

Embodied Pleasure and Radical Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Poetry

By

Andrew S. Kay

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2016

Date of final oral examination: 12/18/2014

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Caroline Levine, Professor, English
Theresa Kelley, Professor, English
Susan Bernstein, Professor, English
Mario Ortiz-Robles, Professor, English
Ernesto Livorni, Professor, French and Italian

Contents

- 1 Introduction **1**
 - 2 Radicalism, Corporeality, and the Unruly Pleasures of Laboring-Class Poetry **65**
 - 3 Robert Browning's Poetics of Fleshly Enjoyment **126**
 - 4 Christina Rossetti's Aesthetics of Redemption **185**
 - 5 Reckoning Sodom's Apple: Swinburne's Poetics of Curative Excess **244**
 - 6 Conclusion: Pater and Radicalized Decadence **279**
- Works Cited* **294**

Introduction

The Argument

On April 10th, 1847, a year to the day before the Chartist movement's last stand—a mass demonstration of 150,000 laborers at London's Kennington Commons vying for suffrage and parliamentary representation—a group of working people gathered at a meeting house in Leeds to debate "The Divine Philosophy of Pleasure." They identified themselves as the Westminster Debating Society, and their discussion, as reported by the great working-class newspaper *The Northern Star*, surrounded the necessity and use-value of pleasure in human life. One speaker, a Mr. Trumbull, declared that "he thought pleasure in accordance with the principles of God and Nature, as mirth appeared to be implanted in man by the Creator, and phrenologists had very properly placed that organ amongst the highest in point of intellect." Indeed, he claimed, "Singing and dancing cultivated and conducted on proper principles, would be productive of the happiest results to humanity in general," a statement that inspired cheers from his listeners. It is easy to infer that pleasure is at a premium in the lives of these men and women, its scarcity imbuing it with a value and power that comes through in their conversations about pleasure's wellsprings, its deeper human purpose. "Sacred history," the *Star* reports their saying, "bore them out as to the acceptability of pleasure, for in the 'inspired writings' did they not find 'Let the loud timbrel,' and the 'Song of Solomon?'" thus proving, even in those days, that both vocal and instrumental music was in vogue." Pleasure, one attendee insisted, was everywhere if only one knew where to look: in observing "the absurdities and eccentricities of the human family," even in reading the *Star* ("Public Meetings").

The meeting is consistent with a deeper impulse among the British working class, from approximately the 1820s through the early 1850s, toward preserving and exalting pleasure—a drive that inflects the astonishing quantity of poetry that laboring writers produced during these same decades. The presiding spirit or genius who hovers most conspicuously over much of this verse, and over the considerable volume of working-class poetic theory written concomitantly, is that of Keats, whom working-class radicals eagerly claimed as their own. So one finds, reading an 1850 issue of *The Red Republican*, an *ars poetica* by the impassioned Chartist Gerald Massey that begins with the opening lines from *Endymion*, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," a line likewise reprinted in issues of working-class periodicals from *National* to the *Northern Tribune* (Massey 19). What strikes one about this poetry and theory is that so very much of it—the majority perhaps—is not angry; rather, its affective registers are positive: celebratory, often rapt, it quests after beauty and sensuality in the midst of abjection. How do we make sense of and theorize this defiant positing of a Keatsian luxuriance in the face of such degradation? How to account for a focus on pleasure, whether real or merely imagined, as a poetic response to a world so signally flawed, inadequate, and incomplete in its current form?

That radical dissonance lies at the heart of this dissertation. What the poets taken up here share is a strong investment in better worlds, a persistent straining toward realities that improve upon and rectify the imperfections of the status quo. In two of the four chapters this aspirational energy is fundamentally political: the working-class poets I examine desire institutional upheaval, imagining poetry as a vehicle for helping to precipitate social equality, as well as a mode of empowering laborers through a transmission of knowledge at once joyful and educative; while another poet, Algernon Swinburne, is a liberal republican in the tradition of Byron,

disdainful of the entrenched political and religious infrastructure that conspires to delimit the potential—sexual, intellectual, social—of human subjects. Poetry is a method of spurring the bodily liberation, the "cleansing of perception" in individuals, which was for Swinburne, as for his powerful antecedent Blake, the prerequisite to structural change in the external world. For the poets foregrounded in the other two chapters, the aspirational character of their writing assumes a spiritual rather than political dimension. In Robert Browning one witnesses a repeated striving toward instants of Wordsworthian stillness that take shape amid the processual flux of linear time—"infinite moments" that hold the promise of a transcendental knowledge but, unlike Wordsworth's spots of time, are explicitly grounded in the life of the body. And Christina Rossetti's poetry, finally, is nearly everywhere inflected with a Protestant "desire [for] a better country" that was very much a reaction against the complacency of her contemporaries—that mid-century Victorian optimism fueled by scientific progress, economic prosperity, and imperial expansion, that for Rossetti was profoundly misguided.

They are all, in other words, visionary poets, if in subtly distinct ways. Their verse gestures to higher realities, whether of an eternal Christian sort or the kind that might be ushered in here, now, pending a radical reconfiguration of human perception and, with it, the make-up of the socio-political realm. Through their poetry they furnish readers with a verbal machinery for getting there, a perceptual training ground that helps them to experience and understand the world—or, in certain instances, to imagine it—in an altered manner, and thereby, in the case of the politically minded poets, sets them on their way toward changing it. Yet what makes them collectively so striking is their shared stake in pleasure, particularly embodied pleasure, as a socially or spiritually redemptive force—a phenomenon not dulling but quickening, not vapid

but enlightening: a key force, finally, in moving people to take on life-altering causes and ideas they might otherwise be loath to adopt as their own. Though their goals differ, I have chosen the poets in this project because each uses pleasurable affect as part of an embodied reading program that tries to subvert the shopworn belief frameworks of audiences and seduce them into trying on new ones: an emancipatory approach that endeavors to topple prisons of accustomed thought by corporeal means. William Blake had prophesied in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that an apocalyptic change, of which the French Revolution had been a prefiguration, would come over the world in the imminent future; its arrival was contingent on "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" among humans, which partly meant discarding the erroneous notion that "man has a body distinct from his soul" (Blake, *Early Illuminated Books*, 166). In a comparable manner, for the poets taken up in this project—two of whom, Swinburne and Rossetti, read and were influenced by Blake—bodily pleasure occupies a place at the center of intricate programs for spiritual regeneration or political defiance. However exalted the hoped-for endpoints of these programs—the salvation of the individual soul, a more equitable or even utopian restructuring of society—they begin, I'll argue, with appeals to the flesh.

And while the chapters that follow are evenly divided between poets I consider predominantly political (working-class poets and Swinburne) and those I think of in primarily spiritual terms (Browning and Rossetti), an important premise of this dissertation is that Victorian politics and religion constituted at bottom a unified front. While they may on the surface appear distinct, the two spheres are fundamentally linked, component parts of an integrated institutional program that strove to discipline and normalize individuals in ways that frequently involved their bodies. Though we tend proverbially to think of the Victorian period as

an age of increasing secularism, scholars like Charles Taylor provide important reminders that the process of secularization was, by the middle nineteenth century, far from complete: "[T]he polity itself remained a monarchy, with hierarchical elements" and powerful, lingering ties to "a church-based monarchy rooted in a time out of mind." Indeed, "this constitutional monarchy, the rights and freedoms it enshrine[d], the Protestant religion, and a certain ethic of 'decency' [were] all seen as inextricably intertwined elements of British identity" (Taylor 393). What was increasingly thought of as proper and "decent" behavior was, in fact, the constructed legacy of a complex weave of political and religious forces that had been afoot since the later eighteenth century—forces that, while disparate in character and origin, alike stressed a self-regulation of bodily appetite verging on asceticism. One of these forces, as James Eli Adams points out, was a tradition of radical politics, perhaps epitomized by William Godwin, that exalted social progress while urging an "anti-sensualism." As Godwin writing in *Political Justice* saw it, the advancement of civilization would inevitably be accompanied by the evanishment of sexual desire—reproduction proving, ultimately, no more than a social duty subject to rational control (Adams 124). Several decades later John Stuart Mill, who had taken up the cause of women's rights, articulated, in his diary, a comparable commitment to radical reform that called for an abnegation of fleshly appetite: "[A]ny great improvement in human life is not to be looked for so long as the animal instinct of sex occupies the absurdly disproportionate place it does therein" (Mill, *Letters*, 382).

In their shared anti-sensualism, radical political philosophers found an unlikely and ironically in a wave of British evangelism that, if it likewise got underway toward the end of the eighteenth century, was cresting by the middle of the nineteenth. It was a movement that,

Adams stresses, made itself strongly felt in the arena of politics: "Evangelicals from roughly the 1780s sought to transform both British politics and everyday conduct by reinvigorating Christian piety, and approaching human life as an arena of constant moral struggle, of resistance to temptation and mastery of desire" (Adams 126). Both evangelism and radical politics were, in a sense, middle-class reactions against what many perceived as the profligacy of the aristocratic class; both left a powerful mark on English identity. They helped contribute, certainly, to that Victorian culture of restraint, of a sedulous self-monitoring of desire in favor of industry, which found expression in works such as Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859). At its most notorious, perhaps, this anti-sensualism informed conceptions of family and domestic life, and particularly of womanhood: the ideal Victorian home, immortalized by Ruskin in *Sesame and Lilies*, was a sanctuary of tranquility presided over by a hyper-solicitous middle-class mother immune to physical appetite. This is the framework that helps account for the fact that the poets in this dissertation return, again and again, to embodiment and specifically to pleasure. Together they recoil against this very anti-sensualism, a political-religious phenomenon that combined, as we will see below, with a growing culture of consumerism to deaden and desensitize, to alienate subjects from their bodies and desires. Though Rossetti, for example, is concerned with the spiritual realm and Swinburne the political (though he too is compelled by a kind of spirituality), the very fact that they loved and imitated each other's work hints that they were fighting against the same fundamental cultural construct: a denial of the body and its pleasures that was at best fraudulent, at worst catastrophic and dangerous. That both revered Blake—whose poetry habitually coupled altar and throne, institutions that colluded in "binding with briars [our] joys and desires"—is telling in this regard (Blake, "The Garden of Love" 12).

In a milieu of anti-sensualism brought on by political, religious, and commercial forces, crafting a pleasure-driven poetry became, for numerous Victorian writers, an inherently radical enterprise. For the poets spotlighted in this dissertation, pleasure—rather than a negligible byproduct of reading and writing or, worse yet, a mode of lulling humans into submission—was a gesture of defiance, even a source of alternative kinds of knowledge that could run sharply counter to the status quo. Though I will discuss particular acts of pleasure detailed in the poems themselves, my primary interest will be the pleasure of reading itself and the importance with which these poets freighted it. By *pleasure* I mean an interval of enjoyment felt along the body that nearly always—in keeping with an anti-dualistic, psychosomatic model of cognition shared by all of the poets in this project—likewise extends to the mind. Thus while my main focus here will be on embodied pleasure, if the poets taken up below teach us anything, it is that we cannot talk about the sensorium without simultaneously addressing the brain. "Axioms in philosophy are not axioms," Keats's apothegm goes, "until they are proved upon our pulses"; so too for the poets in this project, for whom the loftiest truths, whether spiritual or political, make themselves known to us by electrifyingly felt means (Keats, *Letters*, 1: 279). Taking aesthetic, then, in the original sense of somatic experience, the *aisthetikos* of which the ancient Greeks wrote, I have written the ensuing chapters in the spirit of helping to resuscitate aesthetic pleasure as a literary-critical ideal. In so doing, I ask what broader use-value—socio-political, theological, pedagogical—we might learn to ascribe to pleasure: how might literary artifacts, especially via formal attributes such as rhythm, incite pleasurable sensory responses in human subjects; and how might these physiological appeals turn out to be integral not only to the texts' intellectual and spiritual concerns, but their world-altering potential?

The Embodied Pleasures of Poetry

But how exactly did poetry produce pleasure in the body? In attempting to answer this we might hark back to Roland Barthes, that arch-theorist of pleasure who, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, suggests that "the word can be erotic on two opposing conditions, both excessive: if extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness" (Barthes 42). Language can please, that is, through both repetition and surprise. I begin with repetition, which is, not coincidentally, an especially salient device among the overtly political poets I take up in these chapters—the Chartist poets of Chapter 1 and Swinburne, featured in Chapter 4. For the former, repetition manifested itself in monotonous chants—predictably iambic, rife with mantras (e.g., "We're low, we're low" from Ernest Jones's "Song of the Lower Classes")—that lent themselves to collective public performance in pub or street demonstration. Because of the collectivity it called for, this kind of poetry was fitted to incite a pleasure its authors conceived as shared, communal; it was generative of a pleasurable sympathy that, fluid and infectious, promoted a sense of intersubjectivity, of unity. Swinburne, meanwhile, wrote sprawling dramatic monologues that use formal techniques like anaphora and metalepsis, as well as incessantly reiterated rhythms and rhymes. The hoped-for effect of this was to involve readers in wave-like cycles of pleasurable if exhausting repetition, and in this manner activate dormant impulses that slept in their bodies. Rhyme, its own kind of repetition, was for Swinburne a particularly vital method of inciting a pleasure he conceived as fleshly; drug-like, intensely addictive, the pleasures of rhyme were, for Swinburne the algolagnist, invariably mingled with a

stinging pain. Rossetti too deploys repetition in *Goblin Market*, as we will see, though it is Swinburne and the Chartists who rely on it most heavily and obviously. Broadly speaking, the significance of pleasurable repetition for these writers is, I think, as follows: through it they create poetry that serves as a battering ram with which to bore through entrenched social customs, thought-patterns, and habits, accessing energies and instincts latent in readers that might be liberating and destabilizing. It is repetition, in other words, that equates to a Blakean excess that is ideally freeing and mind-opening—as if centuries of restrictive ideology pertaining to matters like class and sexuality could only be overcome through a series of immoderate, relentlessly repeated gestures.

Of course, poets generate pleasure not just through repetition but subtle differences amid that repetition: rhyme, for instance, is pleasurable not simply because it creates patterns of similitude amid the chaos of word-groupings, but because of the slight changes from one rhyming word to the next. (I will have more to say about this in my discussion of Wordsworth later in this introduction.) Rhyme, like meter, sets up schemes of continuity and predictability for readers so that they come to expect, if only subliminally, that a given line or word will accord with the larger pattern. These formal qualities contribute, in fact, to a kind of suspense for readers, who wait for lines and words to correspond with the pattern thus far established. When they don't correspond, that very surprise is itself a source of pleasure, a delightful disruption perhaps no more sophisticated than the pleasurable surprise an infant feels on being playfully startled by a parent or sibling. Often, though, this formal difference amid repetition proves an integral part of poem's politically disruptive potential. Chartist poems are frequently repetitions of British nationalistic songs and Methodist hymns, borrowing the rhythms and sometimes the

melodies of these prior compositions; yet in overlaying rebellious new lyrics onto them, Chartist poets created a form of difference-amid-familiarity that readers—or, often, chanters—found exhilaratingly subversive. *Goblin Market* is a poem about repetition and pleasure: it is rife with repetitious formal strategies like anaphora and, at times, rhyme; it is set in motion by an act of consumption by Laura, one of its protagonists, that is tellingly repeated toward the poem's end; and it is itself a repetition of earlier poems such as Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*. But the poem's myriad rhymes and meters refuse to resolve into any sort of regular pattern, Laura's second act of consumption is strikingly different from her first, and *Goblin Market* radically revises *The Eve of St. Agnes* even as it recycles it. The differences are everything.

Beyond repetition and surprise, nineteenth-century poets also looked to luxuriant language to give readers pleasure. In this their patron saint was Keats, whom I will take up later in this introduction and who will figure prominently in Chapters 1 and 3. The Keats who exhorted Percy Shelley to "load every rift with ore" taught subsequent English poets to impart a richness, a density and viscosity, to their lines in an effort to maximize readerly pleasure, a verbal opulence that aspired to superflux (Keats, *Letters* II, 323). Keats experienced poetry as a bracingly physical phenomenon, setting a precedent in this regard for any number of poets who came after him. Charles Cowden Clarke, a friend of his, records how the poet appeared to grow in physical stature as he recited poetry, singling out an episode in which Keats, intoning lines from the eleventh canto of *The Faerie Queen*, arrived at the phrase "sea-shouldering whales": "He *hoisted* himself up, and looked burly and dominant, as he said, 'what an image that is - *sea-shouldering whales!*'" (Roe, *New Life*, 135). Much of the luxuriance of Keats's mature poetry, as we will see in the discussion of Romanticism below, is traceable to its abundance of long, open-

mouthed vowel sounds, diphthongs that lend his lines an incantatory power, an orotundity.

These diphthongs, combined with frequent sibilance, make poetic lines a joy to speak, perhaps because they call forth from readers deep-drawn meditative breaths, lungfuls of air we can issue, largely unimpeded, into the long corridors of poetic lines.

Luxuriant poetry, with its viscous textures and breathy appeal, characterizes both Swinburne and the working-class John Critchley Prince, who figures prominently in my first chapter. In the hands of both poets it acquires a radical edge. Swinburne in effect co-opts mellifluous poetry from a conservative tradition, epitomized by Tennyson, which had by the later nineteenth century claimed this mode as its own. Though luxuriance arguably possessed, in Keats, a defiant power stemming from the poet's lower-middle-class status, by the time of Tennyson's ascendancy what had come to be called a poetry of sensation was linked to conservatism, regularity, stability. Swinburne charges sensation poetry afresh with radical possibility, crafting seductively luxuriant monologues that celebrate free, often homosexual love, atheism, and revolution. Such poems embody a shocking fusion of hypnotic lyricism and brazenly unorthodox subject matter. For his part, Prince, as we will see, self-consciously harnesses Keatsian luxuriance in poems commemorating pastoral escape and marital love. In a Victorian Britain where laboring people were viewed by many middle and upper-class citizens as a "swinish multitude," to borrow Edmund Burke's eighteenth-century phrase, such poetic refinement and opulence became a defiant gesture (Burke 110).

Still another source of pleasure among these poets arises from pictorialism, the assiduity and precision with which Rossetti, especially, crafts images throughout her work. This was a feature Rossetti had in common with the painterly poets of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,

several of whom were, of course, also visual artists; indeed Rossetti herself, though she eventually abandoned the practice, illustrated her own early poetry. We will see in Chapter 3 how Rossetti learned this painterly approach in part from a Tractarian poetic tradition that understood resplendent images as productive of a pleasure initially embodied—though this felt pleasure ideally gave way to an understanding of the divine truths the images emblemized. A powerful instinct for pictorialism likewise characterizes Browning. Browning's painter poems aspire in their own way toward an imagistic clarity, a quasi-visual evocation of individuals caught during instants of heightened drama, their inner nature made luminously visible—much as early-modern painters had themselves used techniques like tenebrism to isolate freeze-frames of maximum dramatic tension and meaning. Moreover, in his predilection for colloquialisms and knack for replicating the craggy rhythms and tortuous syntax of actual speech, Browning fulfills (and takes to a kind of extreme) Wordsworth's directive to write poetry in the language of ordinary men and women. And a harnessing of ordinary language, language that emulated human speech patterns, was for Wordsworth an important component of poetry's pleasurable appeal.

Pleasure and Suspicion

To view pleasure as a stimulus to action and new thought—something liberatory and empowering instead of passivity-inducing—is to contradict the generally held viewpoint of the several interpretative approaches now collectively labeled "the hermeneutics of suspicion," in Paul Ricoeur's memorable phrase (Ricoeur 356). Whether Marxist, psychoanalytical, or New

Historicist, these critical orientations, dominant over the last several decades of literary scholarship, have tended to share a cynical perspective on pleasure. Pleasure emerges for many of these critics as an opiate, a mode of seducing individuals into states of complacency and inaction, and thereby helping to perpetuate the present order. For them, that is, pleasure becomes an instrument of the status quo, a cornerstone of conservatism: when we are most pleased we are also least aware, happily absorbed in diversions that carry us away from iniquity in the world around us—and converted, meanwhile, into willing receptacles for ideologies we scarcely pause to question. In Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's account, which helped set the terms for much subsequent twentieth-century Marxist criticism, "To be pleased means to say Yes." It represented a flight from the social, a numbing agent that was diametrically opposed to hard thinking and political disruption: a means of "desensitization," pleasure "is only possible by insulation from the totality of the social process." Indeed, "Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness" (Adorno and Horkheimer 144). In Adorno and Horkheimer's nightmare vision, much high art and popular art have alike become the domains of a ubiquitous "culture industry" that has reduced aesthetic productions to empty commodities that reflect and reify the values of a hegemony which spans—and places its imprimatur on—every sector of society. In sum, "Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape" (Adorno and Horkheimer 97).

Critical theory has, as a rule, gone the way of Adorno and Horkheimer in this regard. For Terry Eagleton, writing in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, not merely pleasure but aesthetics itself developed in eighteenth-century Europe as a coercive force that enabled the ruling class to extend and deepen its repressive grip on a proletariat that threatened to dissolve into

individuality. As absolute monarchies gave way to a rising bourgeois social order, the latter consolidated its power over the laboring classes by "aestheticizing" that power, translating it into a "discourse of the body" that governed the corporeal existence of human subjects—their "affections and aversions," the habits that determined how they moved through the world. Aesthetics, in Eagleton's narrative, was in one sense an apparatus that enabled the bourgeoisie to "insert social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugate[d], and so operate[d] as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony" (Eagleton, 28). Since aesthetics pivoted on questions of pleasure—the problem of taste, particularly, concerning itself with what was pleasurable, or ought to be—arbitrary constructions of pleasure served a prime means through which established power asserted its hold on the underclass, a subtle conduit for transmitting ideology. Though Eagleton has critiqued Foucault for what he considers the latter's conservatism, the story he tells is in a strong sense a Foucaultian one. Its basic understanding of pleasure, and of aesthetics more broadly, aligns closely with Foucault's notion of biopower—*itself a legacy of Enlightenment Europe—which he identifies as "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, a general strategy of power"* (Foucault 1-4). Just so for Eagleton, who suggests pleasure functioned as part of the larger, incipient regime of aesthetics, itself a biopolitical program aimed at disciplining whole populations by fleshly means. As we will see later, Eagleton, like fellow Marxist Fredric Jameson (whose writing on pleasure will be important to my first chapter), ultimately paints a dialectical picture of aesthetics, surprisingly investing art—and the sensational appeals art makes—with the potential to afford individuals a measure of freedom

from political repression. But this is strongly counterbalanced by the suspicious narrative I have just outlined.

These arguments arise from a fundamentally skeptical attitude toward pleasure that extends to the pleasures of the text. Suspicious critics have tended to cast a cold eye on the deliberate transports that literary texts offer readers. The bewitching gorgeousness of poetic language and figure, the delights of sound and rhythm, the capacity of suspenseful narrative to captivate, move, and ensorcell: these, the overt and intentional riches that poems and novels set before us, possess little value for many adherents to symptomatic reading methodologies; collectively they constitute a deception to be bored through en route to a Platonic reality beyond or beneath them. For such critics, what really matters are the repressed desires and revolutionary potentialities that lurk beneath a text's ostensible meaning and form, waiting to be unlocked; to become absorbed in the surface pleasures of literary artifacts, therefore, means allowing oneself to be diverted from these concealed meanings and energies, to fall victim to ideology and, in so doing, become interpellated into the existing social order. "At precisely those moments," Rachel Ablow puts it in her own synopsis of suspicious hermeneutics, "when we feel ourselves to be most free from social determinations—as, for example, when we are happily absorbed in a book—we are supposedly most thoroughly overwritten by ideology" (Ablow 1). For D.A. Miller, himself an outspoken Foucaultian whose seminal *The Novel and the Police* helped bring symptomatic reading to Victorian studies, a pleasurable immersion in literature is best seen as "a confirm[ation] of the novel-reader in his identity as a liberal subject." To read literary texts as they implicitly ask to be read is to open oneself to a host of embedded *microtechniques*, the

"carceral restraints" and "disciplinary injunctions" that lay claim to readers even—indeed especially—during moments of apparent freedom (Miller x).

Perhaps all suspicious reading protocols adhere to a more general paradigm supplied by psychoanalysis: the critic is the analyst, the text the analysand whose authentic wishes, fears, and assumptions about the world lie repressed beneath a fundamentally misleading exterior, capable of being coaxed out by means of the critic's strategic inquisition. For that matter, Freudian psychoanalysis bequeathed to posterity its own influential model for theorizing pleasure, one that, owing to its prominence, I ought to address here. Pleasure, as Freud articulates it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, consists in the discharge of tensions in the nervous system that arise as a result of an unequal distribution of energies. The "pleasure principle" is a regulatory mechanism that monitors such "unpleasurable tensions" and compels us to seek out courses of action that will result in their gratifying release; faced with "excitation," it yearns to restore equanimity to our brains. Freud's outlook on human behavior is at bottom a hedonistic one, for he argues that all action is driven by a desire for pleasure—or, what is the same thing for Freud, a wish to avoid pain. As one grows up, Freud suggests, the pleasure principle comes to be eclipsed by the reality principle, that capacity to resist and forestall pleasure until a later moment because of the obstacles and demands of outward circumstances, of life in a social world. Yet even the reality principle "at bottom seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality, even though it is pleasure postponed and diminished" (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 444). Subjects are willing, that is, to endure pain and distress—what Freud terms *unpleasure*—"as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 7).

Freud is of a piece with the "suspicious" thinkers thus far invoked in this section because his conception of pleasure is a fundamentally negative and, I think, impoverished one. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he defines pleasure in negative terms, as the discharge of a pre-existent pain or tension; as, in short, an absence, a thing of nothing. It is a basically bestial phenomenon, a compulsion to scratch neural itches—originating in the id, ideally checked by the ego—which one learns to master as one matures. There is little room in Freud's account for the notion, which the present project supports, that pleasure might have an existence independent of pain and therefore be self-justifying. And there is likewise no suggestion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that there might be various kinds and tiers of pleasure, which nineteenth-century writers are at such pains to delineate; that pleasure might not be a primordial urge we subdue and repress as we go about civilized life but a phenomenon intimately bound up with knowledge acquisition, even a guarantor of a thing's veracity. I'll suggest below, finally, that pleasure may not be at odds with reality in the social realm but a contagious, often shared experience and a lever through which reality and its institutions might be reconstituted.

Suspicion's dominance of literary studies has waned over the last ten to fifteen years particularly, and numerous critics, with the benefit of a clarifying distance, have succeeded in viewing it, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's words, as "a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge." Put simply, it "knows some things well and others poorly" (Sedgwick 9). Suspicious theorists such as Foucault, Paul de Man, and their literary-critical offspring have come to seem, for many, less omniscient and unassailable than they once appeared; and in consequence the reading protocols they popularized are beginning to be subjected to a suspicion all their own, a "meta-suspicion" that endeavors to place these very

methodologies under a microscope and identify their shortcomings, their blind spots. Foremost among these, perhaps, is the plain fact of how punishing they can be. A neo-puritanism dogs these methodologies, seen in the paranoid critic's ascetic refusal to indulge in what is given in a text; and, no less, his relegation of those who do partake, freely and unself-consciously, in deliberate literary pleasures to the status of gullible louts. In one sense, this is an unattractive stance owing to the hubris that underlies it. Its real difficulty, though, may reside in its negative implications for literary studies as a profession. I suspect that it is precisely its prioritizing of pleasure, beauty, and appeals to the affects that ultimately distinguishes literary art from all other kinds of inscription. If we are going to shove these features aside, dismissing them as little more than ideology or flouting them as distractions and trivialities, then I fear we renounce the primary assets that we literary scholars have to offer that no other humanistic discipline (save for art history) does. Ignoring them, we become in effect sociologists, historians, political scientists—and in the process initiate our own obsolescence.

In their renunciation of the deliberate abundance that literary texts provide readers, many of these critics have thus forced on us, I'd suggest, the discipline-wide conundrum of why we are here in the first place; and, relatedly, how we might convince ambivalent undergraduates that they should elect to study English rather than any other field of humanistic inquiry. Our *raison d'être* mostly redefined as the demystification of literary artifacts—the exposure of the buried assumptions about race, class, gender, and sexuality these texts embody and recapitulate—we may well wonder what steered us toward verbal art to begin with: what possessed us to devote our professional lives to these bracing, fun, beguiling, often deeply moving effusions of imagination and not some other, more mundane body of social documents. This is not to suggest

that the unmasking of works of art with the help of predetermined conspiracy theories is not an urgently necessary endeavor; the conspiracy theories developed, of course, in response to real structural imbalances in the social world—conspiracies—that cried out to be diagnosed; and since literature is invariably bound up in that world, it requires ongoing critique. Yet in attending largely or even exclusively to the repressed assumptions, desires, and energies latent in these artifacts, the critic is left with an awkward embarrassment of aesthetic riches she scarcely knows what to do with. What to make of the consummate artistry that recommends these texts, the beautifully wrought forms in which they are housed and which account for much of the pleasure they impart? And how to prevail on skeptical college students that they ought to choose literary study, when we ourselves seem unable to assign a substantive use-value to the very qualities that separate our objects of inquiry from everyone else's—and that should therefore be among our foremost selling points?

The purpose of this project, however, is not to serve as an angry book-length riposte against suspicious hermeneutics. To become mired in the kind of meta-suspicion that has preoccupied Suspicion's most perfervid critics is both dangerous and, I think, counterproductive: one risks going the way of Harold Bloom, sanctimoniously defending the aesthetic against the incursions of a generically termed "School of Resentment," ironically addicted to pious critique in his own right, the mirror image in this sense of the very scholars he repudiates (Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 15-41). If the widespread response to Bloom on the part of feminist, historicist, and other politically minded critics is any indication, all that can ensue from meta-suspicion is the resentful alienation of both sides from one another: an infinite regress of suspicion that offers no promise of reconciliation or constructive consensus. Undeniably, the critiques I have

enumerated above implicate me too in some degree of suspicion; to take any sort of stand against this loosely related genus of reading protocols inevitably demands a certain amount of counter-skepticism. On the whole, however, I wish to follow the leads of both Sedgwick and, more recently, Rita Felski in urging that we learn to see Suspicion as simply one potential stance toward the world and its texts among many other possibilities—a stance characterized by its own set of predominant affects and motivated by its own pleasures. Recognizing that "to accuse others of paranoia is itself a paranoid move," Felski, inspired by Sedgwick, approaches suspicious reading phenomenologically, patiently describing and classifying its salient qualities rather than seeking to dismantle it: Suspicion is above all an "orientation," not an endpoint in an intellectual journey from naiveté toward vigilant maturity but a particular position, one "shaped by sensibility, attitude, and affective style"—a sensibility, notably, "with its own specific pleasures" (Felski, "Suspicious Minds" 219, 216).

My aim in emphasizing this is twofold. First, while many symptomatic critics have tended to "masquerade [their scholarship] as the very stuff of truth," a dispassionate showing-forth of concealed meanings, it can be liberating to view it as the affect-laden, often pleasure-driven writing it more nearly is (Sedgwick 17). Its sensibility is often an admixture of superciliousness and mistrust that cause the critic to eye the text from a doubtful distance, a cynicism about the world and its structures matched with the implicit assumption that criticism, by helping to demolish these structures, can be an instrument of political activism. The pleasures made possible by this affective positioning and the essentially deconstructive procedure that goes with it are manifold. Felski enumerates these as "a sense of prowess in ingenious methods of interpretation, appreciation of the economy and elegance of particular explanatory patterns, the

intellectual satisfaction of a heightened or sharpened understanding" (Felski, "After Suspicion" 33). To this I would add that we would do well to point out the eroticism of deconstructive reading especially, a protocol that brings its own set of clearly discernible transports. For if deconstruction is in one sense a suspicious enterprise, an attempt at revealing how texts embarrass their own best efforts at stable meaning-making, it is also an affair of free play. There is a patent sensuousness to this approach, to the exhaustive caressing of the text in an effort to locate gaps and fissures which become sites of liberatory play. De Man suggests as much in *Allegories of Reading* while discussing Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense," itself concerned with the importance of play to creative artists. To open one's eyes to the fictive, constructed nature of reality and of linguistic truth-claims is to experience "a special kind of affective freedom, a euphoria which is that of *joyful* wisdom or the Homeric *Heiterkeit*"—a "liberation and weightlessness that characterizes the man free from the constraints of referential truth" (De Man 114). It seems to me that in general, current theory and criticism has followed of Žižek, for example (whom I will touch on in my dissertation's conclusion), in viewing the task of freeing oneself from ideology as a fundamentally painful and even violent process; yet there is an equally compelling case to be made for conceiving of intellectual emancipation as a pleasurable affair. This is the model to which I believe the poets in this dissertation overwhelmingly adhere.

My second aim in stressing the affective investment of Suspicion is to argue that a more hopeful, emancipatory concept of embodied pleasure has been embedded in this constellation of theories all along. Though less prominent, this rival understanding of sensuality seeks to wrest it away from conservatism and reveal it to be a bastion of resistance, a source of transitory

windows of freedom from established power, even a reservoir of information and knowledge not circumscribed or anticipated by institutional authority. The totality of Foucault's writing, for example, is an affair of seemingly unremitting bleakness, a study in the ubiquity of systemic power, its relentless administration and disciplining of human subjects by corporeal means especially, its exhaustive cataloguing of deviance and imposed pressure on individuals to confess their aberrant behavior. Indeed in Foucault's account it is, of course, during the Victorian age that the body becomes a spectacular site of power-knowledge, the object of ultra-fastidious surveillance by authorities who endeavor to study and know it. Ostensibly a period defined by sexual repression, the Victorian era is in fact, Foucault writes, the time when social and political authorities began "dedicat[ing] themselves to speaking about [sexuality] *ad infinitum*," using the knowledge it gleaned to demarcate and classify populations and thus consolidate their hold over them (Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure* 35).

But Foucault's work is also, in a sense, a search for corridors of freedom, apertures of escape—and bodies, if loci of colonization by power, are also possessed of an unruly dimension, a potential for resistance. Though it is vital that we trace the historical genealogies through which society has scripted bodily experience for us—fixing it to the predetermined rhythms of work, exercise, meals, carving out the paths through we move through the world—we ought also to recognize in sensation the seeds of recalcitrance. In pleasure particularly, as opposed to desire, Foucault invests some possibility for subverting dominant discourses and administrative techniques. Sexual desire, as Foucault would have it, cannot be a source of political resistance because it is already the foundation of power's division of society into categories of heterosexual and homosexual, for example—so that in asserting desire we merely reaffirm our belonging to

these entrenched sexual identities. But pleasure is different, a fundamentally excessive phenomenon which can never be altogether reduced to the terms of a discursive order that seeks to lay claim to and normalize it. In a culminating if cryptic flourish toward the end of *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault suggests we might look to bodily pleasure for a hope of defiance:

We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality. It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be desire, but bodies and pleasures. (Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure* 157)

As Foucault sees it, there is nothing inherently rebellious about indulging in pleasure. In so doing we may simply be reverting to banal behaviors already anticipated and sanctioned by power. And yet the passage suggests that the pleasures of which the body is capable, by their very variety and profusion, have the potential to elude even a totalizing political system that thrives by seeking to label, classify, and determine them. An overabundance and excess characterizes embodied pleasure—a "multiplicity" of kinds and, I would add, a spontaneity and volatility, that overflows and slips the attempt by regimes of power to contain and compartmentalize it. As Mark Kelly has usefully shown, the English phrase "rallying point" is a

somewhat misleading translation of the French *point d'appui*, which might more accurately be rendered as “fulcrum,” “foundation,” or “point of support.” Pleasure may be less a thing to rally towards, and more—in keeping with the military connotations of *point d'appui*—a temporary refuge to which subjects can return if needed, regrouping, replenishing, and thence carrying on afresh against the enemy; “the subsequent operation, not the rallying,” is “the main thing” (Kelly 117).

Perhaps the vital takeaway from this is that embodied pleasure is, for Foucault, neither intrinsically resistant nor capitulative, but a neutral repository of dynamic and volatile sensations we can periodically revisit in our struggle to discover new knowledge and alternative social arrangements—a way station from which we might emerge better equipped to imagine possibilities which unsettle the status quo. Remorselessly colonized by discourse, the body nevertheless retains a residue or surplus of sensations which remain private, introspective, fundamentally beyond the reach of entrenched power and its attempts to identify and pin it down—and in that private reservoir of embodied experience, particularly pleasure, there resides an anarchic edge. In this dissertation we will see how certain working-class poets, for example—including the Manchester writer John Critchley Prince—find themselves entangled in webs of institutional power and discourse which seek to define and delimit what who they are and what they can say, do, and feel. Yet these very poets seize on pleasure—the pleasures, for example, of pastoral escape—as oases of private sensation to which the surveillance culture of factory and state do not have access. Often they emerge from these pleasurable experiences equipped with utopian visions for radical new social relations which rectify the inequity of the present. We will also discover how the poets I take up are largely in agreement, per Foucault’s

formulation, on the superiority of embodied pleasure to desire. Desire suggests deferral and postponement, a safe longing for forms of gratification that remain perpetually in the realm of futurity. Pleasure, by contrast, exists firmly in the here and now, a far riskier, present indulgence in kinds of enjoyment that frequently have political and spiritual consequences. Pleasure, then, is a good deal more dangerous and consequential than desire. Ultimately, these writers may challenge us to imagine versions of pleasure without contentment, that is, present enjoyment that resists lapsing into a complacent acceptance of the way things are, retaining an unsatisfied openness to still-better future possibilities.

To reclaim the body and its pleasures from organized power, retreading it into an instrument for political defiance and even upheaval—or at any rate learning to find in it elevating, enriching knowledge unavailable by purely rationalistic means: this, though one has to look harder to find it, is the gift of Suspicion to those interested in theorizing fleshly enjoyment as other than vapid, numbing, escapist. Perhaps one might say, in the spirit of deconstruction itself, that a countervailing, if much less pronounced, attitude toward pleasure has been "always already" interwoven in the writings of several of the most authoritative theorists associated with symptomatic reading. Rather than reject this family of theories wholesale, I think we would do better to isolate and salvage that more hopeful strain of thinking on pleasure particularly. I doing so we might look, for example, to feminist theory, some of it expressly influenced by Foucault (and, in certain cases, to the above passage from *The History of Sexuality*). Feminist theorists have, of course, long recognized that pleasure can function as the handmaid of domination: in late consumer capitalism, the commodification and fetishizing of the female body is everywhere writ large, a vehicle through which a corporate elite amplifies its wealth even as, in the same

gesture, it ensures the continued subjugation and degradation of women. To the extent that women are to experience pleasure in a male-dominated world, it has traditionally been with the expectation that it facilitate reproduction—embodied feminine pleasure, in this manner, placed in the service of women's instrumentality.

But certain feminist thinkers have nevertheless found in pleasure a "rallying point" in the Foucaultian sense, recognizing sensuality as a hotly contested ground, ideologically fraught, too rich and too central to human experience to consign to conservatism. That is, the fact that embodied pleasure has been deployed as a repressive device isn't necessarily cause for forsaking it altogether; rather, the more empowered response to this may be to endeavor to recover it, ascribing to it more liberatory meanings. This has been the object of, among other theorists, Luce Irigaray. Irigaray's account of feminine sexuality in *The Sex Which is Not One*, for example, emphasizes its "multiplicity," the plurality of pleasures available to women, which refuse to be subsumed under a single, male-defined trajectory that would restrict them to reproductive utility and masculine satisfaction. Accordingly, she urges women to seek out a *jouissance* all their own, through masturbation or lesbianism—or, one might add, heterosexual activity that prioritizes their own enjoyment—and strive to overcome the language of phallogocentrism and the values inherent in it (Irigaray 30, 233). Other feminist thinkers have gone still further, arguing that the whole of western philosophy at least since Descartes has been built on a fallacious mind-body split that is manifestly gendered: overwhelmingly cerebral, mostly male-propagated systems of thought, in other words, have legitimated themselves by excluding from their bounds a sensorium gendered feminine. From this perspective, western intellectual history has derived validation from a set of hierarchical binaries that include

masculine/feminine, cognition/emotion and sensation, depth/surface, strength/weakness, truth/falsehood. Women, because evidently more determined by the vagaries of their bodies, have been denigrated as "more corporeal," more the capricious products of sensibility than sense: in short, the symbolic exemplars of all that male-dominated philosophy, proudly masquerading as a purely conceptual enterprise, has struggled to distance itself from (Grosz 14).

Yet in banishing the *soma* from its models of cognition, western philosophy, woefully disembodied, has denied itself a repository of understanding, an apparatus for knowledge-formation that might otherwise deepen and vivify, even transform it. This is essentially the thesis of Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. While acknowledging that "some feminists have sought to move beyond the constraints of the body," Grosz argues that reinstating the body as a core element in knowledge-production and acquisition would be a profoundly destabilizing move, for it would promise to shake the foundations of a tradition inescapably reliant on the above binarisms: "[T]o develop a philosophy which refuses to privilege mind at the expense of body would, as Nietzsche discovered, completely change the character of the philosophical enterprise." Indeed, "developing alternative accounts of the body may create upheavals in the structure of existing knowledges," and "[o]ther forms of knowledge. . . will need to be undertaken" (Grosz 20).

I share with Grosz and Irigaray an interest in recovering the epistemological potential of bodily experience and especially of pleasure: as we will see, sensation, particularly pleasurable sensation, becomes for certain Victorian poets a vehicle for accessing truths beyond the reach of pure reason. Much Victorian poetry, in fact, can be understood as a potent critique of dualism: pleasure takes its place as part of a more holistic approach to knowledge that welds sensation to

thought—a reclamation of the sensorium, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, as a dynamic ground for cognition. All four of my chapters, as will become clearer in my chapter descriptions below, bear out this fundamental insight. Two of them, the chapters on working-class poetry and Swinburne, will seek to demonstrate how the struggle by certain Victorian poets to resuscitate bodily pleasure among readers was likewise intended to have political ramifications. It was an attempt to counteract the deadening effects of repressive institutions and rampant, numbing consumerism through poetic art, inspiriting and galvanizing. These chapters, politically focused, will invoke a less frequently acknowledged strand of Marxist theory and criticism that, like its more hopeful feminist counterpart, understands embodied pleasure as empowering and even emancipatory. "Capitalism," Eagleton has asserted elsewhere, "plunders the sensuality of the body" (Saunders, "CivilWarLand"). But for the politically minded Victorian poets I take up here, the heroic response to these paralytic effects—the invasively dehumanizing routines of the factory, the deadening effects of consumerism—is to combat them through a sensation-driven poetry. So that if the nineteenth century witnessed the flourishing of biopower in Britain as a concomitant of industrialism, it also saw the cunning and multivalent attempt by poets to resist this, by dint of verbal art that sustained readers' faculty for embodied pleasure. The body may have been a host for parasitic power structures—corporate, religious, legislative—but sensitizing art could endeavor to liberate it. At its stunningly effective best, it accessed anarchic energies and impulses in the bodies of audiences that cried out to be released and deftly channeled—and sought to use these, in turn, as an impetus for socio-political renovation.

Toward a Radical Aesthetic

This, then, is the aspect of suspicious hermeneutics I am interested in highlighting and recovering, and in turn linking up to more recent trends in theory and criticism that focus on affect and embodied reading. I want to suggest that the newness and import of this dissertation resides, in part, in its marshalling a more affirmative concept of pleasure that has surprisingly been present in certain suspicious reading protocols all along, and asserting a continuum between this and the surge of interest in corporeal experience brought on by affect theory and embodied reading models. Rather than view the more recent, positive conception of pleasure and of embodiment more generally in the criticism of the last ten to fifteen years as a sudden irruption, I suspect we ought to see it as part of a lineage that connects these more recent critics with aspects of Marxist, feminist, and even Foucaultian theory. This, I think, is a more recuperative and less alienating gesture than merely sounding Suspicion's death knell or answering its skepticism with a reciprocal suspicion and resentment. What if we could come to see pleasure as a vital point of contact between these theories and the recent critical turn toward affect and embodiment? For if Eagleton, for example, reveals the coercive dimension of aesthetics since its eighteenth-century inception, he is equally strident about its dialectical nature. If a repressive device, aesthetics was simultaneously a "genuinely emancipatory force" that bound communities of subjects together "by sensuous impulse and fellow-feeling rather than by heteronomous law." Embodied pleasure was central to this: "To lend fresh significance to bodily pleasures and drives, however, if only for the purpose of colonizing them more efficiently, is always to risk foregrounding and intensifying them beyond one's control" (Eagleton 28). Pleasure was a two-edged sword: if the body and its pleasures made a convenient ground for hegemonic control, they nevertheless

retained an explosiveness and indomitability that could be harnessed for subversive purposes. If a way to consolidate state control by binding subjects together, pleasure could, by the same token, serve as a vibrant ground for generating unruly affective networks that pushed back against, challenged, resisted the state. And if, as Adorno contends, pleasure could be used to narcotize, it could also, in keeping with Grosz and other theorists of the body, be powerfully educative.

Affect theory likewise has much to tell us about the potential of somatic experience to work as an emancipatory force, an adhesive that can bind human communities into networks of shared feeling. This theory has concerned itself above all with the realm of the visceral—with illuminating those forces that manifest themselves at a somatic level, a level distinct from consciousness and emotion, that are finally responsible for attachment: the attachment of one body to another, and of human beings to the abstract ideas and causes they can be made to take up. "Affect," Sara Ahmed states, "is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 29). As a complex tangle of "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion," affect, note Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, creates the "bindings and unbindings" that link us to one another and to those concepts and things to which we feel, scarcely explicably, attached. "Affect," in short, "marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters" (Seigworth and Gregg, 1-2). Affect theory surely owes much, then, to phenomenology, for it insists that human thought and knowledge do not materialize in a vacuum; rather, they arise in response to the "given" of a physical reality into which we, as embodied presences, are inescapably entangled, inserted into from birth—and this set of object-relations

shapes what we think and the ideas we come to believe and espouse. Like phenomenology, affect theory thus grounds cognition and belief in an embodied world that precedes and helps construct them. How do humans come together, cohere? And how does an otherwise neutral, indifferent, or even hostile person come to adopt a particular cause, idea, belief? Affect theory asks us to consider that attachment to people and ideas occurs by somatic means, through the adhesive power of visceral magnetisms that bind us to truths, concepts, and causes, grasped by the rational mind but ratified by feeling.

Partly, then, what is at stake here is the notion that "affect and cognition are never fully separable," that "thought," as Seigworth and Gregg note elsewhere, "is itself a body, embodied" (Seigworth and Gregg 2-3). Affect is what sticks: understanding ripens into lasting conviction by virtue of feelings rooted in the viscera. As important, though, is affect theory's basic premise that knowledge and belief tend to take shape in social contexts, borne into people by currents of collective feeling. Ideas are not static entities shorn of sensation and emotion; rather, they travel in ethers of the shared affect that invisibly inundates social networks and holds them together. "[T]he social bond," Sarah Ahmed writes, "is always rather sensational. Groups cohere around a shared orientation toward some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight" (Ahmed 35). People organize themselves around ideas and causes that have, in time, been invested with positive sensational value, collectively determined to be sources of pleasure. And this pleasure—thrilling, fluid, intensely shareable—is thus what facilitates the circulation of these things. Indeed, "[a] number of scholars," Ahmed goes on, "have recently taken up the idea of affects as contagious, drawing on the work of the psychologist of affect, Silvan Tomkins, among others" (Ahmed 36). She invokes Anna Gibbs, whose work on affective

contagion conceives of human bodies as nodal points that constellate networks of intensely catchy fellow feeling: "Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion." Affects, for Gibbs (as for Tomkins), constitute "neuro-physiological events," thoughts that, by the consensus of particular groups, become correlated with physical sensations and, in turn, imbued with shared emotions (Gibbs). Gibbs invokes mass media, particularly television, as the vehicle through which these neurophysiological bundles of feeling and belief proliferate on a large scale throughout affective communities.

This dissertation will suggest Victorian poets harbored a kindred understanding of affect as a "neurophysiological event" that bound thought with sensation and possessed remarkable contagious potential; but the technology through which affect is communicated in these chapters is most often poetry. As a neurophysiological event that yokes feeling with privileged forms of knowledge—political, theological—pleasure qualifies, I argue, as an affect in the way that Tomkins, and like-minded theorists such as Gibbs and Ahmed, conceptualize this. As affect, pleasure does not always prove contagious or interpersonal, though it often does; my first chapter, as will see, spotlights, on the one hand, a set of politically minded poets whose vision of upheaval depended on affective contagion through poetic chant, and on the other a rival school of poets who mistrusted that very contagion as a precipitant of mob activity and violence—and, indeed, insisted the very privacy, unshareability, and inwardness of poetic pleasure was what made it valuable. Yet in every case I take up here, pleasure serves indeed as a psychosomatic phenomenon tasked with triggering inner breakthrough in readers mired in the encrustations of

habit, deadened by the routinized existence that an oppressively industrial, materialistic lifestyle brought on them. How, again, do people caught in cognitive ruts break free, embracing radical suppositions—socio-political, metaphysical—that remap the coordinates of their selves and their relation to the world? For these poets this happens by stunningly affective means, through felt epiphanies that involve the readerly body even as they introduce transforming knowledge. And the pleasure, as will become evident in, for example, my chapter on Browning, who resorts to tropes of music to dramatize this phenomenon, is what makes the new knowledge stick.

Taking pleasure, then, to mean an affective—that is, neurophysiological—event that poets deploy to catalyze moral and spiritual regeneration in readers, I will attempt in these chapters to discern what it is about this poetry that is responsible for inciting pleasure; and, in turn, what more precise change, or set of changes, the poets are endeavoring to bring about. In each chapter, the poetry's formal resources will turn out to account for much of the pleasure it affords—the admixture of rhythms, especially, that poets from Swinburne to the Chartist Ernest Jones make use of by way of generating readerly transports. In this respect the chapters draw together affect theory and that branch of the New Formalism concerned to show how nineteenth-century poetic form was frequently intended to impact upon a reader's physiology. How did form make itself felt on the flesh, and what were the hoped-for consequences of these physiological appeals, whether political, spiritual, or both? In this my most important predecessors are recent New Formalist studies such as Jason Rudy's *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*, which argues that Victorians such as Sydney Dobell invested poetic form—quasi-electric, often irregular rhythmic jolts freighted with risky "physiological truths"—with the potential to affect the fleshly bodies of readers and, in turn, unsettle the political order

(Rudy 1-3, 76-110). As a core aspect of embodied reading, pleasure, insofar as it came from poetic rhythm, was a consequence of form, and was certainly freighted, as I have intimated already and will expand on later, with physiological truths pertaining to class, sexuality, divinity. Spasmodic poetry was, after all, essentially a working-class-phenomenon, one that sought to use visceral sensation, generated by rhythm, to promulgate among readers radical ideas that threatened mainstream Victorian culture (Rudy 79). Chartist poets, as we'll see, self-consciously attempted the same, though their deliberately pleasurable poetry joined radicalism with regularity, fusing unruly ideas with repetitious rhythms. Finally, my focus will extend beyond matters of form, for I'll examine, for instance, how Rossetti built her own poetics around a distinctly Tractarian process of image-making she understood as a mode of enticing readers to God.

The chapters in this dissertation draw together these theoretical threads: Suspicion's improbable narrative of embodied pleasure as a liberatory rallying-point, affect theory's concept of the affects as neurophysiological events that fuse sensation with an activating and empowering knowledge, and New Formalism's quest to demonstrate how the affective experiences poems afford are attributable to their structural make-up. These approaches converge on the idea of sensation as mode of activation, of stunning individuals out of ideological and behavioral torpor and into a concerted engagement with fresh causes and beliefs. Pleasure is what sets us going—a thing possessed of dynamism, a galvanic power—coaxing us out of the somnambulatory rhythms of mind and motion that govern our lives and impelling us toward productive new commitments. What Barthes argues in *The Pleasure of the Text* rings true in this regard: the moment of *jouissance* experienced during reading is, for Barthes, one

defined by self-loss, abandonment, an untethering from one's commitments, beliefs, from the coordinates of selfhood and all one thought one knew. The "text of bliss," writes Barthes, "imposes a state of loss" and "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (Barthes 14). "It is obvious," he claims, "that the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is immoral but because it is atopic." Pleasure's "revolutionary" potential is a function of its *atopic* quality, the fact that it "cannot be overtaken by any collectivity, any mentality, any idelect" (Barthes 23). That is, pleasure instantiates a break in our customary attachments to the ideologies and communities with which we habitually identify; and, if it begins as a "force of suspension," a "stoppage which congeals all recognized values," I would add that it can subsequently propel us toward new ones (Barthes 65).

Because the poets taken up in this dissertation each invest pleasure with this emancipatory potential, they help make the case for what I will call a radical aesthetic. I use *radical* not in an exclusively political sense, though the chapters on laboring poets and Swinburne will argue that these writers indeed looked on poetry as means toward upheaval. Browning and Rossetti were, in my account, radical Protestant poets whose powerfully unorthodox visions located pleasure as an origin-point of spiritual striving. A radical aesthetic, whether politically or religiously construed, is thus one that understands a text's transports—the wealth of affective rewards that readers can partake of who consent to be acted upon and altered by these artifacts—as fundamentally educative, energizing, and redemptive. It arises from a conviction that positive affect such as pleasure can actually be galvanizing and freeing,

especially in comparison with any number of the negative, "unhappy" affects that have co-opted literary-critical attention of late.

Particularly since the publication of Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* in 2005, to say nothing of the array of dysphoric feelings that fueled much symptomatic criticism, a great deal of literary theory has been preoccupied with negative affect: disgust, apathy, envy, boredom, even a hybrid affect called "stuplimity" Ngai herself coined (Ngai 271). I share Ngai's premise that the affects can be interpreted as indices of deeper political realities that help give rise to them, and which they reflect back on in turn. Yet Ngai is adamant throughout *Ugly Feelings* that the affects she examines—Melville's *Bartleby* is her quintessential example—are symptomatic of the *suspended agency* experienced by alienated subjects trapped in a suffocatingly administered late-modern world that isolates, dehumanizes, and denies them voice and volition. She expressly resists the possibility that these negative affects might be "therapeutic 'solutions' to the problems they highlight and condense"; indeed, if anything, feelings such as paranoia and envy have been successfully reintegrated into the capitalist system, in Ngai's account, rerouted as the very "psychic fuel" that sustains the status quo (Ngai 3-4).

