SUBVERSIVE BODIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NARRATIVES
OF PARIS AND LONDON

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In this dissertation, Subversive Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Paris and London, I compare representations of subversive bodies (transgressive women, revolutionaries, and monsters) in six paradigmatic French and British texts written from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century and set in the metropolitan centers of Paris and London. This is an original comparative study of subversive bodies in the context of metanarratives of discipline and control. Working with Fredric Jameson’s concept of the political unconscious, and Michel Foucault’s work on discipline and the body, I analyze the articulation of contemporary scientific and sociological discourses in these novels to ultimately show how bodies that defy the dominant social order and ideology are effectively contained and silenced. In Mary Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria, the protagonist struggles to find a language that legitimates her experience as a moral subject in a female body, which gestures toward a narrative of subject formation that finds fissures in the institutions that define the female. In Claire de Duras’ Ourika, the material realities of the protagonist’s African body are erased through her narrative told in the discourse of the colonizer; in turn, her body disintegrates from an impossible longing to enter the symbolic order that denies subjectivity to her black body. In A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens uses Edwin Chadwick’s construction of the
working classes, and popular prejudices toward colonial subjects and political women, to inscribe the French revolutionary body with feminine hysteria, a projection of Victorian fears which serves to reaffirm the patriarchal hegemony of the British middle class. Victor Hugo’s configuration of the immaterial body of revolutionary leader Enjolras in *Les Misérables* reveals an ambiguous position toward discourses on the working class and conflicting narratives of bourgeois progress and social justice. In Emile Zola’s *Nana*, the demonized courtesan embodies the degenerating Second Empire, and the discourse of working class infection hints at the erasure of the Paris Commune. Lastly, the construction of the vampire that invades London in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* consists of an over-determined conglomeration of medical and pseudo-scientific discourses that constructed veritable monsters.
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INTRODUCTION

Subversive Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Paris and London

The rise of industrial capitalism in imperial nations of England and France led to the growth of metropolitan areas. The growth of industrial capitalism brought more power to the bourgeoisie, and as the ideology of this class became more normalized it served as a lens through which to conceptualize this changing urban environment. As impoverished people migrated into the cities, rapidly expanding the population and creating an exploited work force and feared underclass, the urban environment became a threateningly heterogeneous space. With the presence of this multitude of bodies also came the desire to regulate them and, as Michel Foucault shows us throughout his work, nineteenth-century discourse around the body multiplied in efforts to analyze and discipline the masses. The nineteenth-century novel, informed by both the gender roles of bourgeois ideology, and the growing medical and social scientific discourse around the body, is a crucial part of the intellectual effort to make sense of this increasingly diverse and fast-paced environment. While in the public imagination, the cities came to represent the entire social order and power of the empire, this space is also teeming with the nameless figures of the underclass that seems to emerge from the streets themselves. The man-made structures in the city seem to progressively squeeze out the natural landscape around which the artificial structures were first formed, so that nature is gradually pushed to the margins. Here, the natural and artificial are in constant friction, and this resistance is especially typical of the nineteenth-century city as its boundaries expand and its population multiplies. Bodies and stone come to characterize the cityscape, as nature,
including the human inhabitants, is gradually subsumed into the expanding institutions of the social order. Fiction that represents bodies in the urban environment negotiates concepts of subjectivity, community, and political agency, as the aggregate masses are differentiated and identified through their relation to social institutions. Within this growing process of urban regulation, the body that resists such institutional encoding becomes a polemical figure. The bodies of those that threaten the social order by resisting its inscription are in turn inscribed through their alterity, and through them one may read the anxieties that drive the effort to silence and contain them.

Representation of the body in nineteenth-century fiction lends itself easily to Post-Marxist analysis for several reasons. By “Post-Marxist” I am referring to theoretical texts from the late twentieth century, in particular the work of Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson, which not only acknowledge the ideology that justifies class difference, but trace its workings through the construction and imposition of social institutions as well as the subject’s libidinal investment. The latter is largely indebted to the Lacanian concept of the Symbolic and Fredric Jameson’s idea of the political unconscious of the text. My use of the Post-Marxist theoretical paradigm consists mostly of discourse analysis, in the assumption that available terminology, both fictional and non-literary, determines the categories through which one may interpret reality. Another part of this assumption is that through discourse, ideology is simultaneously imposed by social institutions and invested with a truth-value when used to articulate experience. Thus, through comparative discourse analysis, one may discover the workings of social control and the effectiveness of such control as evidenced by a certain terminology’s continued use. The first reason that this approach is useful with the nineteenth-century novel is that fiction’s
role in understanding the multitude of bodies in the nineteenth-century metropolis is indebted to non-fictional texts centered on reform of the urban environment. The movement toward verisimilitude that characterizes the modern novel by the nineteenth-century develops into the genre of realism, whose truth-value, or the real-ness of what is represented, is constructed using texts that are not encoded as fictional. Reform-minded texts that are particular to the study of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Paris and London are, for example, Louis-Sebastien Mercier’s *Tableau de Paris* (1781-1788) and *Nouveau Paris* (1799), Edwin Chadwick and the Poor Law Commission’s work, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), and Cesare Lombroso’s *L’Huomo Delinquente* (1876). In his book, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson discusses how the analysis of a novel’s political valence can be ascertained in part through its proximity to non-fictional texts. In other words, when the novel uses the same discourse formation as a non-fictional reform text to represent a body, the ideological proximity becomes apparent. The use of this discourse of reform such as Chadwick’s *Sanitary Report* and Lombroso’s work on the criminal in order to construct realistic fictional bodies, is simultaneously positing the reform texts as truth-value, which in essence places the fictional text itself under the same ideological umbrella as the social science text. Fredric Jameson writes: “the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of

