which we see manifested in her mother, the Senora's perverted manual intercourse with the narrator shortly after he slices his hand.

The narrator, unable to find either Olalla or Felipe, applies to the Senora for aid, and then, he explains, "I held out my two hands from which the blood was oozing and dripping" (par. 89).

The Senora responds unexpectedly:

Her great eyes opened wide, the pupils shrank into points; [...] she came swiftly up to me, and stooped, and caught me by the hand; and the next moment my hand was at her mouth, and she had bitten me to the bone. The pang of the bite, the sudden spurting of blood, and the monstrous horror of the act, flashed through me all in one, and I beat her back; and she sprang at me again and again, with bestial cries [...] Her strength was like that of madness; mine was rapidly ebbing with the loss of blood; my mind besides was whirling with the abhorrent strangeness of the onslaught. (par. 90)

Hillary Beattie reads this scene as a "symbolic defloration" wherein "he [the narrator] is the one who bleeds, savaged by passion in an obvious representation of the vagina dentata" (21). The narrator smashes his hand through the window after feeling his "life unmanned" by the thought of losing Olalla, whose "touch had quickened, and renewed, and strung me up [...] to a swelling of the soul that men learn to forget in their polite assemblages" (Stevenson par. 83, 85). This scene more vividly reverses those of female rape in eighteenth-century fiction. As Beattie suggests, the Senora's bite—her monstrous appetite—embodies the dangers of female passion that threatens male virility. The Senora penetrates the narrator's hands with her teeth, but she also clings to them, dominating him with her grip. While the Senora's fierce clasp monstrates the threat female bestial appetites pose to British men, Olalla's enthralling embrace warns of a similar danger: the narrator's desire for her, his willingness to be subsumed by and remain with her, directs his energy away from his duty towards the libidinous pleasures that he longs to gratify.

The narrator proves susceptible to sensual pleasures, and thus the responsibility of renouncing desire to preserve English manhood rests with Olalla. Though the narrator describes it as love, he is actually in lust with Olalla, aroused by “her looks and touch” even after the Senora’s bite (par. 93). While he consents to and reciprocates Olalla’s manual embraces, the text points to their manual intercourse as evidence of his physical weakness: “the touch of her smooth hand lingered in mine and talked with me. To lie thus in deadly weakness and drink in the traits of the beloved, is to reawake to love from whatever shock of disillusion” (par. 94). The narrator experiences her clasp as a form of tactile exchange through which they haptically communicate their innermost desires. He believes that her gesture conveys a reciprocal affection, which inflames his passion further; however, as their manual intercourse continues, it betrays his vulnerability and positions Olalla as the one who must reject his advances in order to preserve his race. The narrator confesses his love and, “reaching out my weak hand, took hers, and carried it to my lips and kissed it. Nor did she resist, but winced a little,” aware of the sacrifice that she must make (par. 99). Fearful that her hand bears her ancestry, that her clasp may communicate her mother’s monstrous impulses, Olalla rejects the narrator’s hand, warning him that “Man has risen; if he has sprung from the brutes, he can descend again to the same level” (par. 113). As she carries the same blood in her veins, Olalla’s enthralling caresses are no less monstrous than her mother’s violent ones. Olalla, aware of her cursed heredity, renounces her desire for love in favor of posterity, literally clinging to a cross on a hill at the end as a sign of her Christian fealty and sacrifice: ““Shall I hand down this cursed vessel of humanity, charge it with fresh life as with fresh poison, and dash it, like a fire in the faces of posterity? But my vow has been given; the race shall cease from off the earth” (par. 113). Olalla chooses duty above desire; she polices her hands to ensure the world’s posterity. Harriet Brandt in Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire*

similarly attracts through her wooing embrace, though, unlike Olalla who knows the evils of her lineage, Harriet must learn the danger that her hands pose to those with whom she comes into proximate contact.

*ii. Harriet's Monstrous Embrace*

In the first full-length critical study on *The Blood of the Vampire*, Sian Macfie links the novel's interest in maternal heritage with Marryat's own difficulty with pregnancy.<sup>236</sup> Citing Marryat's semi-autobiographical work *There Is no Death* (1891), Macfie quotes Marryat's view of maternity as follows: "It [the death of her daughter] was a warning to me (as it should be to all mothers) not to take the solemn responsibility of maternity upon themselves, without being prepared to sacrifice their own feelings for the sake of their children" (Macfie 65). Brenda Mann Hammack expands on Macfie's biographical reading of maternal responsibility, suggesting that the novel's insistence on the hereditary origins of moral degeneracy functions as a commentary in support of maternal impressionism, a theory that "insisted that maternal fantasies or fears that involved animals could produce gestational mutation. [...] reflect[ing] the mother's unfulfilled or even violent desires, experienced either during pregnancy or during conception" (888). Thus, much as we see evidence of Olalla's monstrous heritage in her mother's appetite, the fault of Harriet's psychic vampirism rests with her mother's villainous impulses; as with Olalla, the responsibility of not continuing to pass on those depraved traits lies with Harriet.

Though scholars have focused on how Marryat's novel invokes racialized language to villainize female sexuality, this novel also explores both English masculinity and femininity in addition to offering a critique of the dangers of non-reproductive male sexuality and

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<sup>236</sup> Marryat herself had been called a psychic vampire by the medium William Fletcher because she had a number of miscarriages and premature births (Macfie 64).

miscegenation. Octavia Davis, in her article “Morbid Mothers: Gothic Heredity in Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire*,” argues that Marryat emphasizes hereditary transmission in order to “[confirm] that women must act first and foremost as mothers of the race, even if it means sacrificing their own lives” (51). For O. Davis, this novel articulates the dangers of uncontrolled female sexual energy that parasitically, or anabolically, feeds on particularly male energy, mobilizing the fear that “both the ‘lower’ races and classes drain the energies of groups thought to be more highly advanced” (47-49). Most scholars contend that *The Blood of the Vampire* presents its readers with a conservative view of women’s social function largely because Marryat internalized the sex-based oppression she herself experienced (O. Davis 42; Malchow 170). While I agree, I also suggest that, through Harriet, *The Blood of the Vampire* similarly critiques English male libido, which even more directly threatens the dissolution of the family in the interest of self-gratification. The regulation of female hands as a means of policing desire lies at the center of *The Blood of the Vampire*; though critics talk about Harriet as a psychic vampire, her vampirism poses a distinctly tactile threat: she feeds through somatic contact with others.