In seeking to construct a radical aesthetic, this dissertation, adopting a more positive perspective, will focus instead on an affect that arguably conduces to action, one that, I'll contend, is valuable precisely because it helps individuals to become *un-suspended*, unstuck—ideally, coaxed into states of engagement with transformative ideas and risky causes that might fundamentally alter them and, on a grand enough scale, the worlds they live in. While acknowledging the acuity and power of Ngai's book, I would argue with Sarah Ahmed that "it might be useful to take good feeling as our starting point" (Ahmed 30)—in part, I'd suggest,

because certain good feelings may simply be more *actionable* than the paralytic affects Ngai zeroes in on. If, for example, the determined pleasure-seeking in the midst of moral decay and abject poverty that fuels the poetry of Swinburne and so many laboring poets, respectively, is any indication, then it may be true that humans have some capacity to decide how they wish to respond to execrable outward circumstances. The knowledge, in other words, of systemic defects in the external world need not necessarily breed ugly feelings; there may in fact be a gap between knowledge and affective response, and in this gap an opportunity to control how one feels about it. Disgust, boredom, gloom, disillusionment—these constitute, to recall Sedgwick and Felski once more, particular (and arbitrary) affective orientations toward a world gone deeply awry; but they are not the only possibilities. In a literary-critical milieu where disgust is perhaps our most familiar and, ironically, comfortable affect—precisely because it sets us up to perform critique—it may be well worth considering any number of other, happier affective registers with which to react to iniquity and imperfection, and not presume that doing so entails a naive idealism. In carving out spaces in which to experience certain forms of pleasure, we open ourselves to an affect that is not only potentially educative, but prepares us to intervene constructively in the world around us. This, I'll suggest, is an argument with deep roots in the poetry and aesthetics of the later eighteenth century and the Romantic period—and one that finds powerful new expression in the Victorian poets who form the primary subjects of this project.

The Romantic Roots of Pleasure: Wordsworth and Keats

Among the Romantics it is Wordsworth who, with Keats, forms an urtext on poetic pleasure, one that sets the terms for Victorian poets who likewise grapple with the concept, both imitating and distancing themselves from these earlier voices. Wordsworth's 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* is one of the most sustained and ambitious treatments of poetic pleasure in English literature; in it, his object turns out to be nothing less than a complete overhaul of commonly held beliefs about poetry's origin and function, an offering-up of a new poetic program that pivots on pleasure. "[H]e is using the present volume," notes Michael G. Cooke, "as an Archimedean fulcrum to tilt the entire world of poetry into a new dispensation"—and pleasure, I'd add, is the lever Wordsworth uses to accomplish this (Cooke 77). Wordsworth argues in the 1802 "Preface" that pleasure is both the origin and purpose of poetry: "The poet writes under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a man" ("1802 Preface," 395). Great poetry gives immediate pleasure to readers because it is laden with knowledge of objects in the external world that everyone—by virtue of a common inheritance that comes with being human—is equipped to derive enjoyment from contemplating. The universe is intrinsically beautiful, rife with forms that, by a very Kantian logic, the human mind is "fitted to take delight" in, owing to the fact that "man and nature [are] essentially adapted to each other" ("1802 Preface," 396). Because it is beautiful, gathering knowledge of the phenomenal world is

an inherently enjoyable act, and life itself a ceaseless pedagogical process guided by pleasure.

Each person is motivated by

the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. [. . .] However painful may be the objects with which the anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. ("1802 Preface," 395)

Wordsworth's argument seems to cry out to be dismantled by the modern literary critic: who is Wordsworth, one may (justly) ask, as a decidedly insular Lake District poet at this juncture of his career, to speak on behalf of all humanity everywhere? What were the possibilities for pleasure for a chimney sweeper in Sheffield, an American slave, or for that matter a woman? Granting what can seem like Wordsworth's naïveté and unconsidered bourgeois-male privilege, the importance of his vision for my purposes is, I think, as follows: he is weaving an argument that would democratize poetry by grounding it in an affect that, as he surely knew, eighteenth-century writers had already painstakingly established as an interpersonal enamel. The affect is *sympathy*, which, by dint of a cunning merger, Wordsworth succeeds in

equating with pleasure. The word *sympathy* occurs no fewer than five times in these key paragraphs of the "Preface," and Wordsworth makes it clear that sympathy is a function of pleasure: "We have no sympathy," he observes in the passage above, "but what is propagated by pleasure." The education of the poet consists in a gradually intensified awareness of the existence of otherness: not merely of immaterial things—"the operations of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe"—but, more vitally, the plight of other people, their suffering and hardship, the spectacle of pain that provokes a curiously pleasurable sympathy, an intuitive kinship ("1802 Preface," 396). This is a pleasure comparable to that which Aristotle says accompanies catharsis, the witnessing of dramatic suffering that humanizes by prompting an empathetic identification with a victim—a sympathetic act that may lead to an assumption of responsibility for him or her. Poetry is ideally the record of the poet's pleasurable sympathetic identification with nature and, finally, a suffering humanity; and, in language "exquisitely fitted" to its subject matter, it likewise strives to provoke in readers a sympathy that, owing to their status as men and women, they are wired to experience. The pleasurable sympathy readers feel courtesy of the poet is thus one that connects them affectively with all people everywhere, at any historical moment, even as it deepens and humanizes them: "In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time" ("1802 Preface," 396). One could hardly ask for a more sweepingly audacious claim for the socially unifying, epoch-and-border-transcending power of poetic pleasure.

It is true that Wordsworth suggests poetic pleasure comes from form, too, among other elements, and not merely from readerly sympathy with the people and things bodied forth in the poetry. It arises, for instance, from "the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction," that shudder of recognition amid difference that a reader feels on hearing a familiar rhythm or sound-pattern newly fitted to foreign subject matter. Pleasure could be generated, too, from "the music of harmonious metrical language," "the sense of difficulty overcome," and, more yet, the realism of poetic language, which should "resemble that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of meter, differ from it widely." It is clear that for Wordsworth the choice of a more quotidian vernacular for poetry was at least partly driven by a belief that this language would be more outright pleasurable for readers. In poetry they could hear the diction and rhythms of everyday speech subjected to a meter that made them fascinatingly alien: still another instance of familiarity pleasurablely disrupted by newness. Wordsworth in fact goes so far as to assert that "the pleasure received from metrical language depends" on "the perception of similitude in dissimilitude," as on "dissimilitude in similitude." Meter imposes regularity on language, a kind of unity in multitude that offers the reassuring sense of predictability, but a predictability necessarily undermined by surprise, by small aberrant shocks that yield pleasure.

What makes the strongest impression in the 1802 "Preface," though, is the enormously ambitious social and epistemological claim Wordsworth makes for pleasure, in no small part by yoking it together with sympathy. Though the pleasure that interests Wordsworth is primarily a "sober pleasure" of a moral and spiritual sort, it is clear from the poems contained in the two *Lyrical Ballads* volumes that he understands this to be continuous with a pleasure that is

embodied. While Wordsworth is undoubtedly intent on subordinating bodily enjoyment to that more ethereal, psycho-sympathetic pleasure that binds humanity, poems such as "Tintern Abbey" attest to the fact that the former pleasure provides the ground in which the latter flourishes, and is never entirely left behind. Michael G. Cooke is right, I think, to suggest that "'Tintern Abbey' is not a poem of sequence and—if we consider the Platonic undertones—progressions; rather, it is a poem of manifestation or revelation, bringing forth what inheres in a state without being always recognized or known." Indeed, "the present is a more complex and more inclusive version of the past" (Cooke 72). An embodied pleasure gleaned from the visualized surfaces of nature—a pleasure figured, as so often in Wordsworth, in quasi-sexualized terms—provides the context for the revelatory moment that follows. These are the "coarser pleasures" (73), "aching joys" (84), and "dizzy raptures" (85) that "haunt" the young Wordsworth "like a passion" (77), "sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" (27-28). As sensation, this collection of surprisingly visceral enjoyments has a pedagogical purpose: they are "affections" (a word that, as the *OED* makes clear, could denote "a condition of the body" throughout the eighteenth century) that "gently lead us on, / Until, the breath of this corporeal frame / And even the motion of our human blood / Almost suspended, we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" (42-46). The "sensations sweet," registered at a level both circulatory and respiratory, offer the traces that "lead us on" toward a vision that opens onto "the life of things." If that vision is a spiritual and cerebral one, culminating in a sympathy for "the still, sad music of humanity," it has its foundation in stimuli thrillingly felt, wrought upon a body never fully nullified even in the depths of meditative trance. Breath and blood are "almost suspended," but the qualifier is important; the body is "laid asleep" but not transcended, for sensation is not an

obstacle to be surmounted but the happy precondition of vision. Later in the poem Wordsworth cements this in no uncertain terms. In his mature, deepened state he is

well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. (107-111)

Not only nature but "the language of the sense," that constellation of embodied pleasures taken in nature that possess an eloquence all their own, indices that point the way toward his "interfused[ness]" with a suffering humanity: these are "[t]he anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being." The spiritual-philosophical burden that becomes Wordsworth's moral compass, and which he passes on to Dorothy, is thus vitally "anchored" in corporeal pleasure. Cooke is again relevant here: "The moment of material pleasure is both precious and dangerous. For while it is a gift in itself, it must also serve as a stage and a clue. 'Elevated thoughts' must be added, and 'animal movements' yield to a contemplative and spiritual 'presence.' The poem shows 'coarser pleasures' and 'present pleasure' as a part of ultimate pleasure" (Cooke 72). A stage, a clue: the notion of material pleasure as a trace of spiritual meaning that requires to be examined and deciphered in order to yield up the deeper abstract import it emblemizes—this is a model that, as we'll see, becomes paramount to Christina Rossetti, who, I will argue, gleans it from John Keble, whose

Tractarian poetics owe much to Wordsworth. This associational model of pleasure and its relation to consciousness—which Wordsworth himself may well have borrowed from the philosophy of David Hartley—sees bodily pleasure as valuable insofar as it serves as a trigger-point for "elevated thoughts." Better: it understands thought, memory, and selfhood as affectively determined, anchored in and molded by pleasure particularly. To phrase it rather baldly, formative experiences and ideas impress themselves on us, and remain fixed in our consciousness, owing to the pleasure that accompanies them. Thus *impressed* on us—a word Wordsworth uses often, including in "Tintern Abbey," and which conjures images of printmaking, as if the mind were a text that received the imprimatur of outward phenomena—these things take their place as features of our identities. Affect is what sticks; pleasurable affect, for Wordsworth, ushers visualized objects and events into the memory where they become perpetually enshrined as the building blocks of our selves. Long after the "giddy bliss" and "organic pleasure" that accompany the most "impressive" visions in Books I and II of *The Prelude* have worn off (sometimes a "troubled pleasure," as in the Stolen Boat episode), the images they made so electrifying have settled permanently in Wordsworth's budding consciousness: "All their forms and changeful colours," we are told in Book I, "by invisible links were fastened to the affections" (609-11).

To sum up, then, in Wordsworth we can find distilled many of the core ideas about pleasure that resurface among the Victorian poets I take up in this project, though each of them alters these notions in some crucial way that I hope to make clear in due time. In certain cases, like that of Browning, who felt ambivalently about Wordsworth but was nevertheless deeply influenced by him, the revision of Wordsworthian pleasure is deliberate and overt. In the

instance of Rossetti, where it is less obvious, I will trace a lineage that connects her to Wordsworth by way of Keble. Other poets taken up here do not explicitly invoke Wordsworth, but insofar as Wordsworth stands as an index of nineteenth-century thinking on pleasure, we can see them as both appropriating and daringly reimagining him. Wordsworth's linkage of pleasure with sympathy, that world-spanning social adhesive; his insistent associational coupling of pleasure, even sensory pleasure, with the elevated knowledge it precipitated; even the conviction that pleasure might combat the "savage torpor" brought on by industrialism: all this proves vitally meaningful for the poets I take up here. Rossetti and Browning, as we will discover, make Wordsworth's fusion of embodied pleasure and sublime knowledge-questioning a cornerstone of their radical Protestant poetics (though in distinct ways); working-class poets place this notion, and the concept of pleasure as a glue for building affective networks, in the service of a program for social upheaval that Wordsworth (whose later turn to conservatism they expressly reviled) can little have foreseen.

These are assumptions about the politics and epistemology of pleasure that filtered through subsequent Romantics in important ways en route to being taken up by the Victorians. Richard Sha's recent study *Perverse Romanticism* admirably catalogues a number of these ways. Arguing that the Romantic poets viewed sexual pleasure freed from the necessity of reproduction as a kind of Kantian "purposiveness without purpose," Sha suggests that non-propagative eroticism became a liberatory political force for these writers (Sha 2). Sha's most fundamental point—that sexual pleasure, unhooked from reproductive necessity, served the Romantics as "a figure for equality," especially gender equality—is not of central importance to my project. Yet I share with Sha the belief that nineteenth-century poets seized on pleasure as a mode of

emancipating people from deadening ruts of habit and routine, and thereby freeing them to form transformative new attachments to ideas, beliefs, causes. "Through the swoon of erotic energy," Sha writes, "many of these writers hoped to move readers to a state of engagement." Shelley, for example, "turns to affect because only it can break through the crust that has become synonymous with the lives of his readers. And the breaking through of this crust is necessary before change becomes possible" (Sha 146-47). Shelley—whose stirring apology, in *The Defense of Poetry*, for the political value of pleasure as a resistant force during moments of political repression will surface in two of my chapters—is adamant that the focused and intense pleasures of reading, particularly, can have a purgative and mind-clearing effect. Thus he builds *Laon and Cyntha* around an incestuous love-relationship he hoped would "startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life," he wrote in the work's preface. "It was my object," Shelley goes on, "to break through the crust of those outworn opinions on which established institutions depend. I have appealed therefore to the most universal of all feelings, and have endeavoured to strengthen the moral sense by forbidding it to waste its energies in seeking to avoid actions which are only crimes of compassion" (Shelley, *Complete Poetry* III, 120).

Shelley imagined that the risky, vicarious pleasure readers took in discovering the perverse sexual doings of his protagonists would cause them to form a sympathetic identification with these characters, one that transcended the arbitrary codes governing sexuality with which society had inculcated them. Another way of saying this is that social conditioning is potent indeed, and difficult to reason one's way past; but there are other, perhaps more powerful and direct ways of getting through to people than rational argumentation. Bodily pleasure is one such route; indeed, "the pleasure of the text," asserts Barthes, "is that moment when my body

pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do" (Barthes 17). In making affective appeals to the body, it may be possible to forge sympathetic bonds of attachment with readers that circumvent reason and the conditioning that inheres in it, calling instead on the flesh and its separate, distinct logic. Affect, writes Charles Altieri in *The Particulars of Rapture*, echoing Barthes's notion of pleasure as an atopic break with the familiar, "threatens belief frameworks and the forms of self-assurance on which they rely and which they also sustain" (Altieri 44). Altieri's assertion gets to the crux of this dissertation. As a source of pleasurable sympathy, the body can be appealed to as a mode of wooing a reader into adhering to an outlook or conviction that might otherwise be too alien, too risky. For the politically minded poets I look at—especially Swinburne, who idolized him—Shelley's final quotation reproduced above is eminently applicable because it suggests pleasurable appeals to the readerly body are the first step toward institutional change. The chapter on Swinburne will pivot on this Shelleyan (and Blakean) assumption. In Shelleyan and Blakean fashion, Swinburne conceives of his poetry as a machine geared to unloose the repressed impulses housed in readers' bodies, all the while making them uneasily complicit in erotic pleasures—lesbian, sadomasochistic—condemned by orthodox morality. To corrode the destructive thought systems that uphold social institutions, Swinburne implies, one must begin by engaging individuals at a somatic, if initially unwilling or ambivalent, level.

The final voice in the Romantic lineage I trace here is that of Keats. Perhaps no dissertation on nineteenth-century poetic pleasure would be complete without accounting for Keats's legacy. Because he looms large in two of my chapters, those on working-class poets and Rossetti, where I discuss his verse and ideas at some length, I won't dwell on him here in as

much detail as I did Wordsworth. Keats is crucial in part because, while he begins his career questing after a life of feeling shorn of thought, in his maturity he ends up asserting a Wordsworthian tethering of sensation and epistemology. When Helen Vendler declares toward the outset of *The Odes of John Keats* that in Keats's odes "the English language finds an ultimate embodiment," I take her to mean not just that these poems represent an apotheosis of the language, but that in them words assume the status of embodied entities wrought upon a reader's senses—exquisitely materialized on the tongue, in the lungs, in the viscera (Vendler 3). Keats's legacy resonates down the corridor of nineteenth-century poetry with uncanny clarity and force, his mellifluous, sensation-laden poetry and fascination with medievalism spreading to Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne, and others. As we will see, his glorying in the lavish surfaces of this world and fundamentally secular, pleasure and beauty-driven outlook prove continuously seductive for Christina Rossetti—less a temptation to be exorcised than a style and vision she seeks, with varying degrees of success, to meld together with her high-minded Anglican ideals. A passage from an 1819 letter Keats wrote to C.W. Dilke almost parodically encapsulates his sensualism, even as it prophesies Rossetti's *Goblin Market*: "Talking of Pleasure, this moment I was writing with one hand, and with the other holding to my Mouth a Nectarine—Good how fine. It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy—all its delicious Embonpoint melted down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry. I shall certainly breed." As Rossetti's most powerful poem, *Goblin Market* is animated, I'll argue, by the poet's attempt to reclaim sensual pleasure as a facilitator of Christian redemption, and in so doing imbue it with a formidable curative agency.

But Keats matters to this dissertation as much because of the apparent paradox, touched on at the outset of this introduction, between his lushly pleasure-centered poetics and lower-

middle-class origins. That Keats was born to a livery-stable keeper was of course not lost on subsequent working-class poets writing in Britain from the 1820s through the 1840s, who eagerly claimed him as one of their own, as my first chapter will make clear. Where these latter poets are concerned, Keats is a vital predecessor because his writing contains the germ of thinking about poetic pleasure as a possible response to outward need. It is Keats above all who supplies this radical notion of answering destitution with an imagined luxuriance; Keats who, channeling the mentality of a radical Cockney poetic culture of which he was partially the product, helps solidify the concept of collective, poetry-derived sensuality as a core feature of social reform. Recent scholars have made much of this dimension of Keats's writing. Nicholas Roe, for example, has argued that Keats's sensuality is a key component of the liberal platform he shared with Hunt. The poet's imagined self-sequestration in luxurious bowers such as those invoked in *Sleep and Poetry* and "Ode to a Nightingale" might, on the surface, be read as expressing his "wish to lose the responsibilities of life to erotic enchantment and the 'strange influence' of poetry"; yet for Roe such erotic escape is properly seen as a precursor to "a humane, historicized imagination" (Roe, *Culture of Dissent*, 205-06). Jeffrey Cox, by the same token, suggests that for Keats sensuality was a means toward political renovation, "a way of connecting with the world that escapes the lures of the self," enticing individuals into a loving communion with the external world that might lead on to social transformation and reform. By a distinctly Cockney logic, poetry could, via its manifold pleasures, awaken readers from despondency and torpor, coaxing them out of themselves and into an eroticized connection with one another—or indeed with the poet—that might be lastingly rejuvenating (Cox 118-21).

We see this phenomenon at work in the politically charged early poetry contained in Keats's first volume, *Poems* (1817), written under the spell of Leigh Hunt, who as editor of the radical newspaper *The Liberal* had been arrested in 1812 for libeling the Prince Regent. It is particularly visible in the final movement of the long poem "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill," in which Keats imagines a world revitalized by love and poetry, its denizens inspired to enter into erotic communion with one another by the curative verses of a poet who tellingly doubles as a lover. The salutary influence of that erotic poetry is what heals humankind, an influence that takes the form of medicinal airs, "breezes" that, "ethereal, and pure," "crept through half closed lattices to cure / The languid sick" (221-3). That verse, and the breeze that spreads it abroad, draw the ill out of deadening indoor isolation and into a sensuous engagement with each other that, as Cox has helped us to see, is the critical first step toward communal reform, toward "a society remade through sexual love, not political violence" (Cox 195). The revivifying breath of poetry—generated by a poet-lover, shared by humans bound now by "silken ties, that never may be broken" (238)—is what initiates this movement away from an enervating self-absorption and toward collective political renovation.

That Keats's early poetry was savaged by contemporary critics is, of course, proverbial; reviewers were, we have been (rightly) tutored to think, threatened by a young poet of Keats's social standing evincing such grandiose ambition. Yet I'd suggest that the vitriol evinced by certain of Keats's early reviewers comes from their being threatened, not simply by the prospect of an upstart lower-middle-class poet, but—more specifically and, I think, interestingly—a lower-middle-class poet asserting his capacity for pleasure. The anonymous review of *Endymion* printed in a June 1818 issue of *The British Critic* singles out, as its objects of resentment and

disgust, Keats's penchant for "striking] from unmeaning absurdity into the gross slang of voluptuousness," and, in a telling line, "the artifices of vicious refinement, by which, under the semblance of 'slippery blisses, twinkling eyes, soft completion of faces, and smooth excess of hands,' he would palm upon the unsuspecting and the innocent imaginations better adapted to the stews." The following paragraph briefly takes aim at the "jacobinical" character of the beginning of *Endymion's* third book, but what so offends this reviewer, saliently, is the repulsive thought of a lower-middle-class poet, one possessed of Jacobinical sympathies, having the audacity to adorn his verse with "artifices of vicious refinement" ("Review of Keats's *Endymion*").

His indignation speaks to the subversive potency of pleasure-seeking and pleasure-creation among the downtrodden and marginalized in a society. Why should those in power feel perpetually threatened by the prospect of subordinated groups availing themselves of pleasure? This is a phenomenon still urgently relevant at our own historical moment, when it has become a commonplace for American conservatives to fulminate against the poor allegedly using their food stamps to purchase lobster and other fare linked with privilege. On some fundamental level, it is a kindred impulse to that which continues to motivate ritualistic practices such as female genital mutilation among the majority of women born in many Sub-Saharan African countries and parts of the Middle East; and, perhaps, which inspires so many men everywhere reflexively to reach for epithets like "whore" when they wish efficiently to dehumanize a woman or impugn her integrity and worth. In a vital way that spans the categories of class, gender, and likely other modes of social distinction, the elite tend to be outraged by the possibility that those they have subjugated might encroach on pleasures of which they themselves have declared sole ownership. Their sense of themselves and confidence in their own power, that is, is intimately

bound up in their exclusive claim to pleasure. Thus while Keats's overt political engagements as a poet would wane as he reached his brief maturity, the very fact of his continued insistence on cleaving to sensuality in the odes and elsewhere, stubbornly erecting palaces of opulence, was itself an implicitly defiant gesture that later working poets would emphatically mimic. The message was clear: the struggle to assert individual dignity—personhood itself—would be won or lost on corporeal grounds.

Cultural Contexts and Chapter Descriptions

The key contexts for the arguments I stage in this dissertation are political, philosophical, economic, and religious. One of these is the widespread unrest among Britain's laboring classes both leading up to and (especially) following the Reform Bill of 1832. The fact that the Reform Bill only extended the franchise to men who possessed property worth £10 or more meant that a vast swath of the British population continued to be excluded from the voting process. Consequently, laborers—outraged by events such as the Peterloo massacre of 1819, increasingly unwilling to accept the inhumanity of working conditions in factories, and sensing themselves part of a global insurrectionary community that included the American abolitionist movement and the Italian *risorgimento*—began to organize and insist on legislative change. The primary site of these subversive energies was the Chartist movement, named for the People's Charter of 1838, a document that demanded the expansion of suffrage to all British men over twenty-one, their protection by a secret ballot system, the removal of property qualifications for those who wished to be elected to the House of Commons, and the payment of MPs so that working men

could occupy seats in Parliament without having to rely on an independent source of income. The Chartist movement is arguably the first mass mobilization of human beings under the common rubric of class in history. That its leaders exalted poetry as a prime vehicle for uniting, edifying, and energizing working people—that original verse, printed in Chartist newspapers such as *The Northern Star* and chanted at congregations and public demonstrations, formed the movement's intellectual and emotional centerpiece—is thus extraordinary. Harold Bloom may well be correct that "[t]he most important political event in early-nineteenth-century England was one that failed to take place: the repetition among Londoners of the revolution carried out by Parisians" (Bloom xiii). Many Chartists certainly viewed themselves as latter-day Jacobins, and if they failed to precipitate the revolution at home that had occurred in France decades before, they nevertheless left us with a vision of poetry's role as a cornerstone of radicalism that remains stirringly instructive.

A second framework for my arguments is philosophical: the legacy of utilitarianism and particularly of Jeremy Bentham, who imagined a calculus of pleasure or of happiness (he wrote of the two synonymously) that he termed the *felicific* (or *hedonic*) *calculus*, and that lay at the center of his moral philosophy. Bentham is pivotal for having made pleasure a core feature of social reform, helping to rescue it from the exclusive domain of aesthetics and invest it with urgent political import. In Bentham's hands pleasure becomes a moral compass, the ultimate index of the ethical value of all human action. The best, most morally defensible actions, for Bentham, are those that conduce to the greatest amount of utility, which means the greatest quantity of pleasure for the largest number of people. "Nature," he writes at the outset of *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, "has placed mankind under the governance of two

sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne" (Bentham 1-2). As Chapter 4 of *Principles* makes clear, the variables to consider when weighing the ethical value of an action according to the felicific calculus are the *intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, and fecundity* of the pleasure it produces, the latter two referring to how near or remote the promised pleasure is, and how much pleasure will ensue, respectively (Bentham 29-32).

Given Bentham's centrality to the philosophical conversations that dominated Britain during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is easy to conceive how poets came to regard pleasure as such a weighty political concept. As the new index of moral behavior in the polis, pleasure suddenly figured prominently in how many thinking people reckoned social justice, a mode of measuring the efficacy of efforts at reform. It was fluid and interpersonal, too, a thing that originated in individual choice and ramified outward to encompass networks of people in one's vicinity and beyond. Where nineteenth-century poets and theorists of poetry critiqued Bentham, though, was in taking issue with his generic consolidation of all forms of enjoyment under the single rubric of pleasure—his strictly "quantitative" rather than "qualitative" definition of pleasurable experience. For Bentham, as John Stuart Mill famously remarked in his essay "Rationale of Reward" (in a comment often erroneously ascribed to Bentham himself), "[P]rejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either" (Mill, *Basic Writings* 333). Historicizing helps here: in an ever-more mercantile, advertisement-laden Britain in which citizens found themselves inundated with vapid material gewgaws that

beckoned to them, in Christina Rossetti's phrase, to "come buy," it became vitally important to draw distinctions between and among kinds of pleasure. Poetry was different from push-pin, and for that matter all pleasures that merely diverted, numbed, or immobilized one; in contrast to, say, alcohol and debauchery, it offered, as the working-class poet John Critchley Prince (whom I will examine in my first chapter) urged laboring readers, a "pure and chastened pleasure" that acted as a "wakening fire" ("A Sketch Among the Mountains" 100-01). For Percy Shelley too in *The Defense of Poetry*, expressly at pains to refute Bentham's quantitative view of pleasure, poetry promises a special sort of enjoyment: its utility consists in a pleasure "durable, universal, and permanent," one that "strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense," fostering sympathetic fellow-feeling among men and women (Shelley, *Defense* 34). Sympathy was, for Shelley as it had been for Wordsworth, the highest kind of pleasure—and poetry, by making readers' imaginations more capacious, equipped them to experience sympathy more keenly and thus act compassionately. Along with the delights of contemplating nature and of creating poetry, the pleasures of sympathy—in frameworks of love and friendship—were the most exalted pleasures, possessed of a profound social utility: "The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense," he declares, "is true utility" (Shelley, *Defense* 36).

Still another crucial framework for these chapters is the period of economic prosperity, and with it a strong sense of material and technological progress, that defined Britain during the middle to late nineteenth century and especially from 1850-1873. This was Victorian Britain's "Age of Equipose," as it is often called, symbolically ushered in by the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851—a time of exceeding optimism during which many Victorians possessed "a

faith in English virtue, a hope in unlimited material progress, and the charity of technology and capitalist enterprise," as Jerome McGann has written (McGann, "Introduction" 2). It was, more cynically, a time in which the British citizenry came to worship what Mill scorned as "the idol 'production,'" declaring in *Principles of Political Economy*, "I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind" (Mill 261-62). This was the dark fulfillment of Wordsworth's vision of a society transfixed by getting and spending, an arch-capitalist matrix that flourished by implanting in people an endless series of material desires that could only momentarily and superficially satiate them: a time of spiritually bankrupt consumerism, helped along by an increasingly savvy advertising juggernaut, that kept subjects vapidly and passively absorbed in empty material detail. If this materialistic explosion was enabled by Britain's astonishingly rapid transformation from an agrarian to an industrial nation, it was also fueled by the profits of an empire that had attained global reach. This was an empire that sustained itself—as poets such as Swinburne, we'll discover, were keenly and bitterly aware—through numberless acts of spectacular violence enacted on the subjugated peoples of British colonies.

This is the materialistic hypnosis that Shelley dramatizes in *The Triumph of Life*, a phenomenon profoundly numbing and deadening in its repetitious cycles of possession and desire—and one that finally alienated people from their own bodies as much as their souls. If it is true, as Shelley suggests in his *Defense*, that "the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure," this was a version of corruption that ironically took the form of pleasure

(albeit a superficial kind) but was, for skeptics like Mill, Shelley, and Wordsworth, ultimately desensitizing (Shelley, *Defense* 22). For the exploited men and women who worked in the factories that helped sustain this new lifestyle, the machine-like rhythms and ceaseless surveillance that dominated their lives merely exacerbated this paralysis, as their writings reveal. Out of this consumer culture arose a specimen of poetry—or rather, specimens—that tried to resuscitate the bodies of readers from a state of numbed torpor; poetry that sought, through an aesthetic pleasure its authors conceived as activating rather than passivity-inducing, either to jolt readers into productive political action or, in the case of religious poets, vault them into a perception of the divine. For these latter poets, perhaps the most crucial cultural context is the Oxford Movement. By incorporating aspects of Catholicism back into English Christian worship, John Henry Newman and his Tractarian acolytes were not only seeking to restore a sense of tradition, ritual, and authority to the Church; they were striving toward a version of spiritual apprehension that involved the body. Critics of the Oxford Movement decried its Catholic liturgical borrowings—the incense, music, visual ornaments, and rhapsodic sermons by men like Edward Pusey and William Dodsworth—as a vulgar hodge-podge of "smells and bells" (Marsh 56). In its own way, though, Tractarianism was seeking to revive the bodies of worshippers who had been relentlessly disciplined and desensitized by the increasingly mechanistic, acquisitive way of life in Britain's industrial centers. These liturgical services, sensual feasts aimed at winning over youthful worshippers particularly, used embodied pleasure to spark or solidify religious fervor and devotion. Much the same may be said for the vast body of poetry the movement inspired—including that of Christina Rossetti, who, though not a

Tractarian poet in the strict sense, attended Christ Church in London most of her life, and borrowed stylistic and intellectual elements from these poets.

Neither Browning nor (of course) Swinburne was associated with the Oxford Movement, but the poetic (and, in Swinburne's case, critical) outputs of both can be likewise understood as impassioned critiques of dualism; both—Browning through the mouthpieces of characters like Fra Lippo Lippi, Swinburne in his critical study of Blake—rail against philosophical systems that would uncouple sensation from spiritual understanding. "From flesh," Browning counsels us through Rabbi Ben Ezra, "expect prompt teaching." Thus Browning, however idiosyncratic he undoubtedly is, is nevertheless of a piece with a larger trend among nineteenth-century Protestant poets toward restoring the body and its pleasures as anchors of spiritual searching. In a sense his poetic project, like all those I explore in this dissertation, can be understood as a more nurturing and redemptive alternative to the biopower that, as noted above, Foucault suggests began to manifest itself more or less concurrently with the rise of industrialism. This was not an insidious administrative work on bodies that viewed them as territories to be colonized, labeled, and disciplined by coercive power; rather, it was a subtly therapeutic and liberatory working *with* bodies that looked to rhythmic language—read, chanted, sung—to release their dormant impulses and direct them toward productive ends. It was also a work that, as I have suggested, understood fleshly enjoyment as potentially educative, a means of guiding readers toward truths that would uplift or emancipate them. Insofar as they do privilege embodied pleasure for these reasons, together the poets I take up in these chapters can be seen to forecast Decadence. That they help constitute a thematic or conceptual arc which has its origins in the eighteenth century

and Romanticism, and continues (albeit in altered form) among the writers who make up the Decadent movement, will be the substance of my conclusion at the dissertation's end.

No attempt has yet been made to deal at all adequately with the centrality of pleasure to this poetry, or to surmise what was at stake on deeper level in its privileging of pleasure. Sha, Boyson, and Nagle have led the way in Romantic studies with their respective books, as did the 2010 essay collection *Romanticism and Pleasure* containing a range of meditations by well-established critical voices. But Victorian poetry still awaits this kind of thorough treatment. Jason Rudy and other physiologically-minded New Formalist critics such as Kirstie Blair have done much to set the terms for such a study, but the gap remains to be filled. The closest thing we have to date is Deborah Lutz's *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism* (2011). Lutz's book is intended for a popular audience and so it focuses more on anecdotes about writers' lives than the nuances of their texts. While accounts of Swinburne's intoxicated forays into London's sexual counterculture and experiments with flagellation have some basis in reality, it seems to me that most of what was truly revolutionary about him, as about the other poets in this dissertation, is to found in the poetic innovations rather than the biography. We still require a thorough study of Victorian poetry and pleasure whose main focus is the textual artistry, the forms and other literary inventions that help to account for the readerly transports these works promise. If the poets in the ensuing chapters turn out to justify the label "radical," they will do so, I hope, on literary grounds.

The first chapter, "The Radical Aesthetics of Laboring-Class Poetry," examines the remarkable efflorescence of working-class verse that occurred in Britain's industrial centers from approximately the 1820s through the 1840s. I analyze the poetry and poetic theory that the

Chartists produced, considering how they used chanted verse to incite a collective, shareable pleasure among workers and, in so doing, mobilize them into large-scale affective networks equipped for protest. But it also considers a separate body of working-class verse that, though composed simultaneously, was written by laborers who consciously distanced themselves from the Chartists and operated by distinct means. The Chartists favored a top-down organization of masses aimed at smashing extant political structures through vocalized demands and, occasionally, force; these other writers, whom I will call the Parnassians, deployed poetry to effect an interior renovation in readers. They were after something quieter, subtler, and in their eyes less conducive to violence and mob activity: through poetry that often culminated in rapt utopian visions, they sought to bring about "transforming enlargements of imagination" in individuals, to widen the psyches of readers by furnishing them with radical social arrangements toward which they might aspire, and which might ideally eclipse the status quo. (The phrase belongs to Percy Shelley, who had espoused a similar view in *Prometheus Unbound* and whom, along with Keats, working-class poets revered as an intellectual figurehead.) What the Chartists and Parnassians share is a conviction in the social utility of poetic pleasure. Chartist leaders, I will argue, saw that if they were to convey their message to workers profoundly and lastingly, they had to do so in a manner that was viscerally pleasurable, via a poetry that called out urgently and seductively to their very bodies. The Parnassians, using traditional forms like Spenserian stanzas, sought through pastoral poetry and verse celebrating marital love and eroticism to enact a similarly pleasurable transmission of ennobling truths, daring notions they hoped would equip laboring readers to intervene on their own behalf in the political landscape.

My second chapter is called "Robert Browning's Poetics of Fleshly Enjoyment." In it I suggest that Browning is a powerfully unorthodox Protestant poet who looks on pleasure, rather than suffering, as the defining feature of corporeality, and likewise sees pleasure as integral to the knowledge-transmission that poetry ideally performs. Through persistent analogies to music in poems like "Abt Vogler," Browning implies that poetry owes its efficacy as a conveyor of divine truths to the embodied pleasure it affords; and that this pleasure moreover accounts for the permanence of the knowledge it transmits—the ability of these truths to stick, in keeping with affect theory. Poetry for Browning is positioned midway between music and painting: equipped with the tactility and temporal elasticity he insists on associating with music, it also has the narrative and descriptive power, as well as the psychological penetration, he ascribes to the best visual art. Poems such as "The Last Ride Together" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" enact this liminal position of poetry among the arts; in the enigmatic ending of the latter poem, particularly, we encounter an instance of a painting made processual by virtue of its being narrated aloud in realtime as Lippo mentally composes it. Poetry thus encompasses the best of both worlds. Finally, the chapter demonstrates how Browning's characters are energized by a questing after transcendent knowledge—facilitated rather than hindered by fleshly pleasure—but how Browning nevertheless registers an awareness that these quests, and the pleasure they yield, are inescapably politicized. If, that is, Browning allows certain of his characters, nearly all men, moments of epiphanic understanding outside the constraints of time, he pulls them back remorselessly to the social, temporal worlds that gave rise to them in the first place—or at least forces us readers to acknowledge these human contexts. The "infinite moments" toward which

these men aspire are predicated, at their most sinister, on acts of silencing and violence often visited on women.

In my third chapter, "Christina Rossetti and the Aesthetics of Redemption," I argue that Rossetti—shrewdly appropriating aspects of Romanticism, on the one hand, and Tractarian poetics on the other—fashioned a poetry that uses sensuality as a means toward Christian regeneration. Allusions to them in Rossetti's poetry and devotional prose reveal her surprising admiration of Blake and Keats, particularly. In the former she discovered a powerful precedent for a version of sacramentalism that privileged bodily experience, in the latter a constellation of images (such as fruit), a loving and at times painterly evocation of physical surfaces that often occurred in dreamy medieval settings, and a series of longer narrative poems (most notably *The Eve of St. Agnes*) whose plots she borrowed but strategically revised for her own purposes. The physical world was a repository of variegated splendors for Rossetti, as it had been for Keats (and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, with whom she mingled intermittently but from whom she kept a wary distance); from it she felt we ought to derive intense pleasure registered at an embodied level, as theological tracts such as *Seek and Find* make clear. But though we are meant to indulge in sensual pleasure, for Rossetti this must ultimately serve as a means toward a deepened knowledge of the invisible rather than an end in itself. Sensual pleasure is a perilous thing: potentially beguiling, it is nevertheless a trace and a clue that, rightly interpreted, leads individuals to the supersensible. From Tractarian poets such as John Keble, I'll argue, Rossetti learned to deploy sensual pleasure—pleasure to be gleaned, especially, from manufactured images—to guide readers inductively toward an understanding of abstract Christian truths: a pedagogical program that teaches us to interpret the pleasurable things of this world as indices of

God. In the process, we readers resemble the redeemed Laura of *Goblin Market*, which I examine in detail. Laura's regeneration, I'll argue, is made possible not only by the Christ-like altruism of her sister, but by her own capacity to interpret rightly the sensual feast Lizzie offers up to her. Not renunciation, in this climactic scene of Rossetti's masterpiece, proves the vehicle for regeneration, but a sensual indulgence figured as excessive, in a telling parallel to Swinburne; yet it is an act of indulgence, I will suggest, that derives its healing power from the interpretative import Laura assigns it.

In my fourth and final chapter, "Swinburne's Poetics of Curative Excess," I draw on Swinburne's voluminous literary criticism (especially *William Blake*) and his early sensation novel *Lesbia Brandon* by way of overturning the tired myth of Swinburne as an aesthete in any conventional sense. As these prose writings make clear, Swinburne advocated a politically charged aestheticism that invested poetic forms, particularly, with the power to affect a reader's physiology: rightly deployed, formal features like rhyme, possessed of a drug-like addictiveness that mingled pleasure with pain, could galvanize the body, accessing spontaneous impulses that threatened routine and defied habit. In bodily impulse lay the possibility of spontaneity and danger, of energies too immediate and instinctive to be scripted by ideologically inflected codes of behavior and belief. One of the gifts of recent body theory, as this chapter will show, has been to emphasize the generative potential of bodies, how they possess a calculus all their own, a capacity to create what is new, surprising, and unpredictable; in short, their unboundedness and ability to extend beyond the cultural frameworks that strive, forever vainly, to contain them. This insight guides my readings of several of Swinburne's early poems, from his volumes *Poems and Ballads*, to which I turn in the chapter's second half. These poems, by minimizing the

importance of paraphrasable content and playing up form, effectively convert poetry into a kind of defibrillator, a conveyor of brute shock that might rouse the body from states of torpid habit. Through formal features such as metalepsis and sophisticated patterns of rhyme, Swinburne crafted a poetry defined by relentless repetition—a Blakean excess that, if it ironically mirrored the gross material excess and violence of a society from which Swinburne felt alienated, he nevertheless imagined would activate, quicken, awaken readers. In *Songs Before Sunrise*, written about the *Risorgimento* movement, Swinburne offers a vision of what a more liberated society might look like.

Chapter 1: Radicalism, Corporeality, and the Unruly Pleasures of Laboring-Class Poetry

Introduction

In an undated entry from one of his notebooks, John Clare contemplates the wellsprings of happiness, concluding that they reside in the homely and unadorned pleasures of the natural world, heady delights to which working-class people are more closely attuned than their middle and upper-class counterparts. The untutored rustic is far more susceptible to these than the businessman or merchant hypnotized by getting and spending: "Taste finds pleasure where the vulgar cannot ever find amusement the man of taste feels excessive rapture in contemplating the rich scenery of an autumn Landscape which the rude man passes unnoticed—the rich colours of the forrest trees the wild hurry of the autumn clouds never harmonize his feelings into raptures." "To the man of dissernment," by contrast, "there is happiness in lolling over the old shivered trunks and fragments of a ruined tree . . .to lean on the rail of wooden brigs and mark the crinkles of the stream below and the little dancing beetles twharling and glancing their glossy coats to the summer sun." Such, sums up Clare in a rousing coda, "is real happiness: to stand and muse upon the bank of a meadow pool fringed with reed and bulrushes and silver clear in the middle on which the sun is reflected in spangles and there to listen the soulsoothing music of distant bells this is a luxury of happiness and felt even by the poor shepherd boy" (Clare 479-80). Beneath the high-flown lyricism, Clare is constructing a bold and nuanced argument about class, wresting pleasure away from the elite and claiming it for laboring people and gypsies (he strongly identified with the latter). Higher, refined pleasure of the sort that leads to authentic happiness—

the "excessive rapture" brought on by a sensory exposure to natural splendors and a detailed knowledge of what these consist of—belong to people like himself. He says, in effect, "We're the urbane ones, they the philistines, having lost contact with these originary wellsprings of enjoyment," and in this way performs a daring remapping of sophistication and vulgarity that pivots on pleasure. And he does so in a manner that dramatizes his own quite literally breathless rapture in beholding the phenomena he records—his dashes and blank spaces, increasingly frequent as the entry unfolds, seeming to embody intervals for inhalation. They involve us readers-aloud, in turn, in these same panting breath-patterns as we struggle to keep up.

Clare's meditation is typical of a large body of laboring-class writing, composed in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century, that is deeply preoccupied with affirming the value of pleasurable, even ecstatic embodied experience. The two decades following the Reform Act of 1832, which encompassed the rise and fall of Chartism (approximately 1838-48), saw an efflorescence of working-class poetry and poetic theory concerned to galvanize the bodies of readers via pleasurable response, and in so doing redefine what pleasure consisted of and who might partake of it. In much of the best of it one witnesses a convergence of aesthetics and radicalism both dynamic and instructive; its contours are Keatsian, defined as it is by a frequent sense of superabundance and luxuriance, yet this is never seen to preclude its ambitious social agenda; indeed, the sensuous excess is part and parcel with the political idealism. In this regard the poetry epitomizes what Isobel Armstrong in *The Radical Aesthetic* has envisioned as "an uncoupling [of] the aesthetic and privilege" (Armstrong 4). Aesthetic pleasure emerges, for working-class poets and theorists of poetry, not as a Foucaultian regulatory mechanism to be mistrusted but an emancipatory force, not as the exclusive birthright of conservatism but a

formidable lever for effecting social upheaval and renewal. Much of the enduring value of this literature seems to do, in fact, with its implicit (and occasionally explicit) insistence that aesthetic categories such as pleasure can be charged with radical possibility: defiantly salvaging pleasure for themselves—especially that which they ascribed to reading, writing, and chanting poetry, but also the pleasurable pastimes detailed in the poetry itself—becomes an index of laborers' humanity, evidence they were not, in Edmund's Burke's famously contemptuous phrase, so many "swinish multitudes." That their struggle for equal socio-political footing with the dominant classes was bound up in the body and its pleasures is my fundamental assumption here.

Mike Sanders, writing in *The Poetry of Chartism*, is largely right to suggest that "Chartism possessed a deep-seated, almost instinctual (and certainly a non-theorised) apprehension that the aesthetic was a necessary part of any resistance to utilitarianism and laissez-faire economics: both of which were blighting working-class lives in the 1840s and both of which were notoriously hostile to notions of aesthetic value" (Sanders 19). I will argue in this chapter that this apprehension, as their poetic theory and criticism makes explicit, was not non-theorized, and that it characterized the poetry and theory not only of the Chartists but a good many other working-class versifiers writing at the same time who rejected Chartism but still wished for a more equitable society. They shared a clearly articulated belief that aesthetic pleasure—savored individually, distributed among groups—was an indispensable component of social renovation.

Pleasure and Marxist Aesthetics

How to account for the preoccupation with pleasure, especially sensual pleasure, in the poetry and poetic criticism these laboring writers left behind, to say nothing of their personal (that is, epistolary and diary) records of their own early engagements with poetry? How to reconcile their dogged affirmations of happy feeling, cerebral and corporeal both, with the destitution that formed their outward circumstances? It isn't that laboring-class writing produced during these decades is free of invective; later in this chapter, in fact, I will analyze a Chartist poem, "Song of the Lower Classes," that mixes vehement critique of social inequality with a prophecy of imminent revolution. But those who immerse themselves in this literature shortly discover that its dominant affective registers are celebratory, praiseful, at times ecstatic, and that even poems and songs of critique are often strategically crafted with the intention of generating pleasure. Working-class autobiographers, recollecting their earliest encounters with poetry, describe them as watershed moments that reconfigured their consciousness and widened their sensual and emotional capacities. Alexander Somerville, a Scottish radical journalist and soldier, remembers being twelve years old and asking a harvester what a poem was, and then listening as the latter recited for him a piece of verse by Robert Burns. Somerville was electrified and the harvester, observing this, agreed to lend him a volume of Burns's poetry the next day. Somerville, though, could not wait so long:

I was now so eager to see that famous book, from which he had kindled in me intellectual sensations so new, so delightful, and irrepressibly strong, that I could not go home to

supper and to bed until I had accompanied him to his home, three quarters of a mile distant to get the book; I could not wait until he brought it in the morning. (Somerville 87)

Burns's poetry evoked in Somerville "sensations of pleasure entirely new" and "so exquisitely delightful" that he felt suddenly impelled "to read everything of verse kind which fell in [his] way" (Somerville 87). Such response to Burns's poetry, especially, are common among laborers during this period. An anonymous writer for the *Chartist Circular* recalls a visit he made to Burns's birthplace in Alloway, Scotland:

When I wandered among these streets, musing on the Bard,—rehearsing his poems—chanting his songs . . . my bosom glowed with a patriot's ardour—my heart melted with poetical tenderness, and tears involuntarily trickled down my cheeks. It was an hour of mental ecstasy, spent in rapture on the soft green oasis of the barren desert of human existence. (*Chartist Circular* 20 Feb. 1841: 310).

The account is almost shocking for the extremity of its sentiments, the "ecstasy" and "rapture" the journalist recollects feeling, the cathartic weeping that recalls the responses of many readers to the literature of sensibility. Patently, the pleasures of the (memorized, orally delivered) text offer this reader a transitory window of freedom from the bondage of routinized industrial existence and financial want, and are generative, moreover, of incandescent political sentiment, "a patriot's ardour." Admittedly, the sentiment is that of patriotism; yet the story of

Chartist poetics, as we will discover later in this chapter, reflects how readily this enthusiasm could be redirected toward anti-establishment ends. One final example will suffice to illustrate the sort of affective responses that poetry frequently induced in laboring readers. It is culled from Thomas Cooper's autobiography, a text about which I will have more to say below, and records the young Cooper's first exposure to the poetry of Byron:

[I]n my thirteenth year, by some accident there fell into my hands one of the cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the drama of *Manfred*. I had them in my hands for only a few hours, and I knew nothing of their noble author's life or reputation; but they seemed to create a new sense within me. I wanted more poetry to read from that time; but could get hold of none that thrilled through my nature like Byron's. (Cooper 35)

Given Cooper would grow up to become one of the Chartist movement's preeminent architects, a leader who helped ensure the central place of poetry in its radical program, this was surely a pivotal moment in the trajectory of his life and career. Cooper's claim that Byron's writing "create[d] a new sense within [him]" captures eloquently the underlying human value that, I am arguing, poetry's affective appeals possessed for so many working-class readers. In order to understand this fully, it may help—as Sanders has led the way in demonstrating—to turn to certain voices in twentieth-century Marxist aesthetic theory, none more pertinent than that of Herbert Marcuse.¹ Marcuse of course shares with other members of the Frankfurt School the observation that capitalist societies sustain themselves by proffering false consumerist wants

¹ See the first chapter of Sanders's *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* for a provocative discussion of Marcuse's importance to conceiving of a laboring-class aesthetic.

among individuals, desires momentarily satiated by the hollow and distracting pleasures of possession and consumption—a "plastic form of purity and loveliness" that parades as genuine beauty (Marcuse 62). His theory is distinctive, however, in part because of the emancipatory power it accords to beauty and aesthetic pleasure, the latter clearly to be distinguished from the pleasures of material acquisition. This is especially true of his late work, *The Aesthetic Dimension*. In that study, Marcuse asserts that "the need for radical change must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence, their passions, their drives and their goals" (Marcuse 3-4). A monopoly capitalist society is a fundamentally one-dimensional one that reduces people to instruments of raw utility, imposing on them an overwhelmingly "functional existence" in which they gradually forget their own capacities for sensibility. Such a society relentlessly emphasizes the "performance principle" in individuals, in the process repressing their "pleasure principle"—though, in a key assertion, Marcuse argues that the performance principle is continuously under threat from pleasure:

What are the sources of [art's] radical potential? They are first in the erotic quality of the beautiful, which persists through all changes in "the judgment of taste." As pertaining to the domain of Eros, the Beautiful represents the pleasure principle. Thus, it rebels against the prevailing reality principle of domination. The work of art speaks the liberating language, invokes the liberating images of the subordination of death and the destruction of the will to live. This is the emancipatory element in aesthetic affirmation. (Marcuse 62)

The goal of the repressive one-dimensional society is to effect a kind of amnesia in people, to cause them to submerge altogether and lose contact with their own libidinal energies—energies that confer on them the will to live at all. Authentic beauty, though, as a stimulus of pleasure, acts for Marcuse as a retaliatory force against this domination, for it perpetually reminds the recipient of the erotic dimension of experience, and thus of the potential fullness of a life currently fragmentary. In this way it is a harbinger of a possibly richer and more complete existence, a clue signifying that things could and should be better. "[T]he idea of Beauty," observes Marcuse, "appears time and again in progressive movements, as an aspect of the reconstruction of nature and society" (Marcuse 62). No tepid, effete phenomenon, nor a cornerstone necessarily of conservatism, beauty acquires in this formulation a resistant charge, having taken its place repeatedly in programs for political overhaul. As the arena of beauty, the world of art is a world of free play, of liberatory illusions in which the ossified order of things—which those in power would have one believe is necessary, inevitable, natural—becomes radically unsettled. Its autonomy in relation to a consumerist society, rather than signalling its irrelevance or impotence, provides it with the freedom to turn the settled order on its head, and thereby contest the elite's claim to what is real or true: "Art's separation from the process of material production has enabled it to demystify the reality produced in this process. Art challenges the monopoly of established reality to determine what is 'real,' and it does so by creating a fictitious world which is nevertheless 'more real than reality itself'" (Marcuse 22). By virtue of its very fictionality, then, and the freedom this offers, the literary artifact is at liberty to illumine truths that are concealed or distorted in the course of quotidian life in the external world; under its alternative, imaginative laws, and by dint of its free play of signifiers, these

come startlingly into focus. It is in this sense that the fictive world is "more real" than that which we confront in our daily lives: if reading constitutes an escape, it is more accurately, and perhaps paradoxically, an escape *into* reality from a repressive domain of lies, obfuscating rhetoric, political cant.

Marcuse, then, ends up staging an argument against realism. The emancipatory pleasures of literary texts are not to be obtained through a faithful duplication of the status quo, but a subversive and destabilizing recasting of social relations, as well as a playful redeployment of linguistic figures that have rigidified into the over-familiar. What people come to think of as reality, and as the rightful use of language, turns out on closer examination to be a version of truth—and a host of sanctioned utterances—that exist to justify the distribution of wealth and ownership of the means of production among the elite. Given this, the beautiful illusions manufactured by the poet's or novelist's imagination provide a pleasure that is liberatory and enlightening for at least two reasons. One of these is cerebral: being untethered from the imposed order of things, they can present readers with an endless array of fabricated realities that shock them into an exhilarated realization of the arbitrary, contingent nature of the status quo; and, in the process, encourage them to contemplate new socio-political arrangements that may prove predictive of, indeed help model, the future. Janet Hamilton's essay on "The Uses and Pleasures of Poetry for the Working Classes" (1850) compellingly articulates this world-repairing power of imaginative poetry, and registers the freeing effect on laboring readers of entering and surveying these worlds. Hamilton, one of the few working-class women poets of the Victorian period to gain widespread recognition, notes, "I have often thought and felt it to be a matter of deep regret that working-men and women, in consequence of their social position,

and the want of means and leisure, are to a great extent debarred from the attainment of the elegant tastes and refined perceptions acquired by those on whom the gifts of fortune . . . have conferred the high advantages of a liberal and finished education." Notwithstanding, owing to the availability of inexpensive literature, working-class readers can "rise on the wings of fancy and hover enraptured over the bright world of scenic creations produced by the magic pencil of him, the great poet, painter, and worshipper of nature—glorious Shakespeare." They can contemplate, reading Ebenezer Elliott and William Cowper, the abject inequality of a society where the wealthy lead lives of wasteful consumption "and yet see unmoved their poor brother laid down to perish at their gates." These are poetic fictions that permit the rapture of imaginative escape, but also promise revelations of "awful truths" suppressed in ordinary existence (Hamilton 132-37).