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1 The official author of this text is a corporate author of the “Poor Law Commission” for which Chadwick was the secretary; the title of the text is *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*. This text will be referred to as *Sanitary Report* by Edwin Chadwick.
contemporary life” (19). The concept that some texts are social while others are not only serves to reinforce an illusion created through capitalism that the subject can somehow find a purely individual or purely psychological refuge from the social. As Jameson states: “everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (19).

Both the social science texts and the novels in this project reference the city as a historically specific place. Yet, this historical place and time is only available to us now through texts. In his critique of Althusser, Jameson points out that his notion of history is an absent cause, and he revises Althusser’s interpretive formulation by asserting that history is itself textualized, and can only be accessed through its own “narrativization” (35). In this dissertation, I consider “narrative” in the broadest possible sense. Beyond its use in discussing fiction, any representation of progressing consequences is essentially a narrative, either in the successive events of political history and the exploration of their conditions of possibility, or in the medical and scientific efforts to trace the etiology of disease or progression of illness. All of these cases involve tracing consecutive elements that follow a logic of cause and effect, which in turn is the cause of another effect. It is also possible to trace this narrative toward the past, to explore the causes and conditions of present circumstances. Indeed, the historical narratives at play in the nineteenth-century novel involve more than just political or scientific representation of conditions and effects. The bourgeois faith in progress, or creating conditions that lead to better future society, is another narrative that informs the construction of larger historical narratives.

Thus, the concept that there is a definite singular version of history is completely untenable. Yet another element that refracts this absent cause, or the historical Real, that
the Marxist critic looks for revolves around the problem of mediation. To enumerate the differences between two textual codes, such as fiction and non-fiction, requires the backdrop of a more “general identity” or “initial identity,” and it is only through this third element that any differentiation of textual codes can be identified (Jameson 41-2). This third element is historically and culturally contingent ideology that emerges from the material conditions of the contemporary economic system.2 In texts that represent the metropolis, the body is the site of the mediation of these intersecting narratives. The contemporary cultural codes inscribed on the body involve significations of gender, class, ethnicity, and health, which, when inserted into narratives of social science, medicine, or biology, construct an individuated body in the fictional narrative. While the body may appear to be an arguably transhistorical category because it is anatomically similar throughout history, in fiction it is identified by the historically contingent cultural codes that are inscribed upon it, and the place of these codes within larger narratives of public health, bourgeois progress, and social degeneration, to name a few. The body obtains its significance by being viewed through ideological structures that extend beyond fiction. As the body in fiction is largely inscribed through non-fictional discourse around the body, reading both the fictional text with the non-fictional may lead us toward the ideological structure at play as the “general” or “initial” identity that places its gaze upon the body as an object of study, and as a natural element to be individuated from the urban environment. Through exploring the mediation of these intersecting narratives, the political unconscious of the text becomes clear. As I will show in this dissertation,

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2 I use the term ideology here in congruence with Jameson’s definition that he rewrites from that of Althusser: “a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History” (30).
authors may inadvertently reinforce and disseminate an ideology that they themselves profess to deny, because the systems of available knowledge in the discourses used to construct the body are laden with traces of the dominant ideology.