From the start of the novel, the narrator establishes Harriet’s body as a body out of control by contrasting it with that of Elinor Leyton.<sup>237</sup> We, the readers, first see Harriet at the dinner table through the eyes of Elinor who notes that “she had never seen a young person devour her food with so much avidity and enjoyment,” immediately establishing Harriet as one whose appetite differs considerably from the “proper and ladylike reserve” that Elinor herself exerts in all social situations (Marryat 4, 28). Macfie suggests that both Margaret Pullen, Elinor’s

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<sup>237</sup> Eldridge, among the first to publish on *The Blood of the Vampire*, suggests that “Harriet and Elinor, in fact, form a pair of opposites” (11). This type of opposition is, of course, a common motif in Victorian literature. Compare, for example, *Dracula*’s Lucy and Mina or *The Mill on the Floss*’ (1860) Maggie and Lucy.

travelling companion, and Elinor act as the novel's examples of proper English women: "Margaret is the paragon of 'feminine' virtue; she sublimates her personal desire into the duty of motherhood. Elinor, though less highly praised, is nonetheless heralded as an example to other women; she has subsumed her own identity within that of her husband" (Macfie 63). While critics generally agree on Margaret's position as the novel's paragon, at least one contradicts Macfie's reading of Elinor, suggesting that her general coldness and apathy mark her position as the text's New Woman figure (O. Davis 47-8). Yet, both Margaret and Elinor are punished throughout the novel, suggesting perhaps that neither is the paragon that she at first appears and both are vulnerable to Harriet's influence. The excessive nature of Harriet's appetite, for "she was always eating, either fruit or bonbons," reveals her interest in sensual pleasures, contrasting with the social reserve that Elinor and Margaret initially depict, and alluding to her racial background—a Victorian lady would not eat in such an unguarded, public manner (Marryat 40). Harriet's excessive consumption first alludes to her lack of self-control. "She was greedy by nature," the narrator explains, "but it was the love of good feeding, rather than a superfluity of food, that induced her to be so" (118). Recalling Doctor Phillips' discussion of her mother's lust for blood, the narrator suggests that Harriet too is gluttonous for that which she enjoys. She feeds not to satiate her physical hunger, but rather to gratify her desire for gustatory pleasure; Harriet's interest does not lie in fulfilling her domestic or social duties, but rather in engaging the erotic, situating her as an immediate threat to the social order. Foreshadowing her tactile consumption of others' vital energy, these early examples of Harriet's sensuous nature reveal her single-minded focus on the gratification of her own want. The narrator explains that "[t]he girl had not the slightest control over her passion," suggesting that, as one out of control, her passion requires outside regulation (108). However, it is precisely her indulgence of passion in contrast to the

disciplined English femininity of Elinor that renders Harriet seemingly innocent to the ways of the world, much like a child who cannot help herself while also positioning her as a desiring, and thus desirable, subject.

Harriet's appetite for tactility manifests most strongly in her desire to establish haptic connections with those around her. Physical contact with Harriet proves dangerous early on in the novel and attests to her unseen erotic sexuality,<sup>238</sup> which first manifests in her relationship with Margaret. One evening while Harriet and Margaret are out together, Margaret finds that Harriet "had crept closer and closer to [her] as she spoke, and now encircled her waist with her arm, and leaned her head upon her shoulder. It was not a position that Margaret liked," the narrator explains (19). Wilburn discusses this as the novel's initial threat of lesbianism, which the novel redirects when Harriet meets Ralph Pullen. However, as with *Dracula*, I suggest that vampirism—or vampiric touch as the case may be—threatens to transmit erotic sexuality focused on individual pleasure rather than a particular type of sexuality, thus revealing desire rather than keeping it hidden and controlled. In a scene that almost restages the one where Mina feeds from Dracula's breast, Margaret "become[s] fainter and fainter, as the girl leaned against her with her head upon her breast. [...] She felt as if something or some one [sic.], were drawing all her life away. She tried to disengage herself from the girl's clasp, but Harriet Brandt seemed to come after her, like a coiling snake, till she could stand it no longer" (21). Scholars have read the scene between Dracula and Mina as the inversion of motherhood where Dracula both takes up and corrupts the maternal position;<sup>239</sup> forcing Mina to drink from his breast is an act of sexual violence rather than maternal care. In *The Blood of the Vampire*, when Harriet leans her head

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<sup>238</sup> Both Mann Hammock and Malchow identify the obviousness of Harriet as a sexual symbol and emergent threat (Mann Hammock 891; Malchow 168).

<sup>239</sup> Macfie, along with others, also notes Dracula's Brides' and Lucy's feeding on children as examples of a similar inversion—or perversion, some might say (58).

against Margaret's breast she searches for a tactile sense of maternal intimacy. Unaware of the draining affect her embrace has on Margaret, Harriet clings to her, seeking sustained contact to satisfy her own feeling of isolation. However, as in *Dracula*, the narrator's description of Harriet's clasp assigns a malevolence to it, functioning as the reader's first indication that there is something dangerous, or perhaps supernatural, about Harriet. As with *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Dracula*, here too Harriet's monstrous embrace is described as animal like: Harriet coils herself around Margaret like a snake that then squeezes all of her vital energy. Without realizing it, Harriet absorbs Margaret's energy, feeling a sense of comfort in Margaret's maternal arms but not realizing the violence inherent in her affection.