But the other kind of pleasure that Hamilton and the other autobiographers record occurs at the level of sensation. No poet "thrilled through my nature" as Byron did, recalls Cooper; he "seemed to create a new sense within me" (Cooper 35). For Hamilton, one of the pleasures of poetry for the working class reader is the sympathy he can feel for the downtrodden personages of these texts, which makes his "heart beat and his pulse throb with sorrow and indignation" (Hamilton 133). Somerville, to reiterate, felt the transformative effect of "sensations of pleasure entirely new" (Somerville 88). These moments of readerly discovery mark the introduction of something absolutely new in the consciousness of these writers. "Art," Marcuse suggests in the conclusion of his *Aesthetic Dimension*, "breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle" (Marcuse 72). We can understand these working-class

accounts of literary pleasure as watershed events in which a sensual dimension is "broken open" in their consciousness, and they are made aware of a layer of experience they have been rigorously conditioned to repress. As Pauline Johnson phrases it in her *Marxist Aesthetics*, "The evocation in the work of art of real human creative potential is able to awaken dormant rebellion in the recipient by exposing the deformed character of present needs" (Johnson 111). The pleasures of the poetic text, then, have political consequences because they alert readers to the famished character of their actual lives, how their one-dimensional societies cheat them of the nourishment of authentic, life-affirming enjoyment—propitiating them, if at all, with a grotesque parody of pleasure in the form of commodity acquisitions. (In the case of laboring-class readers, who lacked disposable income, the latter often took the form of alcohol and debauchery, which, as we'll see, became a central concern of the poetry.) They stir a "dormant rebellion" because they subsequently inspire people to seek out and claim for themselves—that is, effect the social conditions that will make possible—the realization of more such pleasures in actual experience, though society is structured to exclude them from these.

Though the two versions of laboring-class poetry I survey in this chapter achieve this in fundamentally different ways, they share this essential drive to harness aesthetic pleasure in order to stimulate a dormant rebellion in readers. Both versions—one through a poetry designed for collective public performance, the other via a far more "literary" poetry crafted for private consumption—aimed at a purposeful activation of the pleasure principle in the Marcusean sense. Whether in group settings or among individuals, this poetry used pleasurable affect to bore through the layers of mental and physical routine that deadened working-class readers, reminding them of a dimension of their lives long since forgotten or choked off. "Affect," to

reiterate a claim by Charles Altieri cited in my introduction, "threatens belief frameworks and the forms of self-assurance on which they rely and which they also sustain" (Altieri 44). As an affect, aesthetic pleasure was being deployed both to unsettle readers' beliefs about themselves, their potential, and their rightful place in the world; and, to the extent that it was corporeal, to reacclimate them with a layer of experience—and a mode of knowledge—they had been disciplined into repressing or ignoring. In an essay entitled "Pleasure: A Political Issue," Fredric Jameson, inspired by Barthes's *The Pleasures of the Text*, considers how the body and its pleasures might constitute a reservoir of knowledge unconditioned by the ego, by the internalized assumptions and habits of mind gleaned from an overadministered capitalist world:

To discipline [the body], to give it the proper tasks and ask it to repress its other random impulses, is at once to limit its effectiveness, or, even worse, to damage it irretrievably. Lazy, shot through with fits of boredom or with *jouissance*, listening for the fainter vibrations of a sensorium largely numbed by civilization and rationalization, sensitive to the messages of throbs too immediate, too recognizable as pain or pleasure—maybe all this is not to be described as self-indulgence after all. Maybe it requires a discipline and a responsiveness of a rare yet different sort, something like free association (outsmarting the instant defenses of the ego or the rationalizing intellect) or boating, sensing and riding with a minimal current. (Jameson 9)

Barthes, who "taught us to read with our bodies—and often to write with them as well," is valuable to Jameson as an instance of a theorist who stressed the importance of what might be

termed corporeal knowledge. That is, as Jameson reads him, he grasps that "the libidinal body" is "an instrument of perception" possessed of its own "peculiar politics," an interpretative device for reading the world and a storehouse of alternative information to which might we learn to attend. If the body can be disciplined, through biopower or other means, to repress its "random impulses," it seems also true that one might, via another form of discipline, train oneself to "listen" more acutely to the full spectrum of its sensations—and thereby gain access to sets of stimuli that are prior to reason and that, by virtue of their spontaneity or "randomness," resist entrenched categories of understanding. Where Marcuse helps us to understand aesthetic pleasure as a means of activating latent rebellion in recipients, Jameson emphasizes the role of *impulse* in this process. (We will see in Chapter 4 how Swinburne, in like manner, conceives of bodily impulse as something inherently dangerous, a source of spontaneous energy unscriptable by socially imposed modes of thought and action.) Though bodies can be socially disciplined to the point where their "random impulses" are damaged irretrievably, it remains possible that they are not dead but in a state of abeyance, and can yet be resuscitated by strategic means. Both models of poetry I take up in this chapter are, I think, concerned to enact such a resuscitation—though this is especially true of Chartist poetry, which, as we will discover, tended to be a very physical enterprise, a chanting or singing in social settings often accompanied by bodily movements and directives.

The Chartists and Parnassians

To talk about laboring-class poetry and poetic theory during the 1830s and 40s as if it were a homogeneous phenomenon would be misleading: the zeitgeist of these decades stimulated at least two major veins of poetic writing, stylistically and politically distinct but also convergent in crucial ways. One of these was the poetry of the Chartists, much of it written by the movement's own leaders, autodidacts like Cooper and William James Linton who doubled as versifiers. The definitive feature of Chartist poetry is that it is designed for collective oral performance. As the deliberate instrument of radicalism and a means toward mass-mobilization, Chartist poetry is written primarily for communal consumption, its rousing refrains, catchphrases, and other formal attributes functioning to bind people together into networks of electrifying, shared feeling. Here was a dramatic embodiment of the concept of affective contagion that Anna Gibbs and other theorists have recently expounded on: "Bodies," Gibbs writes, "can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion." With the diffusion of feeling there occurred also the proliferation of the shared knowledge and goals attached to these, socially constructed truths inflected with affect. Poetry powered this neuro-physiological contagion. If, on the one hand, the Chartist movement was famously powered by a working-class print culture, a series of radical newspapers like the *Northern Star* that achieved widespread and rapid circulation via Britain's railway system, then it is equally the case that Chartist culture thrived on spoken and sung performance. As Iorwerth Prothero notes, most

laborers preferred to hear even newspapers read aloud, not necessarily because they were illiterate but because this way "the 'reading' of radical work was not passive but collective, involving discussion and criticism" (Prothero 290). Its nodal points were a set of meeting houses and especially pubs where "resistance was conceptualised and enacted" and people might come together to exchange ideas, even as they asserted their "right to pleasure as resistance to discipline" (Prothero 282). Poetry—often memorized, frequently chanted communally, as one can discern from reading the notes to Chartist meetings in the *Star* and other publications—was a vital conduit through which these progressive ideas came to be circulated and, equally, a mode of knitting people together into affective communities. Chartist leader Ernest Jones begins "The Poet's Mission" by asking,

Who is it rivets broken bands
 And stranger-hearts together,
 And builds with fast-decaying hands
 A home to last for ever? (II. 1-4)

The answer, implicitly, is that it is poets. Chartist poems often read as serrated socio-political critiques, vessels in which revolutionary doctrines and stirring denunciations of institutional power are housed. Yet they are also mechanisms aimed at provoking a potent non-cognitive response in those who chanted them, uplifting them by transmitting jolting currents of fleshly sensation—and these shared sensations, as much as anything, were the "rivets" that linked these people together. In *Electric Meters*, Jason Rudy argues that the literature of

sensibility "push[es] physiology to the foreground of poetic theory" in the late eighteenth century, and thus "sets the scene for the Victorians' all-out engagement with a poetics of the body" (Rudy 7). The writers associated with the literature of sensibility had presented poetry as a paradigm not just of intellectual and emotional but fleshly connection: the pleasurable effects of embodied reading plugged subjects into networks of shared sympathy and sensation, and this mutual experience came to function, in turn, as "a model for democratic citizenship" (Rudy 12). My contention is that Chartist poetry represented the spectacular fulfillment of a vision that Sensibility had conceived several decades before. Like the Della Cruscan and other exponents of Sensibility, the Chartists looked to poetry as a generator of embodied feeling, largely owing to its repetitious rhythms, the inspiriting pleasures of chanting and marching to it in close bodily proximity. And, like their forebears, they found a democratic value in this pleasure. E.P. Thompson argues in *The Making of the English Working Class* that the notion of a "working class" in nineteenth-century Britain is inherently tenuous, an arbitrary rubric made to apply to discrete groups from weavers to tailors to masons, classes of people linked, if at all, by a set of "productive relationships," ideas, and institutions they inherited at birth (Thompson 11). Poetic chant, with its metered utterance, offered a crucial means of bringing them in unison. These were disparate people united under a common *time*, regular rhythmic sensations that ushered them ecstatically together. Poetic form, in other words—the rhythms that inhered in Chartist songs and the physiological movements, from marching to stomping, these inspired—became itself an institution that synchronized laborers, supplying them with a means of surmounting discrepancies of background and vocation.

The Chartists, then, discover in Sensibility's affective reader-networks a stunning political potential, a class valence that had only been latent in the works of Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, and other predecessors. The embodied pleasure of poetic chant in close fleshly proximity acts as a social enamel, thereby proving an impetus with the capacity to threaten the established order. In this respect Chartist poetics reinforce Rudy's contention that for the Victorians, the political and fleshly work of poetry were finally "two sides of the same coin," mutually constitutive and sustaining (Rudy 2). As we will see, one of the watershed realizations on the part of Chartist poet-leaders was that if they were to succeed in compelling workers to adopt the cause of the Charter on a grand scale, they would need to do so in manner that appealed not merely to their emotions but their very bodies: to craft a poetic program that was not utilitarian but possessed of a sophisticated aesthetic. The section on Chartism below will demonstrate how a deliberate turn to music—culled from Methodist hymns, nationalistic anthems, folk traditions—was a vital consequence of this insight. Music, as we so often see in Victorian poetry (and as my second chapter, on Robert Browning, will detail), is seen to have an instantaneous physiological impact, offering a tantalizingly direct medium through which ideas and truths might be "installed" into subjects by fleshly means. Laboring-class newspapers and other written records from these decades are filled with accounts which underscore the electrifying effect that sung (and often also memorized) poetry had on working people, and gesture to the unruly potential of this ecstasy (a word they often used). The *Chartist Circular* column quoted above, in which the journalist recalls chanting Burns's songs in a state of "rapture" and teary "ecstasy" upon returning to his birthplace, is exemplary in this regard.

As a strategy, this proceeded from that larger working-class vision, adumbrated above, of a politically charged aestheticism that looked on art and the transports it stimulated as a destabilizing agent, at once physically galvanizing and anticipatory of new social arrangements that could run counter to the status quo. To date there has been only one comprehensive scholarly treatment of nineteenth-century working-class literary theory, and this is Paul Thomas Murphy's *Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858*. Of particular interest is Murphy's chapter "Impassioned Truth," in which he surveys laboring-class periodicals in an attempt to induce a general conception of poetry as it evolved over the century's initial decades. Murphy's overarching claim is that as the century wore on, laboring-class theories of poetry became less utilitarian and increasingly compelled by beauty and other aesthetic values: "Later working-class journalists increasingly realized that each member of their audience was an aesthetic as well as a political being and they believed that while political poetry was always important, the cultural improvement of the working class entailed its political improvement" (Murphy 98). Not merely beauty but the pleasure it was thought to provoke emerges, in Murphy's chapter, as a core value that guides working-class, and particularly Chartist, theory. Citing a recurring column called "Blackneb" in the Chartist T.J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf* newspaper, he observes that Wooler "was the first working-class critic to notice and stress the idea of the pleasurable in poetry and the notion of its nonargumentative and emotional power" (Murphy 107). Still other passages to which Murphy calls attention, to be found in other laboring journals, help confirm that the turn to aesthetics and especially pleasure was a deliberate move which belonged to a larger program of resistance to an exploitative utilitarianism. One need only look to the (to us almost astonishing) citation of the

first line of Keats's *Endymion* ("A thing of beauty is a joy forever") in radical publications from *National* (16 Feb. 1839: 100) to *Northern Tribune* (Jan. 1854: 3) to *Red Republican* (5 July 1850: 19). Or, in a juxtaposition just as jarring, there is the reprinting by Julian Harney in an 1846 issue of the *Northern Star* of a passage by Leigh Hunt alongside columns of vehement protest and critique. The "ends" of poetry, insists Hunt, are "pleasure and exaltation"; "next to Love and Beauty, which are its parents, [it] is the greatest proof to man of the pleasure to be found in all things, and of the probable riches of infinitude" (Harney, "Feast of the Poets" 3).

To the extent that I share this Horatian (or, alternatively, Sidneyan) understanding of working-class poetics, this chapter comes out of Murphy's study and will take up several of the same texts. Yet I depart from that book not merely in stressing the centrality of pleasure, specifically, to this literature, but in considering it as a two-fold phenomenon. This is where the other major vein of poetry and theory—a body of writing that, following Brian Maidment, I will call *Parnassian*—becomes relevant. In certain ways, Parnassian poetry represents the obverse of Chartist poetry: highly wrought, self-consciously erudite, far more "literary" than the straightforward Chartist chants, Parnassian verse is designed for private, individual consumption rather than out-loud public performance. If Chartist songs are marked by monotony, a repetition that can be eerily redolent of the routinized rhythms of factory labor, Parnassian poetry tends to be formally ornate, wearing its learning on its sleeve, proudly broadcasting its place in a poetic genealogy that includes at least the Romantics and the dominant voices of the Enlightenment. These are poems that take the form, very often, of Spenserians—most famously, perhaps, in Thomas Cooper's epic *The Purgatory of Suicides*—and frequently of heroic couplets and of sonnets. The preponderance of heroic couplets, which function as vessels of a Swiftian

indignation at social inequality and injustice, attests to the Parnassians' considerable debt to the eighteenth century, a literary tradition that, as much as any, helps make sense of this poetry. Owing, in fact, to what Jonathan Rose has termed "a general theory of rubbish," laboring readers lagged behind the rest of the public in their discovery of literary texts, which did not become available to them until they had passed out of fashion. "Every industrial town of any size," writes Rose, "had at least one second-hand bookstall in the market square"; and "the prime customers of London bookstalls—"and, we may readily imagine, of those in the great industrial centers of the north—"were workingmen." Yet the texts they purchased were not, by and large, the vogue novels and poetry-volumes of the day, but those of their parents' and grandparents' generation: *Rasselas*, *Tom Jones*, editions of Cowper and Pope, and others (Rose 120-21).

My intent in stressing this is primarily to point out that the *saeva indignatio* these writers inherit from the eighteenth century is rarely seen to preclude the elements they borrow from second-generation Romanticism, the other major influence on the Parnassians. It is important to remember that the Parnassians and Chartists both were almost contemporaries of Shelley, Byron, and Keats (himself a poet barely above laboring-class standing, of course, a fact hardly lost on them)—that they had died in 1822, 1824, and 1819, respectively, mere years before Chartism began to gather steam and the best Parnassian poetry came to be written. And, granting Rose's "rubbish" theory, it is also true that laboring writers had some access to Romantic poetry and were acutely impacted by it. Thomas Carlyle, for example, in an effort to assert freedom of the press and help circulate radical ideas, had published unexpurgated editions of Shelley and Byron that were available to a mass audience; and Chartist leaders, by printing Keats's poetry in their periodicals, ushered Keats into the working-class canon (Murphy 98-99, 133). The significance

of this exposure can scarcely be overstated, for much of what makes Parnassian poetry so gripping is precisely that its Keatsian qualities—sensuousness, pastoral immersion, rapt celebration of the quotidian—are often seen to coexist alongside the most energetic indictments of social conditions, not only within the span of a single volume of poetry, but frequently in the same poem. Better: the sensual excess that animates so many of these poems is, I will argue, inseparably bound up with their defiant political agenda, and we cannot properly comprehend either without taking account of the other. In *Victorian Poetry*, Armstrong, discussing a cluster of Parnassian poets who gravitated to the pastoral mode and were strongly influenced by Keats, acknowledges just this, observing their determination to claim for themselves "the possibility of *pleasure*. It is as if the capacity for mental and physical pleasure is what really assures these poets of their capacity to emancipate themselves from the conditions and limits forced upon them and to vindicate themselves as men. The pleasure is a pleasure of resistance" (Armstrong 222).

This chapter will closely examine one of the writers to whom Armstrong refers, the Manchester poet John Critchley Prince. Feckless, dissolute, mercurial, Prince was something of a working-class Byron—a writer with whom he claimed brotherhood—and his adult life, both in the immediacy of fame that ensued from his debut volume of poetry (*Hours With the Muses*) and the rumors of crazed excess that followed him around, came uncannily to resemble that of the more canonical poet (*Nineteenth-Century Labouring Poets* II, 107). Prince is exemplary as an instance of a Parnassian poet intent on regenerating Britain's working class from what he diagnoses as economic and intellectual destitution, and absolutely convinced of the centrality of poetry to this enterprise. He is no conservative (though any number of non-Chartist working-class poets were), yet neither does he align himself with the particular brand of radicalism

espoused by the Chartists. Far from embracing Chartism, Prince excoriates the movement in his personal correspondence, condemning what he sees as its monomaniacal drive to obtain the five points of the Charter by whatever means necessary: "[T]hey do not speak like men who have a claim on the fruits and enjoyments of the earth, but like restless and desperate banditti who have made up their minds to have something, whether lawfully or otherwise." They are "ignorant, intolerant, and ungenerous," owing, he speculates, to "the deception practised upon them by designing *soi-disant* leaders." Prince is interested in structural change all right, but casts a cold eye on the Chartists' proposed means of getting there—on the normalizing, exclusionary tactics that characterized them, the mob mentality he sees these invariably fostering, and the violence that so-called "physical-force" Chartists like Feargus O'Connor advocated. "You will never rise as you deserve," he wrote fellow weaver-poet Charles Davlin, who had joined with the Chartists, "till you take a broader and less exclusive political creed" (Lithgow 117). I will suggest here that a more understated kind of radicalism nevertheless permeates Prince's writing, and that we can best understand this by contextualizing him in that tradition of second-generation Romanticism that is his partial poetic inheritance. His work, in its frequent utopian prophecies of a world in which the laboring classes are emancipated mentally and economically, invokes the legacy of Byron the liberator; but it borrows even more liberally from the philosophical vision of Percy Shelley, for whom large-scale institutional change could only occur as a consequence of individual moral and imaginative transformation. Not the very young Shelley of *Queen Mab* and certain other of his early poems—an apostle of William Godwin, arguing that human corruption follows from the existence of infected institutions—but the mature Shelley of *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Defense of Poetry*, who finally turned against Godwin in urging that

institutions were little more than massive projections of individuals' moral being: this is the philosophical spirit, arguably more than any other, Prince channels in his poetry and theory. How do we imagine radicalism without dissent? Shelley had offered one compelling answer: art, by insistently calling people's attention to idealized worlds in which human potential was liberated and cruelty disposed of, would effect in them "transforming enlargements of the imagination," thus "redeem[ing] from decay the visitations of divinity in man" (Shelley, *Defense* 41). It was a mind-expanding project that alerted readers to hypothetical social formations which corrected on the status quo—a purposeful fashioning of the "golden worlds" Sidney envisions in his *Defence of Poesy*—and furnished them with blueprints of virtue toward which they might aspire. Poets were "legislators" in his famous formulation, but not through calls to arms or mass mobilization. In "England in 1819," after all, a poem that gained widespread currency among working-class readers, he had denounced "sanguine laws which tempt and slay" (10), and could likewise view the French Revolution as a sickening parable of idealism wrongly pursued. Rather, an "apocalypse of the imagination," art-induced, was the means toward large-scale renovation. "Art," Marcuse would later write, "cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world" (Marcuse 32). The later Shelley urges much the same thesis.

Looking jointly at Prince's *ars poetica*, "Random Thoughts on Poetry," and a handful of poems that best characterize his vision, we will see that Prince, in like manner, imagined the ideal laboring poet as a legislative figure who uplifted readers via a pleasurable transmission of moral truths that would empower and emancipate them. Prince's own moral failings ought not to distract us from his poetic agenda, which consisted in redirecting working-class readers from the

self-destructive enjoyments of alcohol and debauchery—distracting opiates through which the laboring class guaranteed its persistent degradation—to the "sober pleasures" of knowledge-acquisition through poetic language, itself a precipitant of "ecstasy," though of a liberating and awakening sort. Prince's poetry circles round a set of terms—pleasure, knowledge (or truth), power, freedom—that recur with startling frequency in the work of any number of like-minded Parnassians writing roughly contemporaneously. In the climactic passages of his poetry, visionary instants in which utopian futures come suddenly into view, these keywords are seen to interlock: the exhilarating, at best ecstatic process of knowledge-acquisition endows workers with the eloquence and understanding they need to intervene on their own behalf in the political sphere; and this, in turn, promises to place them on equal footing with the dominant classes. Like a range of Parnassians, Prince had to find a way to appropriate the poetic diction and forms of a literary establishment that was largely aristocratic—Byron, however ardent a lover of liberty and a detester of cant, was, at the end of the day, a member of the peerage—and make them not only generative of pleasure, but containers of a bracing vision of human equality.

Ultimately, this chapter will argue, both the Chartist and Parnassian models were necessary components of the working-class effort to confront social inequality and exploitative labor via poetry; that each approach had its signal advantages but was nevertheless flawed or lacking in certain ways, and that its counterpart supplied its own deficiency. If the Chartists presented a paradigm of radical poetry as a facilitator of grassroots, often bellicose, spectacularly public protest, their methods could also be, as Prince recognized, "exclusive" and disturbingly normalizing. Foucault's now axiomatic description, in *Discipline and Punish*, of systems of power-knowledge as inevitably normalizing, regimes that thrive by disciplining diffuse

populations of subjects into "homogeneous social bod[ies]," resonates with the Chartists to an extent (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 184). Skeptics like Prince grasped that its greatest asset—its uncanny capacity, through printed media and poetic chant, to mobilize and indoctrinate disparate masses of laborers with a set of potent new truths about themselves and the world—was also Chartism's sobering downside. A rousing invitation to unify was also, on its darker flipside, an imperative to conform and an impulse to efface difference. One need only observe the movement's express decision, made when the Charter was initially drawn up in 1838, to exclude women from its demand for universal suffrage, in spite of increasingly vociferous objections from the Owenite socialists and the incipient feminist movement (Harrison, "Civil Society" 87). There is also the inescapable fact that the history of Chartism is inextricable from violence, a reality equally repellent to Prince and other outsiders who watched the movement from a dubious distance. Certain historians have sought to organize the movement into "moral-force" Chartists, who disdained violence, and their "physical-force" counterparts, but the truth, as Sean Lang has demonstrated, is that "nearly all Chartist leaders sanctioned the use of force at one point or another," from the notoriously pugnacious Feargus O'Connor to the seemingly pacific William Lovett, the paradigmatic "moral-force" leader (Lang 46). Events such as the famously bloody Newport Rising of 1839 chillingly dramatized how easily the collective pleasures of chant and march might, in the hands of misguided orchestrators, ripen into barbarism and mob activity.

Still, it is difficult to underestimate the efficacy and novelty of the Chartists' vision of poetic performance as a central fixture of large-scale resistance. Granting its shortcomings, it offered workers a desperately needed reservoir of unalienated experience that was not be attained

by any solitary reading act, and it involved—ignited—their fleshly bodies in a manner more concrete and immediately exhilarating than any solitary reading act. That the first editions of Chartist poetry were published not in Britain but in Soviet Russia during the 1930s speaks to the enduring power of that vision. A century later, in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, one finds a culture of radicalism seemingly far-removed from the Chartists looking back on them as an analogue to themselves, inspired and tantalized by the Chartist concept of poetry—of aesthetics—as the concomitant of upheaval.

Of itself, however, the Chartist model was not enough. It needed the contemplative, more formally complex Parnassian approach, with its concept of reading as a transformative yet deeply personal undertaking, and its meta-reflection on the nature and use-value of sensory experience, to counterpoise and complete it. While laborers could find in Chartism a sleek and deftly run apparatus for mobilized action, they might locate in this other poetry a literature aimed at healing and renovating them as individuals. This was a body of writing with no partisan designs on them, no calls to immediate action, whose only discernible "creed" was that inward reformation—the acquisition by individuals of new mental structures, the expansion of their affective capacities—was the sole means toward structural change on a grand scale. Where much Chartist verse operated as a weapon of sorts, its more literate counterpart offered itself to laboring readers as a bulwark, a refuge within whose bounds they might find, not merely mind-altering notions, but the possibility of a pure sensuous immersion that relieved the aridity of their quotidian lives. These were poems that traced intense corporeal experiences in their own right: accounts of solitary escape into the countryside or, often, the transports of marital love, that took

place away from the surveillance culture of the factory and supplied laboring poets with a storehouse of sensations they could claim as exclusively their own.

This poetry lacked the sweeping collective scope of Chartist verse, with its underlying mission to bring subjects emphatically together, but this was also one of its great virtues. It reflected the attunement of laboring poets like Prince to a set of physical pleasures that were private, individualized, *not* shared by anyone else (except perhaps readers) and thus beyond the reach of established power, sensations of which they were the sole arbiters. Nothing else, virtually, was theirs; and they led lives, many of them—Prince, a weaver by trade, felt this especially keenly—in which even their physical movements were scripted for them and watched over more or less continuously. But by means of the remarkable sensuality that pervades their poetry, they seek to salvage a parcel of experience no one can wrest away from them, its value a function of its inwardness. Their defiance is like that of Hamlet rebuking his mother and stepfather in the first act of Shakespeare's tragedy: "I have that within which passes show" (*Hamlet* 1.2; cited in Bevington). Hamlet's "that" is a "mystery" over which he "broods" and which remains perpetually barred even to us audience-members; but surely embodied sensation too is a mystery of a sort to outsiders, and laboring poets invest real importance in its privacy and individuality. In this sensation resided the hope, however faint, of a certain form of freedom, a consequence, in keeping with Jameson's essay cited above, of its spontaneity, its being unfiltered and unorganized by the ordering logic of the dominant classes. Of course, it was being transmuted into a set of linguistic structures and forms inherited from the very classes these writers were pushing back against, as noted above. One index of their success, as we'll see, is the extent to which these poets, in appropriating these inherited modes from tradition, managed

to employ them in a manner that preserved something of the spontaneity and rawness of the sensations that inspired them, and that would in turn communicate these to readers. Where were there openings for impulse amid the ponderous old structures, the dusty and cumbersome matrices, of inherited forms and verbal clusters? First, though, I turn to their Chartist counterparts.

Chartism: The Poetics and Politics

It is impossible to draw a line between the oral poetry (ballad, song, chant) and the more aestheticized "print-culture" poetry that Chartism produced; the movement thrived on both, and, as Anne Janowitz makes clear in *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, Chartist newspapers like *The Northern Star*, by exhorting readers to commit printed poems to memory, hint that there existed a fluid "exchange between oral and print modes" (Janowitz 135). Granting this, it was the culture surrounding orally delivered poetry—recited before large groups, chanted during marches, and especially sung collectively—that lay at the center of Chartist life, acting as the conduit through which leaders transmitted radical ideas and sentiments to the working classes. Prothero is clarifying on this count: "Basically Chartism consisted of a set of pub-based clubs, discussions, and lecture groups, mixing radicalism with conviviality and song in the traditional way" (Prothero 301). Chartists "relied very heavily on the reading aloud of their literature, at workshops, lodging-houses, and, above all, pubs," not merely because many among them were illiterate, but because it enabled masses of people to have a collective, simultaneous emotional response to a text and stimulated group discussion afterward. As the primary

locations where radical poetry came to be experienced, public houses "provided the building blocks" for Chartism, serving as "privileged site[s] where resistance was conceptualised and enacted" (Prothero 290, 286).

Reading aloud assumed a prominent role in Chartist gatherings, but its value paled in comparison to that of singing, which by fusing radical lyrics with music, and in many cases physical movement, made for a heady and potentially transformative experience. As the movement wore on, singing came to be more and more intimately braided together with the fabric of Chartist life: "Chartist songs," Prothero reports, "played a vital part in Chartist meetings, both large and small, set to simple metres, often to tunes from Methodist revivalist sects." Indeed, "Chartist, Socialist, and friendly society song-books multiplied after 1839" (Prothero 292). Laborers, crowding into public houses increasingly charged with a revolutionary, illicit atmosphere—spaces that became bastions of radicalism as the streets came to be unavailable or too dangerous—sang subversive poetry to melodies and rhythms rooted in church ritual and in a deeply entrenched plebeian folk tradition (Janowitz 141). My contention here is that as Chartism amassed momentum, its chief leaders and organizers, who doubled as poets, realized that their ability to reach and move laborers on a deep, abiding, widespread level would depend on their capacity to suffuse them with pleasure: pleasure that was not only intellectual but bodily, a totalizing and invigorating enterprise. Inculcating people with the dogmatic principles underlying the Charter was a beginning, but conquering and converting them energetically to the cause would mean deploying poetry in a manner that spoke to them directly and affectively.

Singing offered them a means of doing just this, and the move to implement it more centrally at Chartist gatherings was, it should be stressed, a reasoned decision that Chartist leaders consciously made. "I am bent on resuscitating Chartism in earnest, in London," wrote Chartist figurehead and poet Thomas Cooper to fellow-poet William Jones in 1845, "and, therefore, intend to introduce singing" (Prothero 292). Cooper's autobiography bears this out in lucid detail. Not only does he offer a portrait of Chartist oratory as an embodied affair—an activity accompanied by "clapping of hands and drumming of feet"—but provides compelling accounts of the unifying agency of sung poetry among the working classes (Cooper 237). He emphasizes the electric effect of singing during Chartist retreats into the rural freedom of the Nottingham Forest, which he himself led: "Our singing was enthusiastic; and the exhilaration of that Chartist 'camp-meeting' was often spoken of afterwards" (Cooper 174). More often, though, this phenomenon took place in the city, as in a pivotal episode of Cooper's *Life*, where he relates the intense turmoil in Nottingham surrounding a parliamentary election to replace the recently deceased Whig, Sir Ronald Ferguson. On the eve of the vote, amid grave doubts as to the election's outcome, suspicions that "Tory agents were slyly creeping about to try to bribe voters," and having even endured a physical brawl with conservative activists earlier that same day, Chartist campaigners tellingly resort to embodied poetic performance as their last line of defense:

"We will parade the town, Cooper," said [Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor]; "and you shall lead the singing. We shall be ready then to secure the polling booths in the morning, so that the first votes may be for Mr. Sturge [i.e., the Chartists' choice for Parliament]: *that* is always the surest step towards winning an election."

And parade the town we did, singing "The lion of freedom is come from his den" (a song attributed to me, but I never wrote a line of it: it was the composition of a Welsh Chartist woman) and "We won't go home till morning—till Walter runs away! / We won't go home till morning—till Sturge has won the day!"

Nor was Cooper alone among Chartist leaders in his scheme to implement music. Ernest Jones, from 1845 onward the most prominent figure (and probably the most prolific poet) in the Chartist movement, envisioned sung poetry as a method of shaping laboring-class consciousness: "I am pouring the tide of my songs over England, forming the tone of the mighty mind of the people," he wrote in a diary entry in October 1846 (Hovell 281). In an article from *The Saturday Review* entitled "Politics Set to Music," an anonymous journalist presents an outsider's perspective on Jones's tactics, in the process shedding fascinating light onto the actual workings of a Chartist meeting. Jones "has conceived the felicitous idea—to be worked out in a series of *soirees* at St. Martin's Hall—of 'blending dry political discussion with a musical entertainment.' Waste lands, the law of primogeniture and entail, and a bloated aristocracy, are made to do duty alternately with the *Chough and Crow*, and the *Song of the Lower Classes*—the latter a poetical effusion of the gifted orator himself." "Business and pleasure," it seems, are "harmoniously combined." If song punctuated weighty, abstract oratory, it likewise provided a stirring cadenza to it, with Jones following up his speeches "in a sublime flight of musical and political enthusiasm, burst[ing] into blank verse," and leading his listeners through a stanza that concludes, "The people's land shall be the people's own." The article, it is true, becomes primarily satirical, an exercise in middle-class condescension: "*Pop Goes the Weasel* is an

appropriate dirge for the British Constitution, and rings the knell of land monopoly," the reporter sneers, adding, "An oppressed nation has called in music to its aid in the struggle between might and right, and the People's Charter will be forced down the throats of a sanguinary aristocracy at the point of a fiddle-stick" ("Politics Set to Music"). Underneath the veneer of facetiousness, however, one senses genuine unease, the reporter's attempt to use ridicule to dispel his or her genuine fear of the currents of laboring-class unrest that, stoked by Jones's innovative methods, were fast gathering steam.

Clearly, by the time Chartism reached maturity, pleasure had come to occupy a place at the forefront of laboring-class consciousness. From what did pleasure arise? Which forms of it were beneficial and constructive, and in what quantities? Where Chartist leaders were concerned, how might it be parlayed into a political impetus they might turn to their advantage? As evidence of pleasure's new centrality to the Chartist program, there was, to reiterate an episode from the dissertation's introduction, that April 1847 congregation of laborers identifying themselves as the Westminster Debating Society, who met at Temperance Hall in Leeds to discuss "The Divine Philosophy of Pleasure." It is easy to infer, through *The Northern Star and National Trades' Journal's* account of the meeting, that these men and women are keenly aware that their lives have come to be comparatively bereft of pleasure; seeking to restore it, they argue over the reservoirs of sensual and intellectual enjoyment:

Mr. Trumble, in opening the debate, said some persons were exceedingly ascetic, that he could not understand their motives—such an one was Oliver Cromwell, who destroyed thereby a promising republic, which was glorified by the high and glorious advocacy of a

John Milton [. . .] For his part, he thought pleasure in accordance with the principles of God and Nature, as mirth appeared to be implanted in man by the Creator, and phrenologists had very properly placed that organ amongst the highest in point of intellect. (Hear, hear.) He believed that were singing and dancing cultivated and conducted on proper principles, it would be productive of the happiest results to humanity in general. (Loud cheers.) ("Public Meetings")

The group is keen to assert the value of music-derived pleasure particularly in daily life, as well as its own capacity to feel it. "Sacred history," the article reports their saying, "bore them out as to the acceptability of pleasure, for in the 'inspired writings' did they not find 'Let the loud timbrel,' and the 'Song of Solomon?' thus proving, even in those days, that both vocal and instrumental music was in vogue." One attendee "said a celebrated writer had said that pleasure meant the mass of absurdities and eccentricities of the human family; for his part he felt a pleasure in reading the *Northern Star*. (Loud cheers.) And he did so because it was the organ of a very important portion of the working classes, and afforded much information and pleasure to them. (Applause.)" ("Public Meetings"). The speaker suggests here that pleasure—the cathartic pleasure of witnessing their own long-internalized, perhaps forbidden sentiments writ large in text, or energetically broadcast in song—is the basic motivating force behind laboring-class writing. For many, it was also the hoped-for result of their activism, one of the fundamental points of attaining the franchise, as one Manchester Chartist, the Reverend J.R. Stephens, makes clear in a speech paraphrased by the *Annual Register* of 1838: "If any man asked him what he meant by universal suffrage, he would tell him, he meant to say that every working man in the

land had a right to have a good coat and a hat. . .a good dinner on his table, no more work than would keep him in health. . .and the enjoyment of those pleasures of life which a reasonable man could desire" (Slosson 27). The capacity to be pleased becomes, for many Chartists, an index of their personhood—indeed, a certain quota of pleasure, insist people like Stephens, is their human birthright.

Thus it was in song that the Chartists discovered a method of making poetry generative of bodily pleasure, and in this way helped shape it into a destabilizing and even anarchic force. They achieved this most of all by fusing radical poetry with rousing tunes to which workers, crowded together in street, public house, and music hall might march—or else stomp, clap, and sing along. In part, this was simply a means of making revolutionary truths stick more tenaciously: with the assistance of music, writes Murphy, "working-class poets could relatively effortlessly impassion their truths with verse. Moreover, the simple regularity of meter was in itself compelling, and many working-class critics considered truth with a beat more memorable than truth without" (Murphy 119).

I would argue, however, that the significance of the Chartists' turn to embodied pleasure via song runs a good deal deeper than a mnemonic tactic. It was an effort to resuscitate and release the latent energies of the body from the state of torpid, mechanistic discipline in which they remained locked in the day-to-day factory setting. Since Foucault first developed his concept of biopower in *The History of Sexuality*, it has become commonplace to assert that power operates through a profusion of interventions on subjects' bodies—"a whole series of different tactics that combined in varying proportions the objective disciplining of the body and that of regulating populations." In no context can his theory have found greater applicability

than the carceral setting of the Victorian factory, with its culture of surveillance, the ritualistic and machine-like physical motions that workers compulsively performed, the manner in which child-laborers, for example, were indeed "made to live" and, after a time, "permitted to die" (Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* 146). But while institutional power has proven itself capable of laying claim to individuals' bodies—of making the flesh itself a repository for ideological constructs, and in this manner subjugating whole demographics—it is likewise true that these same bodies can be converted to instruments of rebellion. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton suggests as much, revealing a telling foundation in Marxist theory for thinking about bodily sensation as a trigger-point for upheaval. Eagleton argues, as we saw in the introduction, that the concept of the aesthetic arose in eighteenth-century Germany as an increasingly autonomous middle class sought out a theoretical system with which to manage itself—to gain control, specifically, over the concrete, bodily dimension of human experience that, frighteningly unruly, lay perpetually beyond the reach of reason. It was a means of "inserting social power"—in the form of a set of arbitrary principles of taste—"into the very bodies" of subjects, "and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony." But this was a risky enterprise with the capacity to backfire: "To lend fresh significance to bodily pleasures and drives, however, if only for the purpose of colonizing them more efficiently, is always to risk foregrounding and intensifying them beyond one's control." The notion of the aesthetic was dangerous for precisely the same reason it was effective: because it sought to inscribe itself in the flesh, a volatile entity that forever threatens to overthrow the power that takes possession of it: "[T]here is something in the body which can revolt against the

power which inscribes it; and that impulse could only be eradicated by extirpating along with it the capacity to authenticate power itself" (Eagleton 28).

The Chartist appeal to song was precisely such an attempt to reclaim the physical body, to galvanize it via chants that were exhilaratingly pleasurable, and in so doing to harness a reservoir of power that, they shrewdly recognized, might be fitted into an anarchic weapon. To jolt the flesh in the collective setting of the street-march or elsewhere was in effect to awaken a sleeping giant, for it meant unifying laborers by plugging them into vast communal networks of feeling, knitting them together with the fabric of felt enthusiasm and joy. It was, in a sense, a throwback to Sensibility, in which, as Christopher Nagle has recently contended, feeling—particularly pleasurable feeling—was seen to be "the glue that holds society together." Poetic texts succeeded by hooking readers into affective networks, and in this manner bringing them into a kind of electrifying proximity: Sensibility "works to connect others through its stimulating effects, to plug into *them* through the technology [i.e., of printed texts]" (Nagle 6). This was a "pleasurable proximity" that was seen to be inherently excessive and unruly, a potentially destabilizing force with the capacity to threaten the social order. The Chartists were attempting much the same project, but they spectacularly literalized what had in the later eighteenth century been merely a metaphor. These were no isolated readerships devouring affect-laden texts, but real congregations of live bodies singing, marching, stomping in unison—pulsing with simultaneous and shared pleasure, crying out for a common goal. Industrial capitalism had striven to alienate people in lonely corners of factories and mills; Chartism brought them emphatically and exuberantly together.

In a telling irony, the pleasures that Chartist congregations yielded workers stemmed from simple, monotonous poetry and the machine-like bodily motions that frequently accompanied it. The lyrics were predictable and iambic, never complicated or ornate, and the physical movements they provoked in people were comparably repetitious. Jason Rudy has observed that Victorian ballads composed at mid-century were, as a rule, simple, easily comprehensible songs that kept to strict, banal patterns, "offer[ing] insistent regularity as a model for cultural stability." "Through their formal regularity," he notes, "ballads insisted on 'law' rather than anarchy"—and for this reason such poetry found favor among conservative audiences, who discovered in its formal predictability and repetition a reassuring adherence to the established order of things. By contrast, these same conservative readers, Rudy continues, took exception to the violently irregular, abrupt rhythms that characterized much Spasmodic poetry written during the same period—verse that came to be associated with the opposite end of the political spectrum (Rudy, "On Cultural Neoformalism" 591-92). Most of the Chartist lyrics composed roughly contemporaneously with this poetry, however, refute Rudy's model: possessed of an elemental simplicity, basic rhyming patterns, and a childlike repetition, Chartist poems are nevertheless laced with anarchic sentiment and force. In them one witnesses a formal regularity designed, seemingly paradoxically, to upset the social order. Just as William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* had, several decades earlier, adopted lilting, apparently juvenile and artless forms in order to take aim at Britain's most deeply entrenched institutions, now the Chartists were placing simple repetition in the service of radicalism.

What makes this remarkable is not simply that it undercuts the expected association of regularity with conservatism; more, it meant the Chartists were using a machine-like monotony

to protest against the inhumanity and cruelty of industrial life for the common laborer. One would expect, of course, that they would wish to free themselves from the mechanistic rhythms that governed their day-to-day existence. In fact, though, the Chartists appear to have found in mechanistic prosody a mode of being embodied, succeeded in converting it to a source of liberating pleasure. Part of their achievement, I believe, lay in their ability to reclaim industrial monotony for the purpose of a life-giving enjoyment with radical possibility. These routinized, predictable beats and motions governed their working existence, even as they provided the rhythmic blueprint for their rebellion against it.

A fine example is the justly famous and frequently anthologized poem "The Song of the Lower Classes," written by Jones and sung (and often marched) to music by Jones's composer friend John Lowry:

We plough and sow—we're so very, very low

That we delve in the dirty clay,

Till we bless the plain — with the golden grain,

And the vale with the fragrant hay.

Our place we know — we're so very, very low,

'Tis down at the landlord's feet:

We're not too low — the bread to grow,

But too low the bread to eat.

Chorus: We're not too low — the bread to grow,

But too low the bread to eat.

Down, down we go — we're so very low,
 To the hell of the deep sunk mines,
But we gather the proudest gems that glow,
 When the crown of a despot shines.
And whenever he lacks — upon our backs
 Fresh loads he deigns to lay:
We're far too low to vote the tax,
 But not too low to pay.
Chorus: We're far too low [etc.]

We're low — we're low — mere rabble, we know,
 But, at our plastic power,
The mould at the lordling's feet will grow
 Into palace and church and tower —
Then prostrate fall — in the rich man's hall,
 And cringe at the rich man's door:
We're not too low to build the wall,
 But too low to tread the floor.
Chorus: We're not too low [etc.]

We're low — we're low — we're very, very low,

Yet from our fingers glide
 The silken flow — and the robes that glow
 Round the limbs of the sons of pride.
 And what we get — and what we give,
 We know, and know our share:
 We're not too low the cloth to weave,
 But too low the cloth to wear!
 Chorus: We're not too low [etc.]

We're low — we're low — we're very, very low,
 And yet when the trumpets rings,
 The thrust of a poor man's arm will go
 Thro' the heart of the proudest King.
 We're low — we're low — our place we know,
 We're only rank and file,
 We're not too low — to kill the foe,
 But too low to touch the spoil.
 Chorus: We're not too low [etc.] (1-46)

In *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, Brian Maidment observes that "[t]he dominant literary strategy in [Chartist poems] is the playing off of carefully contrived, accessible, and memorable lyric forms against quite complex *symbolic* modes of writing." By this means, Chartist poets

seek to capture "the unknown, perhaps unknowable, nature of dramatic political change and its inevitable consequences of violent changes in individual human consciousness" (Maidment 38). This is an apt description of Jones's "Song," whose monosyllabic, repetitious, contagious form belies, in its plainness, the sophistication of its argument. Jones draws on biblical archetypes, likening the Chartists to the Israelites, both bound up in a kind of captivity by those possessed of land rightly their own, and, in the Chartists' case, the means of production that confer political leverage. An ironic self-denigration governs these stanzas—an awareness that, though condemned to voicelessness, laborers are nevertheless the engine that makes the country go, economically, militarily, and otherwise—that is finally eclipsed by an apocalyptic forecast ("the trumpets ring") of regicide and, with it, a new and more just dispensation. Of course, no amount of ratiocination can bring us closer to understanding the impact that Jones's "Song" exercised on the men and women who sang and marched to it. Coming to appreciate what made the piece so thrillingly pleasurable and, therefore, successful at mobilizing and inspiring laborers, requires considering its acoustic and rhythmic qualities: in short, all that makes it music. Richard Middleton, drawing on the work of Janos Marothy, has recently noted that "the style of Lowry's tune. . .derives from that of the bourgeois marches that developed out of song-types typical of the vaudeville, comic opera, and pleasure-garden repertoires of the late eighteenth century." All the same, the song's initial 5-1—upbeat—"a call to attention, or to arms"—had martial connotations, for it "recall[ed] the beginning of the *Marseillaise*" (the French national anthem), which, in addition to providing the model for countless marches and political songs during the nineteenth century, was the song to which rebel volunteers from Marseilles had marched during the French Revolution (Middleton 4). Its form, then, conjured popular culture resonances stemming, jointly,

from pleasurable bourgeois pastimes and Jacobin politics: a combination that neatly reflects the yoking-together of pleasure and radicalism that, as I have been arguing, lay at the heart of the Chartist program.

Middleton is helpful, too, in conveying how the song's formal properties were intimately connected with its deeper purpose as a cry of protest: "[T]he lyrical, balanced shapes of the melody—typical of song patterns in the emergent bourgeois culture—are broken up rhythmically and energized by slogan-like repetitions ('we're low, we're low'), internal rhyme and variation, and 'heavy,' even 'stamping,' or 'smashing' crotchets ('our place we know')—a feature "typical of a plebeian song lineage traceable as far back as the Middle Ages" (Middleton 4). It was as though, through the repetition of "We're low, we're low" in the form of "smashing" or "stamping" crotchets (that is, quarter notes), singers could be made to feel they were quite literally obliterating the melodic lines they had inherited from the middle class and, with them, the values and thought-patterns they represented. Bourgeois cultural traditions were being lustily subjected to the relentless battering ram of Chartist chant, a process as gleefully fun as it was cathartic.

Here, in a nutshell, we can see the compelling way in which poetic form generated bodily pleasure, and did so in a manner both intensely liberating for laborers and dangerously subversive: marching through the streets to Jones's "Song," protesters could take delight in physically stomping out those quarter notes while they sang, and thus get the sensation that they were crushing with their very feet the establishment that disenfranchised them. The "Song," in other words, is formally inscribed with certain physical directives that workers might perform in unison, and that were productive of an unruly kind of embodied enjoyment. It is, after all, a poem preoccupied with the body, one whose focus on physicality "[makes] working-class

bodies, and the chores they perform, paramount in defining the true struggle," as John Plotz explains (Plotz 441). But it is also a poem aimed at activating the bodies of the workers who recited it, jolting them into motions that enacted the revolutionary sentiments the words communicated. Beyond the "stamping" the poem seems to prescribe, one may readily imagine protesters miming, for example, the "thrusting" of their own arms "thro the heart of the proudest King" in the final stanza. These were laborers who plied any number of different trades in their daily lives—weavers, farmers, smiths, masons—and represented diverse parts of (typically northern) England, but were rousingly unified, not just under a common class rubric, but under a common *meter*. It was the rhythms of songs like this one, and the physical movements they prompted protesters to perform in concert with one another, that brought these people together, instilling among them a sense of solidarity that transcended regional and occupational differences.

Though Jones's "Song" was set to music written explicitly for it, most Chartist poetry sung at popular gatherings was matched with tunes that were already deeply embedded in the working-class consciousness—plebeian folk songs, songs by Robert Burns, or, even more frequently, patriotic national songs the Chartists appropriated and "corrected." Murphy is informative on this count: "Appropriating tunes for the cause was a favorite recreation for working-class poets," one that remained popular "throughout the Chartist years." The motives behind this practice were partly pragmatic: "Applying new words to popular music," he notes, "allowed anyone to sing at any gathering without a music lesson" (Murphy 119-20). But divorcing rhythms and melodies from their (largely staid) original contexts and placing them in them in the service of insurrection proved downright thrilling and fun, too. First-hand accounts

of Chartist meetings and street protests bear this out. A state document entitled *The Queen Against Cooper and Others, 1843* describes a protest of roughly a thousand striking laborers led by Thomas Cooper through the streets of Manchester: Cooper exhorted them "to strike and cease from labour until the Charter [became] the law of the land," and they subsequently "[went] down to the marketplace . . . singing 'Spread the Charter' to the tune of 'Rule Britannia'" (*Reports of State Trials* 1280-81). Adorno argues that popular music has no place in political protest: because it is "to such a degree inseparable from past temperament, from consumption, from the cross-eyed transfixion with amusement, attempts to outfit it with a new function remain entirely superficial" (*Music and Protest*). But the Chartists, in outfitting popular songs with daring new meaning, force us to consider how fun and amusement might be other than conservative, other than a source of "cross-eyed transfixion." Perhaps we would do better to see this as a form of profound play, a liberating mischief that was simultaneously educative and energizing—the kind of play, that is, that Isobel Armstrong in *The Radical Aesthetic* suggests is necessary "to make an essential cognitive leap which radically changes one's relation to reality" (Armstrong 38).

Plainly, the experience of defamiliarization was in itself innately pleasurable, particularly when the old, recognizable text—or, in some cases, poetic genre—was retreaded in a politically transgressive fashion. Ultimately, however, the great value of the grafting procedure lay in the fact that it enabled a far more expedient—and far more pleasurable—dissemination among laborers with the radical notions that Chartist leaders were seeking to broadcast. It was a means of making poetic forms—rhythms and melodies already securely installed in these people from childhood, thrilling by instinctive association—bear the freight of challenging new ideas about their self-worth, about universal suffrage, about socio-economic possibility. It wasn't only form,

of course, that accounted for the pleasure: there was also the frisson that came from a conscious awareness that rebellious new content was being fitted into musical-linguistic containers originally crafted for patriotic means. Still, the process speaks to the pedagogical power of forms, their capacity to compel and delight and, what is more, their mnemonic value. It seems evident that people have certain forms, foundational matrices that govern the currents of their thought, inscribed in their minds from their early lives—verbal, rhythmic, even melodic structures etched into them by the literature, music, and other artifacts to which they are exposed in their youth. Expeditiously teaching them fresh concepts as adults, as men like Cooper and Jones clearly realized—means availing oneself of these already-extant thought-shapes. In a recent essay, Catherine Robson explores how *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* engages with (and parodies) the Victorian practice of forcing school-children to memorize devotional poems. That Alice, when called upon to recite certain of these poems, can only conjure up their rhythms and rhymes, while replacing the original words with new ones, becomes evidence for Robson that

when pedagogical systems installed rhymed and rhythmic poems within children, they did not only, and perhaps did not primarily, install content, or meaning, into their heads. They also installed shapes, the *forms* of poetry; and just as the pages of the *Alice* books are laid out according to the diverse arrangements of prose and verse, so the mind of a child, trained in this manner, received the structure of verse, as well as the pattern of prose, deep down inside. (Robson 107)

Much the same principle guided the learning process for Chartist activists, though of course the parallel is imperfect: the meeting-places where the Chartist movement took shape were no intellectual training-grounds for the privileged children of Britain's upper and middle classes, and the stakes were a great deal higher. In the section that follows, I turn my attention to a school of poets who practiced an "overlay" procedure all their own, a strategic reclamation not of popular songs but the more rarefied and ornate forms that structured eighteenth and early-nineteenth century British poetry. If more understated, these poems too attest to the versatility of poetic structures and genres, their capacity to travel and change hands and, in the hands of Chartist and Parnassian both, accommodate audacious new import.

Prince and the Parnassians

I will look closely now at the work of John Critchley Prince, a poet who, though he expressly distanced himself from the Chartist movement, was a working-class writer whose verse dramatizes a number of the fundamental assumptions and hopes that undergird laboring-class poetry during the 1830s and 40s. Belying the utter destitution that defined his life—he was "cradled in poverty" from the moment he was born, spent most of his adult life in debt, and watched his son die of starvation—Prince crafted poems suffused by luxuriance, superabundance; poems that can seem almost viscous in their texture, the patience with which they catalogue and celebrate sources of beauty and wonder in the external world. Isobel Armstrong, in one of the only sustained discussions of Prince's work to date, identifies this essential feature of his poetry in her *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, rightly

tracing it to the influence of Keats. Prince "was attracted to Keats's poetry, which he discovered as a mature poet. He characterized Keats's work as 'luscious', and its sense of abundance and commitment to *pleasure* clearly attracted him." Accordingly, she goes on, in his own poetry Prince strives to affirm "the possibility of *pleasure*. It is as if the capacity for mental and physical pleasure is what really assures [Prince and numerous other working-class poets] of their capacity to emancipate themselves from the conditions and limits forced upon them and to vindicate themselves as men" (Armstrong 227). I would add that, like the Chartist journalists who reprinted stretches of *Endymion* and portions of Leigh Hunt's criticism on their own pages, Prince is alert to the emancipatory political edge of Keats's assertions about beauty and sensuality, though that valence remains largely implicit in Keats's own work following his initial (1817) volume.