The texts geared toward social reform that are at play in fiction are texts that posit an ideal based on the assumed “nature” of the human body and its processes (in this case sexuality and reproduction being the most relevant to gendered bodies). This “nature” in turn, must be disciplined so that its drives and the effects of its actions (i.e., behavior) may be supportive of a prescribed social order. The irony here is that the “natural” is also ideologically determined, as it is “always already” (to use the term of Althusser) present in the human body itself. The rhetoric of the majority of these texts, such as those of Chadwick and Lombroso, take as their point of departure the assumption of the normality of the bourgeois nuclear family, and inscribe bodies whose effects are external to that ideal as pathological. The non-fictional texts referenced in this project are specifically concerned with pathological bodies that pose a threat to the social order that properly disciplined bodies would normally facilitate. The subversive body that is the focus of this dissertation is the site of conflicting historical and social-scientific narratives. While a disciplined body is one that performs according to the prescribed succession of actions, and produces the effects desired for the application of the dominant ideological narrative, the body that is subversive threatens the social order precisely because it disrupts these narratives.

Another reason that Post-Marxist analysis is useful in regards to the fictional representation of urban bodies is that the effort of reform behind the non-fictional texts that inform the fictional representation also drives the production of institutions such as
the “Hôpital Général,” as well as policies that attempt to ameliorate unsanitary urban conditions, construct safer spaces, and to overall enforce order on the urban populace. Any discussion of the imposition of social order in a space so densely populated with bodies as the nineteenth-century metropolis would be incomplete without the use of Michel Foucault’s *Surveiller et Punir*. In the first chapter of this text, he considers his work a history of bodies, “une histoire des corps” (33), a statement which highlights the historical contingency of how the body is constructed through knowledge of its effects. Discipline creates what Foucault calls “les corps dociles,” which are submissive bodies that can be analyzed, manipulated, and integrated as a productive element of the social order (162). The subversive body that resists discipline is inscribed through cultural codes that reflect conflicting narratives. As Martine Delvaux and Frieda Ekotto discuss in their introduction to the Fall 1998 issue of *Esprit Créateur*, the success of the panoptic system that Foucault analyzes is to lead the disciplined body to become its own “surveillant” (4). A body that is subversive does not internalize the panoptic gaze that the docile body does. The gaze that inscribes the body with cultural codes to identify its role in the historical narrative is an ideological tool; it is an effect of power; it determines the limits and avenues of the individual body’s relationship to transpersonal realities. Through this gaze an individual is fabricated (Foucault 253). As the subversive body does not internalize this gaze, it is inscribed with conflicting narratives, or attempts to inscribe itself with a narrative that disrupts that of the dominant ideology. In the discourse of social reform texts, this lack of internalized gaze is pathological and the body is inscribed with the codifications of illness, either mental or physical. The method of the social reform texts that attempt to analyze this body identifies the body’s pathology
through how the body affects its environment and its conditions of possibility.

Institutions that attempt to (re)discipline these bodies act on the body’s environment and available avenues of behavior to insert the body into an acceptable ideological narrative and so that the body may internalize the gaze that inscribes it through the codes of this narrative. The convent, madhouse, and prison separate the body from society at large, enforce a particular environment, and create strict avenues of behavior -- all in the attempt to reconstruct the panoptical gaze within the body.

Metropolitan cities such as Paris and London have the highest concentration of such institutions. The threateningly heterogeneous masses of people in the city co-exist with these monolithic structures that attempt to impose a disciplined homogeneity. In her article “Confinement, the Family Institution, and the Case of Claire de Duras’s *Ourika*,” Michelle Chilcoat discusses the institutionalization that begins in France with the Age of Reason and is exemplified in the Hôpital Général: “The institutionalization of the poor, the criminal, and the insane that occurs in France with the establishment of the “Hôpital Général” heralds the institutionalization of power and the power of the institution that defines the bourgeois social order of the Age of Reason” (10). Chilcoat argues that the institution of the family is the norm to maintain the social order, while the “hôpital” restores it (10). While, according to Foucault, in previous centuries, the poor and the insane were considered blessed by God, by the Enlightenment they are a natural force to be channeled toward productive ends, and the Hôpital Général places the body of the poor or insane under strict discipline to instill identification within the narrative of bourgeois progress, that is, to teach a work ethic so that he may contribute to society’s overall well-being. Thus, confinement was both an effort of punishment, and comfort
and healing. Chilcoat states: “Confinement, then, is a structure in which recompense and punishment as well as comfort and repression, are actually interchangeable terms” (7). Those who do not fit into the institution of marriage inevitably end up in the asylum, as I discuss in Part One of this dissertation, “Speaking Statues.” When these female bodies are inscribed with narratives that are in conflict with that of the content domestic wife, they are institutionalized (again) to lead toward inscribing themselves with a new narrative. Apart from the institutionalization of women, these public structures utilized to re-discipline the masses are a dominant characteristic of the nineteenth-century city. As the massive influx of working class people, often represented as mere nameless bodies in the metropolitan environment, the chaos of such bodies and their effects brought about an effort, in turn, to discipline them, often in the form of governmentally sponsored social reform, such as the work of Edwin Chadwick and his Sanitary Report. Through such discourse on reform, begun with the creation of an institution such as the Hôpital Général, madness, as the inability to follow the social order, moved from being a natural tendency to act on primitive impulses to a pathology, viewed as a disorder of natural human functioning (Chilcoat 12). In this sense, resistance is a sickness and subversive bodies must be healed and rehabilitated.