Doctor Phillips first identifies the monstrous nature of Harriet's heritage and her caress because of the effect it has on Margaret's baby, Ethel. Despite Margaret's own negative experience in Harriet's arms and her initial alarm at the fervency with which Harriet desires to hold Ethel, Margaret eventually leaves Ethel alone in Harriet's charge and engulfed in her arms. As we see in the description of Harriet's appetite for "little white babies,"<sup>240</sup> Olga Brimont, Harriet's friend from the Convent, describes Harriet's lust for children in terms of physical appetite: "'Harriet is very fond of children. [...] She wants to kiss everyone. Sometimes I tell her I think she would like to eat them!'" (70). Olga's description associates Harriet's desire for physical closeness with children directly with her excessive appetite, recalling Lucy's similarly monstrous appetite in Stoker's *Dracula*. Harriet's embrace is monstrous because of what it threatens to consume: life, in this case, young life. After spending a great deal of time in Harriet's arms, Ethel appears physically drained as if, according to Doctor Phillips, she "'had all

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<sup>240</sup> Harriet distinguishes her "love [for] little white babies" who "are so sweet and fresh and clean" from her dislike for "the little niggers" who grew up on her father's plantation and "smell[ed] so nasty, you can't touch them!" (16).

of her strength drawn out of her” (87). Harriet’s hands literally absorb Ethel’s life force and results in little Ethel’s death. Ethel is the first child casualty of Harriet’s monstrous manual intercourse, punishing Margaret for her maternal negligence that threatens reproductive futurism and also revealing Harriet as a reproductive threat.

After Ethel gets sick and Elinor’s fiancée, Ralph Pullen, arrives, Harriet shifts her attention from the baby to the man, posing a new type of reproductive threat similar to that posed by Olalla and Ayesha in Haggard’s *She*. Numerous times throughout the novel Doctor Phillips, familiar with Harriet’s parentage from his time spent in Jamaica, explains that Harriet’s heritage makes her unfit to marry an Englishman: her sensuous nature would overwhelm her husband, sap his vitality, and result in miscegenation if her husband proved capable of impregnating her in spite of his loss of energy. The novel does not just warn its readers that racial hybrids are overly sexual as Malchow and Macfie highlight, but it further depicts this specific form of sexuality as a threat to national progress because it disrupts reproductive futurism. Like the narrator of “Olalla,” men attracted to Harriet might be unmanned by that desire. In his discussion of Sander Gilman’s work, Robert Young notes that “blackness evokes an attractive, but dangerous, sexuality, an apparently abundant, limitless, but threatening fertility” (Young 97). Upon first seeing Harriet, Ralph mistakes her for a Spanish lady (like Olalla) and, when told by Elinor that she hails from Jamaica, asserts, ““Ah! a drop of Creole blood in her then, I daresay! You never see such eyes in an English face!”” (Marryat 59). The Spanish Olalla similarly transfixes the narrator: “her eyes took hold upon mine and clung there, bound us together like the joining of hands” (par. 68). Ralph immediately finds himself attracted to Harriet because of her foreign eyes, which Wilburn suggests “are dark with a difference” and “sign post racial difference and sexual allure” (439). Young notes that, according to Gilman, “blackness” in nineteenth-century



culture “evokes an attractive, but dangerous, sexuality, an apparently abundant, limitless, but threatening, fertility” (97). However, while Harriet’s mixed racial heritage renders her attractive, her hybridity does not immediately associate her with the excessive, threatening fertility of her mother that Young and Gilman link with black female sexuality more generally. In fact, Harriet’s sexuality threatens reproduction by diverting Ralph’s sexual energy towards desire and away from Elinor and the socially acceptable family life Elinor represents.<sup>241</sup>

Harriet’s own sexual awakening happens through her tactile interactions with Ralph. Ralph, who ignores his duty to his fiancée Elinor, actively pursues Harriet while in Heyst, enthralled by her warm, lively nature and exotic figure. Ralph and Harriet first engage in manual intercourse one night while strolling near the hotel down the Digue. The narrator explains that “[t]he touch of his cool hand upon her heated palm, seemed to rouse all the animal in Harriet Brandt’s blood”—“animal” functioning synonymously here with “desire” or “passion,” while also racializing it (74). The intimate sexual nature of this touch comes from Ralph’s decision to take hold of her palm.<sup>242</sup> The newness of such a caress rouses Harriet’s passion, which is linked once again to animal appetite. Harriet responds to his embrace with “[h]er hand, [which] very slight and lissom, clung to his with a force of which he had not thought it capable, and he felt it trembling in his clasp” (74). Harriet responds by engaging and reciprocating Ralph’s clasp, expressing her openness to his advances and communicating the erotic desire it aroused. However, even in this relatively traditional scene of manual intercourse, there is something

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<sup>241</sup> While O. Davis argues that Elinor represents the New Woman, I would assert that Elinor’s seemingly cold indifference to Ralph materializes Acton’s view of ideal femininity that will agree to have sex to please her husband without desiring it herself. Elinor is from an aristocratic family and seeks to subsume herself in married life, which suggests that her model of womanhood is not, in fact, “New.”

<sup>242</sup> Think back to the analysis of Raye’s stroking of Edith’s palm in Chapter Three. Even a more contemporary book on hands and their cultural significance notes that when boys tickle girls’ palms “It is titillating because a positive response is supposed to mean that she will ‘do it’” (Lee and Charlton 229).

dangerous about the passion and lack of control that Harriet expresses through her clasp. Her hand's great strength and trembling suggests that it conveys a passion that exceeds her conscious control and that its appearance belies its potency. Following this initial handclasp, "her full red lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality. As he raised his head again, he felt faint and sick, but quickly recovering himself, he gave her a second kiss more passionate, if possible, than the first" (75). This monstrous manual intercourse reveals Harriet's sexuality as a threat to English manhood. Much like Ayesha's overtly violent projected touch in *She* that makes Leo feel "as if all the manhood had been taken out of him," Harriet's pleasurable though dangerous grasp "sap[s] his [Ralph's] vitality," synonymous with manhood during this period (Haggard 225). The fact that Harriet consumes his vitality through her kiss, but that he recovers himself and kisses her more passionately, suggests that this erotic embrace threatens to divert his reproductive energy towards physical pleasure—erotic sexuality—and away from national duty—reproductive or domesticated sexuality.