Building on Armstrong's reading, I will argue here, with reference to his first (and arguably most accomplished) volume of poetry, *Hours With the Muses* (1841), that Prince's intent focus on various forms of pleasure—that of pastoral escape, marital love and sex, and, most importantly, reading and composing poetry—is best understood as part of a larger vision for the moral, intellectual, and spiritual resuscitation of the British working class. In Prince's poetry one witnesses a politically invested aestheticism that conceives of acts of pleasure as refuges from institutional power, as well as modes of stunning the self out of the spirit-deadening hypnosis induced by industrial life. It is an aestheticism that makes pleasure a central component in a process of education which Prince, like most working-class writers and visionaries who rose to prominence during the two decades after the Reform Act, saw as instrumental to his peers' hopes for improving their lot. But Prince likewise registers an awareness of the manifest dangers

of truth-telling, however exhilarating and empowering, and for this reason softens his poetry with concessions to established authority. To read his work comprehensively is to discover not a timidly quietist writer, but one faced with the challenge of performing a rhetorical balancing-act: that of exhorting the downtrodden, on the one hand, while propitiating the establishment that served as his patronage, a moneyed elite Prince could little afford to alienate. His work is shaped by what I will call a *reluctant radicalism*, as I hope to demonstrate through close attention, first, to a prose-essay called "Random Thoughts on Poetry" in which he crystallizes his poetic theory, and then to his poetry. By this I mean a yearning for social upheaval that is frequently (and sometimes awkwardly) undercut by a fearful need to conciliate the middle and upper classes, as well as a genuine abhorrence of the violence that, he clearly suspected, precipitous change would have entailed.

"Random Thoughts" is Prince's *ars poetica*; in it he condenses the core assumptions that serve as arteries running through his verse, informing, sustaining and giving it shape. Most saliently, Prince conceives of his ideal poet as a bardic redeemer-figure in the Romantic tradition, one whose task is nothing less than raising humans to a state of "perfection" through a joyfully instructive infusion of truth, a process at once enlightening and sensitizing. To realize that for Prince the actions of edifying and sensitizing are tantamount to one another is to get hold of a fundamental crux of his poetry. To inform is simultaneously to stir the affects: "Whatever excites our wonder and admiration, awakes our best sympathies, and stirs up the hidden depths of our passions, is Poetry; inasmuch as it brings into exercise the moral and intellectual faculties of the mind." Poetry provokes the passions, acting as a keen emotional stimulus and a humanizing force, precisely as a consequence of its fostering audiences' moral and intellectual

make-up. Poets, wielding this power, have the capacity to regenerate whole cultures from moral, spiritual, and mental decay—even, or perhaps especially, the culture of "the poor and uneducated," as Prince energetically stresses: "[W]hile they have joys and griefs, hopes and fears, feelings and affections in common with all mankind, they cannot be said to be entirely unmoved by [poetry's] influence. The spirit of poetry is within them, and only requires the quickening breath of moral and mental culture to give it a more permanent and elevated character." To "elevate," to "quicken," to "refine"—these are the ends Prince envisages for poetry among working-class readers. It will do so by exposing them to the self-evident "loveliness of truth," whose acquisition will constitute a source of "intellectual enjoyment"—even, as he phrases it in his frequently anthologized lyric "To Poetry," a precipitant of "intellectual ecstasy."

Prince's essay is enormously ambitious in its claims for poetry as an agent of ethical and intellectual reform—and, like many of his own poems, somewhat naively utopian, anticipating as it does a time in which, owing in no small part to the healing power of inspired verse, "ignorance," "superstition," selfishness, injustice, and want will be quelled. Yet underpinning Prince's "Random Thoughts," however wildly idealistic, is an essentially Keatsian concept of the beauty of truth and, closely connected to this, the Wordsworthian conviction set forth in the 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* that "knowledge is pleasure." Pleasure, exhilaration and even ecstasy are symptomatic of truth, accompanying and facilitating its transmission. Prince is characteristic of a swath of laboring-class poets active during the 1830s and 40s, radical and conservative alike, in his persistent yoking together of knowledge with pleasure, beauty with truth. I would suggest that he, like a number of his peers, implicitly adopts Wordsworth's axiom

that knowledge is pleasure and broadens it, making it an integral piece of a large-scale agenda for socio-political transformation. Knowledge was pleasure, and assimilating it would be an intensely empowering enterprise, equipping laborers with the intellectual wherewithal they needed to intervene on their own behalf in the political landscape. Poetry, as "Random Thoughts" and other of Prince's writings make transparent, was to occupy a central role in this program. If Wordsworth's own politics notoriously fizzled into a tepid conservatism later in life, the torch of visionary idealism in his early poetry is arguably taken up by later poets like Prince, working-class voices eager to locate in Wordsworth's (as in Keats's) tenets the building-blocks of a progressive political program.

As a pleasurable purveyor of knowledge, then, poetry was to play a pivotal part in the education of the laboring class; reading and listening to it would instill in them a set of truths that were morally and intellectually transformative, even as it fostered an "intellectual ecstasy." Armed with these truths, audiences would be better prepared to voice their plight in the public sphere and thus pursue social reform. Knowledge was pleasure; but it was also, as the *Poor Man's Guardian* (whose slogan was famously "Knowledge is Power") reminded readers each week during the 1830s and 40s, a vital reserve of political force and torque. Thus it starts to become evident how the experience of aesthetic pleasure ultimately translated to political power: reading (or listening) to poetry galvanized laborers while converting them into more capable rhetoricians, subjects with the ability to articulate their needs and desires in print, in public speeches, and—as the People's Charter itself ideally envisioned—on the floors of Parliament. Prince was not, as I have already noted, a Chartist, but he shared the Chartists' conviction that the aspirations of the laboring classes hinged on their ability to wield rhetorical might: "Chained

followers of oppression's car" who "still slumber in the grasp of power," their only hope at "great reform" is through "Mind—mind alone—must quell the storm!" he writes in "A Call to the People" (9, 8, 35-6). More precisely, Prince exhorts his peers, "With warm persuasion on your tongue. . .plead the cause of right" (39-40). Only then will they attain the "freedom" they have "sought in vain" (45).

To observe that Prince's is a pleasure-driven poetics is to invite the question, How might one conceive of pleasurable acts—whether intellectual, like reading, or embodied—as other than examples of subjects being lulled into states of passive submission? In *Hours with the Muses* Prince explicitly confronts this issue, strenuously distinguishing, in certain of its poems, between what he perceived as vapid, dulling, and self-destructive enjoyments, on the one hand, and forms of pleasure that were autonomous and emancipatory. "The Profligate Awakened," for one, tells a condensed autobiography in which Prince, figuring himself as a prodigal son, recollects past debaucheries, times when he lived with the "Syren called Pleasure— / Can Vice be allied with so gentle a name!) / My footsteps have trod each iniquitous measure, / Through mazes of ruin, disorder, and shame" (9-12). What repels him about this lifestyle is the abandonment of self-control it entails, the "revolting excesses" that threaten his self-possession, that altogether "enslave" him. In their place he seeks out "the Sober Man's pleasures" arising from truth and the exercise of reason, along with virtue, familial bonds, and poetry itself, the vessel whose own very different "measure" conveys these ideals (36). Elsewhere, in the sonnet "To J.B. Rogerson," Prince champions "the quiet rapture of aspiring thought" over a mindless and numbing absorption in material detail (12). Here, a prolonged exposure to the beautiful—"perception of the lovely and sublime" arising, again, from acts of reading as well as social

intercourse—promises a controlled delight that is genuinely revivifying, in contrast to the deadening vices he warns against elsewhere in the volume (10). He preaches versions of delight reminiscent of the "sober pleasure" Wordsworth champions in "Tintern Abbey" and his prose, forms of enjoyment that align him in a sense with the temperance movement then gathering force in England and particularly the United States.

For Prince, the productive sort of pleasure ("quiet rapture"), it seems clear, is one that results in a heightened consciousness: active, volitional, jolting, it holds the key to breaking laborers out of the drudgery-induced trance in which the mass of them are caught—"the same dull, varied, unremitting round" in which these "poor human automaton[s]," "the victim[s] of poverty, vice, and disease," waste their lives ("The Slave" 57-59). This conviction is visible in "A Sketch Among the Mountains," a narrative of pastoral escape in which Prince, alone, absconds to the countryside on the Sabbath, envisioning it as an outdoor cathedral. The poem ends with a rousing paean to the pleasures of natural immersion:

Oh! is it not religion, to admire,
 O God! what thou hast made in field and bower,
 And solitudes from man and life apart!—
 To feel within the soul the wakening fire
 Of pure and chastened pleasure, and the power
 Of natural beauty on the tranquil heart,—
 And then to think that our terrestrial home
 Is but a shadow still of that which is to come! (97-104)

The instant comes to be figured as a Wordsworthian spot of time in which Prince, gaining momentary access to "a happier, holier sphere" of which the present is merely a "shadow," stores the vision away "in memory's keeping" before returning "to mingle with my fellow-men," equipped with new strength and resolution. Absorption in the natural world makes him susceptible to "the wakening fire / Of pure and chastened pleasure," a phrase that neatly captures how Prince conceives of his ideal form of gratification—an experience of sensory enjoyment bridled by reason whose effect is to galvanize rather than sedate, hone rather than dull perception. It would be easy to conclude that these moments, which punctuate Prince's poetry, are meant to be purely cerebral, but to read them closely is to register that they are not disembodied; rather, the sensory apprehension of the physical world becomes a trigger-point for glimpsing the infinite. What Prince seeks is an idealized state in which sensory enjoyment and intellection are mutually sustaining, where contemplating lofty ideas proves deeply and lastingly pleasurable, and sensual pleasure forms inductive evidence of the divine. This specimen of pleasure, it is clear, is not an instance of passive instrumentality but an intensified *concentration*—a "wakening"—whose effect is to alert Prince to areas of reality previously unseen. This becomes still more apparent in his "Appeal on Behalf of the Uneducated," in which Prince depicts his peers as mental slaves of a sort, "machine[s] of animated earth" who, addicted to a series of "unworthy thrall[s]"—that is, debaucheries such as alcoholism—have grown numb to the sublimer pleasures of knowledge: "They cannot feel the pure delight that springs / From constant commerce with all nobler things . . . They reap no joy from wit or wisdom's lore" (99-103). Recognizing this, he entreats the English clergy and aristocracy to use its resources to "purchase wholesome knowledge for the poor; / Knowledge to search the universe, and find /

Exhaustless food and rapture for the mind" (150-2). In the idealized future he projects at the end of the poem, laborers, ignited with "intellectual fire," are made suddenly alert to a storehouse of natural beauties Prince catalogues in meticulously Keatsian detail:

The purity of Spring's delicious morn,
 When pleasant sounds and mingled sweets are born;
 The silent splendour of a Summer's noon,
 When earth is sleeping in the lap of June:
 The gorgeous hues of Autumn's evening hour,—
 Corn in the fields, and fruitage in the bower;
 The night of Winter whose vast flag unfurled,
 Is gemmed with stars, and every star a world;
 From these the mind shall wing its way above,
 To Him the soul of harmony and love. (201-11)

The passage distills the interplay between sensory thrill and the free play of the intellect that shapes so much of Prince's poetry. The informed mind of the laborer is seen, for the first time, to be capable of noticing and appreciating the plenitude of enjoyments with which nature is laden—enjoyments that appeal to nearly each of the senses: gustatory ("Spring's delicious morn," "mingled sweets"), auditory ("pleasant sounds," "silent splendour"), and visual ("gorgeous hues") stimuli converge in this moment. And registering these pleasures in the physical world enables him, in turn, to induce the existence of divinity.

As means toward a heightened concentration and a communion with the deity, Prince's instants of "quiet rapture" function as the anchors of his poetry, climactic moments toward which his lyrics tend to build. The rapt moment also promises, significantly, a form of self-protection as well as a measure of freedom. In the lengthy "A Poet's Sabbath," the opening poem in the volume, Prince, as in "A Sketch Among Mountains," pursues his weekly ritual of escaping into the countryside on Sunday, where he experiences "a poet's raptures" (54). His absorption in the sensory riches of this pastoral idyll affords him a crucial hiding-place, a bid for momentary "freedom"—from the paralysis of his day-to-day routine and from culturally sanctioned modes of thought and utterance—that he dubs a "refuge" and tellingly likens to the Ark of Genesis (168). The experience is one of pure sensation at first, an exercise in negative capability in which the poet, abandoning reason, surrenders himself to the manifold impressions of his surroundings, "nursing the germ of freedom in his soul" (191). Gradually, this therapeutic mental vacancy gives way to imaginative engagement: Prince, adopting an Old Testament prophetic voice, conjures up a vision of an idyllic, "Arcadian" past prior to the advent of capitalism, and the economic equality that it seemed by nature to engender. "As yet," he notes of this imagined society, "gigantic Commerce had not built / Cities, and towers, and palaces of pride— / Those vast abodes of wretchedness and guilt, /Where Wealth and Indigence stand side by side." This was an altruistic world governed by "Virtue" and "Peace," free of "selfish influences" (224-28).

Prince is only too aware that this is a "Transcendent Fiction," yet as fiction it functions both as a sobering, satirical counterpoint to the commodity-driven culture of England's urban centers, and an alternative reality toward which readers might aspire. It stands as a representative example of how instants of acute pleasure serve, in Prince and other laboring-class

poets of the period, to open up space for acts of imagination: freed from the surveillance and constraints of mundane industrial existence, the poet is at liberty to imagine, out loud, daring social configurations that run counter to the status quo. The pleasure such moments incite is neither submissive nor mute but generative and verbalized, constructive of radical possibility. If it constitutes a utopian dream, Prince's vision is still richly valuable for the reasons elaborated on earlier in this chapter: it contains the potential to induce in readers a remembrance of their full affective and imaginative capacities, what Marx would have called their "species being," and thus inspire them to renovate society in such a way that it would accommodate these newly recollected needs. The established social order was a contingent thing, an imaginative projection like any other, and idealized fictions like Prince's could startle readers into recognizing this and thus grasping its ripeness for overhaul. As vitally, though, Prince's poem represents a vision and set of sensations he can claim as exclusively his. Here in the perfect privacy of the countryside, a space paradoxically "secluded" even as it is limitlessly expansive, the poet acquires a body of sensations and experiences of which he might take sole possession, and which aren't circumscribed by institutional power. When Prince writes of the secluded "temple" or "vast pavilion" of the natural world in "The Poet's Sabbath" (201, 212), he may as well be speaking of the pavilion of his own body, an equally hallowed and private space that becomes the site of sensations to which he alone is privy, and which are prior to, and unsorted by, the logic of established authority. Immediate, acute, spontaneous, the body's sensations arise of their own accord and resist any artificial organizing principle imposed from without. In this poem as in others by Prince, they are seen to spark visionary glimpses onto better worlds.

These visionary moments often bring into focus the poet's most urgent concerns, revealing how they interlock to form a coherent vision. In "There is Beauty on Earth," a high-point from his poem-cycle *Lyrics for the People*, Prince depicts the working class as a people shut out from the sustenance—intellectual and biological both—that is the proper birthright of all human life. In part owing to a capitalistic system that is inherently exploitative and alienating, and in part to their own blindness to their surroundings, they have become fatally disjointed from the biosphere and the rhythms and laws that govern it: "There is freedom on earth; for a thousand glad wings / In ecstasy sweep o'er the mountains and plains" (17-18). But the poor, meanwhile, are "shackled through life," cut off from the unfettered exuberance that characterizes the outdoors—cut off, for that matter, from the very plenty that they themselves have labored to harvest (21). In the final stanza, though, Prince, again adopting the bardic voice of a Hebraic prophet, suddenly presents a window onto a utopian society in which these ills are joyously rectified:

A voice speaks within me I cannot control,
 Which tells of a time when these ills shall depart:
 When knowledge shall win its bright way to the soul,
 And beauty, like music, shall soften the heart;
 When plenty shall wait on the labours of all,
 And pleasure, with purity, sweeten each hour;
 When freedom shall spurn degradation and thrall,
 And man rise exulting in virtue and power! (25-32)

The power and significance of the stanza lies in the manner in which it harnesses knowledge, pleasure, beauty, freedom, and power, revealing them to be mutually constitutive. In Prince's utopia these abstractions function as an interpenetrating unit, each promoting and sustaining the others—the elevating pleasures of knowledge-acquisition raising people into an awareness of their own potential, humanizing them, and equipping them with the understanding they need to liberate themselves from "degradation and thrall." "The blessed time shall come," Coleridge had written in *Biographia Literaria* several decades before, "when truth itself shall be pleasure" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 136). Prince's own equation of truth with pleasure clearly had a Wordsworthian valence, outlined above—the one was productive of the other—but it also had a teleological edge consistent with Coleridge's assertion: the time would come when the actual world conformed to the idealized, constructed reality he imagined, and this would be the occasion for real joy.

Much of this sounds innocuous enough: conjuring utopian futures in one's poetry is one thing, but explicitly taking aim at the establishment and calling for immediate change is quite another. That Prince did not do this second thing very often is plain enough from his poetry, and appears to have resulted from his desire not to estrange his patronage. Kaye Kossick is clarifying on this count: "Much of Prince's work wears the deferential camouflage of the labouring-class poet who simply cannot *afford* to throw a pot of ink in the public's face. His rhetoric is fervently utopian, yet remains largely conciliatory, an excellent thing in the eyes of the establishment." It is quite true that Prince can be almost stunningly deferential at times—his panegyric on Queen Victoria, "My Country, My Queen" is perhaps the most glaring instance of this—yet his obsequiousness in these poems is counterbalanced by real invective voiced

elsewhere. That a certain kind of radicalism punctuates numerous poems by Prince is clear even from reading *Hours with the Muses* alone; Prince wanted social upheaval all right, even if he abjured violence as a means of effecting it. His melodramatic ballad, "The Death of the Factory Child," is probably the single most eviscerating example of this, a poem whose obloquy couched in heroic couplets cements its debt to the eighteenth century.

Even, however, when Prince is not being explicitly condemnatory, when sketching the idealistic visions to which he gravitates as if magnetically, his poetry retains a keen progressive edge. If reading it was a private endeavor, there was yet something collective and finally global in its reach, as there was in that of much laboring-class poetry composed during these decades. In part this is because of the socially constitutive power of illusion, the ability of utopian fictions to furnish readers' imaginations with the images, the psychic models, they require to guide their actions in the world—and the capacity of these same fictions to inspire pleasurable, enthusiastic feelings in readers. Though readers initially experienced these visions and the affects they stirred individually, it is important to add that utopian (or simply progressive) fictions have a powerful group-orienting capacity. Put simply, people rally around images and narratives, whose visionary and affective force provides a common base for social relations and collective action. Mike Sanders has usefully invoked one additional Marxist critic, Christopher Caudwell, whose *Illusion and Reality* is clarifying on this count. Caudwell hypothesizes that in early human society, people used poems as "phantastic objects" that served as bridges between "ideal illusion" and "material reality." Primitive harvest songs, for example, "phantastically portray[ed] the granaries bursting with grain," and thus motivated "the hard labour necessary to bring it into being" (Caudwell 34). Poetry, whether it addresses itself in the first place to humans as

individuals or groups, can furnish them with the shared mind-pictures—and the common sentiments these fuel—that they need to assert themselves concertedly as one: it "raises the whole communal feeling of society to a new place of complexity"; more, it "makes possible new levels of conscious sympathy, understanding, and affection between men" (Caudwell 174).

The fact that laboring-class newspapers emphatically celebrated both the Italian *Risorgimento* and the American abolitionist movement, in certain cases even reprinting American abolitionist poems on their own pages, suggests that this collective feeling was international in scope. We need only look to the reprinting of the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier, for instance, the American Quaker abolitionist poet, in *The Northern Star* to realize that many British laborers thought of themselves as belonging to a global insurrectionary community—a community held together in part by poetic art and the affects (and images) it transmitted (Murphy 125). America, while for one anonymous critic "the only democratic land of liberty and equality on the face of the globe," was yet guilty of slavery, of course; and given this, "the only poets America has yet produced" are, for another writer in the *Northern Star*, "those who have devoted themselves to the Anti-Slavery cause" ("American Poets"). One could cite countless other examples of work by radical poets from across Europe, moreover—France, Germany—being recirculated on the pages of these same journals. Wordsworth had prophesied in his 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* a historical moment in which the affect produced by poetry would assume a border-transcending power, uniting humanity itself:

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the poet binds

together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. ("1802 Preface," 396)

Here then, in the pages of the major British laboring-class newspapers of the 1840s, his vision was being dramatically if fleetingly fulfilled. Here were global communities of the downtrodden and exploited who were, indeed, "fastened by the affections" to one another (*The Prelude* 1.611), owing in part to the images and sentiments propagated in literature they enthusiastically recirculated. We can readily imagine that Wordsworth, whose 1850 death coincided almost exactly with the demise of Chartism, would have recoiled by this point in his career at such a realization of that early vision. And while Chartism itself lost steam after around 1848, its radical energies gradually absorbed by British liberalism, the international character of its push for upheaval, and the central place of pleasurable affect in that enterprise, would reappear in subsequent Victorian poetry. The work of Swinburne, whose *Songs Before Sunrise* is a book-length panegyric on the *Risorgimento*, reflects this, as we will discover in my fourth chapter.

Chapter 2: Robert Browning's Poetics of Fleshly Enjoyment

Introduction

Owing in part to Rudy's *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*, scholars have recently become a great deal more attuned to the astonishing corporeality of Victorian poetry. In the Victorians, suggests Rudy, one witnesses "an all-out engagement with a poetics of the body," a phenomenon that manifests itself at a formal level: poetry was thought to exercise its peculiar power over readers above all through its rhythms, quasi-electrical jolts of sensation fraught with "physiological truths," of which the body itself served as arbiter (Rudy 7). In poetic language—rhythmic, sensuous, charged with meaning that insisted on being interpreted physiologically—lay the promise of bringing individuals, as well as disparate social classes, into uneasily close proximity with one another. Poetry could even, in a "post-Darwinian, post-Maxwellian" era, furnish readers with instants of transcendent union with the natural world (Rudy 15). Rudy's book might, in its own turn, be said to have grown out of at least two prior, equally compelling studies. The first of these is Kirstie Blair's *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (2006), which argues that the Victorians conceived of poetic rhythm as an "organic force" capable of influencing the breathing and heartbeat of poet and reader both—and, like *Electric Meters*, traces how the Victorians understood "the transmission of affect from poet to poem and poem to reader" (Blair 16). The second is Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (1999), which, coining the term "linguistic materialism," asserts that certain Victorian writers imagined their poetic corpora

as quasi-fleshly "bod[ies] of writing that materialize through and as meter" (Prins 150). These studies all reflect the increasing impact of the physiological sciences on poetry as the nineteenth century wore on. But they also underscore the growing assumption among Victorian poets that verse itself constituted a corporeal body of a sort, and that its efficacy depended in large part on its ability to affect readers at a somatic level.

Curiously, Robert Browning, though he lies squarely at the center of the Victorian poetic canon, and though his work is as thoroughly shot through with questions about embodiment as that of any of his contemporaries, has remained absent from these discussions. Rudy's book, to cite one example, is mostly preoccupied with poetic voices at the periphery of the canon: the centerpiece and arguably most gripping section of *Electric Meters* is a long chapter on the Spasmodic poets Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith, whose metrical experiments are inextricable from the concerns of the British working classes at mid-century. Yet the fact remains that in the 1960s and 70s, when Browning studies experienced its first resurgence following the almost wholesale denigration of Victorian poetry by T.S. Eliot and the New Critics, the poet's investment in corporeality—especially his interest in embodied pleasure, both the pleasures of sexual enjoyment and the felt pleasures he envisaged his own poetry providing readers—was all but proverbial. In his biography *Browning* (1972), Roy Gridley offers the useful reminder that Browning's "contemporaries sometimes found him to be the champion of illicit sexual fulfillment" (Gridley 9). Meanwhile Isobel Armstrong, in a book chapter entitled "Browning and Victorian Poetry of Sexual Love" from her own influential anthology *Robert Browning* (1972), suggests that "Browning's poetry has a more than usually strong awareness of sexuality." His love poetry, particularly, possesses a "confident erotic intensity" owing to the

fact that he "draws with freedom on sexual imagery" and because of "the thrusting, kinaesthetic movement of his verse, and his way of making a poem look as if it is spilling over unmediated sense-impressions with a kind of still-wet perceptual freshness." This is a combination of effects that "makes the poetry a peculiarly sensitive register of physical feeling" (Armstrong 268). If Browning is acutely interested in the nuances—psychological, social, even philosophical—of sexual activity, then it is likewise true that his own poetry, often intensely mimetic, owes much of its bewitching power to a set of formal and aesthetic decisions meant to reproduce, in the reader, something of the exhilarating pleasure detailed in the poems themselves. These pleasures are, as I hope to show, instrumental to the poetry's capacity to communicate to the reader its intellectual and spiritual burden.

Notwithstanding, most current scholarship on Browning remains largely indifferent to the poet's fascination with fleshly pleasure and powerfully somatic understanding of reading. A special edition of *Victorian Poetry* devoted solely to Browning and published in Winter 2012 spanned a considerable range of topics—the poet's shrewd if well-concealed insights into the European revolutions of 1848, the origins of the dramatic monologue in religious hermeneutics, Browning's influence on Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling—but was essentially silent on the importance of physiology to Browning's work. One article, Erik Gray's "*Men and Women* and the Arts of Love," while a skillful treatment of the shifting relations among love and the various arts in Browning's famous volume, is intent on thinking about eros mostly as a philosophical concept—a thing initially presented in opposition to the arts but ultimately "seen as naturally affiliated" with them (Gray 522). Even Gray's analysis of a monologue as brazenly sexual as "The Last Ride Together" seems uninterested in confronting the concrete reality of the acts

detailed in the poem. Gray is drawn to the poem because it demonstrates "that the relation between love and art is more complex than the speaker admits," and that "both love and art fail or succeed in similar ways, and for similar reasons" (524-25). Nor, for that matter, is a turn toward the often breathtaking physicality of Browning's verse—whether by linking it up to contemporary innovations in the physiological sciences, or to Victorian poetic theory, or by examining it in the context of more current body theory—mentioned among any of the potential "Future Directions for Robert Browning Studies" that constitute the "Virtual Roundtable" included in the same issue of *Victorian Poetry*.

Building on recent work on form and on the striking physiological turn in Victorian poetry and poetic theory, I will suggest here that Browning, however idiosyncratic he undoubtedly is as a thinker and poetic stylist, nevertheless shares with so many of his contemporaries a conception of pleasure as a precipitant of knowledge-acquisition, even, in certain privileged instances, a vehicle of transcendence. Like Rudy's poets, Browning contributes to a broader trend in Victorian poetry and aesthetics toward viewing sensation, particularly pleasurable sensation, as inherently epistemological. Browning is thus a decidedly unorthodox Christian poet for whom pleasure and not suffering is the dominant feature of corporeality. Embodied pleasure emerges, for him, not as an infirmity to be eschewed but a conduit for conveying divine truths and a means of ensuring these truths will stick. Very often, we will see, he turns to music as a model for demonstrating how fleshly enjoyment may be productive of spiritual understanding; how the evanescent, the tactile, the seemingly degraded elements of quotidian existence point the way toward the divine in experiences that culminate in moments of timelessness. An overwhelmingly physiological understanding of music permeates

Browning's verse from approximately *Men and Women* onward. Music for him is a corporeal phenomenon that appeals to listeners via transitory bodily pleasure: in the pleasures of melody and of rhythm, the sudden flights of the improvised fugue, the ordered pulsations of chant, there inhered divine truths that entered human subjects by way of the flesh and subsequently settled in the brain. "Music," Samuel Johnson had written a century earlier, "is the only sensual pleasure without vice" (Brownell 16). Browning, though he does not share Johnson's conviction that sensual enjoyment is innately corrupt, is akin to him in figuring music as an embodied pleasure. As such it possesses, for Browning, a pedagogical value; it manifests itself at a sensory level, and sensation, it turns out, is a fertile ground for cognition and spiritual apprehension. "[T]he soul," Browning has St. John the Evangelist admonish in "A Death in the Desert," "learns diversely from the flesh! / With flesh, that hath so little time to stay, / And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise, / Expect prompt teaching" (252-55). A considerable swath of Browning's poetry, I will suggest, endeavors to substantiate this thesis.

One of my main assumptions will be that in theorizing about music Browning is, as one might expect, indirectly theorizing about poetry—and, to be certain, there exist ample instances of other Victorian poets thinking through the two arts in tandem. According to Coventry Patmore in his *Essay on English Metrical Law*, prosody represented poetry's musical dimension, and was also what gave a poem its corporeal aspect. "Art, indeed," he argues, invoking Hegel, "must have a body as well as a soul; and the higher and purer the spiritual, the more powerful and unmistakable should be the corporeal element." For Patmore as for Hegel, the "corporeal element" in verse consisted in meter; meter endowed the spiritual substance of poetry with an embodied presence in the world. "True genius," he quotes from Hegel's "Lectures on

Aesthetics," "disposes with ease of sensible materials, and moves therein as in a native element, which instead of depressing or hindering, exalts and supports its flight" (Patmore 7). In a seeming paradox, embodiment, rather than weighing down the spiritual germ of a work of art, is the facilitator, even the prerequisite to whatever measure of transcendence it succeeds in achieving. Scholars have tended all too frequently to conclude that Hegel's stance on poetry privileges mind and spirit over physicality, yet Armstrong, in a recent essay entitled "Meter and Meaning," suggest the contrary: "For [Hegel], poetry, because it depends on language and the arbitrary or 'capricious' signifier (unlike, for instance, the painter or sculptor, who depends on physical materials), is the art most prone to drift into philosophy and abstraction, and for that very reason poetry has to be rescued by the intensity of its sensuous life" (Armstrong 31). All art needed embodiment. With poetry, which found its corporeal sheath in versification, the system of rhythmic units and intervals that made it akin to music, that necessity became most urgent.

All the same, it would be reductive to claim that the properties of music correlate exactly with those of Browning's own poetry, or that Browning wishes us to see the analogue as a perfect one. In fact, in one sense it is surprising that a poet as proverbially hard, his monologues so many riddles that dawn on one slowly and with repeated readings, should turn to music as a kindred medium to his own, praising it for, among other things, the immediacy of its impact. If anything we might expect this of Tennyson, whose poetry derives much of its power from its mellifluousness. To this one might counter that Browning's discordant, sometimes sprawling poetry in fact resembles the more avant-garde musical compositions of the second half of the nineteenth century, by Wagner and Mahler especially—though he seldom if ever overtly engages with these composers. (Only in rare instances, such as the allusion to Schumann in the climax of

Fifine at the Fair, does Browning invoke contemporary music, strangely preferring to resurrect eighteenth-century composers such as Baldassaro Galuppi.) Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that for Browning poetry is poised midway between music and visual art, as the ekphrastic monologues of the 1850s, alternately about painting and music, hint. As I hope to show in this chapter, Browning is especially interested in how poetry possesses both music's fleshly appeal and its temporal elasticity, particularly its capacity to convey the sense of slowing down, approaching outright stillness, he associates with instants of heightened pleasure—moments that carry the mind out of its customary, instrumentalized habits of time-keeping. But it also has the capacity to evoke human personalities and show them caught up in episodes of high drama, situations that reveal the minute gradations of their inner selves. Early modern painters such as Caravaggio, making use of *tenebrism* and *chiaroscuro*, had captured their human subjects during moments of crisis, instants of maximum tension and suspense that offered epiphanic windows into who they really were. Browning's own early modern painter-poems, none more clearly than "Fra Lippo Lippi," do just this but add the element of time, allowing for clarifying flashbacks and, in certain cases, for the characters themselves to develop and deepen in the course of their own monologues. It is this dimension of time, as well as a tactile appeal, that poetry shares with music. We will see below how the ending of "Fra Lippo Lippi," by making the typically static medium of paint processual—animating the figures in a prospective picture, altering it fundamentally from one moment to the next—epitomizes this. It shows poetry's ability to balance the referential, image-making power of painting with the temporal quality of music.

That embodiment should be the precondition of spiritual searching; that somatic experience, far from a barrier to the absolute, should be an indispensable means of arriving

there—this is a crucial premise that makes up an important part of Browning's metaphysics and, in turn, his understanding of poetry. Patmore completed his *Essay* in 1857, two years after the publication of *Men and Women*. And while I do not mean to suggest he was in any way influenced by Browning's book, the overlap in their respective concepts of poetry—their shared stake (Patmore explicitly, Browning implicitly) in what Prins has identified as "linguistic materialism"—is suggestive and telling (Prins 117). It hints at a vision of poetics, traceable at least back to Hegel, that by mid-century had assumed a potent grip over Victorian verse and would continue to exercise its influence, by Prins's account, in the works of Swinburne and others as the century progressed. From the flesh, Browning exhorts us, we are to expect prompt teaching; and it stood to reason that poetry, if it was to be the revelatory medium he clearly imagined it ought, should assume the status of a fleshly entity, should tether spiritual facts to the felt stuff of meter and sound—and, moreover, should operate on audiences via a readerly experience that was itself intensely tactile. It should prove itself on the pulses. Ideally it epitomized a "putting of the infinite into the finite," as Browning had famously articulated it in a letter to John Ruskin (Woolford and Karlin 132). The moment of poetic utterance entailed an incarnational merging of spirit with the material substance of rhythmic language, a process that had an obvious Christian resonance for Browning. The merging was necessarily imperfect—language was an ill-fitting garment with which to jacket the absolute—and Browning's own poetic idiom, scabrous and convoluted, seems specially fitted to make this manifest. His poems are rife with images of fleshly bodies that double as self-reflexive commentaries on their own status as corporeal constructs, and on the incarnational act that Browning sees as integral to poetic creation. In the opening of "Karshish, the Arab Physician," the titular doctor professes

himself a student of "man's-flesh," which God has "Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste /
To coop up and keep down on earth a space / That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul"

(2-6). He is

inquisitive how pricks and cracks

Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,

Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip

Back and rejoin its source before the term. . . (9-12)

This is an apt description of Browning's own verses, fissured, awkward vessels—made to feel a constant succession of bumpy, uneven "stresses"—that scarcely manage to envelope the spiritual or intellectual kernel their creator has breathed into them—or that, alternatively, the animating reader exhales into them in speaking them aloud. Yet in keeping, again, with Patmore's Hegelian reading of form, Browning's poetic "bodies," however ungainly, provide their more ethereal content with precisely the ballast it needs to become stabilized, to grow steady and purposeful. "Lyric form," Stefan Hawlin observes in discussing Browning, "incarnates the pleasure of the beautiful"; without it, poetry "flounders in abstraction," "loses sensuous intensity, and so loses all power to seriously attract or move us" (Hawlin 121). Much the same appears to hold true for actual, physical bodies. Lazarus, as Karshish is careful to note, is jubilant to be back in his own flesh again in spite of whatever "ecstasy" he enjoys while out of it—and we might infer that corporeality, however imperfect, is not only a source of real joy but a reservoir of information that assists us in inducing God's existence.

Browning's emphasis on the centrality of physiology to cognition, including the enterprise of reading and understanding poetry, finds a provocative analogue among certain prominent voices in body theory. In her *Volatile Bodies*, discussed in my introduction, Elizabeth Grosz, in a sustained critique of Cartesian dualism—its hierarchical privileging of the cerebral over the bodily, its gendering of the former as masculine and the latter feminine, its insistence on seeing the two as extricable at all—imagines the epistemological possibilities that might be opened up by collapsing these binarisms. "[S]ome kind of understanding of *embodied subjectivity*, of *psychical corporeality*, needs to be developed," she argues. Such a new paradigm would enable us to counter the traditional humanistic tendency to resist corporeality to "a predictable, knowable transparency," to ignore "its constitutive role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions, and psychical representations" (Grosz 22, 10). One of the points of this chapter is that Browning belongs to a development in Victorian poetry and aesthetics that compellingly anticipates these formulations—that, in a number of the poems I will examine below, he helps furnish us with a vocabulary and storehouse of tropes that already contain within them the germ of the understanding that Grosz and other like-minded theorists envisage. The parallel needs to be qualified: Browning doesn't, I don't think, ascribe "primacy [to] corporeality" (Grosz viii); his poetry, notoriously dense and difficult, is as much an intellectual work-out, a strenuous exercise in deduction and suspicious hermeneutics, as a sensuous immersion. Yet there are passages in his oeuvre that make it clear Browning conceived of these things as inextricable in the end—that "flesh helps soul" as much as "soul helps flesh," as Rabbi Ben Ezra asserts, and that sensation is therefore constitutive of intellection and spiritual discernment, even as these latter processes inform sensory experience in their turn.

We can see a shrewd forecasting of body theory, and of antifoundational thinking more generally, in Browning's persistent refusal to figure embodied experience in ahistorical terms. Transitory enjoyment may be a springboard for transcendence, yet Browning's poetry betrays, again and again, a deep mistrust of residing in absolutes that can seem almost poststructuralist, and that lends credence to Herbert Tucker's still-influential thesis, in *Browning's Beginnings* (1980), that Browning is a proto-Derridean poet who thrives on process and deferral rather than stable meaning. As I will demonstrate below, a great deal of his corpus is shaped by a pattern of ascent toward a transcendent realm followed by a descent again into the socio-historical world, and with it a reminder of the actual circumstances that gave rise to the transcendence in the first place. This movement supplies one of Browning's most potent critiques of Romanticism. If Browning's monologists aspire to instances of stillness, Wordsworthian spots of time that carry them above the suffering and irresolvable contradictions of historical experience—Browning calls these "infinite moments"—then Browning insists on pulling them back to the social world again, reminding them, and us readers, of the context (often a sinister context) in which they occurred. Browning is far too much a poet of this world to allow himself to linger at any length in a sphere of Platonic absolutes. It is significant that many of his most terrifying and maladjusted characters are men who aspire to break completely from the social world—men like the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover," who tries to inhabit an instant of sexual pleasure indefinitely, a "spot of time" in the most ominous sense, even where it comes at the cost of a human life. The "Romantic ideology," as Jerome McGann articulated it in his 1983 study of the same name, consists in the illusion that one can transcend the "wreckage of history," deploying the imagination to escape "a corrupting appropriation by 'the world' of politics and money"

(McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* 13). It was in a sense left to Browning to expose the danger inherent in this enterprise. Browning teaches us that windows of transcendence are inescapably politicized to begin with, and that we ignore this fact at our own and others' peril.

What I am going to argue here, finally, is that Browning cannot accurately be called an antifoundational writer. Each of the first three poems analyzed in this chapter attests to how thoroughly Browning is invested in the idea of a permanent layer of reality that endures beneath the Heraclitean flux, and of the role of the body in helping us toward an understanding of it. But he remains keenly aware that the experiences that bring people into close contact with this reality—experiences figured as pleasurable and, in Abt Vogler's case, ecstatic—are situated in a complex web of social interaction that can render them deeply disconcerting. In certain of Browning's most disturbing monologues, these moments are made possible through the help of a female character whose voice we never hear and who remains tellingly barred from whatever transcendent insight is granted the speaker. The last section of this chapter will be devoted to exploring instances of this. One might say, then, that in Browning's poetry we can glimpse an uneasy marriage of certain key tenets of body theory with the ideals of a radical Protestantism. It expresses a yearning for transcendence tempered by an awareness of the socio-political circumstances that conspire to make transcendence possible. And it displays a prescient conviction in an embodied subjectivity that for Browning serves as a mode of gleaning knowledge which can lead us to a keener apprehension of God. He is a poet, finally, much of whose work is situated neither exclusively in the embodied world of social exchange nor in an ultimate reality above or apart from this one, but in the border region between the two. In tracing a continuous upward and downward trajectory between these polarities, his work invites us to

consider what is involved in shuttling humans from the earthly to the divine; how poetry among all the arts is uniquely equipped to facilitate this process—and, as importantly, what is required in coming back again, re-acclimating oneself to the exigencies of this world in light of the enlarged knowledge one has picked up along the way.

"Abt Vogler"

"Abt Vogler" and "The Last Ride Together" are both poems about pleasure that, considered together, suggest a kinship between artistic creation and reception, on the one hand, and sexual passion on the other. The first poem, through an extended if implicit analogy to music, suggests poetic texts operate on audiences by physiological means: like music in Browning's conception, poetry transmits acute bodily pleasure freighted with spiritual knowledge, communicating divine facts by sensational means. Both arts are, at their inspired best, fusions of synchrony with diachrony, illustrations of how "the fleeting," as Don Juan phrases it in *Fifine at the Fair*, "lives to die into the fixed": both offer us transitory thrills felt along our flesh that turn out, ideally, to be conveyors of transcendent facts with the potential to remain with us perpetually. Ultimately "Abt Vogler," like each poem I examine in this chapter, demonstrates Browning's refusal to permit his protagonist to dwell in a place of transcendence indefinitely: whatever ecstatic and visionary moment he is privileged with in the course of the monologue, Vogler is forced in the end to come back to earth, returning to the fleshliness that helped precipitate the vision to begin with. Characteristically, Browning proves as interested in the aftereffects of visionary experience as the vision itself. How, he asks, do we return to and get

on with embodied life in the here and now, and what do we do with the new knowledge we have acquired?

Approximately the first two-thirds of "Abt Vogler," however, evoke a rapt, sexualized instance of musical improvisation by the titular keyboardist. The experience is an ecstatic one, and through the tactile pleasure it affords, Vogler (and his listeners) gain access to an ultimate reality in which the present moment widens to encompass past and future both, and vast expanses of space can be swiftly and easily traversed. In his "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* written nine years later, Pater would exhort readers to "burn always with a hard, gemlike flame," to "maintain" a state of perpetual "ecstasy" since doing so was their sole hope of "expanding that interval" of time they had been allotted. Through experiences of keen pleasure they might attain "a quickened, multiplied consciousness," condensing "as many pulsations as possible into the given time" in order to gain a sense of temporal dilation. Pleasure, for Pater as for Browning, possesses a temporality all its own; carrying the mind out of its customary, instrumental habits of time-keeping, it promises a slowing-down in which each particular instant seems gravid with experience, and the remorseless march of linear time is needfully suspended. It promises, in other words, windows of joyous release that, "by a lifted horizon," seem to "set the spirit free for a moment," offering the kind of liberatory release that Kant had written of a century before when describing the contemplation of beauty in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 237-38). For Pater this slowing down is dilatory in its purpose, an effort at packing each transitory instant with as many "pulsations" as one can, perhaps attaining, we might infer, the illusion that one is postponing the endless acreage of death.

Browning, by contrast, is interested in how the pleasurable instant might be possessed of an eternity all its own—less in how it provides a reprieve from process than in how it might constitute its own kind of timelessness. Deliberately, he zeroes in on forms of art that are evanescent and not capable of being precisely duplicated—in "Abt Vogler," on a keyboardist's improvised music-making, "the conception of an hour" (76) that, despite its maker's wish that it "might tarry" (9), is gone in an instant, "never to be again" (60). This not Keats's Grecian Urn, thronged with painted figures whose likenesses survive from one generation to the next, nor his nightingale whose song achieves immortality because it is inscribed, as it were, into the bird's DNA and will therefore persist in the mouths of all future nightingales as it has done since antiquity. Vogler's improvised piece is already finished by the time the poem begins, and he can only lament that it lacked the solidity and permanence of King Solomon's creations in Jerusalem, similarly divinely inspired:

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
 Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
 Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
 Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,
 Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,
 Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed,—
 Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
 And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved! (1-8)

Vogler imagines himself an Orphic figure capable of manipulating the external world to his own ends, much as Solomon did by invoking Yahweh's "ineffable name." The poem itself is the only record of an inspired outpouring of musical ideas that has already extinguished itself by the time of this first stanza. Though its rolling, elongated, often enjambed lines mimic the free-floating and rhapsodic quality of the music they approximate, the poem is only an elegy of a performance now through. Like so many of Browning's poems, particularly those that take some form of pleasure as their topic ("Fra Lippo Lippi," "Meeting at Night,"), "Abt Vogler" is thus retrospective: situating itself in the immediate aftermath of an electrifying experience, still in the midst of its ghostly trace, the poem sets itself the task of explaining how it happened and expounding on its significance. Vogler thinks of his art as pleasure-driven: as Solomon sought through his own architectural constructs "to pleasure the princess he loved," Vogler purveys a version of pleasure that is both eroticized and laden with visionary import. If, like fleshly enjoyment, music-derived pleasure is evanescent, it is also revealed to be a window onto the absolute: "For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more far or near," he writes of the climactic phase of his improvisation (32). In the inspired moment, a "passion" whose excitement Vogler likens to "conception" itself, the musician reaches an elusive correspondence with the cosmos, one in which the coordinates of his extemporized piece seem to align with the stars themselves. It is a moment of oneness with the creator, a merging of earthly and divine that appears to obliterate distance itself: "The emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth," while earth, in an artfully punning phrase, "had done her best. . .to scale the sky" (27-8). A stretching of spatial boundaries occurs, in other words, until the terms "far" and "near" cease to have meaning, the fragmentary particulars of creation appearing to be as one. Vogler

reaches a holistic perspective in this climactic fourth stanza that he is anxious to sustain into the stanza that follows:

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
 Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
 Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
 Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
 Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
 But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
 What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
 And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too. (33-
 40)

The initial phrase, "Nay more," with its sexual connotations—and clear echo of the fourth stanza's "Not half!"—make evident that there is a temporal expansion occurring here as well as a spatial one. Having reached this ecstatic peak in the music, Vogler prolongs it as much, seemingly, as he can, widening the interval of time to accommodate the spiritual presences who gradually come to dwell in his wrought sound-structure. His music is capable for a moment of offering a glimpse of an apocalyptic reality to be made apparent again at the Last Judgment; within this dwelling space, the long-deceased take their place alongside the living, as well as unborn presences of future ages whom Vogler's godlike imagination calls into being. This is, Vogler maintains, "the finger of God, a flash of the will that can, / Existent behind all laws, that

made them and, lo, they are!" (49-50). That much of the poem is written in dactyls is apt, since *dactyl*, as Browning surely knew, is Greek for finger. What the poem presents readers is, in fact, a relentless cascade of dactyls, or fingers—of God acting through Vogler—pounding out a rhapsodic meditation in poetic language that imitates the music which inspired it. They become craggy and imperfect dactyls as the poem progresses, likely underscoring the fragility of the holistic vision of reality that Vogler achieves, and the difficulty of sustaining it. Still, the poem's relentless rush of textual "fingers" are a compelling example of form merging with content, and thus of the poem itself aspiring to the condition of music, to invoke another Paterian axiom. It is as if Browning were tacitly signaling to us, through his choice of metrical units, that God's finger inhered in this poem, that there were something of divinity in the text itself and not merely the music that prompted it—the *here* of the above quotation referring, reflexively, to the poem, the verbal record of the piece as well as the piece itself. In "A Toccata of Galuppi's," too, Browning had intimated that music, and implicitly poetry, were eroticized phenomena that affected audiences by acutely tactile means—*toccata* deriving from the Italian *toccare*, "to touch." In "Abt Vogler" he goes still further, embedding tactility into the poem's very form and thereby suggesting an embodied conception of reading. The poem reaches out and touches us.

That tactility—evanescent, registered in pulses of wave-like pleasure that resemble the poem's own undulant lines—is the precondition of whatever stillness Vogler locates during the fugue. Vogler undergoes an apotheosis to be sure, exposing something transcendent, but the revelation occurs by the way, a byproduct of movement. This is not a painting but an act of music-making, like poetry a temporal art: "For think, had I painted the whole, / Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth" (43-44). The diction is important: we are never

permitted to forget that the holistic vision that takes shape in the middle stanzas emerges from process, a fact that calls to mind Browning's admonition to Ruskin that all art finally amounts to a putting of the infinite within the finite. The poem's subtitle, "*(After he has been extemporizing upon the musical instrument of his invention)*," is telling on this count. Vogler's music is "extempore" in the conventional sense of being improvised; but it is also *ex-tempore* in the more literal Latin sense of being *out of time*—a phrase that could mean "atemporal" but might as easily mean "issuing from time," a product of flux.

Like poetry, then, music is a processual and keenly tactile medium that seeks after instants of stillness amid movement. Vogler's comparison of himself to a passionate lover toward the poem's end underscores the eroticism of this experience, its seductive sway. This is a form of rhetoric that compels audiences with an immediacy and directness Browning clearly envies and wishes to claim for his own, verbal art. Vogler's improvisation has the effect of stunning listeners into an immediate submission: "Ye have heard it and seen: consider and bow the head!" (56). Non-representational, it nevertheless comes to his audiences bearing the weight of cosmic truths inscribed in the notes themselves and the rhythms that govern them. It offers a concentrated pleasure that, circumventing reason, impresses the word of God onto subjects instantaneously, insinuating itself into their very bodies and commanding their prompt assent. Scholars customarily to think of Browning as a poet preoccupied with painting among the other arts, but his ekphrastic poems about music are at least as revealing albeit less numerous. Together they suggest a fantasy of infusing spiritual facts into recipients by direct physiological means.

a perpetual present, is a useful point of reference here.² Browning almost invariably pulls his monologues back to earth in the end, but in memory's perpetual *now* these windows of insight, and the timeless reality they laid bare, persist. The word *conception* helps reinforce all this, as it hints at the process whereby moral truths are infused in people via an experience of heightened, often fleshly pleasure that comes to fruition later on. It is as though, implanted in the memory, they germinated in time, continuing to make people palpably better well after they have returned to quotidian life. In this way Browning helps moralize bodily pleasure.

That "Abt Vogler" concludes with the speaker's returning to his "resting-place," "The C Major of this life," is significant given that the key of C major was historically referred to by music theorists as the *modo lascivio*, and was in fact forbidden altogether in church music until the fourteenth century (Gay 153). The "C Major of this life" is emblematic of the experiential plane on which Browning's (and Vogler's) art—coarse, earthy, fascinated by the apparently trifling and vulgar—begins to take shape. Wantonness is the wellspring of spiritual and imaginative questing. If Vogler shifts to other, more rarefied modes in the course of his imaginative flight, he is careful to note that he both begins and ends in C Major. Nor is he dejected to return to his "resting-place" after touring "alien ground" and "surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep." Rather, his contentment at the poem's end makes him an important analogue to Browning's Lazarus in "Karshish, the Arab Physician," who, after abandoning his body in a "rapturous" communing with the deity, is intensely relieved to return to his flesh and have a protracted lease on life.

² See especially Book X of Augustine's *Confessions*. O'Donnell, James Joseph. *Augustine Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

"The Last Ride Together"

Where "Abt Vogler" argues for the superiority of music to the other arts, "The Last Ride Together" asserts the primacy of sexual pleasure over art of any sort—even as, implicitly, it suggests important commonalities between sexual activity and these other arts, particularly poetry. That the poem possesses a pronounced sexual dimension, the "ride" it describes being a bawdy double entendre, will be my assumption here. Perhaps the best way into the poem is to consider it as both a descendent and modification of the Wordsworthian concept of pleasure set forth in the 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* and in *The Prelude*. Like Wordsworth's, Browning's poetry aspires toward spots of time (Browning calls them, among other things, "eternal instants"), pivotal moments in his characters' experiences when their lives seem consummated, the essence of reality uncovered, and they feel themselves carried outside the propulsive current of linear time. The moments are accompanied—often engendered in the first place—by a rush of pleasure that is patently embodied: pleasure acts as the index of these experiences in retrospect, an affective bookmark that enables one to look back, isolate, and identify the shaping instants long after they are over, and finally to derive sustenance from them. But Browning, a poet far more at home in the coarse, quotidian facts of this world, approaches fleshliness with a candor and fascination largely alien to Wordsworth. Still, the two poets are akin in that both cleave to the sublimely pleasurable instant as a window onto an apocalyptic reality; and, moreover, their shared conviction in the capacity of memory to retain and resurrect these instants, which act as the durable beads along which human identity comes to be strung. When Browning writes of "the instant made eternity," he means not merely that pleasurable

experience can lift us out of our customary modes of comprehending time but that it becomes distilled in memory and, potentially, in poetic language. Poetry, owing to its narrative and descriptive power, as well as its own capacity to manipulate time and reveal its elasticity, turns out to be uniquely suited to conveying these experiences—Browning's poetry, in its rhythmic irregularity, doubly so.

"The Last Ride Together" makes it clear from the outset that it is concerned with an event which has already receded into the past, beginning as it does with a piece of reported speech:

I said – Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
 Since now at length my fate I know,
 Since nothing all my love avails,
 Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be –
 My whole heart rises up to bless
 Your name in pride and thankfulness!
 Take back the hope you gave, -- I claim
 Only a memory of the same,
 -- And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me. (1-11)

Like so many of Browning's love poems ("Love Among the Ruins," "Two in the Campagna," e.g.), this one is situated in the aftermath of something triumphantly great. (Even

"Abt Vogler" can be said to take place amid the rubble of the now-toppled sound structure its speaker has only lately constructed.) Yet instead of the wreckage of a civilization, say, "The Last Ride Together" occurs amid the ruins of a failed love-relationship—indeed, a failed life; its scale is far more modest, its concerns more intimate. In an eleven-line stanza of almost uniformly iambic pentameter lines, the speaker describes what will turn out to be a quasi-monetary exchange, something that becomes gradually clearer in the light of other financial diction later in the poem: he has purchased a last instance of sex—and, importantly, the memory thereof—at the cost of all his future wishes for a lastingly satisfying relationship with the woman he addresses. He "claims" as a kind of compensation a "last ride" that is to serve as a consolation prize for the romance in which he had invested his hopes. The stanza's final line is tellingly paradoxical: he requests his mistress's leave for "one more last ride"—a hint, perhaps, that their relationship has weathered many such purported endings, endings marked by a final, valedictory instance of love-making—or, equally likely, that sexual union itself ideally induces a state of mind in which past and future seem all but obliterated; it represents an "ending" insofar as, when we are in it, the immediacy and intensity of present pleasure eclipses any before or after, and, for the speaker of "Last Ride," comes to stand as the ultimate expression of meaning and importance in life. It is an experience beside which all human striving and achievement, artistic and otherwise, appear trivial and futile; anticipation itself—the habitual human need to carve out desired outcomes which invariably fail to live up to the designs that inspired them, or simply fall into decay and desuetude—emerges as foolish and deluded in comparison with the satisfying *now* of embodied pleasure. "Why, all men strive and who succeeds?" wonders the speaker. He goes on:

I thought, All labour, yet no less
 Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
 Look at the end of work, contrast
 The petty Done, the Undone vast,
 This present of theirs with the hopeful past!

I hoped she would love me. Here we ride. (50-5)

Like the Venetians of "A Toccata of Galuppi's," the speaker substitutes a philosophy of decadence for an attitude of deferral. And while he harbors his own version of sublimity (he speaks of being "sublimated"), it runs counter to Wordsworth's, which, as we noted in the introductory chapter, is predicated on postponement. Browning's poem admittedly locates sublimity within a larger context of motion; like "Abt Vogler" it hints that process is the precondition of immortality, of fixity. Yet the poem revises Wordsworth in urging that present indulgence rather than deferral is the ideal posture in which to perceive sublimity. Browning is preoccupied with movement, to be sure—and it is true, as Herbert Tucker argues in *Browning's Beginnings*, that meaning tends to occur "by the way" in Browning, a byproduct of process; but motion is not the same as expectation or postponement, and in "Last Ride" it becomes synonymous with embodied delight in the here and now (Tucker 12). As a poem about fleshly pleasure, "Last Ride" offers a compelling model for how movement can be a means toward eternity. This is because it advertises a kind of *speed*, a "flying pace," to be attained through corporeal enjoyment, which causes time's intervals to appear expanded by virtue of their being over-rife with experience, and thus gives a sense that time itself has slowed down. The poem is

akin to certain of the *carpe diem* poems of the seventeenth century, which Browning knew only too well, in that it asserts a joyous indulgence in sexual pleasure can yield a keener, intensified state of consciousness in which the lover gains the perception of having outpaced time: "Thus, though we cannot make our sun stand still," Marvell had written in "To His Coy Mistress," "[y]et we will make him run" (45-6). Browning's poems about fleshly pleasure, none more than "Last Ride," aspire toward this stillness, and do so through a comparable kind of speed, a quickened pace that gives rise to a distinct, protracted temporality. In "Meeting at Night" Browning had written another, more fleeting poem that likewise deploys tropes of swift travel over vast geographies to capture the experience of sexual encounter:

The grey sea and the long black land;
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;
 And the startled little waves that leap
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow
 And quench its speed in the slushing sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
 And blue spurt of a lighted match,
 And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,

Than the two hearts beating each to each! (1-12)

Here, in one of those rare, unadorned Wordsworthian lyrics Browning appears to have permitted himself, there occurs a similar approximation of an orgasmic moment as a strenuous journey in which the speaker covers wide expanses of space. Space functions as a stand-in for time, the huge stretches of land and sea emblematic of long temporal intervals that the speaker, in his determined "speed," proves capable of traversing. Equally significant, in light of this, is the final line, which suggests that this is an act whose duration can finally be measured only by the rhythms of the body itself, the lovers' conjoined pulses functioning at last to beat out time during this climactic moment. The flesh, and not some external, mechanized instrument or system, emerges as the ultimate arbiter of its own experience.

Much the same phenomenon is at work in "Last Ride." Just as the ride is about to begin, the speaker recalls, his mistress "[f]ixed me a breathing-while or two / With life or death in the balance," and immediately he becomes aware that "I and my mistress, side by side / Shall be together, breathe and ride, / So one day more am I deified" (15-16, 19-21). Physically looking down at him, she deigns to grant his wish. The poem only hints at the complex power dynamics that work in and through instances of sexual pleasure, which Browning explores much more fully in, say, "Porphyria's Lover," discussed below. That the act is one of self-abandonment on the speaker's part, a relinquishing of control to his lover which is an occasion for "fear" even as it promises "joy," is clear. Yet Browning appears more interested, in this poem at any rate, in matters of temporality—specifically, in the way that human breaths, or "breathing-whiles," supersede artificial increments of time as the intervals by which sexual activity comes to be

measured. This is an experience whose duration gets beaten out in *corporeal time*, a temporal system rooted in the depths of the body and its cadences. Later the speaker will denigrate poets in comparison with lovers, arguing that the former can only "tell" what the latter feel; but Browning himself wants us to see that poetry and sex are fundamentally alike in that poetry, too, gets measured in "breathing-whiles"; it is likewise a kind of performance that takes place in spaces of human utterance capable of being elongated, shortened, or altogether suspended. To transition from an instrumentalized temporality to a corporeal one, then, is to give up a rigid, contrived regularity in favor of a mode of time-telling that is elastic and has its basis in fleshly experience. Such a transition shapes "Last Ride," which begins in a relatively strict pattern of iambic tetrameter and later gives way to a tempo that is far more irregular and in concert with the action delineated in the poem—a tempo made up of short, quick breaths, interruptions, and suspensions. Reading it, one witnesses the rhythms of the action itself being played against the dictates of a regular metric scheme that becomes radically unsettled as the ride gets underway. The even, obedient iambs and sprawling, single-sentence unity of the initial stanza gives way, by the fourth stanza, to something much more erratic:

Then we begin to ride. My soul
 Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
 Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
 Past hopes already lay behind.
 What need to strive with a life awry?
 Had I said that, had I done this,

So might I gain, so might I miss.
 Might she have loved me? just as well
 She might have hated – who can tell?
 Where had I been now if the worst befell?
 And here we are riding, she and I. (34-44)

By this point it becomes apparent that the poem is built on a sustained tension between the demands of an iambic tetrameter form and the biorhythmic cadences that undermine and at times threaten to supersede it. The choppy, truncated sentences and manifold questions that constitute the stanza above represent stoppages, suspensions which break the forward progress of the poem and force the reader to linger, with the speaker, in a blissful present the latter isn't willing to let go. The first sentence is telling in this regard, with its mind-boggling conjunction of past and present ("Then we begin. . ."): in the rightward progression of a line, Browning formally dramatizes how the ride retains a perpetual presence within the linear flow of the speaker's past; as an instance of heightened pleasure in which he seemed to attain "heaven" itself, it stands out as an anachronism in his personal history—a segment of experience that partook of a temporality all its own, one that aspired toward stillness. *Begin* is an apt word with which to switch tenses, for it suggests that the ride is a rupture in the ordinary march of clock-time, a beginning in and of itself—and moreover that it begins afresh, its presence always available to him, each time the speaker revisits it in his memory, as he is doing in the act of writing.

Owing, indeed, to its formal resources, poetic writing proves specially equipped to reproduce and dramatize this same presence. As a rhythmic record of memorized experience, it

can evoke, through metrical variation and narrative delays, the peculiar, suspended temporality of an event such as this one. By the time we reach the middle and later stanzas, the poem comes to be increasingly filled with lines that are much more gravid with syllables than those which constitute the earlier stanzas—even as the individual sentences become briefer. Lines dedicated to evoking the *speed* of the experience show this with special clarity: "Freshening and fluttering in the wind" (36), "As the world rushed by on either side" (49), and so on. Perhaps one way to understand this is to observe that lines like these are made up of many *outrides*—that they contain metrical feet which, like *fluttering in the*, have as many as four unaccented syllables attached to them. Browning may be implicitly punning on the poem's subject matter, but he is also playing with ways to cram as many pulses into particular lines as possible without violating the metrical pattern. Pater had, again, written that the key to attaining a "quicken'd, multiplied consciousness" was to "get as many pulsations as possible into the given time"; Browning gives this formula a prosodic significance by loading certain lines with an overabundance of syllables, and in so doing gives the impression that each contains that much more time (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 238). At a formal level, the poem like the lovers aspires to *outride* or outstrip its own metrical scheme, to cheat it by getting as many beats as possible into the allotted intervals of certain individual lines. All this helps to convey the unusual density of an experience that challenges the constraints of time, and that liberates the speaker and his mistress rapidly to traverse huge expanses of spiritual terrain, as in "Meeting at Night": "We rode; it seemed my spirit flew, / Saw other regions, cities new, / As the world rushed by on either side" (46-9). As so often in Browning, fleshly enjoyment, evanescent in itself, emerges as a means toward accessing something permanent and divine.

Not merely the poem's rhythmic variations but its narrative trajectory help to engender this temporal suspension. If poetry has the processual quality of music, it likewise has visual art's capacity to tell a story, to be readily representational. In "Last Ride," a narrative digression, following immediately on the heels of those climactic fourth and fifth stanzas, thus works to prolong an instant that has been figured, appropriately, as a swift journey over vast spiritual terrain. The poem overlays multiple temporalities on top of one another, each of which strives to give the effect of expansion: there is the temporality of the initial experience, its duration measured out in physiological rhythms; the separate time of the poem itself, whose own pulses aspire to imitate those of the original occurrence; and, finally, the poem's narrative-time, a distinct unfurling of the story and its meaning that spans all of these stanzas and that likewise has a dilatory effect, widening the period of its own taking-place. The gist of the tangent, as touched on above, is that "riding" is superior to artistic achievement or, indeed, any form of human aspiration. Military conquest is fruitless by comparison with present enjoyment:

Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
 The flag stuck on a heap of bones.
 A soldier's doing! what atones?
 They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
 My riding is better, by their leave. (62-66)

Poetry appears little better:

What does it all mean, poet? well,
 Your brain's beat into rhythm – you tell
 What we felt only; you expressed
 You hold things beautiful the best,
 And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
 'Tis something, nay 'tis much – but then,
 Have you yourself what's best for men?
 Are you – poor, sick, old ere your time –
 Nearer one whit your own sublime
 Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
 Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride. (67-77)

As we have seen, though, the irony of all this is that the entirety of this experience, and the sentiments it provokes in the speaker, are conveyed in poetic writing—that the speaker is of course a poet, and his medium, by virtue of its prosodic and anecdotal resources, does more to convey the "feeling" of the ride than he realizes. The lover and the poet are spiritual pilgrims whose journeys obey discernible rhythms; the speaker has been both, and though he fails to grasp the parallels between the two pastimes, Browning makes them manifest. Indeed, his fate proves closer even to the statesman's and soldier's, whom he also denigrates, than he perceives, for like theirs his deed is ultimately relegated to the status of a written artifact, though it is a kind of inscription that goes much further toward replicating the original experience than any conventional history or, less still, any epitaph. Like Abt Vogler's electrifying performance at the

keyboard, the ride's lone material trace turns out to be poetic language—and Browning, in this poem as in that one, appears most interested in the manner in which poetry can act as a surrogate for these other, kindred performances. Browning plays on the homophonic kinship of *riding* and *writing*, particularly evident in the final line of that sixth stanza, quoted above, in which "riding" occurs as a gerund: his riding, the speaker contends, is better than the written records which preserve the achievements of politicians and military men—but it is still relegated to an instance of *writing*, finally, just as theirs are. Yet the speaker remains correct, as if in spite of himself: his writing *is* better than theirs because it takes the form of poetic language rather than an ordinary prose history or any other sort of written memorial. It has rhythm, pace, rhyme, all of the qualities he ascribes to verse in that seventh stanza—it has, in other words, certain defining attributes of music (excepting rhyme) in addition to the narrative and descriptive powers it shares with prose and visual art. As such it is capable not only of emulating the peculiar temporality of the original experience, but of capturing something of its physiological nature, of transmitting afresh some measure of the embodied pleasure that characterized it.

The ride does end, of course—indeed it is already finished by the time the poem begins, as we have seen—and by the eighth stanza the speaker is lamenting that, having relished it, he has nothing now to look forward to: "Still one must lead some life beyond, / -- Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried" (92-3). He gazes into his future, seeking to glimpse some such "bliss," but recoils in despair: "I shrink back shuddering from the quest -- / Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best? / Now, Heaven and she are beyond this ride" (97-9). The Renaissance trope of orgasm as death leads to a post-ejaculatory image ("I shrink back shuddering"), and these, in turn, are simultaneously used to frame a pair of serious questions. The questions are really one

and the same: what does the speaker have to look forward to after death (whether sexual or actual, physical death)? By comparison with the "little death" with which the ride culminated, won't the remainder of his (solitary) life seem a let-down, a diminution? Furthermore, how can even the afterlife, with its promise of Heaven, compare with the blissful pleasure he has just left behind?

He has momentarily forgotten the point of his own narrative, that the best, intensest moments of life remain perpetually present to us, opening as they do onto a timeless layer of reality and then becoming enshrined in our memories—where they stay, in Wordsworthian fashion, continuously available as reservoirs of mental and emotional nourishment. This is the meaning of the last stanza, in which the speaker concludes that "Heaven" consists in an endless prolonging of earthly moments like this one, in which he and his mistress have been "[c]hanged not in kind but in degree, / The instant made eternity" (107-8). This is a deft summing-up of much of what has transpired in this poem, as well as of Browning's distinctive concept of transcendence: it consists not in a transformation of our nature but a quickening and intensifying of that which we already are. Wordsworth, though his own spots of time are arguably ushered in by sensation, still minimizes their corporeal aspect: the poet of "Tintern Abbey" is "laid asleep in body," undergoing a "suspension" of "the breath of [his] corporeal frame" and even, seemingly, of his blood's circulation (43-6). Browning's are frankly physiological, breathing, palpitating affairs that advertise their own materiality. Changed not in kind but in degree: corporeal experience, raised to an exceptional new pitch, hastens us toward eternity.

"Last Ride," like many of the poems in *Men and Women*—poems whose frequently imperfect rhyme-patterns hint at an analogous discordance between and among the characters—

is, in one sense, a tragic poem. It is about two lovers who miss each other; the men and women in this volume are rarely in concert with one another, and this poem is no exception. Yet it proposes as a consolation that the happiest instants of an otherwise failed relationship possess an eternity all their own, and in this way represent compensatory anachronisms. Viewed from this perspective, whatever transpires "after" them chronologically is irrelevant. For the speaker of this poem, the ride is a moment he goes on inhabiting affectively and imaginatively as long as he is alive. And, as Browning is careful to stress via an ironic subtext, it is an experience that comes to be preserved not just in the speaker's memory but the externalized memory-bank of the poem, which becomes its lasting document. By the poem's end, riding has turned into a trope for poetry itself—motion-bound but continuously aspiring toward stillness—whose rhythmic, acoustic dimension makes it productive of a pleasure Browning conceives in physiological terms.

"Fra Lippo Lippi"

I will suggest here that by reading "Fra Lippo Lippi" alongside certain of Browning's other poems from *Men and Women* and its successor, *Dramatis Personae*—those already discussed, as well as "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "A Death in the Desert"—we can see the poem as an apology for the role of fleshly experience in shuttling humans toward an apprehension of the divine. The flesh proves an invaluable teacher we can little afford to ignore, and a descent into the coarse quotidian realities of this world turns out to be the path toward spiritual edification. Together these poems present a model of the body's relation to the spirit that is both oscillatory

and reciprocal: embodied experience, particularly pleasure (in "Fra Lippo Lippi"), is revealed as the origin-point of spiritual striving and knowledge; yet Browning counterbalances this with a keen awareness of the need to return to the flesh in the aftermath of visionary experience.

Browning is not a visionary poet except in rare instances, and he is certainly not a mystic—as a rule he seems uninterested in offering portraits of the absolute—yet neither is he strictly anchored in the quotidian. Rather, what Browning persistently investigates is the border-space between the two: how does an absorption in the lowly stuff of this world—which manifests itself, in "Fra Lippo Lippi," not merely as sexual enjoyment but images of food and detritus—function to raise one into a perception of divinity? By the same token, how does one come back to the body again, readjusting to the realities and demands of everyday life in the social world, equipped with the "enlarged knowledge" attained during a visionary flight? The motifs of ladders and rings central to "Fra Lippo Lippi" assert this continuous upward and downward trajectory, a cyclical hastening toward the eternal and return to the temporal, which comes into even greater focus in light of the other two poems we have looked at.

Browning's vision of the flesh as a facilitator of spiritual ascent finds clear expression in an early stanza of "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Let us not always say
 'Spite of this flesh to-day
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry 'All good things

Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul! (67-72)

To reiterate, he had begun his career in *Pauline* expressing a deep sadness over the incommensurability of his spiritual aspirations with the limits imposed by his body. The scope of his spirit was infinite: through the poem's speaker he voices a frustrated desire for "[o]ne rapture all my soul could fill," and everywhere sees the possibility for realizing that wish: "I grow mad / Well-nigh, to know not one abode but holds / Some pleasure, while my soul could grasp the world, / But must remain this vile form's slave" (610-17). The mature Browning of *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae* outgrows this notion in favor of a pedagogy of the flesh. No vile form, the body viewed rightly is a storehouse of knowledge, of "prompt teaching" that nourishes the soul into an awareness of God's presence—even as it, in turn, is counselled and informed by the spirit. St. John's "doctrine" of the "three souls" in "A Death in the Desert" may be the clearest definition we get in Browning's poetry of the writer's own conception of the flesh-spirit dialectic:

This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,
 How divers persons witness in each man,
 Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
 Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
 And has the use of earth, and ends the man
 Downward: but, tending upward for advice,

Grows into, and again is grown into
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,
 Useth the first with its collected use,
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows:
 Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
 Grows into, and again is grown into
 By the last soul, that uses both the first,
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,
 As that played off the first: and, tending up,
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.

What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man. (82-104)

Using John as a mouthpiece, Browning presents a model of the subject's relationship to God that is bidirectional and codependent. A person is constructed of three "souls"—a physical body ("what Does") that "has use of earth" and transmits sensory information to the mind ("what Knows"), which is connected for its own part to the spirit ("what Is"), which is in turn bound to God at the topmost rung of the hierarchy. What makes the passage startling is the reciprocal nature of the process. The flesh is not a passive recipient of directives that originate in the mind

or soul but an active, questing instrument of knowledge-acquisition—a "soul" unto itself—whose findings become the basis for spiritual understanding and cognition. The spirit, by way of the mind, "advises" the body, but both the former "lean upon" the body in their own turn, whose "teaching" powerfully determines a person's selfhood; identity—and, ultimately, one's ability to apprehend God—is predicated on sensory experience, even as one's perception of the physical world is inflected by his understand of the divine.

This doctrine informs "Fra Lippo Lippi," a poem that, as acutely as any other by Browning, inquires into "the value and significance of flesh." To say the poem shares with so much of Browning's other verse the notion that flesh and spirit exist in a state of delicate equipoise, each "learning" from the other, is in one sense to say that it is of a piece with much Christian theology. As Robert Louis Wilken reminds us, "What Christian tradition bequeathed to our civilization was not, as some suppose, gnosticism or shame over the body, but the psychosomatic unity of the human being. There is no self that is not embodied" (Wilken 161). That embodied experience drives cognition and nurtures spiritual development would not have been an alien suggestion to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the former of whom believed that a soul yearns for a body and thrives on its fleshly dress, the latter that "'the person is a composite of soul and body . . . and unless there is soul and body there can be no perfect joy'" (Wilken 161). What makes Browning so electrifyingly unorthodox is his implicit conviction that pleasure and not suffering is the defining attribute of embodiment. Aesthetic enjoyment—the sheer sensuous immediacy of beholding a beautiful painting or the natural phenomenon that inspired it—can stun audiences into a praiseful awareness of God, for Browning the supreme artificer whose signature is immanent in the created world. In place of grim, misguided asceticism Browning

substitutes a pleasure-driven philosophy that prefigures Decadence. Sexual indulgence is, in this outlook, entirely consonant with God's plan for men and women, and the apparently trivial "business of this world," in the hands of the capable artist, amasses a sacramental power capable of inspiring piety.

This theory forms the kernel of "Fra Lippo Lippi," a poem whose form, oscillatory and circular, manifests itself almost immediately. The Florentine policemen who have apprehended Lippo do their "rounds" (the words *round*, *ring*, *circle*, and *revolve*, taken together, appear roughly a dozen times in "Fra Lippo Lippi"), and, as one realizes upon rereading, the poem's beginning is also its ending: not only do salient words like *zooks* mark beginning and ending alike; the poem ends with Lippo announcing, "Here's the grey beginning"—a remark that on one level presages the onset of dawn, and on another suggests Lippo's narrative has come full circle. We will see later on how the poem does this; for now, it is perhaps enough to note that, in contrast to Herbert Tucker's assessment of Browning as a poet addicted to beginnings, one whose verse is built upon an attitude of anticipation and a need to secure futurity, "Fra Lippo Lippi" helps underscore how he is at least as much a writer preoccupied with recursion. The structure of the poem, like so many of Browning's monologues, is that of a speaker saying, in effect, "This is where I am; now listen while I backpedal in time and relate how I wound up here." Browning might be seen as an heir to Dante, to whom he compares himself explicitly in "One Word More," the final poem in *Men and Women*, in this respect: his men and women are (usually unrepentant) vice-ridden souls forced to stop what they are doing and be interrogated, at which point they launch on recursive narratives that clarify how they got here—narratives whose veracity and coherence their listeners, and we readers, must judge. Of course, Browning, who I believe shares

Lippo's doctrine of art and the importance of fleshly pleasure, has a more ambivalent stance toward Lippo than Dante the souls who whirl about his *Inferno*.

Lippo's narrative backpedaling begins with a physical descent prompted not by visual but aural stimuli:

I leaned out of window for fresh air.
 There came a hurry of feet and litle feet,
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whifts of song, --
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since?
Flower o the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter,
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight, -- three slim shapes --
 And a fact that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
 That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
 All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,
 There was a ladder! down I let myself,
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
 And hard after them. I came up with the fun

Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,--

Flower o' the rose

If I've been merry, what matter who knows?

And so as I was stealing back again

To go to bed and have a bit of sleep . . . (50-71)

This is the only instance in Browning's poetry where song lyrics are spliced into the text proper, a literal fusion of poetry and music that goes beyond ekphrasis to suggest an actual hybridity. To the extent, however, that music comes to assume physiological importance in this poem, it is entirely consonant with his other monologues. One might observe, for example, how the song lyrics, which take the form of *stornelli*—lusty, often improvised love songs that originated in Tuscany and whose name, which likely derives from *ritornillo*, further connotes the idea of reversion and recurrence—function to elide the sex itself. Through the "flower o'the rose" couplet, Lippo's actual encounter with the prostitutes is neatly passed over, and when it is finished he is on his way home again. It is music, too, that acts as the harbinger of the prostitutes' arrival, the blithe, amorous singing and lute-playing announcing their proximity, even as the lyrics themselves act as erotic aphorisms that champion sexual pleasure.

The section that follows, detailing Lippo's origins as an orphan scrounging up sustenance in Florence's streets, helps to make this still more apparent, even while it develops the poem's distinctive understanding of "the value and significance of flesh" (268). The child Lippo is driven to join the monastery, in a telling irony, out of corporeal need:

I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-pairings, rinds, and shucks,
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
 My stomach being empty as your hat,
 The wind doubled me up and down I went. (81-7)

Having subsisted on the barest scraps, what amount to "refuse and rubbish," he is finally pitied by an old woman who spirits him away to the monastery, a place where the renunciation of this world coincides, with amusing hypocrisy, with an unself-conscious indulgence in the delights of eating. ("So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father / Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection time,—'To quit this very miserable world?'" [93, 95]) Lippo thus agrees, in theory at least, to exchange the worldly desires that such as the Medici devote their lives to—"palace," "banking house," and so on, all of it "trash" from the perspective of the monks—for the ethereal dividends of Christianity as these men interpret it.

Yet it turns out, in a telling twist, that Lippo's years of near-starvation as a street urchin have served inadvertently as his artistic apprenticeship, conditioning his perception for the art he will create upon his initiation into the monastery:

But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,

Watching folk's face to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again,
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
 How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch. (112-26)

Studying Florence's motley gallery of denizens, men and women of varying levels of compassion, with eye toward the cast-off morsels he can filch from them, trains Lippo's eye to see value in the trivial. He "learns the look of things," cultivating a vision, realist in its penetrating awareness of the latent wonder and drama in the vulgar, that approximates, I would suggest, the way Browning himself would have the artist see. All of this is garbage—half-stripped grape bunches, wax drippings, fig-skins melon-parings—yet in Lippo's hands it becomes the basis for a threadbare diet that sustains him before his admittance into the convent, and later a repository of fodder for his artistic productions. These second-hand bits of food and

merchandise, and the mundanity they stand for, become his "meat and drink" (315). Basic physiological necessity ("admonition of the hunger-pinch" [126]) conditions how he perceives his surroundings; and this, in turn, matures into an aesthetic that looks upon the physical world as a storehouse of spiritual nutriment. "Soul and sense," in this manner, "grow sharp alike" (124).

This gets to the heart of something fundamental about Browning's poetics—a poetics of garbage, one might call it—visible in the genesis-narrative toward the beginning of *The Ring and the Book*. The manuscript that becomes the basis for Browning's epic is one the poet locates "Mongst odds and ends of ravage" being peddled by "re-venders" (51-2); it languishes amid other second-hand items long divorced from their original context and intended use. It is "pure crude fact / Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard, / And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since" (34-6). That is, it has its provenance in the tactile and embodied lives of the people whose record it tacitly forms; lifeless though it now is, it is a text that was, at least in the first place, sweated out, as it were, from the warmly corporeal world of social exchange. It is a secretion of sorts. Browning's poetic task, which he ascribes to Lippo in like manner, consists in reanimating these decayed fragments, a galvanism that finds veiled possibility in rubbish and rot. "Something dead," he announces in *Ring*, "may get to live again"; through the galvanic power of the imagination, one can "start the dead alive." "I can detach me," Browning boasts,

commission forth

Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage

O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,

May chance upon some fragment of a whole,

Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
 Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
 I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
 Push lines out to the limit, lead forth at last
 (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
 What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
 Mistakenly felt: then write my name with Faust's! (742-52)

This is about as close as we get to an *ars poetica* in Browning. His method consists in flinging his imagination across vast distances of space and time, causing it to inhabit the most disparate and unlikely shards of poetic material—marginalized historical personages, apparently insignificant events, drab physical objects that languish in places no one else would think to look—and infusing them with spiritual import and force. When James Joyce, several decades later, would define a writer as "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life," he would articulate the same synthesis of vulgar realism and transcendental searching that Browning had already powerfully asserted in his own work (Joyce 184). Like Joyce, Browning appropriates the imagery of the Eucharist to convey this. Lippo, we find out, is willing to "clench [his] teeth" for a time and follow the Prior's injunction to eschew worldly beauty; yet

there's pretty sure to come

A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—

A laugh, a cry, the business of this world—

(Flower o' the peach,

Death for us all, and his own life for each!)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,

The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,

And play the fooleries you catch me at,

In pure rage! (247-54)

The passage anchors much of what matters most about "Fra Lippo Lippi," thematically and imagistically. Perhaps most importantly, it foregrounds the concept of *turning*: "there's pretty sure to come a turn," Lippo remarks, when the facade of obedience will break down and he will begin to heed his own inspired vision. At that point his "whole soul" will "revolve," and the quasi-sacramental "cup" of his love and enthusiasm for the quotidian will become impossible to contain. There is also a *carpe diem*-flavored fragment from a *stornello*, and we have already seen how the notion of turning is embedded in that musical form. By means of all this, Browning is suggesting the centrality of *troping* to Lippo's art, and by inference his own. In his recent *Robert Browning's Language*, Donald Hair seeks to pin down Browning's theory of language, spotlighting the poet's deep interest in the act of troping through language, a process fundamentally linked to his underlying mission as a Protestant writer:

Browning's central concern as a poet is the way in which men and women turn all things, such turning being, in his view, finally a spiral upwards. Language makes possible such versions (a word derived from the Latin verb for turning, as we 'revert' (another turn) to the world and all that is therein; and what is conversion, the central concern of the dissenting religious tradition, but a climactic turn? If we are going to recover from the fall, language provides the means, and we can trope our way to heaven. (Hair 6)

A *trope* is, of course, a *turn* in its original Greek sense—and Browning, as Hair sees it, resorts to linguistic figure as a method of redeeming the physical world from its decayed, fallen state. Via an effort of imagination, the poet performs figural interpretations of reality that turn its material details into emblems shot through with a sacral meaning. Hair may err in emphasizing the fallenness of the physical realm for Browning, yet he is essentially right about the integral place of troping in Browning's understanding of how art wings us from the material world to the divine; and though he mentions "Fra Lippo Lippi" only in passing, it is in that poem more than any other that this comes to be figured. Lippo's medium, needless to say, is painterly rather than verbal art, yet his revelatory task too consists in seizing upon aspects of the external world and assigning them an eternal significance, transmuting them into signs of the beneficent God he believes engendered them: "This world's no blot for us, / Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good: / To find its meaning is my meat and drink" (313-15). If *trope* signals a turn, it is also true that *trophe*, a very similar Greek word, means *food*, a telling verbal kinship that it is difficult to imagine would have been lost on Browning, who had learned Greek by age fourteen.

Trope and *trophe* are conjoined in his imagination, which works by troping the improbable minutiae of the felt world and of history into material with nourishing sacramental value.

Nor does Browning permit us to forget that these imaginative artifacts have their origin in the gritty sensory world with its rubbish, its sweat, its framework of insatiable striving, its sudden incursions of lust—or that they operate on audiences at a fleshly level. Lippo's description of his first attempts at drawing upon admittance into the monastery, his doodling in the margins of his hymn-book, epitomizes this insight:

I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black. (129-35)

This quite literal binding-together of musical notes with body parts cements, at a symbolic level, the inextricability of imagination and flesh, of art and *aesthesis*, that Lippo is at such pains to expound elsewhere in the poem—a conjunction that, as we have seen already, is most conspicuous for Browning in music.

Browning's poem culminates in a mysterious finale that finds Lippo narrating in real-time, as he thinks of them, the details of a painting he plans soon to undertake. The painting

depicts the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus, "[r]inged by a bowery flowery angel brood," only the last of the poem's figures of circularity, along with Saints John and Ambrose, and Job. Into their midst appears, of a sudden, Lippo himself, "As one by a dark stair into a great light, / Music, and talking" (362-63). Conscious, however, that he doesn't altogether belong in this celestial company, Lippo wonders aloud, "Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?" (369). Having resolved to leave, he is arrested by "a young angelic slip of a thing" (370) intent on his remaining there—after all, she reminds the other painted personages, "He made you and devised you" (373). In the end he "scuttle[s] off / To some safe bench behind, not letting go / The palm of her, that little lily thing / That spoke the good word for me in the nick" (383-87). In one sense the passage is an instance of a painting being made processual: no static image, it changes from one moment to the next as Lippo conceives it aloud, and is thus given a proto-cinematic quality. It has, in other words, the referentiality and imagistic precision of painting, but its actual status as poetic language means it can overcome the fixity of visual art. It possesses the temporal unfolding that characterizes music—and music, in fact, emanates through this final scene. The finale is, viewed in this way, a paean to poetry, which, poised in an intermediate space between painting and music, has access to the resources of each; it enjoys something of the best of both worlds.

But it also dramatizes, I would argue, Browning's own understanding of his place as a verbal artist poised between this realm and the next. Possessed of an upward Faustian striving, he is also never totally comfortable with transcendence, never at peace dwelling in absolutes. Like Lippo, embarrassed and uneasy in the otherworldly company of Christ and the other divinities, Browning shies away from transcendence, carving out escape routes that enable him

to return again to the flesh and forcing his creations to do the same. The "dark stair" Lippo ascends en route to the "great light" that inundates the holy personages in the painting is part of the same constellation of images as the ladder, a bridge linking the mundane to the numinous. Browning's primary concern as a poet is, as I have sought to emphasize in these readings, neither with the one world nor the other, but the intermediary region—how to stage transcendence amid the commonplace, and having achieved it, make one's way back again. "I know my own way back," Lippo assures the Florentine police in the poem's penultimate line (391). It is precisely this knowledge that Browning seeks to cultivate in himself and instill in readers. The halcyon "light" that throngs the heavenly host in line 362 has given way, in a rude descent back to this world, to the lights the policemen crassly shine in Lippo's face ("no lights, no lights!")—a harsh awakening from vision that would almost be Keatsian were the two poets' styles not so alien. "Don't fear me!" the poem ends. "There's the gray beginning. Zooks!" (392). Dawn has set in, a liminal time of day that resists the categories of "black and white" Lippo associates with Saint Ambrose (355), being instead dominated by grayness. That crepuscular grayness is the poem's lingering final image, and it embodies the border region in which Lippo's art, like Browning's, takes shape.

Lippo's "I know my own way back" might be thought of as a slogan that sums up Browning's critique of Romanticism, and helps us toward an understanding of how Victorian and Romantic poetry differ on the count of pleasure. Lippo's impatience with transcendence, his restless desire to pull back from a realm of absolutes and return to the quotidian, is also Browning's. Browning is particularly Victorian in that he frequently insists on politicizing

pleasure by contextualizing it within the social frameworks in which it takes shape. One of the arguments of this dissertation, as I suggested in my introductory chapter, is that the Victorian poets distance themselves from the Romantics in part through their persistent and often self-conscious politicizing of pleasure, their refusal to consign it altogether to a realm of transcendence and escape. In part this politicizing means demonstrating how pleasure might be harnessed for productive social ends, as we saw in the previous chapter. But it also means exposing the human casualties that can make embodied pleasure possible in the first place. Browning accomplishes the latter with graphic and often shocking vividness and force, wrenching his monologues—and/or us readers—back to the here and now in the midst of pleasure, short-circuiting transcendence by jolting them, or us, into an awareness of the human contexts that give rise to these experiences. Truth for Browning is a perspectival phenomenon, as Joseph Bristow reminds us, but so is pleasure, and what is pleasurable or ecstatic for one party may not be for another, and may indeed be predicated on the suffering, agony, or outright death of others involved (Bristow 53). Much as he admired him, Browning, in driving this point home, helps supply a badly needed corrective to the idealized and disembodied love that Shelley, for example, evokes in *Epipsychidion*.

"Porphyria's Lover" is a poem that demonstrates that corrective element with especial power. The monologue begins with a naturalistic description that appears, on the surface, a homage to Romanticism:

The rain set early in to-night,
 The sullen wind was soon awake,
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

And did its worst to vex the lake:

I listened with heart fit to break. (1-5)

Readers discover a landscape imbued with gothic qualities that would be at home in a ballad such as Coleridge's *Christabel*. They also find instances of the pathetic fallacy—the "sullen wind" that, waking, "tore the elm-tops down for spite, / And did its worst to vex the lake" (3-4). The Romantic elements, though, turn out to be something of a red herring, the opening tactic in a larger strategy of defamiliarization that will build toward the poem's horrifying macabre climax and denouement. The pathetic fallacy, in fact, might be thought to dramatize the shaping power of the individual imagination over the external world, consistent with a vision of nature as a vast projection of the human mind and emotions. Yet the grotesque scene that follows exposes the dark underside of such a model of the mind's relation to reality: if the people and things that constitute the phenomenal world are essentially imaginative projections, Browning seems to suggest, then we are at liberty to do with them as we please. Put differently, George Berkeley's famous insistence that *esse est percipi*—that to be is to be perceived, and reality therefore a mental construct—which had found assent among Romantic writers like Blake, admitted only too easily of dangerous delusion. One key achievement of Browning's, I would suggest, was to lay bare the narcissism—in certain cases a violent, savage narcissism—that inhered in such a worldview. The only love that such a model might engender was an egomaniacal one predicated on self-projection; its logical endpoint was a desire to convert objects of desire into reflections of the lover's own self, and a profound discomfort when the other party threatened to assert his or her otherness and volition. U.C. Knoepflmacher is

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
 Murmuring how she loved me — she
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
 To set its struggling passion free
 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
 And give herself to me for ever.

(16-25)

Porphyria begins to orchestrate a seduction, initiating intimacy (she “called me”) and thereby asserting agency—an expression of volition consistent with her next gesture, that of placing the speaker’s cheek on her bare shoulder and inundating him with her hair. The tableau evoked here is telling. She is physically above him, “stooping” to bring his cheek to rest on her person, a word that for readers of Browning might easily resonate with the Duke’s “Who’d stoop to blame / This sort of trifling?” and “I choose / Never to stoop” from “My Last Duchess.” In that poem, “stooping” would entail, for the Duke, exposing his morbid insecurity in admonishing the Duchess for what he perceives to be her coquettishness—and so revealing a crack in his artfully constructed façade of omnipotence. In “Porphyria’s Lover,” too, the word is embedded in the context of a power dynamic with which the speaker feels ill at ease. Porphyria appears in control both of this instance of would-be intimacy and their relationship at large: it is she who is already committed either to a prior relationship or a higher social standing (or both) she refuses abandon in order to be with the speaker in the long term; she who decides when to flout this prior commitment, fleetingly and probably secretly, to visit the speaker. This is what makes it

fascinating and revealing that the speaker feels compelled to reframe their situation in terms that highlight her putative "weakness," rather than acquiescing to see it as an arrangement in which Porphyria possesses the agency. He is overcome with a sense of impotence, powerless even to respond when she calls out to him: "[N]o voice replied," the speaker recalls, in a peculiar construction that allows him to elide himself and hence avoid saying, for instance, "I was powerless to reply"—and that of course anticipates the reversal which comes with Porphyria's imposed voicelessness momentarily (15). That the speaker is "pale / For love of her, and all in vain" at least tempts readers with the possibility that he may be physically impotent as well, though we cannot know this for certain (28-9).

This is an impotence the speaker seeks swiftly and brutally to rectify through the murder that follows. The prominence of Porphyria's hair both to that murder and the attempted seduction before it reminds us that hair is, for the Victorians, closely linked not just to feminine sexuality but personhood itself. An obvious corollary here would be the Pre-Raphaelite paintings that began to appear roughly a decade after Browning wrote "Porphyria's Lover," with their loving and perhaps fetishistic attention to the hair of the female "stunners" they depicted; but we might also think of the profuse and intricately braided locks belonging to the empowered, defiant speaker of William Morris's "The Defense of Guenevere." We could think too of Laura's encounter with the goblins early in *Goblin Market*—an episode I will explore in the next chapter—wherein Laura, in tearfully relinquishing a portion of her hair to the goblin men, consigns to them an aspect of her very self. Yet the strangulation in Browning's monologue is, as patently, a brutal denial of Porphyria's voice—quite literally, at a physical level—and to that extent it might remind us of another literary asphyxiation scene that Browning would have

known only too well: that which takes place at the end of Shakespeare's *Othello*, itself a snuffing off of a woman's voice, the awful but apt culmination of a play whose first words are "Never tell me" (*Othello* 1.1; cited in Bevington).

What Browning gives us in the second half of "Porphyria's Lover" is a sinister variation on the many "infinite moments" that punctuate his other poems, as he dubbed the instants of transcendent stillness one finds in, for example, "Abt Vogler" and "The Last Ride Together." Like the latter poem, "Porphyria's Lover" builds toward "an instant made eternity" that arises in the context of embodied pleasure, but this time the pleasure is a sexual charge the speaker derives from domination and a monomaniacal self-regard which approaches self-deification: "at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me; surprise / Made my heart swell, and still it grew / While I debated what to do" (32-5). His swelling heart becomes an obvious figure for a sexual arousal that coincides with his own godlike sense of himself—and this, in turn, leads him to commit an act that might best be described as a displacement. *Displace* is a word that occurs early in the poem ("And all her yellow hair displaced"), and helps frame "Porphyria's Lover" as a poem which documents a displacement—that of an actual, embodied and volitional human being by a mental concept which exists in the imagination of the speaker. In the second half of the poem the speaker becomes a demented artist figure who converts Porphyria into a prop—"I propped her head up as before," he notes—and incorporates her into an aestheticized tableau that depends on her conversion into inanimate object. That it is a tableau which inverts the positioning of the two figures earlier in the poem is clear enough. Note the conspicuous transition, though, in the span of a single line, from "Her head" (51) to "The smiling rosy little head" (52), the definite article underlining her swift metamorphosis from person into prop, into a thing possessed of a

trite kind of beauty she shares with countless other objects immortalized in art, poetic and otherwise. The godlike creative agency of the poet that Coleridge had celebrated in *Biographia Literaria* as the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" has found horrific real-world expression here, in an act that lays bare the potentially fatal egomania arguably latent in Coleridge's formulation (Coleridge 177). Browning, then, embeds in this poem a potent critique not just of Romanticism but his own, generally positive and optimistic figurations of pleasure elsewhere in his writing.

Published in 1836, "Porphyria's Lover" is an early poem in the trajectory of Browning's career. Though he would not altogether abandon the critique of narcissistic male pleasure that we glimpse in that early monologue, his figurations of bodily enjoyment become generally more positive in his subsequent poetry. Perhaps this is because, as a young man, Browning was particularly intent on finding ways to distance himself from the Romantic poets: his exposure of the sinister narcissism that inhered in Romantic imaginings of eroticism and love was, I suspect, an important feature in Browning's self-fashioning—a carving-out of a poetic voice and identity that depended on the first-generation Romantics as foils. "I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room," the young Browning wrote Elizabeth Barrett shortly after composing "The Lost Leader," "if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge & Southey were condensed into the little China bottle yonder" (Tucker, *Browning's Beginnings* 13). This was surely part-braggadocio by a young male poet eager to impress a love-interest, but it was also part-legitimate disdain for a trio of poets arguably linked by a solipsism that, Browning had already grasped, had dangerous implications. A poem already as celebrated and well-known as "Tintern Abbey" is, after all, a dramatic monologue in its own right, one that traces gradations of pleasure in the

evolution of a male speaker who addresses a young woman we never hear from—whose presence, indeed, is not even disclosed until the poem’s final movement. Browning’s own early monologues, none more shocking than “Porphyria’s Lover,” are key stepping-stones toward his poetic self-definition, tracing the solipsism latent in those canonical Romantic monologues to their logical and harrowing conclusion. The poem’s great achievement is that it is a monologue charting a speaker’s godlike self-assertion—his devastating articulation, through murder, of the Coleridgean I AM—in which the existence readers are left caring about is the one not allotted any words.

Chapter 3: Christina Rossetti's Aesthetics of Redemption

Introduction

Christina Rossetti might seem an unlikely choice for inclusion in a project concerned with embodied pleasure. Hugh Walker neatly expresses the place Rossetti has come to occupy in the popular imagination as well as the minds of a number of prominent critics: "[T]here is no English poet more ascetic than Christina Rossetti," who "sings renunciation, not only of love of husband and wife. . .but of the world and all its beauty and joys" (Walker 504). This is a perspective that has defined a good many of the most powerful and lasting interpretations of Rossetti's poetry—studies such as Dolores Rosenblum's *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, which pursues the thesis that Rossetti, energized by an "aesthetic of renunciation," crafted a "poetry of endurance" that is at once self-abnegating and flamboyantly self-dramatizing: "On the one hand, the poet renounces and negates everything, vanity of vanities; on the other, she makes everything out of herself and her sorrow in a transfixing display of her stigmata" (Rosenblum xvi, 10). Yet even Rossetti's ostentatious mythologizing of her own suffering proceeds, in Rosenblum's view, from the "sorrow and renunciation" that engenders it in the first place; and it is with this willful self-deprivation, this predilection for postponement, that Rosenblum is largely concerned.

In this Rosenblum resembles the majority of Rossetti's critics, whose readings of *Goblin Market*—the poem I will privilege in this chapter—have tended to view the work as a cautionary fable that exposes the perils of succumbing to fleshly desire. Readers, according to this line of

reasoning, are admonished to follow Laura's example and redirect their yearning for sensual pleasure toward spiritual ends. For Lionel Stevenson, the poem epitomizes "the evil of self-indulgence, the fraudulence of sensuous beauty, and the supreme duty of renunciation" (Stevenson 105); while for Diane D'Amico, Laura's folly early in *Goblin Market* lies in "placing sensual gratification of any kind before God," in contrast with Lizzie, who is "properly suspicious of the things that appeal to the senses." The poem's climactic scene, in which Lizzie offers up the goblin fruit off her body for Laura's consumption, is for D'Amico "an affirmation of the power of the spiritual over the sensual"—particularly since it seems to D'Amico so counterintuitive that Rossetti should marshal the language and imagery of the Eucharist to depict the power of sensuality (D'Amico 98). Even Antony Harrison—who, as we will see, productively sheds light on Rossetti's aestheticist leanings, as well as her telling affinities with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—nevertheless concludes that *Goblin Market* asserts "the betrayal that inevitably follows upon false expectations of fulfillment through sensual pleasures" (Harrison, *Rossetti in Context* 115).

And yet *Goblin Market* is such a deliberately excessive poem, a work whose surplus of meaning, connotation, and detail overflows the limits of these seemingly airtight but ultimately reductive arguments. Its excess operates on multiple levels. For one, it displays a profoundly ambivalent attitude toward embodied pleasure, portraying it as alternately contaminating and redemptive, that cannot be fully subsumed under the value system and outlook set forth in the rest of Rossetti's corpus—though certain of her other poems, as well as theological tracts she authored such as *Seek and Find*, do help to make sense of it, as I hope to show. It is linguistically excessive, too, both in its overall length and, more importantly, its apparently

unpruned stretches of lists, heaps of similes, and long descriptive detours—all of which run counter to what Harrison has influentially dubbed Rossetti's "poetics of conciseness," a category that certainly encompasses her lyric poetry but not her greatest achievement (Harrison, *Rossetti in Context* 23-63). Finally, *Goblin Market* ends up promoting a form of sensual excess as curative and regenerative, much as Swinburne's poetry, written contemporaneously, was doing, as we will see. None of the readings cited above, nor the many others akin to them, has satisfactorily accounted for these excesses, particularly the last one. None adequately explains the plain fact that the very fruit that precipitates Laura's decline and near-death is likewise, albeit in a profoundly altered context, the agent of her redemption. If the goblin fruit in synonymous with embodied pleasure—and this seems a reasonable assumption—there is no getting around the fact that this same pleasure is instrumental to Laura's recovery and return to human community, work, and family life. In its daringly paradoxical suggestion that excess might be salubrious and cleansing—that the antidote to a sickness brought on by corporeal pleasure may be more of the same, as if Laura suffered from an ailment that demanded to be remedied homeopathically—*Goblin Market* invites comparison to Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* and *Songs Before Sunrise*, discussed in the next chapter. Indeed, Robert Louis Stevenson's description of Swinburne's early poetry (which Rossetti admired) as a "Sodom's apple" whose "sensuality is too deep; it works its own cure," doubles uncannily as a synopsis of *Goblin Market*, which in like manner insists that roads of embodied excess, if prudently traced, can lead to palaces of spiritual wisdom (Hyder xxi).

Prior critics like D'Amico and Harrison are right, of course, that Rossetti's poetry warns against placing sensual gratification before God, admonishes us not to expect fulfillment from

embodied enjoyment. Where they err is in not adequately accounting for the integral place of corporeality in Rossetti's vision of spiritual edification and renewal. Embodied pleasure may not supply fulfillment of itself, but for Rossetti as for the other poets in this project it is the happy precondition of an elevating, transforming knowledge—the critical first step toward an apprehension and love of God. Rather than eschew it, we would do better to look on pleasure as the soil in which spiritual questing can take root and fructify. Moreover, by casting *Goblin Market* particularly as a cautionary fable that warns against pleasure, critics divest the poem of much of its radical strength and edge. The audacity of *Goblin Market* derives, I think, from its bold sanctioning of bodily appetite and indulgence among Christians generally and women specifically. Rossetti's poem is not a parable of temptation and gratification followed by punishment and repentance; it is a narrative of wanting and having, yearning in vain for a time, then having again in a changed context with antithetical results. In a recent study on the "dynamics of desire" in Rossetti's poetry, Suzanne Waldman has convincingly demonstrated how the discourses of sexual love and religious devotion are intertwined in Rossetti's imagination, a feature arguably traceable to medieval literature and theology (Waldman 10-11). Waldman's book, which builds on a lineage of Rossetti scholarship similarly fascinated with the centrality of desire to her poetry, is persuasive enough; yet desire, it seems to me, is too safe a concept to describe what happens in *Goblin Market*, a poem that foregrounds two separate acts of indulgence, one of which turns out to be redemptive. To brand Rossetti's a poetics of desire is to relegate the very real, present pleasures spotlighted in her work to the realm of futurity. Desire concerns itself with delights that remain perpetually and comfortably on the horizon, somewhere in the vicinity perhaps of Wordsworth's sublime, a phenomenon "evermore about to be";

pleasure is the domain of the here and now, a matter of current transports and actual consequences.

Clearly, though, Rossetti is not an unequivocal proponent of pleasure; she doesn't advocate hedonism, though it is true, as we will see at the end of this chapter, that she forecasts—however inadvertently and ironically—the spiritually inflected New Hedonism envisaged by fin-de-siècle decadent writers. Rather, she suggests that acts of pleasure gain their character, value, and purpose from what human subjects bring to them. Rossetti—as I will argue with reference to certain of lyric poems, passages from *Seek and Find*, *The Dead City*, and especially *Goblin Market*—implies that acts of interpretation are finally what determine the saving and elevating, or corruptive and enervating, quality of pleasure. These interpretative acts function as windows in which people can exercise agency, shaping for themselves the meaning and outcome of sensual enjoyment. The things of this world and the pleasures they yield are inherently neither good nor evil for Rossetti; indeed, "Our outward circumstances become good or evil not of their own essence, but in strict accordance to whatever good or evil responds to them within ourselves" (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 201). The imposed meanings that agentic individuals, through their intentions and the attitudes with which they approach it, determine the nature and effect of sensual pleasure for Rossetti. Sensuality turns out to be a very contingent thing, bound up in and shaped by the contexts in which it arises.

This is certainly the case in *Goblin Market*, where Lizzie and Laura become joint interpreters of the goblin fruit, whose juice is scrawled by the goblin men on Lizzie's body in the manner of a written text that requires to be read and deciphered. How the sisters elect to read this text, the altruistic meaning they jointly make of it and the pleasure it stands for, holds the

key to its healing efficacy. Viewed in this light, Rossetti's poem doubles as an allegory of reading: the young women are proxies for us readers, confronted with a poetic text that is, like the fruit it catalogues, "sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (30). Sumptuously musical, an oral work-out, *Goblin Market* demands an analogous effort of interpretation from us, readers scanning the text with our own eyes, endeavoring to form a construction that holds up as "sound." It is our deciphering work that determines the poem's effect on us, ensuring that, though our experience of it may begin as a version of embodied reading, it ends up being lastingly instructive and even redemptive.

What emerges from the poetry and prose I take up in this chapter is a conception of pleasure that is, in one sense, Derridean. Rossetti's equivocal portrait of pleasure—a volatile, indeterminate phenomenon whose healing capacity is forever encroached upon, or held in equipoise by, its potential toxicity—recalls Derrida's evocation of the *pharmakon*, with its simultaneous valences of remedy and poison. We can't banish or efface either of these potentialities, both of them immanent for Rossetti in sensuality and, by inference, in poetic language that strives to appeal to the senses even as it enfolds divine facts. Derrida's ultimate object in invoking the *pharmakon* is to shake at the foundations of western philosophy by laying bare its contamination by, and reliance on, language—language that, whether spoken or inscribed, invariably undermines its own efforts at stable meaning-making (Derrida 98-118). Obviously this is distinct from Rossetti's aims as a poet and spiritual teacher, but Rossetti's meditations on pleasure have, for their own part, a linguistic dimension: implicitly in *Goblin Market* she is reckoning with the ambiguous nature of her own poetic craft, its powerfully sensuous appeals—made, as we'll discover below, through a seductive play of rhythms and, with

it, an instantiation of images in the mind's eye of the reader traceable to Tractarian poetics—implicating it in that very doubleness which characterized all embodied pleasure. Responsibly harnessed and shrewdly construed, rhythmic utterance could be edifying and transformative; wrongly viewed, linguistic invention could, like any sensual delight, lure subjects into a hypnotic absorption in pleasure for its own sake.

In another sense, though, Rossetti's model of pleasure is a strongly Romantic one, positioning her in a lineage that reaches back to Keats and Blake, poets she read and admired. To assert that Rossetti viewed pleasure in Derridean terms, as a phenomenon that took shape in an indeterminate region between contaminant and cure, is likewise to invite a comparison to Keats: for Keats the poet-physician remedies are, in a comparable way, nearly always bound up with poisonous threat; the antidotes in the Keatsian pharmacy, as Hermione de Almeida reminds us, derive their curative value from their very liminality (Almeida 162). Yet Rossetti's resemblance to Keats goes beyond this, as we will discover, encompassing too their shared preoccupation with pleasurable excess, an excess that, in *Goblin Market* at least, will prove salutary and renewing. The last section of this chapter will trace Rossetti's connection to Keats, her lifelong fascination with a writer whose own poetic axioms—his advice to Percy Shelley to "load every rift with ore," for example—envisage excess as a distinguishing feature of the best poetry; and whose own lines often fulfill that vision: the Autumn goddess and sun conspiring "to set budding more, / And still more, later flowers for the bees" (8-9); the Grecian lovers aspiring toward "More love! more happy, happy love!" (25); all the sensual excesses of *Endymion* to which contemporary reviewers took exception, as we saw in the introduction. If excess was Blakean, so too was it Keatsian; and, for that matter, it was hallmark of the repetitious, often

rhapsodic rhetoric of the Tractarian sermons Rossetti soaked in as a youthful convert to the High Church. This was a pleasurable excess, a compulsion toward *more*, that Rossetti sought with varying success to reconcile with her lofty Anglican ideals. *Goblin Market* is, I think, her greatest success in that regard, and for this reason I have made it the centerpiece of this chapter.