Doctor Phillips speaks directly to the importance of placing duty above individual pleasure and indulgence, a form of self-interest that the novel associates directly with death—moral and physical decline. The next day when Doctor Phillips sees Ralph, he notices that Ralph's "face was chalky white, and his eyes seemed to have lost their brightness and colour" (77). As discussed in this chapter's previous section, such pallor also often signifies autoerotic indulgence. Though, in this instance, it marks Ralph's tactile flirtation with a more heterosexual form of indulgence, it still alludes to sexual depravity in service of the self rather than the nation. After Ethel's death, Doctor Phillips informs Ralph of Harriet's monstrous heritage and reminds Ralph of his duty to his betrothed, his family, and his country, commanding him that "it is your bounden duty to separate her [Harriet], as soon as possible, from your fiancée and your sister-in-

law!” (94). The Doctor fears that Harriet will contaminate Margaret and Elinor if they are not removed from her reach, and further that unless Ralph redirects his energy towards his family, he will succumb to the lascivious, non-reproductive sexuality that Harriet embodies. Her embrace does not just consume, it threatens to contaminate Ralph with her lust and to tempt him away from his familial obligations as the narrator and Doctor Phillips describe it.

Unlike Ralph, who escapes Harriet’s clutches with his life, the next two men that Harriet engages with romantically fall victim to her monstrous manual intercourse. After Ralph leaves Heyst, Harriet transfers her attentions to Bobby, who is a few years her junior and the son of the Baroness Gobelli, one of the acquaintances that Harriet makes in Heyst with whom she ends up staying while in London.<sup>243</sup> In contrast to her relationship with Ralph, Harriet’s manual intercourse awakens Bobby’s sexual desire, positioning him as an infatuated lover somewhere in between child and man. Pining for Ralph, Harriet lies alone in her bed until Bobby comes upstairs to check on her, laying his head on a pillow next to hers intending to console her. As soon as his head hits the pillow, “Harriet turned her face to his and kissed him. / The blood rushed into his face and he trembled. It was the first time that any woman had kissed him. And all the feelings of his manhood rushed forth in a body to greet the creature who had awakened them” (109). Because Bobby is younger, initially Harriet’s kiss swells his masculine virility rather than sapping him of it. In fact, the flowing of his blood, trembling of his body, and rushing feelings of manhood allude to highly erotic physical sensations that Harriet’s animalistic kiss—she is a “creature,” after all—has awakened. However, Bobby’s surging sense of manhood is quickly undercut as the narrator explains that “he [Bobby] was a male creature whom she had

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<sup>243</sup> The narrator describes Madame Gobelli as a loud, crass, “enormous woman of the elephant build, with a large flat face and clumsy hands and feet,” whose manners and appearance betray her working-class origins in spite of her claim to class standing (5). Much like Harriet, Madame Gobelli is described in animal terms, marked by her lower-class heritage.

vanquished with her charms” (109). Like Harriet’s, Bobby’s arousal positions him as a “creature,” less than human because he indulges his baser impulses. Described as almost a fierce female animal, Harriet possesses the power in this moment, taking pleasure from Bobby’s utter helplessness in her hands: “She kissed and fondled him [...] calling him every nice name she could think of, and caressing him as if he had been what the Baroness chose to consider him—a child of ten years old” (109-10). Harriet’s dominant position here recalls Olalla’s after her mother bites the narrator; the Senora’s bite paralyzes him and Olalla assumes the masculine position of rescuer: “I felt [Olalla] clasp me in her arms,” the narrator recounts, “her hair falling on my face, and, with the strength of a man, raise and half drag, half carry me upstairs into my room, where she cast me down upon the bed” (par. 91). Like Olalla, Harriet assumes the masculine role, unmanning Bobby by feminizing him. Bobby holds a unique position in the narrative because he is simultaneously a child and a man—his mother infantilizes him though he tries to assert himself. Thus, as Harriet continues to caress Bobby, she threatens not only the nation’s future by draining his masculine virility, but also the fate of his family by robbing it of a child.

The more tactile contact, the more the danger that Harriet poses to Bobby’s health bears on his constitution. Rather than the sexual awakening he experienced when she first kissed and fondled him, now when “she put her lips to his, [she] drew his breath away with her own” (Marryat 120). However, unlike Ralph, Bobby does not respond by kissing Harriet back with even greater passion. Eventually, Bobby dies and the Baroness confronts Harriet with the monstrous nature of her embrace that has, once again, resulted in the death of a child. The Baroness initially blames herself for “letting you [Harriet] come within touch of my innocent child!” (182). The language here reveals the significance of proximity and contact to psychic

vampirism—Harriet “came within touch,” a tactile type of danger. However, following this, the Baroness reveals the extent of her knowledge about Harriet, whom, she claims, “poisons everybody with whom she comes into contact” (187). For the first time, Harriet learns of the dangerous nature of her caress and the cursed blood that runs through her veins and how that heredity contaminates her touch, whether a kiss or a caress. The Baroness confronts Harriet with the curse of her heritage and the monstrous form of tactility that results from it, explaining that “[Harriet’s parents] left their curse upon this girl—the curse of black blood and of the vampire’s blood which kills everything which it caresses” (188). Yet, this outburst also reveals the Baroness’ own complicity in Bobby’s death; she kept Harriet around for her wealth and entertainment, placing her own satisfaction above her son’s welfare. Bobby’s death reveals the monstrous nature of Harriet’s hands—and the inheritance they carry—to Harriet herself. In Bobby’s death, Harriet also confronts Ethel’s death and the deaths and illnesses of others whom she has loved and with whom she has been physically close.<sup>244</sup> As both the child of Madam Gobelli and a man who will have children, Bobby’s death highlights the threat to reproductive futurism that Harriet’s embrace poses.