Rossetti and the Critics

To survey the literary scholarship on Rossetti from the nineteenth century to the present is to discover a genealogy of commentary that insists on the unwitting, or at least inadvertent, sensuality that inflects her poetry. Perhaps no single interpretative thread more saliently connects Rossetti criticism from the Victorians to the later twentieth century than this one. That she is a writer compelled by sensuality is practically received wisdom; equally commonplace, though, is the presumption that her tendency toward pleasure is either unconscious or, in certain cases, a slip of her innate impulses routinely snuffed out, in the manner of a Freudian superego, by a learned Christian habit of self-censure. An air of condescension lurks behind these appraisals, largely stemming from their shared assumption that Rossetti cannot have known what she was doing—and from the corollary that it is incumbent on the sage critic to intervene and say in effect what she is really up to. This notion tellingly coexists in much criticism with the belief that Rossetti is an intellectual lightweight—the implication being that, vapid as she was, she can scarcely have grasped the fundamental paradox at the heart of her own poetry, its simultaneous exaltation of worldly enjoyment and patient yearning after eternity. "There is not much thinking in them," wrote a *Saturday Review* critic of the poems in *The Prince's Progress* in 1866, "[b]ut

they are melodious and sweet"; "[n]early every stanza," in fact, "presents a picture full of colour and movement and redolent of a peculiarly purified sensuousness" ("Miss Rossetti's Poems" 761-2). To Edmund Gosse writing nine years later in *The Examiner*, Rossetti most closely resembled Coleridge among all other poets: prone, like him, to a "purely romantic inspiration" bodied forth in an unrivalled "subtlety and magic of music," she is likewise being constantly grounded by "a direct didactic purpose" that short-circuits her natural impulse toward lushness and exuberance (Gosse 1418-19).

Critics in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, anxious to claim Rossetti as an aesthete in their own image, followed these early reviewers, limning a portrait of her as a naturally sensuous and beauty-driven poet deluded, or betrayed, by the Christian dogma she had so thoroughly internalized. For Swinburne writing W.M. Rossetti in 1904, Rossetti's poetry was "rich in beauty" but its aesthetic merits were woefully tarnished by its author's religious convictions: "It is horrible to think of such a woman—and of so many otherwise noble and beautiful natures—spiritually infected and envenomed by the infernal and putrefying genius of the Galilean serpent [i.e., Christ]" (Rooksby 281). A.C. Benson went further, insisting the same year that "[t]here was nothing didactic" about Rossetti; in the hands of Benson (simultaneously at work on a biography of Pater), Rossetti becomes a Saint Theresa figure, her religion serving her less as a storehouse of morals than a source of rapture:

Even Christina Rossetti, deeply religious as she is, had little ethical about her.

She enjoyed her faith, if I may use the expression, with all the rapture of a medieval saint.

She visualized her dreams without timidity, and spoke her thoughts, not because they were improving, but because they were beautiful. (Benson 143)

Arthur Symons, writing in 1897, is similarly at pains to establish that her poetry "is never didactic, or concerned with purposes of edification"; rather, it showcases a version of piety defined by a Baudelairean fascination with death, for Rossetti (and, in turn, her readers) a cause for quasi-orgasmic shudders of morbid awe: "Her intensity of religious feeling touches almost, on the ecstasy of Jacopone da Todi, but without the delirium. It is usually a tragic ecstasy. In a poem such as 'Despised and Rejected'. . .the reality of the externalised emotion is almost awful: it is scarcely to be read without a shudder" (Symons 143). It is tempting to observe that there is something powerfully gendered about all this male-authored criticism. It is as if these men were, like Rossetti's own goblins on encountering the stubbornly chaste Lizzie, threatened by the prospect of a woman who, consciously at least, simply had no use for sensual pleasure—and, by inference, for them. They respond by calling her bluff, striving to show how her poetry aspires toward pleasure and even ecstasy in spite of itself.

Perhaps more surprisingly, this is a theme that dominates female-authored Rossetti criticism as well, both modernist and even (or especially) later twentieth-century feminist scholarship. By 1932, Virginia Woolf, in her essay "I Am Christina Rossetti," was making claims about the poet that were already essentially bromides: "[Y]our eye, indeed, observed with a sensual pre-Raphaelite intensity that must have surprised Christina the Anglo-Catholic . . . No sooner have you feasted on beauty with your eyes than your mind tells you that beauty is vain and beauty passes." The aesthetic and theological were perpetually at odds in her imagination,

but ultimately the former won out: "For you were not a pure saint by any means. You pulled legs; you tweaked noses . . . In a word, you were an artist" (Woolf 243). Beginning in the 1970s, feminist critics took Woolf's argument a step further, citing *Goblin Market* as evidence that Rossetti was not merely a sensuous poet, enchanted by the quotidian world of the senses and the pleasures it afforded (as Swinburne and others had long before noted), but a sensual one, compelled by forms of fleshly desire too scandalous to be consciously acknowledged. As Germaine Greer argues in an introduction to *Goblin Market*, "[Rossetti's] sensuality was unknown to her: the more it loomed vast and polymorphous in her dreams, the less able she was to confront it in any recognizable form" (Rossetti, *Goblin Market* xxx-xxxiii). To the extent that she was aware of these fantasies, she had relied on the disciplinary mechanisms of Christianity to keep them repressed and to punish herself for having harbored them in the first place. By asserting that Rossetti's sensuality was unconscious, Greer and other feminist critics were able to ascribe to her poetry forms of subversive, non-normative pleasure—lesbianism, masturbation—not dependent on men for their realization.

Revelatory and needed as much of this criticism was, it was tarnished, in my view, by its insistence that the embodied pleasure in Rossetti's poetry was "unknown to her." What if, for once, we actually gave Rossetti the benefit of the doubt, allowing her the pleasure that so many critics have identified since the 1860s? Why are we so afraid to grant her intentionality in this regard? And why do we feel compelled to disentangle the theology from the pleasure and other aesthetic contours of her work? Need we choose, as Woolf felt compelled to do, between viewing her as either an artist or a Christian, an aesthete or a theologian? An important premise of this chapter will be that we can reconcile these polarities, and in so doing arrive at an

understanding of Rossetti's poetics and theology that more closely accords with her own outlook. By way of accomplishing this, I will offer an extended reading of *Goblin Market* along with several of Rossetti's other poems, but won't suggest that the pleasures that long poem depicts are necessarily to be equated with lesbianism or masturbation—or, for that matter, with the pleasures of consumerism in an acquisitive capitalistic system of which Rossetti disapproved. All of these readings have been done. Herbert Tucker, for example, has written one of the most recent and perhaps the best of the economic interpretations of *Goblin Market*, arguing that the poem both partakes in, and comments critically on, the burgeoning advertising industry in mid-century Victorian Britain—the process through which advertising can "influence behavior by reorienting desire through language," reframing and re-presenting proffered goods in poetic chants that tantalize, and momentarily cloy, through pleasurable repetition (Tucker, "Rossetti's Goblin Marketing" 118, 123).

And yet the sheer multiplicity of these interpretations—sexual and mercantile both—speaks to the flexibility of the fruit trope, its capacity to be allegorically read as corresponding with a vast variety of distinct pleasures. Isobel Armstrong is right, I think, to suggest that while "[s]ome critics have literalised the poem in terms of masturbation"—and, of course, lesbianism—"the images [of the fruit and of Laura's consumption of it] are so enigmatically precise that they are open-endedly generalisable" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 349). It is enough, I suspect, to identify Rossetti's fruit as an emblem of corporeal pleasure as such; we must stop short of equating it with this or that expression of bodily enjoyment. The more difficult, and to me important, task then becomes that of welding this pleasure together with the high-minded Anglo-Catholic vision that drives *Goblin Market* and Rossetti's other writings.

How does Rossetti carve out space for a purposive, spirit-renovating model of pleasure in a metaphysical system that prioritizes individual salvation above all else?

Rossetti's Tractarianism and the Specter of Blake

Rossetti's concept of the spiritual utility of embodied pleasure derives in part from her steeping in Tractarianism. Beginning in 1843, Rossetti was a devoted attendant of Christ Church, Albany Street, the main stronghold of the Oxford Movement in London, renowned for the impassioned, rhapsodic preaching of men like Edward Pusey and William Dodsworth, his disciple. The Anglo-Catholic services at Christ Church reflected a desire to revert to the liturgical customs of the pre-Reformation Church, and thus offered worshippers a heady array of visual, aural, and olfactory appeals: vestments, candles, incense, a sung liturgy, and other fixtures of the Roman Catholic church, collectively labeled "smells and bells" by the movement's opponents (Marsh 56). The sensuousness of the experience—a reaction against what Tractarians saw as the arid, affectless, excessively cerebral quality of much English Protestant worship—effectively reintroduced the body as a central component of spiritual yearning and understanding.

Anglo-Catholic church services had, as their centerpiece, sermons that were imbued with formal qualities likewise geared toward producing pleasure. Edward Pusey, particularly, delivered sermons that could exercise spellbinding effects on listeners, especially young listeners such as the Rossetti of the 1840s. Sara Coleridge, a parishioner at Christ Church at the same time as Rossetti, offered the following portrait of Pusey's rhetoric and pulpit presence in July 1845: "His discourse is generally a rhapsody, describing with infinite repetition and

accumulativeness the wickedness of sin, the worthlessness of earth, and the blessedness of heaven. He is as still as a statue all the time he is uttering it, looks as white as a sheet, is as monotonous in delivery as possible" (Coleridge, *Memoirs*, 173-4). An excerpt from Pusey's sermon *Sudden Death* gives a clear sense of his style:

We should shrink from [sudden death] ourselves. We should wish for the most part to have notice of our death, to wind up our repentances, to be disciplined by its approach, to receive the comforts of our holy Faith, to be prayed by and for, and to be commended to God by those whom He has appointed to bless in His name. We should wish once more to receive the tokens of our Saviour's mercy, His Body which was given, His Blood which was shed for us, to be united with Him, and in that union, to wrestle with the last enemy, and in His Strength to trample on him. These natural feelings are true. (Pusey 6)

Pusey's strongly anaphoric style is itself a "winding up" in climactic passages like this, a gathering of momentum through repetitious phrases that accrue mesmeric power and build toward moments of release in terse remarks ("These natural feelings are true"). Jan Marsh observes that certain of the same qualities that Coleridge identified, and that are visible in the passage above, impacted Rossetti's then-nascent poetic method: "Rather uncannily, the chief qualities of Christina's mature verse can be described in similar terms: rhapsody, repetition, accumulativeness, the worthlessness of earth and the blessedness of heaven" (Marsh 57). As I hope to show in my discussion of *Goblin Market* below, Rossetti is hardly committed to a view

of this world as worthless; these other qualities, though, especially rhapsody, repetition, and accumulativeness, play an instrumental part in her poetics.

The most compelling of these Tractarian poetic voices, and certainly the most influential for Rossetti, was John Keble, whose hugely popular *The Christian Year* Rossetti owned, annotated and even illustrated. In addition to being a poet, Keble authored poetic criticism that functioned as the theoretical backbone for Tractarian verse, and, along with his lectures and sermons, helped establish him as "the true begetter of the [Oxford] Movement" in the eyes of John Henry Newman and other Tractarians (Tennyson 24). His criticism finds Keble grappling with the question of how to justify the Tractarian turn toward embodiment, both in its poetry and liturgical practices; how to legitimate the increased reliance on materiality and somatic experience as a means of winning the soul to God. Keble begins with the basic assumption that the Incarnation—the fundamental event of Christianity and, for Tractarians, the core of the Church—is evidence enough that God is no unapproachable abstraction but a force requiring palpable form in the world (Tennyson 33). The Incarnation thus serves as the prototype for spiritual embodiment, becoming the basis for an Incarnational poetics that endeavors to give physical presence, particularly visible presence, to the absolute. Keble's most vital and oft-excerpted statements on poetic theory pivot, in fact, on the capacity of this process—this "presenting" of the invisible—to provide pleasure to poet and reader: "All the pleasures of poetry," Keble wrote in an 1814 essay on Edward Copleston, "imply the embodying something visionary, the presenting something absent, the bettering something imperfect: their very being lies in the consciousness of some such operation" (Keble 158). Pleasure, the crux of Keble's most trenchant statements on poetics, results from "the graces of form," the artful endowment of

concrete visual shape to the abstract. Our consciousness as readers that we have seen fleshed out, in our mind's eye, the visual analogue of something ethereal causes us pleasure. Keble's formulation, in other words, strongly anticipates T.S. Eliot's concept of the objective correlative roughly a century later, in their mutual emphasis on locating a corresponding "type" in the physical world of something otherwise immaterial and ineffable—except that Keble is of course exclusively interested in presenting moral and spiritual realities, and makes the process hinge on pleasurable feeling.

Yet pleasure also arises, for Keble, from the mental exercise of inducing cosmic truths from these same embodied forms, learning to read into them for the moral and spiritual facts that silently inhere in them. Elsewhere in the same essay on Copleston, he notes, "It is to the awakening of some moral or religious feeling, not by direct instruction (that is the office of moral theology) but by way of association that we refer all poetical pleasures" (Keble 150). It is easy to detect here the influence of Wordsworth, whom Keble admired, particularly in that coupling of knowledge with pleasure that proved so attractive for subsequent nineteenth-century poets (including working-class poets, as we saw). Wordsworth had, in his own way, charted a formula in "Tintern Abbey" and the first two books of *The Prelude* whereby the superficial delights of the natural world gave way to the more "sober pleasures" that attended an awareness of "something far more deeply interfused" that underlay them. This too was a habit of interpreting creation as a storehouse of types, however more pantheistic than Christian in its original conception—and, indeed, Tennyson has already suggested that for this reason Keble was more indebted to Wordsworth for his mode of analogical thinking than critics tend to realize. I would add that Wordsworth too was driven by an associational mode of thought that likewise

privileged pleasure: as I sought to show in the introduction, Wordsworth, himself drawing on the "association" theory of David Hartley, posited pleasure as an adhesive through which individuals retained their memories of formative visions and events. Wordsworth's "spots of time" are, after all, accompanied by pleasure, "fastened to the affections" and thereby made to linger in the memory where they become the building-blocks of identity.

Keble, though his own formulation is somewhat less elaborate, nevertheless channels Wordsworth in setting down a progression from surface to depth, visualized embodiment to invisible truth, facilitated by pleasure. In keeping with Keble's arguments, later taken up and expanded on by Newman in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and other writings, Tractarianism became, at heart, a religious and poetic movement that lived and died on ocular appeals. Where Anglican churches like Christ Church were adorned with resplendent visual stimuli that symbolically dramatized the Christian mysteries, Tractarian poetry thrived on a "presenting" of divine realities through the manufacturing of images. Both were conceived as vehicles of a higher, moral pleasure that began as corporeal but carried readers and worshippers toward the supersensible. George Landow has aptly summed up a critical distinction between Victorian evangelicalism and Tractarianism: "[E]vangelicals sought the pleasures of the ear and High Anglicans those of the eye" (Landow 19); "and there can be no doubt," as Lorraine Kooistra adds, "that Rossetti was greatly affected by the visual pleasures of her worship experiences" (Kooistra 5). Much Tractarian poetry, accordingly, can be seen as a training ground that conditions readers, via the pleasurable fashioning of images, to read the universe as a massive text instinct with holy meaning. Like the working-class theorists of poetry formulating their own *ars poeticas* at roughly the same time, Tractarian critics like Keble seize on pleasure as the precipitant of a new

knowledge they imagine as ennobling and redemptive—a yoking together of affect and cognition that exalted pleasure, in both cases, by placing it at the center of programs for moral and spiritual transformation.

Though Rossetti will not fit easily into the mold of a Tractarian poet—her work is simply deeper and more varied and complex than that of Keble, Isaac Williams, or any other High Church poet—few would disagree that her spiritual outlook and poetic approach bear the mark of the Oxford Movement. For Tennyson, "Rossetti is the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry" (Tennyson 198), while Mary Arseneau has traced in detail the formative effect of Tractarian habits of mind on the young Rossetti's nascent style (Arseneau 80-82). Her primary connections to the movement lie, first, in her own Incarnational poetics, that Keble-derived mode of justifying physicality in poetry by seeing it as a Coleridgean repetition of God's own assumption of fleshly form for the sake of human comprehension and salvation. Perhaps poets too had license to glory in corporeality, to forge embodied correlatives to abstract truths that might more easily make themselves felt, and thus understood, by readers. Second, and closely related, the movement contributed to Rossetti's sacramentalism, which meant not merely a reverence for the church sacraments, but an "awareness of the transcendent as sacramentally and analogically present in the material world and human life" (Arseneau 80). Divinity was immanent in our material surroundings, and poetry could instill in readers a faculty for identifying and interpreting it rightly. Rossetti's celebrated pictorial imagination—her propensity for crafting powerfully imagistic lyrics that dazzle even as they startle readers into epiphanic realizations of a deeper cosmic significance—plays directly into this ambition. This is apparent even in poetry as seemingly ingenuous as that contained in *Sing Song*, Rossetti's 1872 volume of

children's verse. The book showcases Rossetti's whimsical, ludic side, its poems as convincing an argument as any against a perception of Rossetti as a poet addicted to ghostly restraint, Baudelairean morbidity. One of the most memorable of these is "Who Has Seen the Wind?":

Who has seen the wind?
 Neither I nor you.
 But when the leaves hang trembling
 The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
 Neither you nor I:
 But when the trees bow down their heads
 The wind is passing by. (1-8)

It is a pictorial poem, paradoxically, about invisibility. Its two quatrains suggest we need sense perception, particularly vision, precisely to induce the existence of something forever beyond the senses' reach. Wind, which in *Seek and Find* Rossetti expressly interprets as an emblem of God's will working itself out in the world, makes itself known symptomatically via its continuous material effects, a logos invisibly governing phenomenal reality. Rossetti's longer poems, as I will suggest below, are often far more Swinburnean than critics tend to acknowledge; her shorter lyrics, however, resemble bouillon cubes, distilled images that worm their way into the mind and expand into manifold suggestions and associations. In this sense her short poems

are like Swinburne's verse turned inside-out: in Swinburne, as we'll see, most of the denotative meaning is writ large on the surfaces of poems, in sprawling metaleptic sentences that cloy through excess; Rossetti, though she deploys excess to startlingly Swinburnean effect in *Goblin Market*, adheres in her short lyrics to a surface simplicity and economy of diction that conceals expansive depths. There is much pleasure to be found in the poems of *Sing-Song*, in their nursery rhyme-like music, their occasional silliness, the shorn purity of their truncated lines and the images they conjure; and, more seriously, the rewards that come with unpacking the riddles these images constitute. Elsewhere, in "Give the Sun Time Enough," Rossetti sketches a verbal portrait of three sisters out gathering roses on a spring day, whose final stanzas suggest a hidden import behind the apparent artlessness:

Give the sun time enough,
 Glowing and glowing,
 He'll rouse the roses
 And bring them blowing.

Don't wait for roses
 Losing today,
 Oh Minnie, Mattie,
 And wise little May.

Violets and primroses

Blossom today
 For Minnie and Mattie
 And fat little May. (1-12)

The poem becomes an imploration to make the most while we can of an earthly bounty that Christ—in an iteration of the sun/son wordplay common to English devotional poetry—engenders for our enjoyment. It enjoins us to take relish in a natural world that teems with erotic energy, savoring of pleasures fathered into being by a "son" who makes himself known, initially, by material means. That the pleasures are fleeting is not a reason to shun them but a testimony to their preciousness, the necessity of seizing them while we have the chance: "Don't wait for roses / Losing today," entreats the speaker. Worldly pleasure, while no end in itself, isn't meant to be perpetually deferred, though Rossetti's poems abound with tragic instances of self-denial until it is too late. *The Prince's Progress* is such a poem, a cautionary tale not about the perils of succumbing to earthly desire but the irrevocable loss we incur by continuously postponing it: "Too late for love, too late for joy, / Too late, too late! / You loitered on the road too long, / You trifled at the gate: / The enchanted dove upon her branch / Died without a mate" (481-86). This is the Rossetti far less talked-about than the grim author of *memento mori* poems we are so used to hearing about: Rossetti the tweaker of noses (in the case of *Sing-Song*), the writer of *carpe diem* exhortations that make her as reminiscent of Robert Herrick as George Herbert, the sensuous poet lovingly cataloguing the given world and urging us to delight in it with her.

And, as far as Rossetti's own poetry was concerned, much of the sensuousness she generated stemmed, in Tractarian fashion, from that facility for image-fashioning her own

Blow flower-like; just enough alive

To blow and multiply and thrive.

Shells quaint with curve, or spot, or spike,

Encrusted live things argus-eyed,

All fair alike, yet all unlike,

Are born without a pang, and die

Without a pang, and so pass by. (1-15)

"By the Sea" generates pleasure in part through its arresting images ("Encrusted live things argus-eyed") and nuanced interplay of vowels ("It frets against the boundary shore"); but it does so, too, through the Wordsworthian surprise that results from its subtle transgressions of its iambic tetrameter tempo, as we will see in a moment. The poem turns out to be an expression of a soul's futile yearning while on earth for an apprehension of and union with God. "Shut out from heaven," the individual vainly chafes against the limitations of human intellect and sense perception, desirous of transcendence—"fret[ting]," one might say, "against the boundary shore" of his or her finite modes of discernment. Worldly enjoyments prove inadequate to satisfy this divine longing: "All earth's full rivers cannot fill / The sea, that drinking thirsteth still." The soul remains stuck, in a sense, enacting again and again a perpetual round of striving ineffectually for a fulfillment that can only really come through a merging with God; its grasping yields no lasting and complete contentment. Formally too the poem is about repetition, limits, and a desire to transcend those limits. It is as if Rossetti's poem becomes stuck in its own way, caught in a web

of its own repetitions from which it seems unable to shake free. *Moan, blow, without a pang*—these words and phrases get repeated in the lines immediately following those in which they initially appear. The poem seems, moreover, to chafe against the dictates of its own metrical pattern, enacting little violations of its meter that ultimately give way in the closing couplet to perfect iambic tetrameter. Each stanza begins with such a violation, the first with a dactyl, spondee, and cretic foot, and the latter two with a spondee followed by three iambs. "To the Sea" is, another words, a poem of repetitions that is alive with difference. This fact sharpens into focus with the telling and self-reflexive line, "A fair alike, yet all unlike," a description, on one level, of the poem's own lines—all of which tend toward iambic tetrameter, yet most of which depart from it in different ways—and of rhyme itself, all rhyme being a matter of repetition tinged with difference.

It may be that the poem's difference-amid-repetition is a way of formally dramatizing the experience of being a mortal, body-bound soul cut off from a perfect union with God. Peter McDonald gets at this idea in his recent *Sound Intentions*: "For Rossetti, just as Christ and the individual soul must ultimately find a likeness or harmony with one another, so the apparently discordant and unfixed sounds of meaning in poetic language have to move always closer towards a state of perfect similarity" (McDonald 230). Whether the discordant sounds of Rossetti's poetic language in fact tend toward "perfect similarity" seems to me debatable—*Goblin Market*—revels in its own dissonance to the end—but the argument helps make sense of "By the Sea." All progeny of Christ, the infinite array of animate and inanimate things that furnish the universe, are "alike" in that they bear the imprint of their creator, are wrought with an "inscape," to borrow Hopkins's term, that testifies to their divine origin. Yet they are "all

unlike," too, to the extent that they remain individualized entities, unique. If that difference is what accounts for the fascination and piecemeal beauty of the world—its mottled splendor, the "sheer miracles of loveliness" that everywhere adorn it—then it is also cause for a yearning on the part of human souls to overcome their distinctness and reunite with Christ. We find ourselves products of a perpetual cycle of generation that brings us further and further away from our creator—distinct, nostalgic, pining for a "harmony" or synchrony with God that would seem possible only in death.

It is tempting to read aspects of this poem in a biographical light, as an oblique description of Rossetti herself, possessed at twenty-eight not just of startling beauty but an elaborate, dazzling, and richly furnished inner life she was only too conscious of not sharing with a spouse (though sharing it through poetry); and possessed, too, of a "bed" that likewise languished as Rossetti aged. But it may be safer to say that "By the Sea" anticipates, in its portrait of a profound yearning that "[a]ll earth's full rivers" are incapable of quenching, the speakers of Rossetti's devotional poetry and *Goblin Market's* Laura, as I'll show below. Laura too will remain locked, through the middle portion of that poem, in a liminal state of death-in-life, "just enough alive" by the poem's climactic scene to be resuscitated by her sister's graceful intervention. But "By the Sea," like Rossetti's religious verse, serves also to highlight *Goblin Market's* radicalism by virtue their contrast to each other. *Goblin Market* boldly substitutes indulgence for the (relatively safer and more tepid) longing of "by the Sea," investing an act of present ecstasy (albeit mixed with anguish) with redemptive power, as I hope to demonstrate. That poem will also be an affair of difference amid repetition, one in which the young women are indeed "alike" in appearance, identity, and the fact that both deal with the goblin men. Yet

they are manifestly "unlike" in the stark and all-important differences that separate their respective encounters with the goblins.

"By the Sea" is, for all its acoustic nuance, a highly visual poem that endeavors to convey the "loveliness" of its subject, and in this regard it typifies Rossetti's pictorialism. As Lorraine Kooistra has usefully argued in a discussion of *Sing-Song*, Rossetti's pictorialism can be usefully seen as buttressing rather than undermining her spiritual purpose. She draws a comparison to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, a work Rossetti knew well, to enforce this claim: "Like picture and word in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the visual-verbal partners in *Sing-Song* create a rich interplay of surface and symbol designed to delight and instruct the listening child while at the same time suggesting extended meanings for the reading adult" (Kooistra 102). Kooistra refers here to the actual, physical illustrations that originally adorned *Sing-Song*, but the visual-verbal partnership she describes applies as well to the mental pictures Rossetti habitually aspires to create for readers—a technique that will become of central importance to my discussion of *Goblin Market*.

To my knowledge, Kooistra's invocation of Blake is the only instance of a critic asserting any kind of lineage linking Rossetti—in form, style, or belief system—back to the Romantic poet, engraver, and visionary. Antony Harrison's *Christina Rossetti in Context* offers an excellent discussion of Rossetti's aestheticism, doing the most of any critic to date by way of showing how the aesthetic and spiritual impulses, *aesthesis* and *ascesis*, might be mutually promoting rather than antithetical in Rossetti (though his discussion of *Goblin Market* doesn't finally sustain this model). Harrison attributes Rossetti's "aesthetic mysticism" (to borrow a phrase that multiple Victorian critics used in describing her) primarily to her exposure to the art

and philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. While it is hard to deny that Rossetti's poetry exhibits key features of Pre-Raphaelite art and literature—a richly detailed pictorialism (which dovetails with Tractarian poetics), an anti-dualistic outlook, and a form of sacramentalism that privileges fleshly experience—it is also true that Blake was an important progenitor of these same Pre-Raphaelite ideals. At the very least, then, Blake is an indirect source for a number of vital contours of Rossetti's poetics by way of the PRB—though I will go a step further here in suggesting that Rossetti was quite aware of Blake, that she read and was influenced by him to a degree that goes beyond resemblances between *Sing-Song* and *Songs*.

Blake loomed exceedingly large for the PRB, including the Rossetti brothers: Dante purchased, in the later 1840s, a notebook of Blake's containing drafts of "The Tyger," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and other works, as well as annotations in which Blake gestured at various intellectual and artistic precepts; William, for his part, helped usher Blake into the Victorian canon by editing a volume of Blake's poetry that initially appeared in 1874. Among those associated with the PRB, however, it was Christina in whose work Blake's poetic style and abstract thought found its most compelling and enduring expression. An early biographer-critic and personal friend of Rossetti's, Mackenzie Bell, urged readers in a study of Rossetti four years after her death to "recollect how great, apparently, was the influence of Blake on her own work." Bell pinpoints a passage from Rossetti's devotional prose, a piece of moralizing occasioned by the Feast of St. George in 1885, that "reveals her love of William Blake":

There is a design by William Blake symbolic of the Resurrection. In it I behold the descending soul and the arising body rushing together in an indissoluble embrace: and the

design, among all I recollect to have seen, stands alone in expressing the rapture of that reunion. (Bell x)

The passage, almost certainly about Blake's image "The Reunion of the Soul and the Body," is crucial, for it cements Rossetti's admiration for Blake even as it helps us toward an understanding of what, specifically, she found so energizing in his work and ideas. For Rossetti, as for Blake, the body is not a vile and humbling barrier for the spirit to surmount; rather, body and spirit are indissolubly bound up, their inextricability an occasion not for lament but joy. If death divorces them, we can infer from Rossetti's passage that this is to be regretted—and that their reunion at the Last Judgment is an event she imagines in rapt terms. Blake's impassioned critique of dualism, his insistence in *MHH* that "Man has no Body distinct from his soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses," must have resonated with Rossetti; indeed, the intimate welding of sensuousness and spirituality in both Christina's and Dante's poetry was all but a commonplace among Victorian readers and critics. "The Rossetti virus," observed one anonymous reviewer in 1895, "is a peculiar mingling of sense and soul in a sort of mystical aestheticism" ("Christina Georgina Rossetti" 21).

Blake was a vital precursor for this perspective; in him Rossetti would have discovered a charismatic predecessor whose own sacramental outlook likewise accorded to the body a pivotal role in knowledge-formation and the apprehension of divinity. "Everything that Lives is Holy," Blake had asserted in *MHH*; but this would only become apparent once "the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul" was "expunged." Recovering the body as an instrument of perception itself entailed "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (Blake, *Early Illuminated*

Books 166). The phenomenal world was a vast unity in which each minute particular, viewed rightly, contained within it the imprimatur of the harmonizing force that organized it into a coherent cosmos. "To see a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour," Blake had written in "Auguries of Innocence" (1-4). Glimpsing the world in a grain of sand meant perceiving how the latter took its place as part of an interconnected totality, a divine architecture that conferred on individual details their meaning, purpose, value. If they differed fundamentally on the question of what this unifying force consisted of—for Blake it was the human imagination, for Rossetti a logos that existed independently of us—they shared a conviction in the body as the indispensable mediator through which an understanding of the cosmos came to take shape. Both, albeit in distinct ways, were struggling toward a version of sacramentalism that exalted the senses as the apertures through which visionary experience came into view. "Common things continually at hand," Rossetti wrote in *Seek and Find*, "wind or windfall or budding bough, acquire a sacred association, and cross our path under aspects at once familiar and transfigured, and preach to our spirits while they serve our bodies" (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 203). "Objects of sight," she observes elsewhere in the same volume, "may and should quicken us to apprehend objects of faith, things temporal suggesting things eternal" (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 180).

That the details of physical reality "preach to our spirits while they serve our bodies" helps justify the central place accorded the flesh in Rossetti's poetry. It clarifies why so much of her poetry itself aspires toward a sensuousness that invites—indeed, partly depends on—a form of embodied reading. The particularities of the sensible world functioned as indices of divine truths, and they impressed themselves on people through experiences that began as embodied

pleasure and subsequently ripened into spiritual nourishment—and into a longing for union with God. It was pleasure that coaxed the soul out of itself and into an engagement with the external world, and thereby, ideally, an awed awareness of the force that had created and invisibly inhered in it. This is a pleasure that, as Rossetti sees it, we are not meant to abjure:

It is good for us to enjoy all good things that fall to our temporal lot, so long as such enjoyment kindles and feeds the desire for better things reserved for our eternal inheritance. The younger fairer than the elder (Judges xv.2), the best wine last (St. John ii.10), these are symbols calculated to set us while on earth hankering, longing, straining, after heaven. (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 180-81)

While a desire for heaven is the hoped-for endpoint of this formulation, it is made possible by an indulgence in the things of this world, the sensuous feast that, for Rossetti, constitutes phenomenal reality. The flesh is the apparatus for reading the world, even if the knowledge it gleans is ultimately offered up to the spirit rather than serving as an end in itself. Those Rossetti critics who have built their arguments around the assumption that physicality is a segment of experience to be eschewed, commit the same dualistic error that Blake had railed against and that Rossetti, in her own more understated way, plainly contradicts. The underlying message of *Goblin Market*, writes Arseneau, is that only the person who is "not tempted by the empty promise of material things, and who attempts to look behind physical surfaces for some moral or spiritual significance" can "interpret the world in a meaningful and Christian way" (Arseneau 91). But Rossetti loves the material world, for her far too rich, variegated, and

mysterious a thing to be coldly dismissed as an "empty promise." Her own poetry is gilded with gorgeous surfaces—with that Pre-Raphaelite and Blakean intensity, the stunning clarity of visualized dreams—to which readers such as Virginia Woolf responded so powerfully. Considered in the light of the above quotation from *Seek and Find*, it is safe to say that she understands these surfaces not as a mode of duping readers but a means toward an awareness of, and desire for, the eternal. Put differently, the second half of Arseneau's statement quoted above is true, but the wording of the first part might mislead one into thinking physical surfaces were present in Rossetti merely to be cast aside, snares around which readers—and Rossetti's protagonists—must vigilantly tip-toe en route to durable spiritual knowledge. I would argue, though, that Rossetti understands these surfaces and the pleasure they incite as the very stuff that "quicken(s) us to apprehend objects of faith."

It is less interesting and perhaps too obvious to say of Rossetti, "Yes, her poetry is rife with surface pleasures, but she wishes for us to look past these and glimpse the absolute that lies beyond or beneath them, of which they are merely types." More startling and remarkable is the fact that, while of course she is invested in the absolute, she appears equally adamant that sensuousness is necessary to guide humans to it. This dimension of her poetry comes out of Tractarianism (to say nothing of the PRB and Blake), but it is also very much of a piece with a broader impulse in Victorian poetry toward positing fleshly enjoyment as a vehicle for transcendence—an impulse clearly discernible in Robert Browning and, as we will see, Swinburne. It makes her, with Browning specifically, a radical Protestant poet who identifies embodied pleasure as the provenance of spiritual striving. Like Browning, Rossetti finds justification for this in the Incarnation, in the example of a God whose "descendental motion"

into flesh, as Arseneau has written, epitomizes the Christian poet's own endeavor to give embodied form to the numinous. The counterpart for this is the necessity for human consciousness to transcend the material, learning to interpret the physical world as a text in whose characters divinity is inscribed. "The link between heaven and earth," for Rossetti, is thus akin to "a Jacob's ladder with its continuous simultaneous ascending and descending motion" (Arseneau 82). Just so with Browning, who, ventriloquizing through his own Fra Lippo Lippi, asserts the interdependence of the fleshly and spiritual in terms that correspond closely with Rossetti's vision—and, likewise, makes a ladder (which links Lippo's apartment with the streets below) into one of the central tropes of a poem that traces a continuous, symbolic pattern of upward and downward movement.

As for Browning via Lippo, then, "the world and life," for Rossetti, are "too big to pass for a dream"; her poetry, in its bold suggestion that the empirical world—and our seen, felt experience of it—can set us "straining after heaven," forms a cogent apology for what Lippo calls "the value and significance of flesh." Still, it would be an error to equate Rossetti fully with Browning in this regard, much less with the lascivious monk who serves as Browning's proxy in that monologue. Enamored though Rossetti doubtless is with the sensible world, it is also true that her writing evinces a profound wariness of fleshly enjoyment that simply isn't present in any of the other poets taken up in this project. That wariness stems above all from her concern that worldly pleasure and beauty, rather than pointing the way toward God, might distract and hypnotize us, deceiving us into believing they are self-contained ends instead of means. Thus, alongside defenses of worldly enjoyment such as the one from *Seek and Find* quoted above, readers of Rossetti's devotional prose will discover other, seemingly antithetical passages: in

Annus Domini, for example, she entreats God, "Let not the worldly influence sway us, or worldly glory dazzle us, or this vain life enthrall us in its shadow, or riches weigh us down to earth, or pleasure slay us" (Rossetti, *Annus Domini* 40). This is the Rossetti with whom most readers are acquainted. To try to reconcile it with the celebration of the physical world that fuels *Seek and Find* and any number of her poems, as well as her rapt affirmation of the indissolubility of body and spirit, is to gain a clear sense of the conundrum out of which Rossetti's poetry arises: knowing that sensuousness is necessary to woo humans to God yet being simultaneously aware of how very risky it is, how apt individuals are to become stuck on the material, beguiled into thinking it is self-sufficient.

Yet the point remains that Rossetti is an artist whose aesthetic impulse and fascination with beautiful forms surely compelled her to choose poetry in the first place. If her ultimate fidelity is to the invisible and to the task of spiritual edification, it is still true that she has opted to take up verbal art as her medium; and in response to those who would suggest the surface pleasures that distinguish her poetry are merely incidental, or a deception to be stoically passed over, one might ask, with Fra Lippo Lippi, "What need of art at all?" If Rossetti's object were merely to impress on readers the imminence of their deaths and the urgent necessity to repent, then surely, as Lippo remarks, "A skull and bones would do as well" as the beautifully wrought structures Rossetti in fact elected to leave behind. Given, though, that she opted to devote her life to verbal art, it stands to reason that in much of her verse and prose we witness Rossetti thinking metapoetically about the spiritual utility of sensory appeals—particularly, as I will shortly suggest, appeals to sight. *Goblin Market* is such a metapoetic meditation. In tracing the fate of Laura—enthralled by a fruit that initially infects her but proves, in an altered context, her

antidote—*Goblin Market* asks how embodied pleasure might be rerouted toward spiritually regenerative ends; and, by inference, how the sensual feast the poem itself so knowingly offers readers might be considered to have a redemptive charge.

The Dead City, Goblin Market, and Rossetti's Revisionary Reading of Keats

Goblin Market can be usefully approached by way of an earlier narrative poem of Rossetti's, *The Dead City*, which strongly anticipates it. *The Dead City* is among Rossetti's most impressive early achievements, the most considerable poem contained in her first volume, *Verses* (1847), published when she was only seventeen. The poem is a medieval dream vision that traces the progress of a spiritual pilgrim, the narrator, who wends her way through a pathless wilderness and ultimately to a banquet hall in a palace, where she beholds a host of guests turned to stone in the midst of a feast. The opening, in its sylvan setting and sense of disorientation, clearly invokes the start of Dante's *Inferno*, though Rossetti's speaker is far more blithe than Dante's about being lost:

Once I rambled in a wood
 With a careless hardihood,
 Heeding not the tangled way;
 Labyrinths around me lay,
 But for them I never stood. (1-5)

But the echoes of Dante give way fairly quickly to resonances of a different poet, whose work provides the real subtext of *The Dead City* and forms one of the vital backdrops of *Goblin Market*: Keats. Advancing further into the woods the speaker begins to succumb to an illusion of timelessness ("Sweet forgetting of the time"), and this leads to a series of delighted exclamations in praise of a landscape that appears immune to change: "Oh most blessed solitude! / Oh most full beatitude!" The place seems an idyll, above mutability:

Happy solitude, and blest
 With beatitude of rest;
 Where the woods are ever vernal,
 And the life and joy eternal,
 Without Death's or Sorrow's test. (36-40)

Rossetti is likely appropriating the language of "Ode on a Grecian Urn," particularly that third stanza, a celebration of perpetual spring: "Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed your leaves / Nor ever bid the Spring adieu" (21-22). Like Keats's ode, Rossetti's narrative poem leads on to a portrait of a "desolate" town, its streets emptied of its denizens, though in this case the "sacrifice" to which they have unwittingly gone off is their own; they have martyred themselves to vanity: "Enter in," says a voice to the speaker-pilgrim, "and look, and see / How for luxury and pride / A great multitude have died" (162-64). Like the figures detailed in the second and third stanzas of "Grecian Urn," the inhabitants of Rossetti's dream city are frozen just on the brink of indulgence, banqueters at an immense feast that remains intact by the time the

speaker enters: "In my great astonishment / To the feasters up I went— / Lo, they all were turned to stone" (223-25). But the astonishment, in the older and more literal sense of that word, belongs to the banqueters themselves. Rossetti's revisionary adroitness, her ability to seize on and revamp for her own purposes the inventions of a prior poet—so often Keats, who loomed large for her—are already on display in this early poem. She takes Keats's rapt, albeit ambivalent, ekphrasis on artistic immortality and recasts it as a horrifying *memento mori*: these are not painted figures but embodied humans interrupted on the cusp of consumption, forced to confront an afterlife for which they aren't prepared. Death, Rossetti seems to say, visits us in just this way, arresting us mid-bite, mid-gesture, mid-look. Removed from the march of linear time, we are no longer capable of repentance.

The Dead City, then, is a fairly straightforward denunciation of pride and sensual pleasure, rendered in even tetrameter stanzas of five lines each. Its pictorial centerpiece is an extended description of fruits piled in panniers spread out on the banquet table, evoked in terms obviously anticipatory of *Goblin Market*:

In green emerald baskets were
 Sun-red apples, streaked, and fair;
 Here the nectarine and peach
 And ripe plum lay, and on each
 The bloom rested every where.

Grapes were hanging overhead,

Purple pale, and ruby-red;
 And in panniers all around
 Yellow melons shone, fresh found,
 With the dew upon them spread.

And the apricot and pear
 And the pulpy fig were there;
 Cherries and dark mulberries,
 Bunchy currants, strawberries,
 And the lemon wan and fair.

And unnumbered others too,
 Fruits of every size and hue,
 Juicy in their ripe perfection,
 Cool beneath the cool reflection,
 Of the curtains' skyey blue. (181-200)

The passage, and the larger context in which it occurs, are telling by virtue of their difference from *Goblin Market*, composed some fifteen years later. In the latter poem, Laura will be permitted to partake of the fruit-feast set before her, not arrested on the cusp of pleasure but allowed to rush headlong into it. *Goblin Market*, that is, offers something much more

provocative and subversive: this time one of the protagonists will eat, and do so toward the beginning of the poem, which is as much concerned with the aftereffects of this act as the act itself. That poem's attitude toward the fruit and all it stands for, moreover, will be far more vexed and ambivalent, not merely condemnatory. Yet the above stanzas also demonstrate that Rossetti was already experimenting with the trope of fruit at this early juncture of her career, and by inquiring into the source of this trope, we can gain a still clearer sense of the originality and daring of *Goblin Market*, as well as Rossetti's deeper purpose in writing it. In an influential article, B. Ifor Evans traced the imagery to excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contained in Thomas Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology*, a favorite book among the Rossetti children (Evans 157). Especially relevant in Evans's view was the passage in which Titania, enamored of Bottom, instructs her elves to "Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes, / Feed him with apricocks, and dewberries, / With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries." I would suggest that while Evans is right in identifying Keightley's volume as a source text, we would do better to look to a different poem, likewise excerpted in *The Fairy Mythology*, for the origin of *Goblin Market*'s fruit: Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*. As early as 1849 Rossetti composed a sonnet, "On Keats," whose sestet expresses unequivocal admiration for the Romantic poet:

What was his record of himself ere he
 Went from us? "Here lies one whose name was writ
 In water." While the chilly shadows flit
 Of sweet St. Agnes' Eve, while basil springs—
 His name, in every humble heart that sings,

Shall be a fountain unto love, verily. (9-14)

The invocation of Keats's *St. Agnes* confirms Rossetti's special attachment to that work. It ought, I think, to direct our attention to the culminating episode of Keats's narrative poem, a seduction scene—profoundly ambiguous morally—in which Porphyro, Keats's male protagonist, woos the young Madeline with the assistance of a spread of fruits and spices:

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
 In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd
 While he from forth the closet brought a heap
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
 From Fez, and spiced dainties, every one,
 From Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon. (262-70)

If the entirety of *St. Agnes* reads like an urtext that enfolds much of what's most characteristic of Rossetti's poetry—the medieval setting, the dreamy atmosphere and luxuriant, detail-studded surfaces, in short those qualities that might be termed Pre-Raphaelite—then this pivotal moment is a key antecedent for *Goblin Market* especially, an episode Rossetti appears never to have forgotten. The apples and quinces, the "lucent syrups," the exotically Eastern

character of much of the fruit, whose rare, fetishized status facilitates a sexual transaction: all of these details from Keats can be found transplanted in *Goblin Market*. Rossetti's poem, preoccupied with repetition as we'll discover, is thus itself a repetition of numerous earlier poems like *St. Agnes*—though with critical differences embedded amid these repetitions. Foremost among these, I'd suggest, is that while Laura's initial encounter with the goblins roughly reiterates Keats's narrative, Lizzie is given the capacity to say no. No passive Madeline, she takes her sister's fate into her own hands, co-opting the goblin fruit and placing it in the service of spiritual rejuvenation. In appropriating Keats's poem only to revise it strategically with an eye toward altering the gender politics, Rossetti reveals the influence on her of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.³ As Marjorie Stone has suggested, it may well have been from EBB that Rossetti gleaned inspiration for the subversive gender politics that underlie much of her own poetry. Specifically, she seems to have borrowed from EBB the practice that Stone calls "revisionary mythmaking," a procedure of reclaiming mythic figures such as Eve from a male-dominated cultural tradition and recasting them in a more empowering way (Stone 343). As interestingly, Rossetti found in EBB poems such as "Catarina to Camoens" an example for a similar strategy, that of incorporating literary echoes "to insert her poem[s] into an established poetic tradition, which [EBB] then proceeds to deconstruct from within" (Stone 346). Stone points specifically to both poets' subversion of the male amatory poetic tradition to shore up this point. I suspect

³ Rossetti's admiration of EBB was such that she expressed skepticism about "whether the woman is born, or for many a long day, if ever, will be born, who will balance not to say outweigh Mrs. Browning" (Bell 103). In 1870, having been asked by her publisher to compose a set of socially conscious poems, she wrote her brother Dante, "It is impossible to go on singing out-loud to one's one-stringed lyre. It is not in me, and therefore it will never come out of me, to turn to politics or philanthropy with Mrs. Browning: such many-sidedness I leave to a greater than I, and, having said my say, may well sit silent" (Stone 344). Rossetti's self-effacement in this quotation is over-the-top to the point of being facetious, and indeed, if my own discussion of *Goblin Market* is any indication, Rossetti had an obvious investment in matters of gender, at the very least.

Goblin Market is just such an instance of a deliberate revision of a male-authored amatory poem; indeed its climactic scene, I will suggest below, features a quasi-sonnet that, far from presenting us with a silent woman who serves as the object of a male gaze, dramatizes feminine self-reliance and agency.

Goblin Market's clearest departure from Keats, then, lies in Lizzie's having the potential to refuse the goblin fruit. This does not amount to a rejection of sensual pleasure as such, merely an insistence by Lizzie upon having the fruit on her own terms. Lizzie, we will see, effectively wrests it away from the goblins, and together with Laura assigns to it a healing, altruistic purpose that supersedes the exploitative one the latter would ascribe to it. Recast as the residue of an act of steadfastness for another, the fruit juice becomes an emblem of sisterly defiance and loyalty, and the embodied pleasure it affords acquires healing force. Recontextualized, contaminant becomes cure. The poem's climax, an act of consumption that fuses Christian regeneration with pleasurable excess, makes deepened sense in light of Rossetti's fascination with Tractarianism, her Blakean and Keatsian leanings, and to a lesser extent her affinities with the PRB. As a daring vision of Christian redemption as an outcome of indulgence rather than renunciation, it powerfully aligns Rossetti with the other poets taken up in this study, hinting at a radical aesthetic that posits embodied pleasure as a facilitator of spiritual renewal and growth.

The poem begins in a manner at once familiar and alien:

Morning and evening

Maids heard the goblins cry:

'Come by our orchard fruits,

Come buy, come buy:
 Apples and quinces,
 Lemons and oranges,
 Plump unpecked cherries,
 Melons and raspberries,
 Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
 Swart-headed mulberries,
 Wild free-born cranberries,
 Crab-apples, dewberries,
 Pine-apples, blackberries,
 Apricots, strawberries;—
 All ripe together
 In summer weather,—
 Morns that pass by,
 Fair eves that fly. (1-18)

The poem's fantastical elements—the goblins and, later, details such the kernel-stone—combined with its fable-like structure and pat moralistic ending, conjure associations with fairy tales. Yet it very clearly does not begin "Once upon a time" but "Morning and evening," situating itself firmly within the diurnal rhythms of the agrarian world where it takes place, the rhythms that govern the lives and work-routines of the two sisters (Rosenblum 72). The fairy-tale archetype is thus invoked only to be subverted, a pattern of defamiliarization that will

continue through the remainder of the poem. It is important to note, too, that Rossetti, as she relates in a *Seek and Find* section entitled "Night and Day," understood these same diurnal rhythms, the procession of morning into evening, and in turn into morning again, as emblems of death and regeneration: symbolically, "evening and morning compose the entire day of our hopes," typifying, "as in a lovely figure, the death-stricken life which we lead in this world's twilight, passing out of itself into the immortal life of heaven's noon." "Night," moreover, is a phase that "sheweth knowledge," a segment of time when, according to ample Biblical precedents, divinely-gifted visions and revelations tend to occur (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 69, 73). In the first line alone, then, Rossetti has already forecast the spiritual trajectory Laura will follow in the stanzas to come: her approaching lapse into a dark night of the soul, the wisdom that trial will eventually yield, and the morning-like restoration to grace that will come with the dawn described in the penultimate stanza.

Yet the reference to "Morning and evening" is also indicative of *Goblin Market's* deeper interest in temporality—in how time gets beaten out by the prosodic units of the poem, with its ever-varying metrical scheme; and how the poem's form more generally, its lists and peculiar heaps of similes, facilitate or hinder its narrative progression. What then is the poem's form? To the extent that it adheres to any formal scheme, *Goblin Market*, as Victorian metrists like George Saintsbury recognized, deploys the system of meter, rhyme, and line-shape known as Skeltonics. Its short, heavily stressed, staccato-like lines of two and three accents each, often organized into couplets and tercets; its frequent coinages created by stitching words together into composites of adjectives and nouns (e.g. "Bloom-down-cheeked," "Swart-headed"); its turbulent, jaunty, lusty rhythms used to evoke often grotesque subject matter; its galloping pace ("Morns that pass by, /

Fair eyes that fly"): all of these qualities make *Goblin Market* a clear descendent of the verse-innovations of the early Tudor poet John Skelton (Jamison 162). If, for Victorian metrists, Skeltonics were associated both with a native English (rather than Continental) and a working-class poetic tradition, the most immediate and noticeable effect of this form, as Anne Jamison observes, remains "sensual and rhythmic." What one notices at the poem's outset is "[t]he intense physicality of the goblin chant and the raw phonemic and rhythmic embodiment of oral pleasure that inaugurates the poem" (Jamison 158-60). The goblin chant both comprises and implicates readers in a linguistic feast whose distinguishing features are: a profusion of strongly accented dactyls ("Melons and raspberries"), dactyls often paired with trochees ("Plump unpecked cherries"), bilabial consonants ("Bright-fire-like barberries"), and repetition ("Come by, come by"). Together these qualities make us aware of the material aspect of this language, its capacity to make itself pleasurable if also strenuously felt in our mouths, lips, tongues. They also call to mind, in their seemingly ingenuous, nursery-rhyme-like feel, the poems of *Sing-Song*, though with obvious irony given the treacherous intentions of the figures who speak the lines.

Equally conspicuous, though, is the strain that these and other lines in *Goblin Market* place on the reader-out-loud. Rossetti gives us much to savor: her poem, like the fruits it tells of, is "sweet to tongue" for the reasons just enumerated, but it is also laborious. Lines such as "Lizzie plucked purple and rich golden flags," to name but one, might easily double as tongue-twisters for children, difficult as they are delightful. In fact, the cluster of interrelated words associated with Laura—"glossy Laura," "curious Laura chose to linger" (italics added)—recall the Greek and Latin *glossa* and *lingu*, respectively, both words that denote the tongue. Like Laura who sucks at the fruit "until her lips [are] sore," readers aloud encounter in *Goblin Market*

a verbal banquet requiring considerable effort, one whose lines threaten to trip the tongue. (I will have more to say about Laura and tongues at the end of my *Goblin Market* discussion.) The poem's texture, so distinct from that of Rossetti's lyric verse, recalls the cragginess and dissonance of Browning as well as Skelton. However spiritual its ultimate meaning and intent, it takes place not in a realm of wispy Platonic ideals but the bustling human world (however saturated with supernatural elements)—hurried, chaotic, rife with grotesquerie. If the two sisters achieve sanctity in the end, Rossetti, like Browning, makes clear that this can only materialize within the context of the quotidian.

The goblin fruit is, to quote the entirety of that telling line, "Sweet to tongue and sound to eye." It is clear enough, by this point, how and why the goblin chant—and much of the rest of *Goblin Market*—is "sweet to tongue," a pleasure to enunciate if also an oral work-out. But what of the synaesthetic "sound to eye"? In a poem that will turn out to be very much about vision, the phrase underscores Rossetti's fascination with the transition from sound to eye: like "sweet" (an adjective but also, alternatively, a noun synonymous with "dessert"), "sound" doubles as a noun. By what means, Rossetti implicitly asks, do the sounds of poetic chant come to be transmuted into seen, quasi-physical presences in the mind's eye of a listener, and thereby become objects of longing? Or, to consider the entirety of the line, the poem asks that we reflect on the transition from orality to aurality and finally to an abstract form of sight: how rhythmic utterance, brought into being by the mouth, is then devoured by the ear and subsequently materializes in the mental vision of the hearer. Ultimately, as we will see, Rossetti wants to know how audiences can make a final, interpretative leap from mental pictures—those gorgeous, alluring images, so pleasurable to imagine, that her poetry particularly is adept at conjuring—to

the invisible ideas and truths these emblemize; how "objects of sight" might lead on toward "objects of faith." Through the seductive play of images in *Goblin Market*—the myriad sights that, for Laura specifically, yield pleasure even as they generate a seemingly unquenchable desire—Rossetti is reckoning with her own formidable image-making power as a poet: how might her pictorial imagination be parlayed into a force with the capacity to edify and raise up, rather than lead readers astray? The poem's insistent rhyming of *eye* with *buy* is purposeful to this end, for it betrays an awareness that poetry's manufacturing of images is integral to its rhetorical power: we are seduced by what we mentally see.

We might recall that Rossetti's earliest readers considered her pictorial imagination the main wellspring of her sensuousness, a source of quasi-visual pleasure that diverted many of them from her deeper sacramental purpose. In this they were much akin to Laura, utterly taken with the visions instantiated in her mind by the goblin chant, whose effect is as powerfully addicting as the actual fruits they purport to describe. The chant initially takes hold of Laura by aural means: "Morning and evening / Maids heard the goblins cry"; "Laura bowed her head to hear," while Lizzie "thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear, shut eyes and ran." While she certainly sees the goblins ("Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie, / Down the glen tramp little men"), and later the fruit they proffer, what seduces her, rather, is the heard goblin-cry and the imaginary portrait it conjures of the fruit. In this vision-fixated poem, whose working title was *A Peep at the Goblins* (it was brother Dante, not Christina, who christened it *Goblin Market*), Laura's seduction is set in motion by descriptive language—pulsing, imagistic—that evokes pictures in her imagination. The crucial "peep," one might say, occurs in her mind's eye. Indeed, Laura has resolved to eat the fruit well before it is placed in front of her; as early as line 60 she is reiterating, in painterly

language of her own, the goblins' physical description of the fruit to Lizzie, showing how rapidly and thoroughly she has internalized their chant: "'How fair the vine must grow / Whose grapes are so luscious; / How warm the wind must blow / Thro' those fruit bushes'" (60-63). What she buys, in a very real sense, is the succulent language the goblins proffer, the sensations it incites and the pleasures it provokes. As much as the actual fruit, the goblins are selling a lusty, incantatory brand of poetry, beguiling in its repetition, lascivious rhythms, and verbal-visual efficacy.

Laura goes awry not in acquiescing to enjoy the goblin fruit (or the poetry that advertises it), but in erroneously thinking these pleasures are self-justifying, an end in themselves. Worldly pleasures, remember, are a boon so long as we view them as material traces of the higher, enduring reality they typify; seen rightly they are "symbols calculated to set us while on earth hankering, longing, straining, after heaven" (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 180-81). To the extent that earthly pleasure occurs for its own sake, it amounts essentially to masturbation. Laura becomes stuck on the physical world, in effect, thirsting after the mundane but failing to surmise the existence of the divine force that engendered it. She needs that inductive impulse, the interpretative effort of imagination through which earthly things acquire eternal meaning by virtue of their emblemizing cosmic truths. Walter Pater, in an the 1868 essay "Aesthetic Poetry," would write that "[e]arthly love," left to its own devices, "becomes a prolonged somnambulism. Of religion it learns the art of directing towards an imaginary objects sentiments whose natural direction is towards objects of sense" (Pater, *Appreciations* 218). Pater might as easily have been describing *Goblin Market*, whose lengthy middle section indeed finds Laura caught in a "prolonged somnambulism," idle, directionless, hopelessly enervated. Formally the

poem enacts this same stuckness, its anaphoric repetition paralleling, in one sense, the spiritually deadlocked state Laura has entered. Its conspicuous lists, that is (e.g., "Like two blossoms..." "Like two flakes..." "Like two wands..."), are detours that get in the narrative's way, slowing it to a state of near-suspension or stillness. *Goblin Market* begins securely within the diurnal round of "Morning and evening," unfurling at a brisk clip; by the start of the middle section, Laura "[knows] not [is] it night or day" (139), inhabiting an "absent dream" and waiting for "slow evening," removed from the rhythms of domestic life and work. The poem's anaphoric heaping enforces an analogous timelessness in which readers are implicated.

Yet even amid the anguish that consumes her throughout the poem's middle, Laura begins to show signs of her suitability for a life of piety. Perhaps most signally, she exhibits a yearning, an intensity of desire that, if exclusively worldly in scope, nevertheless aligns her with any number of the speakers of Rossetti's devotional poetry. Laura may be myopic in her desire, but she is consumed with an inner flame, a craving that is the mirror-image of the "hankering" Rossetti ascribed to the ideal Christian. This becomes clear in the contrasting descriptions of the two sisters following Laura's first eating the fruit: "They went with pitchers to the reedy brook; / Lizzie most placid in her look, / Laura most like a leaping flame" (216-18). Lizzie's is a placidity of ignorance, of one who will not, until over a hundred lines later, "[begin] to listen and look" "for the first time in her life" (327-28). But Laura has already taken the critical first step in a journey to God, though she has become stuck on that step, conceived an incandescent love of creation but not succeeded in extending that love to the creator. Her longing for the fruit, considered alongside the pining for God expressed in the devotional sonnet sequence *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets*, begins to look like admirable but misplaced agape. "So tired am I,

so weary of today"(1), pines Rossetti in *propria persona* in the fourth sonnet of that cycle. "I scarce can bring myself to watch or pray, / To hope, or aim, or toil for more or less" (5-6), she desponds; "Half-starved of soul and heartsick utterly, / Yet lift I up my heart and soul and eyes / (Which fail in looking upward) toward the prize" (9-11). Sick with desire, listless, rendered incapable of working, Rossetti is the spitting image of her own Laura, except fired with eternal rather than mundane yearnings. "Nerve me to labor till Thou bid me rest," she implores God in the next sonnet, and, in line strongly reminiscent of her characterization of Laura, "Kindle my fire from Thine unkindled fire, / And charm the willing heart from out my breast" (12-14).

Rosenblum makes a similar claim in arguing that "Laura may want the wrong fruits, but her attitude is correct. She wants with the right degree of single-mindedness and intensity" (Rosenblum 70). She too is attuned to the parallels between *Goblin Market* and Rossetti's devotional verse, observing how, when we juxtapose the two, "Laura's longings look like—indeed are—immortal longings" (Rosenblum 69). Ultimately, however, for Rosenblum the deeper import of the poem is to "redefine female action as endurance: on the one hand, blind tenacity, as exemplified by Laura's obsession with the fruits; on the other, heroic perseverance, as exemplified by Lizzie's standing firm against the goblins' assault" (Rosenblum 70). I think such an assessment does only partial justice to the complexity and strangeness of *Goblin Market*. Rossetti's poem is partly a championing of resistance and deferral, but it is equally a bold affirmation of fleshly appetite in women particularly, and, more radically still, of indulgence in the here and now. The poem's daring indeed stems, to a significant degree, from its annexing desire—a desire gendered specifically feminine—to the enterprise of Christian salvation; but it derives too from its locating a space for present enjoyment in that same regenerative project. To

call it merely a poem of endurance is to deny *Goblin Market* so much of its audacity, its ratification of bodily appetite and indulgence in Christians generally and women particularly. Rossetti is writing against a Victorian tradition that proverbially assumes women don't possess appetites at all, or that if they do, their gratifying these will prove a slippery slope, the start of a precipitous decline to complete moral decay. Countering this, she posits embodied pleasure in women as a way station in a journey toward redemption.

We see this in the fact that Laura's education consists not in repenting for what she has done but repeating the act, this time in an altered context, with different intentions and a changed interpretation. Rossetti doesn't punish Laura for desiring and having; she suggests rather that Laura goes astray in believing worldly pleasure to be enough—and *enough*, in fact, is a word that tellingly resounds through the Rossetti corpus, as in "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." "How can we say 'enough' on earth" (9), Rossetti asks in that poem. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard, / Nor heart conceived that full 'enough'" (51-52). The visible world may not be enough, but it is an indispensable starting point that sets us on the path to what is. What Laura has savored of isn't toxic, simply insufficient; she requires more of the same, but this time elevated and transfigured by a sisterly love that, in its altruism and empathy, proves Christ-like. From this angle, the poem's anaphora and other forms of repetition become reflective of the excess that cures Laura in the end, that reiteration of the original act that provides her antidote. If the anaphoric repetition has a dilatory effect initially, later it becomes the formal counterpart to the excess that, by a fascinating if paradoxical logic, turns out to be Laura's remedy. By the time we reach the poem's climax—to which I will turn fully in a moment—these exhaustive heapings (e.g., "Or like a caged thing freed, / Or like a flying flag when armies run") begin to recall those

same qualities of accumulateness and rhapsody that had distinguished the preaching style of Edward Pusey and other men at Christ Church. Even more interestingly, perhaps, they resemble the same formal attributes in the poetry of Swinburne, as we will see in greater detail in the next chapter. With the Rossetti of *Goblin Market*, as for the Swinburne of *Poems and Ballads*, excess and repetition—dramatized at a formal level—have redemptive value, are catalysts of breakthrough, antidotes to stuckness.

Laura and Lizzie's reunion following the latter's encounter with the goblins is the poem's climax as well as its most enigmatic episode. It occurs in a garden—appropriately, since it features a "fall," as we will see, though of a paradoxically regenerative sort—and is set in motion by Lizzie's injunction to Laura, "Eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura, make much of me" (471-72). The first half of the statement recalls, as countless critics have noticed, the language of the Eucharist—and the redemptive scene that follows will fulfill the promise of this allusion. But what of the statement's second half? On the surface it would seem an entreaty to seize the moment, to take full advantage of Lizzie's timely self-sacrifice and maximize its restorative potential. A more concealed significance, though, might reside in the phrasal verb to make of, with its sense of interpret or construe, as in, "What do you make of that?"—a usage that had been in circulation in English since the Renaissance (*OED*). During Lizzie's assault by the goblins, we learn that they "[s]cratched her, pinched her black as ink" (427). Is the inky blackness symptomatic of contusions, of Lizzie's having been battered black and blue, or is the ink rather a figure for the juice itself, scrawled upon her body in the manner of a written text for her sister—and us readers—to interpret as we will? Either way, she emerges from the assault with her flesh inscribed, ink-like, a riddle requiring to be read and deciphered; and, in a powerful sense, the

whole of *Goblin Market*, itself a poem about interpretation, hinges on what one makes of Lizzie and the beguiling interaction that ensues.

I want to suggest here that one way into interpreting the episode is to look to its form. Laura's reaction to consuming the goblin fruit this second time—a frenzied, exorcistic struggle that mingles agony and ecstasy—is rendered, first, in a stanza of fourteen lines:

Her lips began to scorch,
 That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
 She loathed the feast:
 Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
 Rent all her robe, and wrung
 Her hands in lamentable haste,
 And beat her breast.
 Her locks streamed like the torch
 Borne by a racer at full speed,
 Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
 Or like an eagle when she stems the light
 Straight toward the sun,
 Or like a caged thing freed,
 Or like a flying flag when armies run. (492-506)

It is difficult to read this stanza without viewing it as a sonnet of a sort—not in its rhyme scheme or meter, of course, but its line count, a fact that can scarcely have been lost on Rossetti, an inveterate sonneteer and seasoned reader of Petrarch and others. Indeed, the name Laura would almost certainly have resonated, for Rossetti, with the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, though her own Laura is ironically antithetical to the beatific figure who inspired the *Canzoniere*. Lizzie is a far closer analogue to Petrarch's Laura, her Christ-like altruism working a miraculous cure reminiscent of the exorcisms detailed in the Gospel narratives. It is likely, too, that Rossetti chose this name with "Lizzie" Siddal, then engaged to her brother, in mind; and, as Dante Rossetti made Siddal into his model for the character of Beatrice in painting scenes from Dante's *Commedia*, so Christina makes her Lizzie into a Dantesque (and Petrarchan) exemplar of Christian virtue. She invokes this amatory poetic tradition, however, only to turn it on its head.

Lizzie becomes the agent of a regeneration, a "life out of death," figured in startlingly embodied terms. Elsewhere in her work, Rossetti had intimated that Christian salvation lay at the end of a progression from worldly to spiritual enjoyment; in "The Convent Threshold," to cite one instance, a young woman exhorts her former lover (they are likely based on Eloisa and Abelard) to repent following their illicit affair, abandon fleshly pleasure, and opt instead for the rewards of Christian virtue. *Goblin Market* takes this a good deal further, suggesting that Christian virtue—those ideals of discipline, self-effacement, and altruism toward which Rossetti so strenuously aspired—might themselves be productive of pleasure, generative of a form of gratification embodied in its own right. Here in this scene, at the climax of her most famous poem, one finds a portrait not of self-denial but unbridled sensual indulgence figured as redemptive: as compelling an argument as any against interpretations of Rossetti as a

straightforwardly or exclusively renunciatory poet. This is not the invention of a mind driven solely or even primarily by an ascetic deferral or outright refusal of sensory enjoyment. On the contrary, the scene derives its radical, subversive power from its ascription of pleasure to the religious ideals Rossetti cherished. In a brief, gestural coda to a discussion of *Goblin Market* in her recent study *Pleasure Bound*, Deborah Lutz essentially accords with this reading:

The key to Rossetti's success was to make the strict rules [of Christianity and of writing by women], the godly confinement, the spiritual postponement, vibrate with eroticism as they clamped into place. From Rossetti we learn the ecstatic pleasures of submitting the body to the greater moral good of a loved one. The genius of *Goblin Market* is in making Christian self-sacrifice as lusciously delightful as the sinful fall itself. (Lutz 66)

Lutz doesn't, however, elaborate on this. What might it mean for Christian virtue to be charged with a pleasure all its own, one capable of competing with what Rossetti saw as the addictive, illusory enjoyments of the capitalistic marketplace and of sensual indulgence for its own sake? In *Seek and Find*, Rossetti would later write of how beauty and pleasure accompanied affliction—as if these were a cosmic compensation for the inner struggle that self-discipline called for. Her meditation on "Dews and Frosts" stands out as a particularly compelling apology for pleasure and beauty on the grounds of their spiritual use-value:

Hoar frost seems to me to be one of those things which empatically bring out before our eyes God's love displayed in the lavish beauty of creation, and in the relish which

accompanies a bracing discipline. The charm appears, in a sense, gratuitous: one can imagine all necessary operations of the visible world conducted to a flawless issue, without that world suddenly assuming a crust of silver which converts each veined leaf and spider's web into a noticeable wonder of intricate beauty, and which clothes the bare season with its own exclusive robe of honour. Independently of a keen temperature this special form of beauty is not vouchsafed: and thus even beauty hints to us the bright side of salutary pain, the much comfort of ennobling discipline. (Rossetti, *Seek and Find* 57-58)

Rossetti wants us to see that discipline—steadfastness, self-possession, adherence to a higher moral code in the midst of affliction—brings windfalls of pleasure to those who exercise it. The fortitude and resilience humans cultivate during spiritual trials engender a "relish" that might seem gratuitous but functions, in effect, as divine recompense for virtue. Rossetti is likely thinking of the opening image of George Herbert's "The Flower":

How fresh, oh Lord, how sweet and clean
 Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring;
 To which, besides their own demean,
 The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring. (Herbert, *The Temple* 160)

Affliction endured left pleasure in its wake. Like the frost in both Rossetti's and Herbert's imagining, the fruit juice, as Lizzie renders it to Laura, is the happy byproduct of hardship, in

this case a purposeful steadfastness for the sake of another. Vicarious suffering, and the discipline it calls for, is the necessary precondition of this pleasure; as the earned harvest of a deliberate anguish withstood for a loved one, the pleasure amasses regenerative power. Lizzie, in procuring the fruit juice for Laura, experiences this sort of pleasure, thrilling to discover her own resilience amidst the goblin assault—she "laugh[s] in heart" during and after the ordeal—and exulting in the knowledge that she is laying the juice in store for her sister's cure. Yet it is seldom observed that Laura, too, must undergo a form of self-sacrifice and willing self-debasement in order to gain access to the feast that proves her remedy. Laura, in order to partake of the juices in the first place, must degrade herself through an act of almost canine baseness, devouring it off her sister's body in a manner that precludes pride and dignity. This too qualifies as an act of great humility, one almost as compelling in its way as that of her sister in the preceding episode; and as such it is an important first step toward a "life out of death," that accords with ideals of Christian virtue. Through it she begins to evince her readiness for that life.

Still, for all that humility, the episode is alive with self-empowerment, agency, decision-making: Lizzie, the strong and self-determined counterpart to Keats's Madeline, has appropriated the fruit from the goblin men and, reinterpreting it as an emblem of self-sacrifice, infused it with redemptive capacity. Rossetti emphasizes Laura's volition, too: Laura "chooses" the "part" she elects to play in the end, consciously opting for the path of salvation in spite of the fact that it brings "anguish" as well as "pleasure" (511, 522, italics mine). Moreover, the self-debasement and, in Lizzie's case, resistance, that both girls demonstrate is ultimately in the service of the feast they beget. Isobel Armstrong may be right to assert that "[t]he insight of *Goblin Market*" is

that "overflow and resistance, expression and repression, create one another" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 357). The "overflow" or plenty that Lizzie bears on her body following her encounter with the goblins is indeed made possible by her resistance to them, but it is the excess and not the forbearance that proves curative for Laura. It is an excess, to be sure, instantiated by steadfastness and self-abnegation, but these disciplinary measures are in the service of the abundance they engender, and it is this abundance that confers on them their meaning, nobility, purpose. Seen in this light, Lizzie's entreaty to Laura, "make much of me," may not only be a challenge to interpret shrewdly the text of Lizzie's body, but an invitation to interpret it in excessive terms. Lizzie—and by inference we readers—are being enjoined to notice the surplus on display here, the much-ness of what is being offered. If this is a dramatization of the Eucharist, never had that sacrament been depicted with such exorbitance, such brazen gorging.

To sum up, then, *Goblin Market* cannot be easily reduced to an allegory cautioning against sensual enjoyment, given the fruits that ostensibly trigger Laura's decline are likewise the agents of her renewal. Rather, it accords to embodied pleasure an integral place in the enterprise of Christian redemption. It insists that context absolutely determines the character of pleasure: sensual delight, an unruly and liminal phenomenon with the capacity to function as antidote or poison, derives its quality from the interpersonal framework in which it is offered up and devoured. The path to regeneration lies through indulgence—the injunction "Oh taste and see" from Psalms 34:8 hovers over *Goblin Market*, and it isn't ironized—but a feast acquires its healing potency from the impulse or spirit in which it is both delivered and consumed; intention and construction are all. It is telling, in this regard, that Lizzie's "make much of me" is followed by a colon, after which she clarifies, "For your sake I have braved the glen / And had to do with

goblin men" (473-74). This is what Lizzie makes of her own action, the altruistic reading she actively imposes on the inscription her body bears. Laura adopts this same interpretation, responding to her sister's words in kind: "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted / For my sake the fruit forbidden?" (478-79). It is an act of readerly construction reminiscent, again, of the goblin mantra, "Sweet to tongue and sound to eye," a reading that for Laura involves eye and tongue alike: an embodied reading. It is tempting to call it an instance of eroticism, but to do so may be to read Rossetti's poem anachronistically. What is glaring to us would likely not have been visible to Rossetti and Victorian readers, who, though they were attuned to Rossetti's sensuousness, as we saw earlier in this chapter, would simply not have thought to dub the poem sexual. At the very least, the scene presents a version of redemptive pleasure served up by and on the body. In so doing it acknowledges and seeks to restore fleshly appetite to women, and invites us to consider that women's bonds may be the stuff of a fulfilling life.

Midway through *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde would envision a "new scheme of life" that "[found] in the spiritualizing of the senses its highest realization." Such an outlook would amount to a "New Hedonism" that, though "[i]t was to have its service of the intellect," would begin by recuperating the body and its pleasures and "making them elements of a new spirituality" (Wilde, *Dorian Gray* 34). This spiritualizing of the senses was an impulse that, if it found its most ostentatious expression in the Decadent movement, was already being articulated at mid-century by poetic voices as seemingly unlikely as Rossetti and Browning.

Accounting for this can help us to see Decadence in Britain as the culmination of a trajectory that had arguably begun decades earlier in the purposeful, spiritually inflected aestheticism of Rossetti and Browning. Wilde, through his proxy Lord Henry, would confer medicinal, redemptive value on sensation, asserting, "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul"—a formulation he almost certainly borrowed from Pater, who had written in *Marius the Epicurean* that "the maladies of the soul might be reached through the subtle gateways of the body" (Wilde, *Dorian Gray* 48; Pater, *Marius* 33). But already in Rossetti, particularly, we see a compelling dramatization of that vision, an attempt to ennoble and sanctify sensation by placing it in the service of spiritual apprehension and cure. Wrongly construed as self-sufficient, pleasure might serve as an instrument of self-absorption, an onanistic distraction from the abiding solidity of the real. Interpreted rightly it acquired salvific power. If it was true, as Dante (whom Rossetti read avidly) had suggested in his *Commedia*, that there existed only love of self and love of God, then Rossetti, like her Italian predecessor, devotes a significant portion of her poetry toward asking what is involved in spurring the transition in individuals from the former to the latter. The answer she offers, as I have sought to argue here, is that it is beauty and pleasure; and her poetry furnishes readers with an elaborate training ground that teaches them to view these not as traps to be proudly abjured, but clues that might guide them toward the absolute, divine gifts they can scarcely afford to overlook.

Reckoning Sodom's Apple: Swinburne's Poetics of Curative Excess

This chapter will argue that Swinburne's poetry and prose, contrary to the "art for art's sake" philosophy he overtly espoused, is actually driven by a purposeful, politicized aestheticism. Swinburne looks on verbal art as a method of purifying and reconfiguring the sensory perception of readers, and sees bodily liberation in turn as the pivotal first step toward institutional change. His poetry may be seen as a political weapon whose intricacy and subversive power derives from the raw, self-consciously shocking sensual excess it produces in readers—an excess generated above all by its formal arrangements. Swinburne's formal excess manifests itself in a highly deliberate deployment of techniques like metalepsis and anaphora that involve readers in wave-like cycles of pleasurable if exhausting repetition. That excess is visible too in the poet's deft manipulation of rhyme, for Swinburne productive, as we will see, of physiological sensation that fused pleasure with pain, ecstasy with an exquisite agony. His verse is excessive, finally, in its luxuriant language. It represents, in fact, a poetry of sensation turned against a socio-political establishment that had, by the 1860s, claimed sensation poetry as its own—and its luxuriance is designed to seduce readers into an uncomfortable complicity with sexual and theological ideas that run dangerously counter to the status quo. By means of this repetitious excess, I will argue, Swinburne is pounding away at a Victorian morality that would dissociate mind and spirit from body, submerging fleshly desire through an effort of repression and all the while thriving, instead, on an absorption in material detail that was ultimately numbing and paralyzing. But burying physical desire beneath layers of guilt was not the same as extinguishing it altogether; and shunning one's appetites in the name of an externally imposed

ethical code, fashioned by jealous men no longer possessed of the ability to indulge their own, did not amount to virtue, merely hypocrisy. Swinburne's poetry combats this hypocrisy, endeavoring by sensational means to activate the latent desires—and revolutionary potentialities—that sleep in the bodies of readers. His critical study of William Blake—the poet whom, along with Shelley, he most ardently revered—helps affirm that Swinburne harbored such a lofty vision of art. His own poetry, as I hope to show through my readings below, does much to substantiate that vision.

Swinburne, Blake, and “The Corrosive Touch of Revelation”

I will offer an extended reading of Blake here to suggest that his myth of humanity's fall, as well as his program for redemption through art, had a profound impact on the young Swinburne. That Swinburne felt compelled to write his first critical study on Blake is itself revealing. In the works of Blake, whose *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he considered "about the greatest produced by the eighteenth century in the line of high poetry and spiritual speculation" (Swinburne, *William Blake* 204), Swinburne discovered a number of poetic and philosophical tenets he was most eager to claim for himself. These found dynamic and often shocking expression in his own *Poems and Ballads* (1865), written concurrently with *William Blake*. Foremost among these was a doctrine of sensual excess as an inherently radical gesture, a perception-cleansing power that, placed in the service of poetry, could trigger apocalyptic renewal in a society crippled by arbitrary moral restraints. It is easy enough, perhaps, to observe with Foucault that political regimes thrive by visiting regulating mechanisms on subjects' bodies,

disciplinary techniques that enable them to insert social power into the very flesh of those they aim to subjugate—and to infer, therefore, that toppling these regimes will result in some manner of physical freedom. Yet Blake in the *Marriage* and elsewhere offers what may be a more radical proposition, one that Swinburne clearly picked up on: that, contrarily, liberating the body was in fact the prerequisite to social upheaval and not its consequence. The *Marriage* is rife with gnomic celebrations of bodily excess often figured as sexual: "Enough! or Too much" (Plate 10, line 17); "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough" (Plate 9, lines 9-10); "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (Plate 7, line 8); "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (Plate 10, lines 12-13). By virtue of "an improvement of sensual enjoyment," humans may be "rais[ed] into a perception of the infinite"; and it is clear that Blake's own vocation as poet and engraver, which he viewed in apocalyptic terms—a mode of "printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid"—was integral to jumpstarting this breakthrough (Plate 14, lines 9-16).

For all its apparent disarray, its wild polyvocality and gleeful flouting of genre conventions, a unified thesis gradually emerges from the *Marriage*: that human beings were, at some prelapsarian moment in history, more fundamentally creative and autonomous, more fully in touch with their own desires, than they are currently; indeed, they were poets freely writing myths that endowed the world with a sacral meaning, assigning "Gods or Geniuses" to "all sensible objects" (Plate 11, lines 1-2). In time, though, they forgot they were the authors of these myths, and allowed a predatory contingent of men, whom Blake equates with the Christian priesthood, to appropriate them for the purposes of control. What began as poetic myth came to

be rigidified into scriptural codes that insidious clergymen used to bind human thought and behavior, to shame people into disowning and repressing their instinctive desires. The kernel of the *Marriage*, in fact, turns out to be a massive conspiracy theory in which priests succeed in duping men and women into believing that their own imaginative constructs—the deities who had featured in primeval poems—have an existence independent of themselves; and, more, in collapsing these deities into a single sky-god, whom Blake elsewhere identifies as Urizen, and intimidating them into falling down and worshipping their own creation. "Thus men forgot," declares Blake, "that All deities reside in the human breast" (Plate 11, lines 14-15). Humans live, consequently, in a degraded state, prostrating themselves before a fiction of their own making and passively accepting a false doctrine of dualism that insists their bodies are corrupt entities distinct from their souls, abject containers for the spirit to be subdued and surmounted.

For Blake, redeeming ourselves requires a double act of reclamation. On the one hand, we need to reclaim, or re-internalize, the myths that have been gradually externalized and hardened into unyielding codes that govern thought and behavior—and in so doing, discover afresh that these myths are fluid and subject to revision. Revise the foundational myths of a culture, Blake intimates, and its socio-political scripts and value systems will undergo tectonic shift. Additionally, though—and here was the part that so affected Swinburne as a budding poet and reader—we must reclaim our physical bodies, recognizing that flesh and spirit exist on a continuum. The five senses, however frustratingly limited they may be, are "the chief inlets of Soul in this age," and placed in the service of a vigorous imagination they can become instruments of vision, windows onto a higher spiritual world. They are what we have, and we may as well use them to their fullest capacity. As Blake sees it, the body politic is little other

than a gigantic aggregate of embodied humans; reconstituting it entails a liberation of individual bodies, a releasing of latent, long-repressed energies through acts of fleshly indulgence that—according to a modified cultural mythology whereby "every thing that lives is Holy"—can finally enjoy the sanction of sacredness. As Morris Eaves has observed, "Blake's emphasis on the imprisoned, shrunken body, the body as its own dungeon, shows him participating in a common strain of pro-Revolutionary politics. In popular representations, the bodies of the Bastille captives were as darkened and narrow as the vaults where they were confined" (Blake, *Early Illuminated Books* 129). Precipitating an apocalyptic event on a grand scale, such as the French Revolution, meant masses of individuals overcoming the "mind-forg'd manacles," or ingrained institutional bans and taboos, that manifested themselves as curbs to bodily desire.

This was a doctrine that resonated strongly with Swinburne, who wrote in *William Blake* that the latter's poetry teaches us how, "by faithful following of instinct and divine liberal impulse, earth and man shall obtain deliverance" from a morality that has alienated people from their own bodies (Swinburne, *William Blake* 88). In the *Marriage*, with its numerous exhortations to sensual excess and spontaneous, impulsive action, Swinburne found a roadmap for how to arrive at this freedom or deliverance. Our senses, Blake's prophecy suggests, are more capacious than we know, and only by surfeiting can we determine their actual bounds. Excess's fruit turns out to be the knowledge of our full potentiality and of the illusory, arbitrary nature of imposed limits. Excess, superabundance—these also comprise, we might infer, the only adequate battering ram with which to break through the encrustations of long-accepted habit and received tradition. Centuries of repression could only be undone via a succession of sudden, immoderate, relentlessly repeated gestures. The deeper significance of the *Marriage's*

championing of impulse and instinct, similarly, is that these present a way out of habitual psychological ruts, momentary openings for accessing modes of being that diverge from stale, culturally sanctioned scripts: to pursue, without premeditation, the spontaneous dictates of the body might lead one to insights and outcomes not authorized or determined in advance by established power. There was wisdom in impulse; heeding it offered a means of preempting the censoring effects of entrenched cultural norms and of getting back, at least briefly, to an originary state of unchecked desire and "enlarged" sense perception.

This was a version of corporeality—brazenly excessive, impetuous, capable if adopted on a large enough human scale of dismantling a political order—the young Swinburne avidly absorbed. An underlying assumption of *William Blake* and Swinburne's early verse is that poetry might be instrumental to instilling in readers this radically altered outlook. Its very forms might implicate readers in unremitting, wave-like cycles of pleasurable repetition, even as its content pointed toward acrid truths with the potential to burn away fraudulent systems of morality. In his commentary on the *Marriage in William Blake*, Swinburne dwells at particular length on the "Memorable Fancy" spanning plates 12-14, in which Blake asserts that, by impressing upon people, through his art, the holistic unity of flesh and spirit, he will help instigate a cataclysmic shift in perception such that "the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas now it appears finite & corrupt." "If the doors of perception were cleansed," he famously declares, "every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite—" (Plate 14, lines 16-19). This was soaringly apocalyptic rhetoric, of course, fueled in no small part by the still-surreal tidings of the French Revolution, yet it found a very receptive audience in

the young Swinburne, who, some seventy-five years later, added this elaboration to Blake's pronouncement:

After which corrosive touch of revelation there follows a vision of knowledge; first, the human nature is cleansed and widened into shape, then decorated, then enlarged and built about with stately buildings for guest-chambers and treasure-houses; then the purged metal of knowledge, melted into form with divine violence, is made fluid and vital, that it may percolate and permeate the whole man through every pore of his spirit; then the metal is cast forth and put to use. (Swinburne, *William Blake* 216)

The passage betrays much of what is most vital to Swinburne's poetics. Verbal art is a salubrious caustic whose words "burn their way in," infusing unsettling, potentially revolutionary ideas into readers via a sensory experience best described as exquisitely painful. We can see this theoretical kernel taking shape in Swinburne's portrait of Blake, which doubles as inadvertent self-disclosure. Poetic form comes about by means of a "divine violence," a description that resonates with Blake's engraving procedure, in which copper plates were saturated with acid in order to make them tractable, then carved with an awl. But the description also hints, as we will see, at Swinburne's own vision of form as a set of mechanisms through which the fleshly stuff of language is beaten, constrained, and disciplined into shape—a violence at once binding and paradoxically liberatory. Above all, perhaps, what sharpens into focus in this and other telling passages in *William Blake* is a conception of aesthetic experience that runs sharply counter to the "art for art's sake" bromide Swinburne purports to endorse in this and other critical studies he

authored. It is well established that *William Blake* functioned, on its surface at least, as a manifesto for aestheticism in English; it was a document that absorbed and reiterated Theophile Gautier's doctrine of "*l'art pour l'art*," first expressed in the latter's *Emaux et Camees* in 1855 (Hough 188-89). Swinburne, in his turn, acted as the conduit through whom Pater accessed this idea, French in its inception, which would so powerfully inflect *The Renaissance*. "Art for art's sake first of all," Swinburne asserts in a preamble his explications of Blake's poetry. "Art is not like fire or water, a good servant and bad master; rather the reverse. She will help in nothing, of her own knowledge or freewill. . . Handmaiden of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, she cannot in any way become" (Swinburne, *William Blake* 137).

Yet Swinburne's very choice of Blake as the subject of his debut critical work ought immediately to cast doubt on this doctrine. It is not merely that Blake himself would have been surprised and annoyed by Swinburne's characterization of him as an effete high priest of art unconcerned with politics; that all Blake's poetry, as Northrop Frye points out with reference to his private correspondence, "was written as though it were intended to have the immediate social impact of a new play" (Frye 4). It is hard, indeed, to imagine any poet in English literature more intensely preoccupied with politics than Blake, a writer whose most powerful poems—the lyric "London," for instance—read like concentrated grenades tossed in the midst of the parasitical institutions he perceived to be crippling his contemporaries. It is also that, on closer inspection, Swinburne himself hardly seems to buy into his own purported philosophy. Three years after completing *William Blake* he would publish a full-fledged volume of political poetry, *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), celebrating the Risorgimento movement in Italy, a book dedicated to Mazzini that contained rallying-cries for independence such as "The Eve of Revolution" and

paean to liberty. For that matter, *Poems and Ballads* contains overtly political poems that take their place alongside lyrics suffused with a shocking eroticism—and it is difficult not to surmise that its revolutionary and sexual politics are intertwined. *William Blake* itself is rife with textual moments that radically unsettle the essay's overt purpose as an aestheticist handbook. Swinburne presents Blake as a poet engaged in a form of warfare with cultural orthodoxy, one whose most successful creations function as ideological weapons aimed at unseating Urizenic thinking, that is, a mentality predicated on systematic reasoning and ascetic self-denial: "Even Shelley. . . never shot keener or hotter shafts of lyrical speech into the enemy's impregnable ground. Both poets seem to have tried about alike, and with equally questionable results, at a regular blockade of the steep central fortress of 'Urizen'; both after a little personal practice fell back. . . upon light skirmishing and the irregular work of chance guerilla campaigns" (Swinburne, *William Blake* 136).

Swinburne's Radical Aestheticism

A vehicle of human deliverance, a desperately needed riposte to the ongoing encroachments of institutional power on individual liberty: these are fairly gigantic roles to assign to an ideal art that allegedly exists for its own sake alone and can only be tarnished by an involvement in politics. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Swinburne is composing a declaration of independence for art from politics. That is, to argue for art as an autonomous realm is not to condemn it to political irrelevance, but to assert that the artist must ultimately follow the dictates of his or her own imagination, conscience, and instinct rather than consenting

to be instrumentalized by a political faction. Moreover, to claim that poetry belongs to an autonomous field called "aesthetics"—rather than being simply a collection of documents to be dispassionately examined by the sociologist or historian—is to imply that it confers a special, privileged status on pleasure, beauty, and appeals to the affects; and in the hands of a highly capable poet like Swinburne, aesthetic pleasure, far from an incidental surplus or negligible side-effect of reading, functions as an indispensable part of a poem's socially destabilizing, morally renovating power. Of course, poetry of sensation was hardly an uncommon phenomenon in Victorian England by the middle 1860s: Tennyson, most obviously, to say nothing of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had been writing a luxuriant, Keats-derived specimen of poetry since the 1830s that often prioritized physiology over cognition. What makes Swinburne so radically innovative is, in part, the manner in which he turns sensation-based poetry, traditionally the domain of conservatism, against itself, refashioning it into a vehicle for the most sexually and theologically shocking subject matter. This was no longer Tennyson, composing poetry that sprang from a "conservative belief in the slow, ordered progress of science, society, and civilization toward some distant futurity" (Bloom, *Tennyson* 66-67). Swinburne marries mellifluousness to debauchery, hypnotic lyricism to staunch social critique.

The realm of aesthetics, then, need not be a bastion of conservatism but could, on the contrary, be a close ally of political defiance and rebellion. For instances of this attitude Swinburne would have had to look past Tennyson to the Romantic poets, not merely to Blake but to his own closest stylistic forebear, Percy Shelley. In a passage from *The Defense of Poetry* that Swinburne, who idolized him, surely knew, Shelley harks back to the final, decadent stage of ancient Greek civilization, a phase characterized by tyranny, political corruption and widespread

moral decay, as well as internecine strife. During this period, a group of pastoral poets came of age whose verse was marked by an almost overpowering sensual excess, a cloying intensity: "it overcomes and sickens the spirit with excess of sweetness," "endow[ing] the sense with a power of sustaining its extreme delight" (Shelley, *Defense* 86). As Shelley sees it, the extremes of fleshly pleasure these erotic writers celebrated in their poetry—and strove to reproduce in readers—are not symptomatic of the comprehensive moral degeneration that gripped their age; on the contrary, they are the centerpiece of a heroic effort to counteract and subvert that very corruption:

Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in them the sensibility to pleasure, passion and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been achieved. For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and therefore it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralyzing venom, through the affections into the very appetites, until all becomes a torpid mass in which sense hardly survives. At the approach of such a period, poetry every addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed, and its voice is heard, like the footsteps of Astraea, departing from the world. (Shelley, *Defense* 87)

Shelley's thesis is that poetry supplies us with an aesthetic pleasure that is fundamentally renovating and protecting, acting as a kind of safe-haven that assumes special value in societies particularly fraught with tyranny and repression. Pleasure emerges as the liberal subject's last

line of defense when faced with the mentally and somatically deadening threat of social corruption—the "Defense" of Shelley's title surely referring, not merely to the essay's status as *apologia*, but to the bulwark that poetry ideally constitutes for readers. The larger realm of aesthetics, according to this model, performs a function that might appear superfluous on the surface, for it doesn't have any measurable value; yet as Willard Spiegelman puts it in *Majestic Indolence* (1995), a study of Romantic poetry, it fulfills a supplemental office that's paradoxically necessary, lacking in concrete utility yet deeply, indispensably purposive: "[H]uman beings require a renovation that one might mistake for mere decoration. Such renovating preserves (as the paint protects the wood beneath) by laying on something additional to the existing structure" (Spiegelman 157).

But Spiegelman's book, like a number of studies that purport to defend aesthetics against the hostile incursions of Marxist and New Historicist theory, suffers somewhat from an insistence that aesthetics and politics exist in opposition to one another, along with a corollary implication that one need choose the one or the other in seeking to understand poetic performance. His own allegiance is obvious: "Not politics or class (as Marxist critics would have it) but physiology and aesthetics" are the "proper measures" of the poetic figuration he considers in his study (Spiegelman 4). Shelley, however, gives us what I suspect is a deeper and more exciting suggestion, and one that is truer to the literary projects not merely of Swinburne, but each of the poets taken up in this dissertation: that aesthetic "renovation"—which means, above all, sustaining readers' capacity for pleasure—is indissolubly bound up with the socio-political conditions that give rise to it in the first place, that make it necessary. To see it as other than a political gesture, an answer to a dire need that arises from humans' membership in civic

bodies prone to moral decay, is to strip from aesthetic achievement much of its vitality and urgency. In so doing one condemns it to insularity, a state of self-enclosed insignificance that, as I have sought to show here, even Swinburne himself did not really sponsor in practice.

Isobel Armstrong, in a chapter on Swinburne from *Victorian Poetry* (1993), aids us in beginning to see Swinburne's formal and stylistic idiosyncrasies as a unified response to political and economic realities that haunted Victorian England. She sees Swinburne—rightly, I think—as a poet situated in a rigidly constraining world governed by a bourgeois morality that, in spite of its veneer of propriety, actually thrives on gross political and economic excess: the excesses of a burgeoning commodity culture fueled by mercantilism and exploitative industrial labor, and of a political system predicated on stunning violence—the violence that propelled colonialism, for example, or that was spectacularly visible in the carceral setting of English prisons. Not merely English but "European power is predicated on violence," and "bourgeois society," it turned out, "was bizarrely symbiotic with the violence it condemned" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 407, 417). Middle and upper-class Victorians were implicated in a capitalistic matrix that operated by breeding in them multitudes of material desires that could only be momentarily satiated—an endless, profoundly deadening round of desire and consumption that was itself enabled by exploitation in factory and colony. And Swinburne, as he makes evident, for example, in a December 1876 letter to Theodore Watts, was only too aware of much of this. Alluding to an 1871 article in the *Fortnightly Review* about the cruelty inflicted upon slaves by Governor Eyre of Jamaica, he singles out "the loathsome detail about 'the whips made of piano-wire' being 'first tried on the backs of women' and showing 'that their skins were easier cut than those of males,'" noting, "I did not follow [it] . . . for very shame and physical nausea." Armstrong usefully

contends that his poetry is best understood as a response to this very violence and excess: "The excess of [Swinburne's] poetry," she suggests, "is forever in competition with the excesses of an economic and political system which can always outdo the poet in its violence" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 419).

Yet Armstrong's account is notably less successful, as well as somewhat vague, in its attempt to theorize *why* Swinburne should task himself with such a project. Why respond to the excesses of the external world, economic and political alike, not with a poetry of overt moral indignation, but a poetry itself overrun with commensurate excesses, as if in a furious attempt to one-up the actual circumstances that had prompted it? Swinburne saw his culture as one diseased and inwardly rotting, painted over with a garish mascara of cant and hypocritical decorum which only served to facilitate the actual moral bankruptcy that ran rampant beneath it all. The literary-critical industry, members of which (such as Robert Buchanan) had savaged his *Poems and Ballads*, epitomized this false piety: "Nowhere is cant at once so foul-mouthed and so tight-laced as in the penny, twopenny, threepenny, or sixpenny press," he writes in *Notes on Poems and Ballads* (1866). "Nothing is so favourable to the undergrowth of real decency as this overshadowing foliage of fictions, this artificial network of proprieties. [. . .] The whiter the sepulchre without, the ranker the rottenness within. Every touch of plaster is a sign of advancing decay." By contrast, "Literature, to be worthy of men, must be large, liberal, sincere" (Swinburne, *Major Poems* 358). This is a sentiment Swinburne echoes in a critical essay on Byron written the same year, in which he suggests, curiously, that the earlier poet's greatest virtue is his "sincerity" (Swinburne, *Major Poems* 360). But Swinburne's own poetry from this period, namely the most powerful and notorious poems from *Poems and Ballads*, is not

distinguished by its sincerity; it's marked by a perverse complicity with the very excess he had observed in the world around him, indeed by a diabolical effort to outpace it. Not honesty but a Blakean Voice of the Devil—or rather, a dizzying gallery of voices—resound through this volume, voices by turns angry and lyrically seductive, celebratory of sin and gloatingly contemptuous of moral custom. They are united, if at all, by the shock value they deliberately generate.

I suspect this mission to shock and scandalize, performed through a kind of heteroglossic variety show sustained for over two-hundred pages—or, better, a hall of mirrors in which his readership might glimpse its own hidden vices and desires magnified to an obscene, dependably outrageous scale—provides an important clue into Swinburne's underlying intent in *Poems and Ballads*, the work I will focus on in this chapter. Like Blake's *Marriage*, which looms in the background throughout so much of it, it's best seen as a form of satire; and, like the *Marriage*, its rowdy, dissonant admixture of voices and forms suggests it has much in common with the Menippean satirical tradition, specifically. Menippean satire, or anatomy, is distinguished, as Morris Eaves notes, by its diversity of form and voice: "Its disjointed structure is largely a function of its oppositional structure. The satirist pounds away from this angle and that, with tools of various sizes and kinds" (Blake, *Early Illuminated Books* 118). Swinburne like Blake hammers away at a dualistic philosophy that divorces spirit from sensation, confusing fastidiously choked-down desire with real virtue. "Nor pale religious lechery call that virginity which wishes but acts not!" Blake warns toward the end of the *Marriage*. Moreover, "He who desires, but acts not, breeds pestilence" (Plate 5, line 10). Even if repressed, libidinous energies persisted beneath the surface, manifesting themselves occasionally and in secret, often in deviant

and illicit ways. "Brothels," after all, "are built with bricks of religion," and we can see prostitution, accordingly—as well as the whole underground sex culture that flourished in 1860s London, in which Swinburne was an enthusiastic participant—as the perverse offspring of the arrogantly conservative attitudes toward sexuality, sponsored by institutional Christianity, that predominated in mainstream Victorian culture. Deborah Lutz has shown in her recent study, *Pleasure Bound*, how Swinburne belonged to two groups of sexual subversives, The Aesthetes and The Cannibals, whose deliberately scandalous behavior was intended "to shock their contemporaries"—including, for example, proponents of evangelical purity campaigns—"out of a certain smug complacency, one that tended toward restraint, silence, and conservatism, especially in matters of sexuality and gender" (Lutz 14).

All the same, it is common enough by now—especially in the wake of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians*, to name only two influential studies—to observe that mainstream Victorian culture, with its stultifying sexual mores, engendered pockets of resistance, deviants whose preferred modes of pleasure ran powerfully against the grain. And while it is certainly useful to remember that Swinburne was such a deviant—that his championing of sexual liberty was not simply a literary pose, as Oscar Wilde contended—I worry that dwelling on this fact ultimately diverts us from the more nuanced and, for the purposes of New Formalism, richly valuable version of rebellion on display in his work. The content of Swinburne's poetry was undeniably shocking in its own right—many readers, including John Ruskin, famously experienced a frisson stemming from its graphic and unapologetic depictions of lesbianism and sadomasochism, among other taboo subjects—but, strictly as pornography, it was hardly new or unique in 1860s London. Marcus long ago showed

that "pornography and especially pornographic writing became an industry" in the nineteenth century, developing roughly in tandem with the Victorian novel (Marcus 2). The decades leading up to the publication of *Poems and Ballads* had witnessed the publication of *The Lustful Turk* and other erotic fictions and memoirs. Thus what made Swinburne's book such a seismic sensation can scarcely have been its subject matter exclusively or even primarily; rather, it was its formal presentation—its cadences, sentence-structures, acoustic textures, and other aspects—that accounted for its peculiar reservoir of power. If *William Blake* is anything to go by, one senses Swinburne would have agreed with this assessment; he is consistently strident in that book about the absolute importance of form and the iterability of content: "Strip the sentiments [of poetry] and re-clothe them in bad verse, what residue will be left of the slightest importance to art? Invert them, retaining the manner or form (supposing this is feasible, which it might be) and art has lost nothing" (Swinburne, *William Blake* 134).

Poetic art was a powerful weapon, to say nothing of a shield, in an ongoing struggle in which human liberty hung in the balance—and it owed its efficacy to a set of intensely physiological appeals traceable largely to its forms. Catherine Maxwell, in the relatively recent *Swinburne* (2004), has isolated a group of passages from Swinburne's novels that aid us in delineating his distinct poetics. An especially remarkable one is drawn from *Lesbia Brandon*, a sensation novel in which one of the lead female characters, Lady Wariston, expounds on poetry to her son:

Things in verse hurt one, don't they? hit and sting like a cut. They wouldn't hurt us if we had no blood, and no nerves. Verse hurts horribly: people have died of verse-making,

and thought their mistresses killed them—or their reviewers. You have the nerve of poetry—the soft place it hits on, and stings. Never write verse when you get big; people who do are bad, or mad, or sick. . . . It's odd that words should change so just by being put into rhyme. They get teeth and bite; they take fire and burn. I wonder who first thought of tying words up and twisting them back to make verses, and hurt and delight all the people in the world for ever. For one can't do without it now: we like it far too much, I suspect, you and I. It was an odd device: one can't see why this ringing and rhyming of words should make all the difference in them: one can't tell where the pain or the pleasure ends or begins. (Swinburne, *Lesbia Brandon* 148)

This is about as precise and compelling a description of Swinburne's physiological conception of poetry as one could wish for, a formulation that—unsurprisingly, given they were all written approximately at the same time—resonates powerfully with both *William Blake* and *Poems and Ballads*. It is spoken with wry humor, of course, but beneath that one glimpses a really earnest attempt to define how poetry achieves dominion over people: it does so, it seems, via its formal elements—most especially its *rhymes*—and, more generally, its pure sound ("this ringing"), which we can surmise is mostly a result of the rhymes and other formal features. These qualities, in turn, account for a wincing pain that is also, perversely and perhaps inexplicably, bound up with the keenest pleasure—a pleasure drug-like in its addictiveness ("For one can't do without it now: we like it far too much. . ."), and realized at a somatic level. The verse itself becomes the subject of a "tying up and twisting," as if it were—much as we saw with Robert Browning—a fleshly body in its own right, and poetic form a means of "binding and

disciplining language and yet also releasing its energy. Form," sums up Maxwell, "gives language its teeth so that the finished poem is itself a pleasurable violence exerted on the sensibility of the reader" (Maxwell 21). In another passage, this one from a later critical essay, Swinburne sums up Carolingian playwright John Ford's verbal power:

No poet is less forgettable [sic] than Ford; none fastens (as it were) the fangs of his genius and his will more deeply in your memory. You cannot shake hands with him and pass by; you cannot fall in with him and out again at pleasure; if he touch you once he takes you, and what he takes he keeps his hold of; his work becomes part of your thought and part of your spiritual furniture for ever; he signs himself upon you as with a seal of deliberate and decisive power. (Maxwell 24)

Paired with the previous passage, this one suggests poetry possesses an almost sinister tenacity, an ability to make its way into one by virtue of provoking an acridly embodied pleasure, and in turn settle in the brain and spirit, taking its place alongside one's "spiritual furniture" and *impressing* or "seal[ing]" one permanently—this last a printing idiom that crucially recalls Blake. Again as with Browning, the flesh emerges as poetry's primary conduit into subjects, with pleasure—in this case, pleasure that smarted—serving as its means of getting in, as well as the guarantor of its staying power. Pair these, in turn, with that vital passage quoted above on "the corrosive touch of revelation" in Blake's poetry, and it becomes evident that these bitter and addictive pleasures are ultimately vision-cleansing and spirit-enriching, the means toward an exalted "knowledge" that, assimilated by enough readers, could usher in a more liberated epoch

in human history—one in which subjects would be free to realize their myriad potentialities and desires. But it would begin with appeals to the body.

These were fleshly appeals that were, again, characterized both by an excessive and exhausting repetition, and by the violent smart with which they visited themselves on the body. If the content of this poetry is shocking, so too do its forms deliver an analogous—and, as Swinburne clearly saw it, quite literal—shock to the flesh of the reader, series of recurrent, raw, and exquisitely "stinging" pangs of sensation. But while Swinburne no doubt viewed poetic sensation as fraught with an elevating knowledge, as we have just seen, a great deal of the liberating work of his poetry lay, finally, in the brute shock it was designed to deliver, as though it were a sort of defibrillator aimed at accessing and awakening something that lay dormant in the bodies of readers. This was violence, all right—patterned, reiterated, excessive—and, as such, it strangely mirrored the violence Swinburne had identified in the social world and found so repugnant. Yet it was potently if counterintuitively curative. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to bear in mind that Swinburne, following Blake, looks upon the body as the seat of powerful impulses, and sees poetry's raw, smarting sensation as a means of galvanizing and freeing these impulses. Blake had been an "evangel of bodily liberty" not merely because he had so fiercely critiqued the dualistic philosophy that prevailed among many of his religious-minded contemporaries, but because he had demonstrated how "all instinct is sacred"; indeed, the core of his belief-system, in one sense, is, for the young Swinburne, that "by a faithful following of instinct and divine liberal impulse, earth and man shall obtain deliverance" (Swinburne, *William Blake* 207, 208, 117).

It's evident that Swinburne imagines himself another evangel of bodily liberty whose own poetic forms, and the corporeal pangs they induce, are an effort to access and activate the physiological impulses of his readership. The value of bodily impulse, as I sought to articulate earlier in discussing Blake, lies largely in its unscriptable, spontaneous aspect, the fact that the body and its instincts will always retain qualities of indomitability, surprise, even danger that make them forever at odds with efforts from above to contain them. Thus in analyzing the enigmatic ending of Blake's *The Book of Thel*, in which the heroine suddenly confronts the reality of her own embodiment—and recoils in fear, speechless—Swinburne remarks, "[It is] as though no word spoken upon earth or under could explain the marvel of the flesh, the infinite beauty and delight of it, the infinite subtlety and danger." It is fundamentally a "mystery" (Swinburne, *William Blake*). One sees here a very similar faith in the subversive strength of corporeal impulse as that which fueled Chartist chant—and that runs through a considerable portion of post-structuralist theoretical writing, from feminist body theory to (as we saw toward the end of Chapter 1) certain threads of Marxist theory. The great gift of bodies, as Elizabeth Grosz sees it, is that "[t]hey generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable." Indeed, she goes on, "It is this ability of bodies to always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control, which fascinates me and occupies much of this book" (Grosz xi). The body, one might say, operates by its own calculus, following the dictates of impulses at once pre-rational and impossible to delimit, by virtue of their spontaneity and force. This helps explain the "infinite subtlety and *danger*" Swinburne attributes to it, a notion whose strong appeal to late twentieth-century theorists invested in politics ought not to come as a surprise.

We might understand Swinburne's project in *Poems and Ballads* and other early verse, then, as an attempt to retread language into an instrument for communicating shocks of violently pleasurable sensation, potentially bereft of superimposed meaning—sensation capable of stunning the body into impulsive response. We are so accustomed to hearing from his detractors that Swinburne is a master of poetic form but little else, a great prosodic experimenter with nothing significant to offer in the realm of cognition. "We cannot say his thinking is faulty or perverse—up to the point at which it is thinking," wrote T.S. Eliot of Swinburne, with that air of condescending dismissiveness that characterized modernism's attitude not merely to Swinburne but Victorian poetry at large (Eliot 12). Yet, granting that these accusations of vapidness are greatly exaggerated, what if the mass of Swinburne's poetry were low on paraphrasable import—and what if this were absolutely deliberate on his part? Supposing a poem has its origins in a somatic hunch, a set of rhythms that gestate in the body and cry out to be released, given linguistic embodiment. To write a poetry marked by prosodic mastery and elegance, stripped of ratiocinative meaning, would therefore entail returning verse to its formal, rhythmic building-blocks, arresting these at a gestational moment before they were freighted with arbitrary significance, customary association. Such a model suggests a narrowing of focus and an implicit recognition that poetry's structural matrices, particularly its cadences, are the nodal points in which its power and force are concentrated. If these began in the body of the poet, they were likewise meant—as the excerpts from *Lesbia Brandon*, for example, illustrate—to incite fleshly impulses in the reader; and these impulses, unencumbered with attached meanings and contexts, were free to shoot off in any number of directions. As pure impulse, they could assume all the

unfettered recklessness and dynamism—the danger—that Swinburne following Blake so wished to ascribe to them.