Ralph, Bobby, and finally Ralph’s cousin, Anthony Pennell, all succumb to the pleasures Harriet’s caress offers, suggesting that the nation’s reproductive fate lies in the hands of women because men are easily overcome by physical passion. Like the narrator of “Olalla” who found “my [his] heart melted at her [Olalla’s] looks and touch,” so to do Ralph, Bobby, and Anthony at Harriet’s (par. 93). Shortly before Bobby dies, Harriet meets and falls in love with Ralph’s cousin Anthony Pennell, a charitable, liberal-minded Socialist who “waged perpetual warfare

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<sup>244</sup> In addition to Bobby and Ethel, Harriet recalls that her little neighbor, Caroline, died after they slept together when they were children, that two nuns with whom she was close left the convent ill, and that even Olga Brimont, Harriet’s travelling companion at the novel’s start, fell ill after they shared a room.

against the tyranny of men over women; the ill-treatment of children; and the barbarities practised upon dumb animals and all living things. He was a liberal minded man, with a heart large enough and tender enough to belong to a woman” (Marryat 176). Anthony is unarguably the novel’s hero whose fatal flaw is his love for a woman “who is not the sort of girl that any man could marry [...] One might get a piebald son and heir,” or so Doctor Phillips continually reminds both the readers and main characters, emphasizing the racial threat Harriet poses (172-3).

After Bobby’s death and Doctor Phillips’ confirmation that Madame Gobelli’s accusations were accurate, Harriet tries to control her tactility in order to protect Anthony from contamination. When she next sees Anthony after speaking with Doctor Phillips, she reacts violently, ““Don’t touch me, Tony!”” (198). Fearful that her contact with her will deplete his vital energy, she commands physical distance as a means of protection. Anthony ignores her imperative, trying to assuage her and convince her of the ridiculousness of Doctor Phillips’ story. Initially, Harriet hesitates to accept Anthony’s protestations, explaining, ““I will live my life without, I *could* do that, but I can never, never consent to sap your manhood and your brains, which do not belong to me but to the world”” (201). Once again, the text reveals a clear correlation between Harriet’s monstrous embrace and the loss of male virility; Harriet’s tainted heritage and insatiable lust will drain Anthony of all his virility, leaving no energy for reproduction and national duty.

Though Harriet recognizes Anthony’s social value and desires to protect it, Anthony, by contrast, thinks only of his lust, his individual sense of gratification:

He felt as though he had captured some beautiful wild creature and was taming it for his own pleasure.

[...] And yet he knew all the while that the savage in her was not tamed—that at any moment, like the domesticated lion or tiger, her nature might assert

itself and become furious, wild and intractable. It was the very uncertainty that pleased him; men love the women of whom they are not quite certain, all the more. (218)

Anthony finds himself fascinated with her animality and the prospect of taming or containing that for his own pleasure. He believes himself capable of regulating her hands and their tactility, though he knows the danger that they pose. Even Anthony, a liberal-minded Socialist who dedicates his life to helping others, finds himself enthralled by the desire Harriet's embrace evokes and the opportunity to tame someone so wild. He rationalizes his desire by shifting the focus of his humanitarian endeavors to Harriet herself, taking up the white man's burden in a mission to civilize her. After threatening to kill himself if she leaves, Harriet agrees to marry Anthony and they travel on the Continent for six weeks before she wakes up still wrapped in his arms, and "place[s] her hand upon his heart. The body was cold—cold and still all over! His eyes were glazed and dull. His mouth was slightly open. [...] Tony was—*dead!*" (224). Eldridge points out that "her [Harriet's] waking up in bed alongside the corpse of her husband, is a nice touch that drives home the physicality of her alleged vampirism" (Eldridge 11). Harriet is a tactile vampire that feeds through contact. Denied the possibility of life-long love or even reproduction,<sup>245</sup> Harriet, who sits on the edge of the bed "holding the hand of her dead husband," must confront her responsibility: "it was she who had killed Margaret Pullen's baby and Bobby Bates, [...] —now, her Tony! the light of her life, the passion of her being, the essence of all her joy—[...] She had killed him—*she*, who worshipped him, whose pride was bound up in him, who was to have helped him and comforted him and waited on him all his life—she had killed him" (225). Harriet's realization reveals her 'feminine' virtue in her willingness to have

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<sup>245</sup> Though O. Davis suggests that Harriet is pregnant at the novel's end, I would argue that the text suggests otherwise—Harriet would suck the life from her infant before birth or end up with another monster, tainted by Harriet's heritage and destined to similarly pollute the nation (O. Davis 51).

subsumed herself in her husband, yet her hands, her cursed heritage prevented her assumption of that role. In other words, the novel bars Harriet from reproducing because of her race and manifests the dangers of miscegenation in Harriet's monstrous embrace, which feeds on the energy of those with whom she makes physical contact.

Harriet herself ends the narrative by taking her own life and leaving her wealth to Margaret Pullen, the eventual exemplar of ideal Victorian womanhood who refocuses on her familial duties after Ethel's death. In the note she leaves, Harriet explains, "My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out" (227). Ultimately, Harriet regulates—or we might say disciplines—her monstrous tactility and legislates her family line by taking her own life in service of the nation. As Olalla vowed that with her sacrifice her "race shall cease from off the earth," so Harriet acts (par. 113). Much like Gertrude who recognizes the monstrous in herself when she touches the corpse of her husband's son, Harriet too recognizes herself as both a monster and a carrier of monstrosity as she holds Anthony's dead hand. Monstrous touch perverts manual intercourse, rendering tactile forms of engagement that were once liberating in their ability to communicate the unspoken or unspeakable, dangerous because of the type of sexual expression it allows. In *fin-de-siècle* speculative fiction, contact tempts and contaminates, revealing the unseen monsters—or those "impulses of anger," the "sporting instincts," and the "wayward imagination"—in us all.