That Swinburne's poetry endeavors to achieve this effect through a pleasurable violence exacted, repeatedly and exhaustingly, on the reader would seem, again, to implicate his poetry in the very vices that so disillusioned him in the external world. But much of the cunning of Swinburne's method lies in his manner of identifying the follies and defects of his culture and turning them against themselves, converting them into the arsenal of a subversive and ultimately medicinal artistic undertaking. When he writes of Blake that the Romantic poet "labours to invert the weapons of his antagonists upon themselves," he inadvertently provides us with a clue into his own satirical technique (Swinburne, *William Blake* 211). Little, in fact, could be more Blakean than a satirical procedure that looks upon human error, raised to an extreme pitch and repeated *ad nauseum*, as the paradoxical means toward enlightenment. "If the fool would persist in his folly," Blake had asserted in the *Marriage*, "he would become wise" (Plate 5, lines 24-5). The pages that follow will attempt to show how a number of Swinburne's most powerful early poems are guided by an inverted logic: one in which the violence he had glimpsed in the social world—in the sphere of colonialism, for example—is reconfigured into an "imaginary" or "aesthetic" violence, freed from the context of exploitation and placed in the service of a readerly experience Swinburne envisaged as liberatory. The binding and beating of bodies depicted in the poetry finds its parallel in a comparable discipline and violence enacted on the verse itself, "bound" by the intricate, remorseless formal constraints to which the poet subjects it; and these, in turn, affect the reader through a "hurting" or "stinging" finally indistinguishable from pleasure, which accounts for their tenacious hold on him. Meanwhile the numbing, interminable cycle of

material desire and momentary satiety that fueled bourgeois consumerism is replaced by an aesthetic pleasure, rooted in an awakening of corporeal impulse, Swinburne imagined as empowering rather than instrumentalizing—an excess that "widened" our nature rather than lulling us into passivity.

Armstrong suggests in *Victorian Poetry* that we ought to think of the poetic projects of Swinburne and Gerard Manley Hopkins in tandem; that in spite of their utterly antithetical ideologies Hopkins is actually Swinburne's "shadowy self," a fact of which Hopkins, she suspects, was dimly and agitatedly aware (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 403). But perhaps it would be even more clarifying to say that Christina Rossetti, rather than Hopkins, was Swinburne's shadowy self. Swinburne—whose *Poems and Ballads* was deeply influenced, particularly at a prosodic level, by Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862)—is, like Rossetti, a poet who locates pleasure in acts of disciplinary self-binding, and who discovers liberating energies in rigorous feats of often painful fleshly constraint. That Rossetti read Swinburne's earlier volume *Atalanta in Calydon* and pasted pieces of paper over those lines which expressed the latter's atheism especially strongly, is a detail critics have cited enough times to make it almost trite (Tinkler-Villani 332). It is difficult, anyway, to imagine that Rossetti can have read *Poems and Ballads*, his ensuing book of poetry, without seeing certain key features of her own poetry adapted and shockingly re-contextualized. In 1868 Robert Louis Stevenson, an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh, wrote in a review of Swinburne's book, "In the latter [Swinburne],

although we have all the fiery maddening pleasure of sin burning on the paper, there is still a tang of bitter remorse, a loathsome something that draws the veil aside and lets us see the white ashes gushing from Sodom's apple, and the clanking bones of the skeleton below the fair, white, smooth skin and flesh on which the sensual poet gloats. To read Swinburne long would either make you mad or moral. [. . .] Swinburne's sensualism is too deep; it works its own cure. (Hyder xv)

Stevenson's eloquent assessment brings together much that lies at the heart of this chapter, and helps cement Swinburne's uncanny resemblance to Rossetti. His emblem for Swinburne's early poetry, that of a "Sodom's apple" whose poisonous flesh "works its own cure" in those who ingest it, makes for a powerful analogue to the climax of *Goblin Market*. Though in distinct ways, both poets are deeply preoccupied with the possibility of what might be termed homeopathic cure, the notion that diseases of the body and spirit may be susceptible to remedies that consist in some form or version of the disease itself. Shocking, excessive, self-consciously sickening, Swinburne's art offers a superabundant "sensualism" intended to be both purgative and quickening.

Poems and Ballads

This shocking, curative excess is vividly on display in any number of the poems contained in *Poems and Ballads* (1866). One of the most successful of these is "Hymn to Proserpine," a sprawling dramatic monologue written in rhyming hexameter couplets. The

poem, subtitled “(After the Proclamation in Rome of the Christian Faith),” is spoken not by a medieval personage—as are so many of the poems in this volume—but an aged pagan living at the twilight of the Roman empire. Acknowledging the ascendancy of Christianity, now the official faith of Rome, he rejects the new religion and the “pale Galilean” it reveres, disdaining its grim philosophy of self-denial and postponement and championing, instead, “all the joy before death” (26). Aware of pressure from without to convert to this new creed, he proudly abjures it, resolutely clinging to his individuality and conviction in the preciousness of the here and now: “Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all knees bend, / I kneel not neither adore you, but standing, look to the end” (45-6). He is a direct descendant of Byron’s Manfred, himself a proud iconoclast who refuses to submit to the external authority of Christianity in exchange for absolution from sin; godlike in his own right, Byron’s hero, visited by a host of spirits who demand that he “prostrate [himself]” before them, stubbornly rebuffs them: “I know it; / And yet ye see I kneel not” (35-6). Meditating on this textual echo may provide us with a conduit into the poem’s underlying purpose, for the basic impulse behind it is as Byronic as Blakean: a love of liberty, particularly bodily liberty, and a detestation of the man-made institutions and laws that, masquerading as natural, god-given and timeless, conspire to delimit it.

Though situated in the fourth century, the monologue is really about Swinburne’s Britain. It takes aim at a hypocritical middle-class culture built on Christian ideals of meek self-restraint and bodily hatred, and simultaneously addicted to a consumerism that, as we saw above, was fueled by violence in colony and factory. To put this another way, bourgeois society was sick on the wrong kind of pleasure: it piously espoused values of “decency and dignity and social duty”

(to quote an angry 1866 review of *Poems and Ballads* in *The Saturday Review*) that in reality translated to a strangling of fleshly desire, all the while glutting itself on a commercial excess made possible by exploitation and tyranny (Rooksby 136). Such a society could hardly be called virtuous; rather, it was profoundly self-deceived, in denial about its own desires and needs, performing an act of furious displacement whereby it filled a void left by fleshly self-restraint with a ongoing stream of material acquisition—and was complicit, therefore, in the violence that engendered that material plenty. If it was sick, bloated on the excesses of an economic system that ran on violence, Swinburne’s Britain had the effect of inspiring in him, an outsider who looked askance at its misguided ways, an abhorrence that itself approached biliousness. He found himself unable, remember, to finish reading that *Fortnightly Review* article detailing the physical abuse of slaves by the British governor of Jamaica, “for very shame and physical nausea” (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* 419).

“Hymn to Proserpine” is an expression of that very nausea, even as, by means of its own rhetorical excesses, it becomes a kind of emetic in its own right, a poem that—together with the others in *Poems and Ballads*—force-feeds readers a verbal superabundance that might be conceived as a purgative. Like *Goblin Market*, these poems operate by a homeopathic logic, hinting that the antidote to a sickness brought on by excess pleasure is *more* pleasure, though a different sort of pleasure offered up in an altered context. Engaged in a poetics of one-upmanship with a capitalist economy that overwhelms subjects through a ceaseless profusion of numbing acquisitive enjoyments, these works greet readers with unremitting waves of pleasurable violence—or violent pleasure—which we might read as appeals to the viscera, to those dormant bodily impulses Swinburne imagined poetry could access. Even while a poem

such as “Hymn to Proserpine” gives voice to the poet’s own nausea and world-weariness at inhabiting a culture gone awry (“I am sick of singing”), it seems to imagine itself participating in a process of flushing away the wrongheaded assumptions and beliefs—beliefs it identifies with Christianity—that afflict that same culture. Indeed, through its undulating form it aligns itself with the sea it describes, a body that purges the world of all phenomena in time, including all religions—the gods themselves are “cast forth, wiped out in a day”—and looks forward to a future moment when Christianity too might be expunged from the earth. In Christianity’s place it urges a hedonistic philosophy that pivots on a reclamation of the flesh and its pleasures:

Wilt thou yet take all, Galilean? But these thou shalt not take—
 The laurel, the palms, and the paean, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake,
 Breasts more soft than a dove’s, that tremble with tenderer breath;
 And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before death. (23-26)

Christ is a “pale” prophet whose breath has caused the world to “grow gray” (35), to become sterilized under a “barren” (17) dispensation which grants little import to corporeal enjoyment. The late Romans, like the late Victorians, are alienated from their bodies as well as from the potentially redemptive pleasures to be found in the natural world, an endlessly self-renewing reservoir of sensory and spiritual nutriment that will outlast any religion. Both cultures wilt under the yoke of a sanitized worldview that idealizes bodily transcendence and a renunciation of this world, and in so doing deprive themselves of the regenerative power of sensational experience; both, in banishing sensuality to the outskirts of experience, lead paralytic

lives, heedless of the possibility—common to Swinburne and all of the other poets in this dissertation—that fleshly pleasure might be a means of tutoring the soul into understanding. Isobel Hurst has observed how “[t]he crisis of faith in the Victorian period prompted some poets to look back to the time when Christianity began to take the place of ancient religions”—particularly to “the cults of the chthonic deities Persephone and Dionysus (Proserpina and Bacchus),” whose emphasis on the value of irrational and destructive energies invited “the perception of sex and violence as central to the development of religion.” In so doing they formulated “radical, counter-cultural versions of Hellenism” that corrected upon the more Apollonian—and arguably more boring—portraits of Greco-Roman culture to be found in Matthew Arnold’s criticism (Hurst 158).

Swinburne’s Proserpine is such a chthonic deity, a figure he links by turns to death, sleep, the earth, sexual pleasure, and violence. In exalting her, Swinburne articulates a critique of Christianity’s folly: Christianity, in attempting to blot out death—to show it as a thing capable of being surmounted, like the body itself—has also precluded beauty and pleasure. Process and death are painful, often violent phenomena—remorseless, ineluctable, obliterating as the waves that crest through the middle section of this poem—but they also engender “all the joy before death” (26); the violent and the beautiful are, like pain and pleasure, finally extricable. The old pagan deities are “bitter god[s] to follow” but “beautiful god[s] to behold” (8), just as “the young compassionate gods,” “merciful, clothed with pity,” are barren by virtue of their gentleness and evasion of raw physicality in all its ecstasy and agony. The “wave of the world” invoked in line 54 is spectacularly violent—“[w]hite-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved”—but it is also wonderfully fecund, the source out of which Venus is shown to be born in

line 80. Like Whitman, whom he raptly praises in a lengthy epilogue to *William Blake*, suggesting he is America's counterpart to the Romantic poet-engraver, Swinburne deploys sprawling, wavelike poetic lines to make the case that death is an intensely desirable thing, a quasi-maternal presence that, if it consumes us in the end, confers urgency and value on our lives. To try to transcend the body—mortal, subject to violence, bound up in a world of process that culminates in an often grim death—is to lead a fragmentary existence predicated on postponement, all the while cheating oneself of present sensory pleasures which may well be our sole conduits to the infinite.

“Hymn to Proserpine” conveys all this through a series of stanzas in which form and content effectively merge. The poem self-consciously dramatizes the rolling, repetitious movement of the sea through heavily anapestic and dactylic lines, typically punctuated by caesuras, that accumulate and gather momentum in the course of greatly elongated sentences. The anapests particularly lend to it a hypnotic quality appropriate to a poem fascinated with sleep, but it is by means of the dactyls that the monologue flirts with the Homeric meter, dactylic hexameter, without ever resolving into it. That “Hymn to Proserpine” ultimately refuses any fixed metrical pattern is appropriate: like the sea it emulates, it exhibits—in its seemingly endless multiplicity of rhythm—an indomitability, an unwillingness to be “chained” by the constraints of a regular meter. “Will ye bridle the deep sea with reins, will ye chasten the high sea with rods?” the speaker wryly inquires of Jesus and the other divinities associated with Christianity. “Will ye take her to chain her with chains, who is older than all ye gods?” (65-66). As ever in Swinburne, the poetic text itself is a thing that demands to be disciplined into some manner of form; one made verses, as the above passage from *Lesbia Brandon* suggests, by “tying words up and

twisting them back,” and so creating rhymes that “hurt and delight” at once. “Hymn to Proserpine” is disciplined into neatly rhyming, largely end-stopped hexameter couplets, yet its metrical instability hints at a refusal to be constrained by any artificial, outwardly imposed pattern or pulse—a resistance that aligns it with time itself, revealed in this poem to be above Christianity’s attempt to master it. “Time and the gods are at strife,” we learn in line 19—and it is clear time will win out in the end: “Ye are gods,” the speaker declaims, “and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last” (69). Undulant, partaking itself of the “pulse of the years” (58), Swinburne’s poem endeavors, like the sea it emulates, to wash away an order of stale divinities and the desiccated morality they represent, welcoming instead a pleasure-centered outlook found on impulse and instinct. That the poem is addressed to Proserpine, who in Greco-Roman myth returns to earth at springtime following a periodic sojourn in the underworld, may well suggest that Swinburne anticipates a return to his own culture of the qualities he associates with her. It may, that is, implicitly forecast a more liberated future for Britain, a more sensuous way of living with the potential to revivify what he sees as a paralyzed culture.

Looking closely at “Anactoria,” another poem from the same volume, can extend and deepen our sense of what Swinburne seeks to accomplish in this book. “Anactoria” is a long dramatic monologue in heroic couplets that offers a graphic and often shocking—though also mellifluous and formally virtuosic—portrait of sadomasochistic lesbianism. Perhaps the best way into the poem is observe that it is deliberately boundary-breaking in a multitude of ways. There is, of course, the fact that “Anactoria” brazenly transgresses mid-Victorian boundaries of decency and decorum, looking unflinchingly at taboo subject matter without passing any moral judgment on it or the characters involved. And there are, moreover, the manifold instances of

synaesthesia—the “shuddering semitones of death” (34) for example, which Sappho yearns to chant to Anactoria—that invite us to imagine sensory experience in a holistic manner, hinting at how aural experience, in this case, might produce exquisitely tactile effects on listeners—a clear parallel of Swinburne’s own embodied concept of readerly experience. Beyond this, though, the poem gives voice to Sappho’s desire to bridge the boundaries of identity that separate her from Anactoria, overcoming the barriers even of body en route to achieving outright oneness with her: “O that I / durst crush thee out of life with love, and die, / Die of thy pain and my delight, and be / Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!” (129-32). Ultimately, I’d suggest, “Anactoria” entertains the possibility that poetic language can dissolve the boundary between text and reader in much the same manner that Sappho desires to merge subjectivities with Anactoria. Sappho is a poet after all, and she invests her own verse with the capacity to obliterate the divisions separating herself from Anactoria, and ultimately from readers in posterity whose perceptions, conditioned by her immortal metaphors, mesh with her own (“Memories shall mix and metaphors of me”). The poem, in other words, becomes an extended meditation on the potential of rhythmic language—dynamic, tenacious, impacting on readers in irresistibly somatic way—to generate sympathetic bonds of felt identification among subjects, bonds which can transcend the customary limits of selfhood.

It is in this sense above all that “Anactoria” aligns Swinburne with the other poets invoked in this dissertation. In the introduction we saw how nineteenth-century notions of pleasure descended directly from the eighteenth-century concept of sympathy: Wordsworth’s deft rhetorical feat in the 1802 “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* was, as I sought to demonstrate, to merge pleasure with sympathy, inviting readers to think of the two phenomena synonymously.

Pleasure arose, indeed, from a sympathetic identification with the plight of a suffering humanity; as a social enamel, pleasure promised to fasten people together into tightly woven networks of compassion. Percy Shelley's *Defense* continued this thread, as we saw, by rigorously distinguishing among the kinds of pleasure available to humans (and thereby correcting upon Bentham's generically "quantitative" model of pleasure), suggesting like Wordsworth that the interpersonal pleasures of sympathy were the highest and noblest that individuals could hope for. And in *Laon and Cyntha* he explicitly looked to erotic, sensational appeals in order to arouse readerly sympathy for a set of characters—namely, the protagonists who engage in incest—with whom they would otherwise have been loath to identify. It seems to me that Swinburne, through the pleasures of "Anactoria"—pleasures deriving from its hypnotic rhythms and luxuriant, almost Tennysonian linguistic textures—is doing much the same thing. The poem's pleasures entice readers into sympathetic bonds of attachment with characters whose sentiments and appetites—for Swinburne's Victorian contemporaries, that is—might otherwise have appeared too shocking and repellent to relate to. Catherine Maxwell is clarifying on this count, observing that "Swinburne's poetry tends to encourage the reader not to assent to moral or didactic propositions but to draw him or her into sympathy with the aesthetic or emotional atmosphere of the verse." She goes on to suggest that Swinburne's formal innovations are part and parcel with this sympathetic endeavor:

Rhythm and meter in themselves naturally help dramatize the symbolic meaning of the verse, but Yeats's proposition that 'the purpose of rhythm . . . is to prolong the moment of contemplation . . . to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance in which the mind

liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols' is a good description of the way in which Swinburne's often mesmerizing metres can lull readers into acquiescence so that they absorb through the poem's imagery controversial or disturbing ideas they might otherwise not tolerate. (Maxwell 20)

Perhaps sympathy had never been deployed to such shockingly radical purposes as in "Anactoria" and its companion poems in *Poems and Ballads*. Here was poetic pleasure rooted in the minutia of formal qualities like rhyme—a pleasure indissoluble from pain, as usual for Swinburne—being manipulated for social ends: the poem is wired to seduce contemporary readers into a swoon of erotic sympathy for characters immersed in versions of sexuality that were criminalized, indeed scarcely mentionable at all in respectable Victorian circles. "My pain / Pains thee," Sappho gloats to Anactoria (11-12). So too, we might say, does it pain readers, involved in an empathic connection through which they experience the agonies and ecstasies alike that are dramatically bodied forth in the poem's lines. Victorian readers would have found themselves coaxed into an aesthetic experience that must have been decidedly queasy and troubling. Swinburne's monologue offered them all the relish and sensory superflux of a well-wrought Tennyson poem; partaking of that relish, however, would have meant reckoning with the palpably real and embodied presences of characters engaged in acts vehemently banished from mainstream culture. Shelley had written that poetry succeeded by stimulating "transforming enlargements of imagination in readers" and thus equipping them for acts of empathy, of imagining the actual plight of others. Swinburne's poem gives this formulation a concrete social valence by tempting readers into a pleasurable engagement that requires of them

to carve out cognitive space for the existence of people and behaviors they might habitually banish from their consciousness.

The poem makes these (violently) pleasurable appeals through rhymes that, as Swinburne saw it, “sting” even as they deliver pleasure, and by implicating readers in vertiginous cycles of orgasmic repetition, exhausting, which mirror Sappho’s own experiences. In some very real sense, Swinburne clearly imagined that poetry’s sensational dimension equipped it to cling to readers, and, more than that, to force its way into occupying a portion of their headspace. The poet John Ford, recall, “fastens (as it were) the fangs of his genius and his will . . . deeply in your memory,” such that “his work becomes part of your thought and part of your spiritual furniture for ever; he signs himself upon you as with a seal of deliberate and decisive power.” Blake, for his part, used “the corrosive touch of revelation” to perform a “divine violence” on audiences, with the purpose of “cleans[ing],” “decorat[ing],” and “[enlarg[ing]]” human nature with a “purged metal of knowledge” that might “percolate and permeate the whole man through every pore of his spirit.” To read the best poetry, then, is to enter into a skewed power dynamic not unlike that which “Anactoria” evokes, an eroticized communion with the poet who, by dint of a “divine violence” that is also perversely pleasurable, insinuates herself into your thoughts, into your very nature, clearing, altering, furnishing it afresh. Sappho’s own tenacious poetry, which she prophesies will “cleave to men’s lives” (279) long after she herself has expired, filtering the way they experience and make sense of reality, is thus exemplary in this regard. Through her Swinburne compellingly envisages his own ideal for poetry, a mind-expanding phenomenon capable of reconfiguring and renewing readers’ consciousness, which initially makes its way into them by bewitchingly corporeal means.

Conclusion: Pater and Radicalized Decadence

Walter Pater serves as the endpoint of this dissertation. As the most obvious forerunner of decadence in Britain, Pater is intensely preoccupied with pleasure; looking closely at his prose, it becomes evident that decadence—so often read as an antecedent to modernism—is, at least as compellingly, the flowering of the nineteenth-century poetic thinking on pleasure I have sought to map out in the preceding chapters. Vincent Sherry has recently read decadence as "one of the origin stories for literary modernism" (Sherry 30), while a range of other scholars, as David Weir points out in *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, associate decadence with modernism "so closely, in fact, that the two concepts are all but interchangeable" (Weir 9). To the extent that any scholars have opted to read the movement as culmination rather than precursor, they have interpreted decadence as "a modernization of Romanticism," Weir notes—and Weir himself goes on to posit decadence as a transition between romanticism and modernism (Weir 9, 1-21).

But decadence is not so easily assimilated to the twentieth century, nor is it entirely reducible to a modernized epilogue to Romanticism. What the majority of these accounts miss, even the backward-looking ones, is the impact of the Victorians on decadence; they overlook the extent to which decadence represents a dramatic coda to a good deal of hard thinking that, if it began with Wordsworth, was tested, refined, and greatly enriched in the crucible of Victorian poetry particularly. In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and parts of *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater offers what might, in one sense, be seen as the ultimate expression of the nineteenth-century fascination with pleasure: pleasure becomes, for him, the foundation of an

entire philosophy of living. Pater's is a philosophy of moments, one that urges individuals to bring all the concentrated fullness of their energy and attention to bear on present instants, gleaning from the given world—from the Heraclitean swarm of matter and forces that randomly cohere in windows of exquisite beauty—all the pleasure they will yield. That pleasure, as bodily as intellectual or spiritual, assumes at various junctures of Pater's writings a quietly revolutionary edge. We see this in the chapter "Two Early French Stories" from *The Renaissance*. Describing the irruption, not just of reason and imagination, but sensual pleasure amidst the historical phase he terms the "medieval Renaissance"—a phase during the High Middle Ages that prefigured the actual Renaissance—Pater evokes a seemingly orderly Europe destabilized by subversive forces:

One of the strongest characteristics of that outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart, in the middle age, which I have termed a medieval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion.

(Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater* 24)

Pater loves to use the term "antinomian," which literally means "against the law." In his hands, as in the above passage, it helps to convey the unruly power he ascribes to a radical new way of life—sensuous, worldly, imaginative—that broke in on and unsettled the pious

asceticism, the ethic of postponement and self-denial, that dominated medieval Europe. In his quiet, indirect way, Pater is also envisaging an "outbreak" of sensual pleasure and imagination, an exaltation of the body and its manifold, sometimes illicit desires, that might challenge and ultimately revivify Victorian Britain. Denis Donoghue is clarifying on this point: "In his own time, while he acknowledged that official society moved on its metaled ways—imperial, expansionist, mildly Christian, ardent for commerce and industry, the manly virtues, heterosexuality, the containment of women in obedience—[Pater] hoped to take the harm out of these certitudes by making them doubt themselves" (Donoghue 134). In his narrative of the Italian Renaissance, as well as the ante-Renaissance he traces in medieval France, Pater turns his attention toward a historical epoch in which humanity powerfully rehearsed the moral insurgence he sought for his own Britain; here were stirrings of "rebellion," "liberty," "freedom" (words that recur in "Two French Stories"); here, in twelfth and thirteenth-century France, was "the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life," a push "not merely to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of enjoyment, but to the divination of fresh sources thereof"; toward forms of enjoyment that might, as in the "earthly passion" discernible in Provençal poetry, permit a "liberty of the heart"—indeed, of the body—not to be found within the moral strictures either of medieval Christian or Victorian orthodoxy (Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater* 1-29).

The obvious homoeroticism present in the Provençal narrative of "Li Amitiez de Ami et Amile," which he makes the centerpiece of "Two French Stories," helps to clarify that for Pater this "moral and religious revolt" depended on seeking out forms of embodied pleasure that ran counter to those sanctioned by the dominant morality of his time and place. The story of Ami and Amile dramatizes, for Pater, "that free play of human affection" that "makes itself felt in the

incidents of a great friendship, a friendship pure but generous, pushed to a sort of passionate exaltation, and more than faithful unto death” (Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater* 8). This kind of same-sex eroticism represented, we can surmise, that questing after "old and forgotten sources of enjoyment"—or perhaps "fresh sources thereof"—Pater envisages in the same chapter (Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater* 2). To the extent that it was "old and forgotten," it was a throwback, perhaps, to the homoerotic passion of the ancient Greeks, which Pater's Winckelmann likewise exhibits in his intense relationship with Friedrich von Berg in the penultimate chapter of *The Renaissance*. Regardless, it is clear that for Pater much hinged on the free, transparent play of bodily affection among young men especially. Liberated desire has, in the context of a society as stiflingly repressive as his own, the potential to irrigate and renew the world. Pater's early essay "Diaphaneitè," now accepted as, among other things, a coded paean to homoerotic love—an entreaty to young men to pursue their desires in a free, unconcealed ("diaphanous") manner—concludes with a vision of a rejuvenated world in which hidden, restrained libidinous energy has been laid bare and allowed unbridled expression:

People have often tried to find a type of life that might serve as a basement type. The philosopher, the saint, the artist, neither of them can be this type; the order of nature itself makes them exceptional. It cannot be the pedant, or the conservative, or anything rash and irreverent. Also the type must be one discontented with society as it is. The nature here indicated is worthy to be this type. A majority of such would be the regeneration of the world. (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 254)

Diaphanous types are, on some fundamental level at least, young men whose desires go against the grain of the worlds they inhabit; their nature "crosses rather than follows the main current of the world's life." Indeed, "the world," Pater goes on, "has no sense fine enough for these evanescent shades, which fill up the blanks between contrasted types of character"—that is, these men occupy interstitial spaces between the recognized, sanctioned identities in the societies into which they are born (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 248). Reconfiguring society in a manner that carves out room for these types, recognizing and offering them avenues of unconstrained fulfillment, will, Pater suggests, lead to a liberation of checked energies with the potential to regenerate and restore communities. A difficult and often vague essay, "Diaphaneitè" is admittedly nebulous on how this is to happen. Nevertheless, it appears that Pater shares with any number of other writers taken up in this dissertation—Blake, working-class poets, Swinburne, Marcuse—a conviction that large-scale institutional change begins with the release of repressed eros in the bodies of individuals. Much rides on the capacity for free play of human affection, not merely among homosexuals but anyone who finds his desires curbed by a society unready or unwilling to permit their frank expression. Whether choked off by forms of alienated labor that paralyze the body, numbing it into complacency, or suffocated by arbitrary laws that forbid its open expression, libidinal energy is a precious thing, a fundamentally generative force—not merely a fuel for sex but, in its sublimated form (as Freud would have had it), the tidal wave that powers creative achievement, artistic or otherwise. Opening routes for its uninhibited realization may be the first step toward refashioning the world.

Together these passages from *The Renaissance* and "Diaphaneitè" help to rescue Pater's formulations in his famous "Conclusion" from the realm of pure abstraction and endow them

with radical meaning, however muted. Diaphanous types are people, presences who wander like ghosts through a world unprepared as yet to accept and furnish them with legitimized spaces for living fulfilled lives. They move through life athwart the current of society, settling in its in-between spaces, largely hidden from view. To the extent they are visible, they "do not take the eye by breadth of colour" but by "that fine edge of light, where the elements of our moral nature refine themselves to burning point"(Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 248). Donoghue has usefully shown how Pater's Oxford listeners would have instantly grasped this "fine edge of light" as a reference to the homoeroticism detailed in Plato's *Republic* (Donoghue 112). It is not only a Platonic echo, though, but a prefiguration of the rousing exhortation in the "Conclusion": "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 236). Just the same, the "fine edge of light" that characterizes diaphanous types anticipates the "finest senses" that Pater imagines to be necessary for those who hope to derive the greatest pleasure life can offer in its fullest moments. Read in this light, Pater's exhortation becomes a dare to those whose appetites place them at odds with official society to pursue those same appetites determinedly and transparently (gems are, after all, transparent), even or especially if doing so impels them beyond the bounds of accepted behavior. Pater's own writing—encrypted and at times oblique, a prose that often works by suggestion and indirection—is hardly "diaphanous." But the kind of pleasure he imagines and wishes for readers is both transparent and incendiary; and, more than this, it is fundamentally activating, energizing, educative (it "yields the fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness"), a liberatory force that "seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment" (Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* 238, 237). At its riskiest, it places individuals firmly against the entrenched habits and

laws of the worlds they live in, positioning them to challenge those worlds to be more capacious and inclusive. His ideal pleasure is antinomian.

For all of these reasons, Pater is the logical endpoint of the nineteenth-century theorizing on pleasure I have sought to trace in this project. He shares with each of the poets taken up in the preceding chapters an anti-dualistic vision in which cognition and sensation are ideally as one. Indeed, his obsession with the perfect blending of form and matter—that seamless interpenetration only consistently achieved in music—manifests itself, too, in a model of human life and art in which the spiritual and physical are thoroughly assimilated into each other. In a commentary on Dante Alighieri from his essay "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Pater observes, "To [Dante Alighieri], in the vehement and impassioned heat of his conceptions, the material and the spiritual are blent and fused together. While, in that fire and heat, what is spiritual attains the definite visibility of a crystal, what is material, on the other hand, will lose its earthiness and impurity" (Pater, *Appreciations* 212). His images of the gem and crystal, in other words, also stand for moments of ecstasy in which bodily sensation is elevated and ennobled with spiritual potency and value—instants that become, for Pater, the anchors of a secular religion, the "New Cyrenaicism" with which Marius experiments in Chapter IX of Pater's novel. A life wedded to the sensuous world, one "occupied very largely with those aspects of things which affect us pleasurablely through sensation [including art]," "might come even to seem a kind of religion—an inward, visionary, mystic piety, or religion, by virtue of its effort to live days 'lovely and pleasant' in themselves, here and now, and with an all-sufficiency of well-being in the immediate sense of the object contemplated, independently of any faith, or hope that might be entertained as to their ulterior tendency" (Pater, *Marius* 148-49). In contrast to the ethic of postponement that

underlies traditional religious faiths, this was a doctrine that pressured adherents to "make the most of what was here and now" to the point where their "existence, from day to day, came to be like a well-executed piece of music" (Pater, *Marius* 150).

The allusion to music, presumably, refers to that synthesis of embodiment and spirituality that so captivated Pater. Though he would obviously have rejected her dogmatic Christianity, Pater's New Cyrenaicism is reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's attempt to discover in the contingencies of the here and now—in intervals of particular beauty and pleasure in the phenomenal world—the coordinates of a sacral meaning. More directly and explicitly, it comes out of Robert Browning, whose own quest after "infinite moments" was an attempt to do much the same thing. Pater's praise of Browning in his chapter on Winckelmann from *The Renaissance* illustrates this clearly, helping to cement a lineage that connects Browning with decadence. Browning's importance for Pater is that "[h]is poetry is pre-eminently a poetry of situations," one that seizes on a character insignificant in itself, "and throws it into some situation, or apprehends it in some delicate pause of life, in which for a moment it becomes ideal" (Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater* 214). It is easy to imagine that Pater would have approved of Browning's definition of poetry as a putting of the infinite into the finite. That Browning also looked to tropes of music to demonstrate this phenomenon—that music was, for him, a medium that transmitted eternal facts by fleshly means—helps to make the parallel still more provocative and convincing.

Pater's outlook resonates powerfully in the writings of Wilde, the poster child of British decadence who dubbed *The Renaissance* "my golden book" (Danson 83). Wilde's "New Hedonism," which I discussed at the close of Chapter 3, clearly comes out of the New

Cyrenaicism sketched in Pater's *Marius* in its attempt to recuperate sensual pleasure as a core component of spiritual striving. In Wilde the political dimension of pleasure is made even more explicit than in Pater, particularly in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. Wilde's thesis in *Socialism* is that industrial capitalism has robbed his contemporaries of their individualism, involving them in forms of labor—and, in the case of the privileged, supervision and exploitation—at once dehumanizing and alienating. It has imposed a fatal division between labor and pleasure, converting work into a joyless, mechanistic, impersonal enterprise that yields commodities which have tragically usurped the place of higher, more lasting and transformative enjoyments. Men and women exist, consequently, in a state of "exaggerated altruism"—the poor toiling for a ruling class whose affluence depends on their own continued destitution, the more empathetic members of the ruling class weighted down by a guilt that moves them to acts of charity which are actually "part of the disease," for they prolong the infected system rather than overthrowing it (Wilde, *Socialism* 3-5). There is little or no place for pleasure in a world built on such degrading competition and domination: the poor lack the time and capital to enjoy life, engaging in forms of work devoid of delight; those possessed of money, property, and the means of production waste their lives worrying about losing these, or scheming to acquire more, or else burdened by the manifold pressures and responsibilities that attend having that property, a "nuisance" whose "duties make it unbearable" (Wilde, *Socialism* 10). Art itself has been reduced to a commodity that, rather than issuing from an artist's singular vision of the world, obeys the whims of a mob-like consumer class with no sense of taste; artists craft their works with an eye toward the marketplace, whereas they ought to be "making them for their own pleasure" (Wilde, *Socialism*, 69).

For Wilde, socialism is the antidote to these ills. Abolishing private property and converting machines, particularly, into public assets will release people from this enervating and dehumanizing state of affairs: no longer "living for others," they will at last be at liberty to develop their personalities through forms of labor that double as art. As it stands, only a select few individuals have succeeded in escaping the "clamorous claims" of the capitalist system Wilde limns in *Socialism*; men such as Keats and Flaubert have, we learn, managed to isolate themselves and "realise the perfection of what was in [them]" (Wilde, *Socialism*, 3-4). Under socialism, though, all people will be free to pursue ennobling vocations that elevate them to the status of artists. No longer, that is, will they be alienated laborers producing objects whose worth is rigidly defined by market-value; rather, imaginative expression—and the pleasure that ensues from it—will be the desired end of work. Carolyn Lesjak has observed how Wilde, like William Morris, posits socialism as the necessary precondition for versions of labor that prioritize pleasure—indeed, that in Wilde's ideal society "the worker and the artist are interchangeable." Lesjak invokes Wilde's lecture on "The Decorative Arts," in which he speaks of "the pleasure [the laborer] must take in making a beautiful thing," to make the case that for Wilde labor *is* pleasure, or ought to be: in keeping with what Lesjak terms "the labors of hedonism," Wilde, she suggests, wants us to see that "pleasure is something to be worked at and worked for" (Lesjak 184, 182). Wilde's utopian future bridges the present rift between labor and pleasure, for in it men and women, liberated from alienated toil, can ascend to the status of imaginative makers whose work is an engine for joyous self-realization.

Pleasure may not be the lever of social upheaval for Wilde that it is for certain other writers in this dissertation, but it is unquestionably the index of society's better reconstruction.

“Pleasure,” he argues in the rousing peroration to *Socialism*, “is Nature’s test, her sign of approval” (Wilde, *Socialism* 89). That is, when society arrives at the emancipated state Wilde imagines, we will know because people’s lives will be replete with pleasure rather than pain. Pleasure (or joy) is, after all, the symptom of self-development for Wilde: “For it is through joy that the Individualism of the future will develop itself” (Wilde, *Socialism* 84). One of the most fascinating and suggestive arguments Wilde advances in the final pages of *Socialism* is that pain is a barbaric and antiquated method of self-realization with its origins in medieval Christianity: “The terrible truth that pain is a mode through which man may realise himself exercises a wonderful fascination over the world,” and has its roots in the “worship of pain,” the “love of self-torture,” the “wild passion for wounding [oneself]” that predominated in the Europe of the Middle Ages. “Pain,” however, “is not the ultimate mode of perfection.” “It has reference to wrong, unhealthy, unjust surroundings” (Wilde, *Socialism*, 85-86, 89). In other words, we love to romanticize pain as a catalyst for inner growth, but the sobering reality is that it is a consequence of the structural imperfections that plague society, and will be greatly diminished when these flaws are rectified. Wilde wishes us to see that the cult of pain-as-enlightenment is actually slowing the progress of civilization by glorifying a phenomenon that arises from inequity and corruption. It is a primitive outlook that harks back to the lurid, often grotesque imaginings of Christ’s passion that dominate medieval art—and one humanity is overdue to outgrow. “It is rarely in the world’s history that its ideal has been one of joy and beauty,” he notes—and yet the society he envisages for his contemporaries is one that idealizes pleasure, joy, and beauty as precipitants of individual regeneration (Wilde, *Socialism* 84-5).

With the advent of modernism, however, this very fascination with pain that Wilde is so concerned to reject as barbaric returns full-force. Modernist writers proudly cleave to pain and self-abnegation—or, better, what Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* termed *unpleasure*—as core ideals that define sophisticated imaginative writing and reading. In *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents*, Laura Frost argues that “the fundamental goal of modernism is the redefinition of pleasure: specifically, exposing easily achieved and primarily somatic pleasures as facile, hollow, and false, and cultivating those that require more ambitious analytical work.” In fact, she goes on, “Essential paradigms of modernism, such as the high/low or elite/popular culture divide and the attention to formal difficulty . . . revolve around pleasure” (Frost 3). While acknowledging that modernist literature never altogether banishes these “facile,” often embodied pleasures (think Leopold Bloom eating with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls), Frost nevertheless contends that modernism’s major objective lay in its stern refashioning of what counted as legitimate aesthetic pleasure. Pleasure was suddenly the byproduct of difficulty: “Along with offering thrilling and powerful innovation, modernist writers ask their readers not just to tolerate but also to embrace discomfort, confusion, and hard cognitive labor. Modernism, in short, instructs its reader in the art of unpleasure” (Frost 6).

But Frost’s argument is, for all its acuity, essentially the narrative of the modernists themselves, part and parcel with a myth they fashioned to denigrate and distance themselves from the nineteenth century. Behind W.B. Yeats’s notorious “fascination with what’s difficult” lurked a clearly discernible agenda, one hinted at in his contemptuous portrait of Keats in “Ego Dominus Tuus”:

His art is happy but who knows his mind?
 I see a schoolboy when I think of him,
 With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,
 For certainly he sank into his grave
 His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
 And made—being poor, ailing and ignorant,
 Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
 The coarse-bred son of a livery stablekeeper—
 Luxuriant song. (54-62)

Keats is the quintessential poet of “easy” nineteenth-century pleasure, the literary figurehead, as we have seen, of early to mid-century working-class poets and a vital influence on Christina Rossetti. In Yeats’s hands he becomes a fatuous childlike figure longing for material pleasures that lie beyond his financial reach, creating in poetry imaginary—and, notably, empty-headed—luxuries to compensate for what he can’t have in real life. Ridiculing him, Yeats separates himself not just from a social stratum he perceived to be well beneath his own, but the very century in which he himself was weaned, and a style of poetry—mellifluous, at least as concerned with music as meaning—he spent the first interval of his career writing. In keeping with his promotion of a specious Anglo-Irish aristocratic ancestry for himself, Yeats envisioned a new and hard-won form of aesthetic pleasure available only to a privileged few. The message was clear enough: pleasure was an index of breeding, and enjoyments immediately available

were fare for the “swinish multitude” (itself a phrase coined by Edmund Burke, a member of that Anglo-Irish elite with which Yeats identified).

My concluding thoughts take the form, first, of a question: Have we ever quite recovered from modernism’s elitist redefinition of what counts as valid literary pleasure? Are we critics still the thrall, to some extent at least, of a modernist aesthetic that fundamentally mistrusts readerly pleasures which come easily on the grounds that they must be vapid or misleading? At this point in literary-critical history it seems almost radical to suggest that what immediately feels good may in fact be edifying, freeing, redemptive. We are still somewhat in the grip, perhaps, of a hermeneutics of suspicion that, like modernism, has tended to valorize pain: in “The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology,” a recent documentary that garnered widespread attention, Slavoj Žižek reminds viewers that pleasure is the handmaid of ideology and liberation a consequence of “extreme violence” (*The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*). In this Žižek shows himself the heir to an attitude that took shape long before he arrived on the scene. “[A]t some point in modern history,” declared Lionel Trilling in his influential 1963 essay “The Fate of Pleasure,” “the principle of pleasure came to be regarded with . . . ambivalence.” Repudiating the easy sensuous delight of, say, a Chopin nocturne or a Tennyson lyric as a “specious good,” modernist writers “imposed upon themselves difficult and painful tasks, they committed themselves to strange, ‘unnatural’ modes of life, they sought out distressing emotions, in order to know psychic energies which are not to be summoned up in felicity” (Trilling 175, 189).

Yet in their elitism and appetite for pain and struggle, their sometimes smug dismissal of the forthright pleasures of nineteenth-century literature and art, the modernists may have mistaken transparency for superficiality. As anyone knows who has dwelled at length with

Christina Rossetti's poetry, crystalline waters need not be shallow; the lucidity and still, placid surfaces of Rossetti's stanzas give way to depths that can hold their own alongside the lyric poetry of the most accomplished English-language poets. Moreover, there is something powerful to be said for the Romantics' and Victorians' attempt to democratize pleasure, a model that would be well worth our while to recover. "So I say it again and again, pleasure is shared," wrote Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*, a statement that could serve as the maxim for a number of the writers examined in this dissertation (Lucretius 133). Together Eliot and Yeats introduced a new version of readerly pleasure that came of struggle and self-abnegation, an enjoyment tailored for solitary consumption; whatever transports may be found in reading *The Waste Land* or *A Vision*, they are likely to be savored in isolation, the rewards of lonely readers wading through formidably opaque lines, tracking down recherché allusions, proud but alienated. By contrast, nineteenth-century poetry at its electrifying best promised pleasures at once transformative, eminently available, and capable, on occasions that are moving to contemplate, of ushering people together toward shared causes and ideals. Modernist poetry offers nothing to rival the spectacle of the Chartists marching through the streets of Manchester and London, belting out poetry instantly fun and irreverent but also pregnant with revolutionary knowledge, emancipatory suggestions that imprinted themselves on the memories—in the bodies—of those who chanted them. Bearing examples like this in mind might help us literary critics to restore a degree of trust in forms of readerly enjoyment on which many of us have learned to cast a cold eye. And it might help us, finally—as we reread and reread again, for no purpose other than the sheer bliss they reliably furnish, the poems and novels that enticed us to choose this as our vocation—to feel a little less guilty about getting our kicks.

Works Cited

- Ablow, Rachel. *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2010. Print.
- Adams, James Eli. *A History of Victorian Literature*. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print.
- Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." *The Affect Theory Reader*. Ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 29-51. Print.
- Almeida, Hermione De. *Romantic Medicine and John Keats*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.
- Arseneau, Mary. "Incarnation and Interpretation: Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and *Goblin Market*." *Victorian Poetry* (Spring 1993): 79-93. Print.
- Armstrong, Isobel. "Meter and Meaning." *Meter and Meaning*. Ed. Jason David Hall. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2011. 26-52. Print.
- , ed. *Robert Browning*. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1974. Print.
- . *The Radical Aesthetic*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000. Print.
- . *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Barthes, Roland, Richard Miller, and Richard Howard. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. Print.
- Bell, Mackenzie. *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1898. Print.

Benson, Arthur C. *English Men of Letters: Rossetti*. Ed. John Morley. New York: Macmillan, 1904. Print.

Bevington, David M. *Shakespeare*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2002. Print.

Blair, Kirstie. *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2006. Print.

Blake, William, Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. *The Early Illuminated Books*. Princeton, NJ: William Blake Trust/Princeton UP, 1998. Print.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009. Electronic.

Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. Orlando: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1994. Print.

Boyson, Rowan. *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.

Bristow, Joseph. *Robert Browning*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. Print.

Brownell, Morris R. *Samuel Johnson's Attitude to the Arts*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Print.

Browning, Robert, John Woolford, Daniel Karlin, and Joseph Phelan. *The Poems of Browning*. London: Longman, 1991. Print.

Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France, Volumes 1-2*. London, U.K.: John Sharpe/Piccadilly, 1821. Print.

Caudwell, Christopher. *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977. Print.

"Christina Georgina Rossetti." *The Critic* [New York] 12 Jan. 1895: 21. Print.

- Clare, John. *Major Works*. Ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.
Print.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1920.
Print.
- Coleridge, Sara. *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge*. London: Laurence King, 1873. Print.
- Cooke, Michael G. "Romanticism: Pleasure and Play." *The Age of William Wordsworth: Critical Essays on the Romantic Tradition*. Ed. Kenneth R. Johnston and Gene W. Ruoff. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987. 62-83. Print.
- Cooper, Thomas. *The Life of Thomas Cooper: Written by Himself*. London: Hooper and Stoughton, 1872. Print.
- D'Amico, Diane. *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999. Print.
- Danson, Lawrence. "Wilde as Critic and Theorist." *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Chicago: U, 1981. Print.
- Donoghue, Denis. *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.
Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998. Print.

- Evans, B. Ifor. "The Sources of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" *The Modern Language Review* (April 1933): 156-65. Print.
- Felski, Rita. "After Suspicion." *Profession* (2009). 28-35. Print.
- . "Suspicious Minds." *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011). 215-234. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House, 1977. Print.
- . *The Uses of Pleasure*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Viking, 1985. Print.
- Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, Francois Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Frost, Laura. *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents*. New York: Columbia UP, 2013. Print.
- Gay, Penelope. "Browning and Music." *Robert Browning*, ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1974. 211-230. Print.
- Gibbs, Anna. "Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect." *Australian Humanities Review* 25 (2002)
- <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-December-2001/gibbs.html>.
- Gosse, Edmund. "Miss Rossetti's Poems." *The Examiner* [London] 18 Dec. 1875: 1418-19. Print.
- Gray, Erik. "Men and Women and the Arts of Love." *Victorian Poetry* (Winter 2012): 521-41. Print.
- Gridley, Roy E. *Browning*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. Print.

- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.
- Hair, Donald S. *Robert Browning's Language*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1999. Print.
- Hamilton, Janet. "The Uses and Pleasures of Poetry for the Working Classes." *A Serious Occupation: Literary Criticism by Victorian Women Writers*. Ed. Solveig C. Robinson. Lancashire, UK: Broadview Press, 2003. Print.
- Harney, Julian. "Feast of the Poets." *The Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser* (Leeds, England) 19 April 1845: 3. Electronic.
- Harrison, Antony H. *Christina Rossetti in Context*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. Print.
- Harrison, Brian. "Civil Society by Accident? Paradoxes of Voluntarism and Pluralism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*. Ed. Jose Harris. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Hawlin, Stefan. *The Complete Critical Guide to Robert Browning*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Herbert, George. *The Temple*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893. Print.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972. Print.
- Hough, Graham. *The Last Romantics*. London: Methuen, 1961. Print.
- Hovell, Mark. *The Chartist Movement*. Manchester, England: Manchester UP, 1966. Print.
- Hurst, Isobel. "Victorian Poetry and the Classics." *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

- Hyder, Clyde Kenneth. *Swinburne, the Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985. Print.
- Jameson, Frederic. "Pleasure: A Political Issue." *Formations of Pleasure*. Frederic Jameson, ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983. Print.
- Jamison, Anne Elizabeth. *Poetics En Passant: Redefining the Relationship between Victorian and Modern Poetry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Janowitz, Anne. *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Johnson, Pauline. *Marxist Aesthetics: The Foundations within Everyday Life for an Emancipated Consciousness*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Print.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. Print.
- Keats, John. *Complete Poems*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978. Print.
- . *The Letters of John Keats*. Ed. Hyder E. Rollins. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Print.
- Keble, John. *Occasional Papers and Reviews*. Oxford, Eng.: J. Parker, 1877. Print.
- Kelly, Mark G.E. *Foucault's History of Sexuality Volume I, The Will to Knowledge*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013. Print.
- Knoepflmacher, U.C. "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and Victorian Dramatic Monologue." *Victorian Poetry* (Summer 1984): 139-59. Print.

- Kooistra, Lorraine Janzen. *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2002. Print.
- Landow, George P. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*. Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980. Print.
- Lang, Sean. *Parliamentary Reform, 1789-1928*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Lesjak, Carolyn. *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- "Literary Sketches." *Chartist Circular* (Glasgow, Scotland) 20 February 1841: 310. Electronic.
- Lithgow, R.A. Douglas. *The Life of John Critchley Prince*. London: Abel Heywood & Son, 1880. Print.
- Lucretius. *On the Nature of the Universe (De Rerum Natura)*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965. Print.
- Lutz, Deborah. *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Print.
- Maidment, Brian. *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain*. Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1987. Print.
- Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-nineteenth-century England*. New York: Basic, 1966. Print.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Boston: Beacon, 1978. Print.
- Marsh, Jan. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. London: Faber & Faber, 2012. Print.

- Marvell, Andrew, and Nigel Smith. *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*. London: Pearson/Longman, n.d. Print.
- Massey, Gerald. "Poetry to Be Lived." *The Red Republican* 5 July 1850: 19. Electronic.
- Maxwell, Catherine. *Swinburne*. Tavistock, U.K.: Northcote House, 2006. Print.
- McDonald, Peter. *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-century Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.
- McEathron, Scott, Kaye Kossick, and John Goodridge. *Nineteenth-century English Labouring-class Poets: 1800-1900*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006. Print.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1983. Print.
- Middleton, Richard. *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Letters of John Stuart Mill Volume 2*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Hardpress, 2013. Print.
- . *Principles of Political Economy*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer. 1871. Print.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. Print.
- "Miss Rossetti's Poems." *The Saturday Review* [London] 23 June 1866: 761-62. Print.
- Murphy, Paul Thomas. *Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994. Print.
- Music and Protest*. Perf. Theodor Adorno. *YouTube*. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Dec. 2015.

- Nagle, Christopher. *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005. Print.
- O'Donnell, James Joseph. *Augustine's Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Pater, Walter. *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1901. Print.
- . *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. London: Macmillan and co., 1885. Print.
- . *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1913. Print.
- . *The Works of Walter Pater, in Eight Volumes. Volume 1: The Renaissance*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1900. Print.
- Patmore, Coventry, and Mary Augustine Roth. *Coventry Patmore's "Essay on English Metrical Law."* Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America, 1961. Print.
- Plotz, John. "Chartist Literature." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature, Volume 1*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 440-44. Print.
- "Politics Set to Music." *The Saturday Review* (London, England) 15 November 1856: 639. Print.
- Prins, Yopie. *Victorian Sappho*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.
- Prothero, Iorwerth. *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- "Public Meetings." *The Northern Star and National Trades Journal* (Leeds, England) 10 April 1847; issue 494. Electronic.

Pusey, E. B. *Parochial Sermons: Preached and Printed on Various Occasions, Now Collected into One Volume*. Oxford: Sold by J.H. and J. Parker, 1865. Print.

Reports of State Trials: New Series, Vol. IV (1839 to 1843). Ed. John E.P. Wallis. London: Eyre and Spotwood, 1892. Electronic.

“Review of Keats’s *Endymion*.” *The British Critic* [London] June 1818: 649-54. Print.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1970. Print.

Robson, Catherine. "Reciting Alice: *What Is the Use of a Book without Poems?*" *The Feeling of Reading: Affecting Experience & Victorian Literature*. Ed. Rachel Ablow. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2010. Print.

Roe, Nicholas. *John Keats: A New Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2012. Print.

Rooksby, Rikky. *A.C. Swinburne: A Poet's Life*. Aldershot, England: Scolar, 1997. Print.

Rose, Jonathan. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.

Rosenblum, Dolores. *Christina Rossetti: Poetry of Endurance*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986. Print.

Rossetti, Christina, and R. W. Crump. *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti ; Edited by R. W. Crump*. S.l.: Louisiana State UP, 1990. Print.

———. *Annus Domini: A Prayer for Each Day of the Year Founded on a Text of Holy Scripture*. Oxford: James Parker, 1874. Print.

———. *Goblin Market*, introduction by Germaine Greer. New York: Stonehill Publishing, 1975. Print.

Rudy, Jason R. *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2009.

Print.

———. "On Cultural Neoformalism, Spasmodic Poetry, and the Victorian Ballad." *Victorian Poetry* 41 (Winter 2003): 590-96. Print.

Saunders, George. "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Preface." *The Paris Review*, 7 January 2013.

Web. www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/01/07/civilwarland-in-bad-decline-preface/

Sanders, Mike. *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Schmid, Thomas H., and Michelle Faubert. *Romanticism and Pleasure*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1997. Print.

Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." *The Affect Theory Reader*. Ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 1-28. Print.

Sha, Richard. *Perverse Romanticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2009. Print.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, and Albert S. Cook. *A Defense of Poetry*. Boston: Ginn, 1891. Print.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, Donald H. Reiman, and Neil Fraistat. *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000. Print.

Sherry, Vincent. *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2015. Print.

- Slosson, Preston William. *The Decline of the Chartist Movement*. New York: Preston William Dawson, 1916.
- Somerville, Alexander. *The Autobiography of a Working Man, by "One Who Has Whistled at the Plough"*. London: Charles Gilpin, 1848. Print.
- Spiegelman, Willard. *Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.
- Stevenson, Lionel. *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1972. Print.
- Stone, Marjorie. "Sisters in Art: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning." *Victorian Poetry* (Winter 1994): 339-64. Print.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. London: J.C. Hotten, 1868. Print.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles, Jerome J. McGann, and Charles L. Sligh. *Algernon Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004. Print.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles, and Randolph Hughes. *Lesbia Brandon*. London: Falcon, 1952. Print.
- Symons, Arthur. *Studies in Two Literatures*. London: Leonard Smithers, 1897. Print.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
- Tennyson, G. B. *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981. Print.
- The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. Perf. Slavoj Zizek. 2013. DVD.
- Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Pantheon, 1964. Print.

Tinkler-Villani, Valeria. "Atheism and Belief in Shelley, Swinburne, and Christina Rossetti."

Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: The Fusions and Confusions of Literary Periods.

Ed. C.C. Barfoot. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. Print.

Tucker, Herbert. *Browning's Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1980. Print.

Tucker, Herbert. "Rossetti's Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye."

Representations (Spring 2003): 117-33. Print.

Trilling, Lionel. "The Fate of Pleasure: Wordsworth to Dostoevsky." *The Partisan Review* (Spring 1963): 167-91. Print.

Waldman, Suzanne. *The Demon & the Damsels: Dynamics of Desire in the Works of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008. Print.

Walker, Hugh. *The Literature of the Victorian Era*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1910. Print.

Weir, David. *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995. Print.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

———. *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905. Print.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christianity: Seeking the Face of God*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Second Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt, 1932. Print.

Woolford, John and Daniel Karlin. *Robert Browning*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1940. Print.

Yeats, William Butler. *The Poems*. Ed. Daniel Albright. Everyman: London, 1990. Print.