## Epilogue: Touching Ourselves

“I remember watching my grandma rub cream into her hands at night and then cover them with gloves. She used to tell me that soft hands on a lady were extremely important. Have you considered hand cream?”

“You know, hands are all over Tennyson’s *In Memorium*.”

“Did you know they still have yet to create a working prosthetic for hands? ... They can’t seem to reproduce our sense of touch.”

“Kim, in *Pacific Rim*—the system for running the giant robots depends on a ‘neural handshake’!”

“I watched a movie tonight titled *Possession* starring Gwyneth Paltrow. It’s about two college researches as they unravel a mysterious Victorian love affair. [...] One phrase caught my attention, ‘And I took your hand in mine. Mine rested in yours with trust and relief.’ A lot for a hand to do.”

Some of the quotations above I draw from memory, one I quote from a message left on my answering machine by a friend and colleague, and the last I take from an email a family member sent me almost three years ago. Professors, colleagues, friends, family, people from all walks of life and diverse professional backgrounds, each has a story to regale me with or a reference to contribute when they learn that I write about touch in the Victorian period: Right-versus left-handedness. Hands in art—they were very difficult to paint. Plaster casts of hands. Gloves. Prosthetics. Hand-cream. Hands in film. Hands in poetry. Hands in advertisements. Thinking hands. Animal hands. Sexual hands—our terms for autoerotic practices are rooted in the hands, after all. Even dead hands have been suggested.

One of my favorite finds, when Prince Albert died in 1861, Queen Victoria actually had a plaster cast made of his hand and arm. While there is no existent image of which I will explain momentarily, the below figures will provide a sense of what it may have looked like. The first (Fig. 14) is a marble model of one of her children’s arm and hand, the next is a plaster cast made of her son, Prince Albert Edward’s hand (Fig. 15), and the last is an image of plaster models of the hands of Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones (Fig. 16), both of whom were associated with



**Figure 14.** Macaulay, Jo. “Discover the Island’s Royal Palace – Osborne House.” myIsleofWight.com (17 March 2014). Caption: “From their home high above the beach their nine children must have looked out of their nurseries on the second floor each day to see if the weather was suitable for bathing. It is here that you can see their playroom, dining room and bedrooms along with marble models of their hands and feet.” © Red Funnel Group 2012 <http://www.redfunnel.co.uk/my-isle-of-wight/features/discover-the-islands-royal-palace-osborne-house/>



**Figure 15.** Boehm, Joseph Edgar. “Left Hand of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII, r. 1901-1910).” (ca. 1862-1876) © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O73077/left-hand-of-albert-edward-hand-boehm-sir-joseph/>

the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Though little research has been done on this specific memento mori of Queen Victoria's, records suggest that she used to hold hands with it, sleep with it, and even requested to be buried with it—which is why I don't have an image. Queen Victoria



**Figure 16.** artscuratorialtrainee. “Condition Checking Loans for Exposed.” Arts Curatorial Trainee. (13 November 2013) Caption: “Plaster cast of the hands of Edward Burne-Jones (left) and Georgiana Burne-Jones) right.” <https://artscuratorialtrainee.wordpress.com/>

arguably sought an emotional, and possibly erotic, connection with her dead husband through contact with a model of his hand. Queen Victoria's attachment to Albert's plaster hand points to her culture's association of the hand with individual human character as well as the emotional dimensions of interpersonal relationships. For the Victorians, contact was connection. As Tennyson so aptly puts it, “But o for the touch of a vanished hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still!” (Tennyson, “Break, Break, Break!” line 11-12). My difficulty has not been finding avenues of exploration but rather narrowing my focus to a single topic: literary moments when hands touch.

When pressed by my contributors, I explain that Victorians understood touch as having the potential to communicate, but they also feared the erotic nature of what might be communicated. Reciprocal contact between hands meant an unrestricted emotional flow—a

physical and psychological connection beyond social or linguistic regulation. What you cannot see and cannot hear, you cannot legislate. Interestingly, a dissertation about Victorian ‘manual intercourse,’ as I term it, has generated a wealth of distinctly non-Victorian, often contemporary, avenues of exploration as the epigraphs illustrate. I contend that understanding Victorian manual intercourse encourages us to read beyond the surface of its more contemporary representations by querying how our understanding of the communicative character of touch has developed as well as why we still rely on tactile modes of communication when language fails us in a digital and visual age.

As I will suggest it is today, touch was central to Victorian understandings of human identity and human relationships, which we see reflected in the prevalence of hands and their touches in nineteenth-century literature. I confined my study to erotic manual intercourse in Victorian novels and short stories to suggest that commentary on erotic or transgressive sexuality, reproductive politics, and power structures associated with gender relations in non-pornographic nineteenth-century fiction did not exist only in the margins as other scholars have suggested.<sup>246</sup> The erotics of touch have been muted in our times and thus, as contemporary critics looking back, we may not initially register moments of manual intercourse as significant to a novel’s plot as Victorian readers might have. However, as the quotations that I began with show, when we tune ourselves to this earlier culture of the hand and economy of touch, continued contemporary interest in its social signification comes to the fore: How do cosmetics influence what we deem a pleasurable tactile sensation? How does technology transform modes of tactile

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<sup>246</sup> See Maynard, Marcus, and Cohen, for example. While William Cohen notes in *Sex Scandal* that he seeks to establish “deviant sexuality at the center of orthodox cultural formations, not just at the margins,” his reading of *Great Expectations* examines the absences, the places where the novel “encrypts sexuality not in its plot or in its announced intentions, but in its margins” (21, 32). I argue that manual intercourse proves central to the plots of Victorian novels rather than marginal.

interaction? What is the relationship between touch and the human psyche? While I have focused on erotics and gender, I have learned that there are endless avenues of exploration.

Aside from the quotations above, I have been instructed to watch a stand-up routine by John Oliver in 2011 that explains how a handshake between himself and his African American friend embodies the struggle of the 1950s; an episode of the popular ABC series *Castle* that aired in 2012 wherein the main characters agree to embrace hands when unable to openly acknowledge their relationship while at work; and, most recently, an episode of the Victorian era Showtime series *Penny Dreadful* (2014) wherein the leading lady is confronted at a party for not wearing gloves because she longs for an unmediated touch with her surroundings, to know the world through tactile sensation rather than visual perceptions. This epilogue is for those who eagerly contributed their knowledge and experience, who embraced my fascination with touch and, in so doing, showed me that hands and their touches still hold an important place in modern, twenty-first century culture. Victorian authors embraced the haptic potential of tactile communication, employing manual intercourse to nonverbally comment on unspeakable aspects of culture or to express ineffable emotion. Representations of manual intercourse in contemporary culture still embody social taboos and negotiate structures of power, but they also express an interest in codifying touch as a sign that signifies, as a language we can master.

## **I. Reading Backward**

Why did touch fascinate the Victorians? This question underlies much of my dissertation and inspired my research. Taken collectively, the literature I explore throughout this dissertation suggests that the Victorians were not just fascinated by the physiology of touch, but rather by the social function of tactile sensation. Each text employs manual intercourse to explore tactility as an alternative means of social expression through which those at a gender, socioeconomic, or

racial disadvantage could claim a level of authority. Characters touch each other's hands to communicate what language and social decorum sought to restrain. Through literary representations of touch, characters negotiate the power dynamics and material conditions of gender; comment on the reproductive, domestic, and national politics that undergird the perceived social danger attributed to female sexual agency; and identify the place of pleasure in romantic encounters for both men and women. By considering texts from various literary genres and authors from diverse backgrounds, I encourage my readers to read as the Victorians did—across centuries, across genres, and across disciplines. Putting George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) in dialogue with Thomas Hardy's "On the Western Circuit" (1891), for example, establishes the primacy of manual intercourse to narratives that explore the social limitations placed on female eroticism and also highlights the growing anxiety throughout the century about female sexual pleasure and women's active desire for sex as threatening to the patriarchal order. Conduct could regulate hands' behavior, but could not effectively legislate the haptic communication that reciprocal touch facilitated.

The social dimensions attributed to touch during the Victorian period continue to inform the questions we ask about the function of tactile sensation in human development today. Much as touch has become a subject of increasing interest for scholars since the late 1990s,<sup>247</sup> various fields within science and psychology have begun to explore the role tactile sensation plays in social development and embodied cognition, and to render these findings increasingly available

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<sup>247</sup> See Cohen, Classen, Briefel, and Ann C. Colley's *Wild Animals Skins in Victorian Britain* (2014).

for public consumption often through interviews.<sup>248</sup> While articles published in popular magazines may note recent advances in these fields, many of the assumptions that underlie the studies cited have their roots in Victorian understandings of tactile sensation and its communicative character, suggesting that to fully understand the significance touch plays in individual and communal development we must at least consider the historical perceptions that underlie our contemporary assumptions.

In a special issue of *The Scientist*, a popular science journal, published in 2012 Sabrina Richards notes, “Touch orients us to the world; it also attunes us to each other,” a familiar figuration (35). We can trace this claim through phenomenology back to Condillac’s *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754): “Placing its [his imagined statue] hands on itself it will discover that it has a body, but only when it has distinguished the different parts of it and recognized in each the same sentient being. It will discover there are other bodies when it touches things in which it does not find itself” (Condillac 85-6). In that same issue of *The Scientist*, Megan Scudellari explains that “Touch, researchers agree, is our most complicated sense. It involves the perception of three-dimensional shapes and sizes, textures, vibration, temperature, and pressure. Touch provides a sense of where our m are in space (a poorly understood phenomenon called proprioception [...]) and detects a huge range of forces, from the lightest brushing of a cat’s fur on one’s fingertips to the smack of a baseball into one’s palm” (40). Again, while clearly

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<sup>248</sup> To trace the rising interest in tactility in fields other than literature would be a dissertation in itself. However, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy does note that, “Empirical research on embodied cognition has exploded in the past 10 years.” Briefly, a few popular examples, in 2007 Kenneth Aizawa published “Understanding the Embodiment of Perception” in the *Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 5-25; in 2009 Anthony Chemero published his book *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science*; in 2010 Frederick Adams, who has since published widely on the topic, published an article simply titled “Embodied Cognition” in the journal *Phenomenology and Cognition*, pp. 619-28; and in 2011 Larry Shapiro published *Embodied Cognition*, a manuscript dedicated to the topic. This field has its roots in the work of Martin Heidegger, Didier Anzieu, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to name a few, which my dissertation suggests drew influence from eighteenth-century philosophy and nineteenth-century philosophy, science, pseudo-science and etiquette—cultures that were widely interested in hands, touch and haptics.

exploring a new avenue of research, this assertion reads similarly to Georg Meissner's discoveries popularized by Richard Beamish in 1865: "Unlike the nerves of feeling, which perceive only pressure and temperature, and are common to the whole surface of the body, the nerves of touch are endowed with the superior function of conveying to the brain the conception of form, size, weight, and local position, and are limited in their distribution to the hands and feet" (Beamish 2).<sup>249</sup> What these articles reveal is that, despite our technological advances, touch still eludes our mastery, we also still associate hands and their capacity to communicate or bring thought to bear through touch with the essence of humanity and human relations.

*Psychology Today* published an article by Rick Chillot in April 2013 titled, "Louder than Words," with the tagline, "Touch is the first sense we acquire and the secret weapon in many a successful relationship. Here's how to regain fluency in your first language." Chillot emphasizes that touch, like language, holds power and can be deployed as a weapon; to understand touch is to gain control over yourself, your surroundings, and others in Chillot's figuration. Imagining touch as a language that can be decoded and then codified offers readers a sense of control over a sensation that has exceeded our mastery for centuries. Victorian literature reveals through representations of manual intercourse that characters can acknowledge desire, establish connections, and communicate, but also negotiate structures of power that language and social codes maintain. As I do throughout this dissertation, in this epilogue I suggest that touch still proves a central preoccupation of those interested in human cognition, human social interaction, and human sexuality. Yet, because touch exceeds our grasp of it, we invoke it more simply in

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<sup>249</sup> Richards focuses her study on role of touch in childhood development, and Scudellari explains a new development in hand prosthetics that provides tactile feedback, allowing someone to pick up a cup without crushing it. The assumptions that lay the foundations of these studies, however, can be traced back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy and science as I have shown, suggesting that contemporary studies develop these earlier perceptions rather than accomplishing something wholly original or distinct. The hand still proves an emblem of humanity and human development and touch still holds a potential for social communication and cognitive development that exceeds our comprehension.



popular culture as a metaphor for connection, whether socially acceptable or transgressive. I establish this burgeoning interest in tactility within academic fields to suggest that we cannot fully appreciate touch today when conceptualized apart from the historical contexts that influence our contemporary perceptions.

## II. Reading Forward

In concluding this dissertation, I want to consider how our perceptions about touch have changed (and remained the same) over the last one hundred years. What vestiges of Victorian manual intercourse do we still see today? As I mentioned earlier, the British-American television series *Penny Dreadful* premiered in April 2014 and addresses the transgressive nature of touch in episode two.<sup>250</sup> While at a party, the character Dorian Gray notices Vanessa Ives from across the room because she is the only lady there not wearing gloves. He comes within close proximity, takes her hand, and while playing with it assesses her choice to attend a party ungloved: “Your hands want to touch, but your head wants to appraise. Your heart is torn between the two.” This scene presents its viewers with but a pale representation of Victorian culture for titillation. While Dorian’s uninvited touching of Vanessa’s hands highlights the erotics associated with touch during the period, his comment pits hand against mind, touch against vision, feeling against thought. As we have seen, manual intercourse scandalized Victorians because it opened the mind to the pleasures of physical sensation, diverting the mind’s attention from public duty and toward individual desire. This scene from *Penny Dreadful* might tantalize, but it also strips Vanessa of the agency she claimed by rejecting etiquette and not wearing gloves in the first place; Dorian’s touch subsumes her hands, and Vanessa becomes the object of his touch rather than an agent in her own right. Reading touch in popular culture through our understanding of manual intercourse

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<sup>250</sup> The series was filmed in various locations throughout the United Kingdom, was produced by the American Showtime Network, and co-produced by the British Sky Broadcasting.

in nineteenth-century literature encourages us to think about the social and sexual politics that contemporary depictions of touch may still communicate.

In a June 2014 issue of the *New York Times* the “Social Questions” section of the paper addressed a question about handshake etiquette and the asker’s social and physical discomfort with the obligation that comes with an offered hand:

**Palm Reader**

*Please address handshake etiquette between men and women. I was taught that a gentleman waits for a lady to initiate handshakes. Responding to a man’s offered hand is uncomfortable for me. How do you suggest I respond?*

*LESLYE, ANCHORAGE*

Were she Margaret Hale from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), Leslye would withhold her hand, rejecting the offered shake in response to the social discomfort and nontraditional mode of social intercourse it offers; were she Jane Eyre from Charlotte Brontë’s eponymous novel (1847), she would accept the offered shake, though perhaps somewhat reluctantly. In 1859,<sup>251</sup> the widely read etiquette book *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook for Ladies and Gentlemen* clearly instructs its readers that “A man has no right to take a lady’s hand till it is offered” (326). Leslye does not desire the type of physical transgression that seems to arouse Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful*. While most contemporary readers might attribute Leslye’s response to outdated notions of chivalry, to do so overlooks the power relations and politics that still underlie the intimate exchange that physical contact between hands facilitates. Much like Margaret and Jane, our twenty-first century Leslye expresses a discomfort not merely with the reversal of gender roles, but with the physical vulnerability that comes with the obligation to touch—to engage in manual intercourse and open oneself up to an uninvited guest.

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<sup>251</sup> Scholars have found it difficult to establish the exact date of the original publication of this etiquette book, but agree that it dates to the late 1850s or early 1860s (Curtin).

Philip Galanes responds to Leslye's question, making an assumption about her age based on her "old-time," outmoded concern with etiquette. He replies,

With grace and even gratitude that our world marches (slowly) toward gender equality. I would never discourage a man, today, from reaching his hand in greeting to a woman. It is simply egalitarian. But it's also kind for younger folks to be cognizant of old-time rules of behavior, like the one you mention—or pulling out chairs for women, if that makes someone else more comfortable. Often, it's not the content of rules but their context that makes for the best behavior.

While egalitarian handshaking might prove evidence of our slow march towards gender equality, it further suggests a shifting consciousness about the once dominant social awareness of the personal intimacy involved in a shake of the hand. Given what Victorian novels teach us, is Leslye wrong to be wary of an uninvited touch? Vanessa who allows herself to be touched also proves the monstrous fallen woman of the show, reinforcing for female viewers the importance of safeguarding their hands. Leslye's discomfort may not come from age and a desire to preserve an outmoded form of etiquette as much as from the fact that in learning this particular rule she internalized the dangers that uninvited manual intercourse poses to women, and that women must regulate male impulse. She may experience such unforeseen male-offered handshakes not so much as a breach of etiquette as a transgression of a personal boundary. Handshake etiquette did not just teach women deference to men, but indicated that regulating their hands was analogous to safeguarding their bodies. These examples suggest that the dangers, pleasures, and social politics associated with Victorian manual intercourse are alive and well today. In touching the Victorians, we touch ourselves.

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