By pathologizing the inability to enter the social order characterized by such institutions as bourgeois marriage and the work ethic, the discourse around the working class bodies that populate the urban environment is also informed through growing theories of infectious disease, and for good reason. In the 1830s, Asiatic cholera spread to England and France, largely concentrated in the large cities such as London and Paris because of sanitation systems unprepared for the amount of bodies they served. Although
cholera did not kill as many people in nineteenth-century Britain as, say, small pox or tuberculosis, the speed at which cholera can kill brought focus to the state of health of the urban populace and exposed the limits of public health efforts and possible medical treatment (McLean 3-4). Sanitation to prevent the spread of infectious disease formed a large part of reform efforts. One particular element of the urban masses is also of interest here: the prostitute. In his work on prostitution, *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris*, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet extends his hygienicist project to the body of the prostitute, where syphilis posed an even more insidious threat to public health. Parent-Duchâtelet calls syphilis “la peste” (the plague), which in turn places the body of the prostitute as a place to be sanitized through regulation and institutionalization (such as the *maisons de tolérance*) because her infection threatens the rest of society (Parent-Duchâtelet 178). According to his study, the majority of prostitutes come from working class families (81); this adds another dimension to the discourse formation around the urban body. Sexual behavior and reproduction is another effect of the urban body that must be disciplined to conform to the narrative of bourgeois progress. The discourse formation around the subversive urban body consists of codes that reference the inability to participate effectively in capitalist production, and these codes are also constituent parts of narratives of contagious disease.

Theories of the etiology of disease inform many representations of urban bodies, even when these bodies are not necessarily ill during span of the fictional narrative. The prevalence of such diseases as cholera and syphilis in the urban population leads the fictional representation of these bodies to also be informed through theories of infection. According to Martin Willis in his article, “‘The Invisible Giant,’ Dracula, and Disease,”
the ideas around disease transmission in the nineteenth century moved from contagionism and miasmatism to germ theory by the end of the century. The theory of contagionism, practically scientific orthodoxy in the first half of the nineteenth century, traced the transfer of disease through close bodily contact, and the prevention of disease transmission involved the containment of the infected individual. This method of protecting the populace from disease is effectively the same as methods of disciplining the insane by walling the body off from the rest of society. Miasmatism was a counter-current to contagionism and linked disease to environmental factors and a weak constitution. In this theory, vapors from an unsanitary environment penetrated the body and caused infection. This concept backed many reform efforts, such as Chadwick’s, for improved urban sanitation. While quarantine can be extended to the imprisonment or cloistering of threatening bodies, and its representation in fiction involves overt imprisonment, the miasma is much more difficult to contain. Representations of subversive urban figures from the mid-nineteenth century onward are often constructed in part through bits of miasmatic theory, where the body is inscribed through its unsanitary environment, and is depicted as part of a larger, dangerous infectious landscape. Both of these theories are at play in the fictional representation of the subversive urban body because the concepts employed to protect people from illness reflect a larger discourse formation around the body that is threatening to the social order.

Parallel to early efforts to contain infectious disease and bodies that threaten the ideologically dominant narrative, the woman outside of the institution of marriage is effectively quarantined. The female outside of the domestic sphere is a problematic figure in the urban environment. Her threat to the social order is not as demonized as that
of the prostitute later in the century but is disciplined severely. The representations of
subversive bodies in the early nineteenth century involve their explicit imprisonment
behind stone walls. Two novels written by women, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*
by Mary Wollstonecraft and *Ourika* by Claire de Duras, depict the female body and its
containment from the point of view of the female herself. In *Maria*, Mary Wollstonecraft
demonstrates many of the wrongs she addresses in her *Vindication of the Rights of
Woman*; yet using the Gothic mode in a fictional work allows her to subvert the available
discourse of subject formation that is largely constructed through codes inscribed on a
masculine body. Here, the multiplicity of meaning available only in fiction allows
Wollstonecraft to gesture toward the embodiment of a rational female subject. The
female body in *Maria* is not an Other, standing in as a screen for projected anxieties, but
a subject trapped in a phantasmagoric world of imprisoning institutions. Through the
protagonist Maria, Wollstonecraft subverts these social strictures imposed on women by
presenting a liminal autobiography, within which there are other marginalized women’s
autobiographies, and the protagonist speaks for the whole gendered category of
“woman.” In Claire de Duras’ *Ourika*, the autobiography of the fictional Senegalese
woman raised in the late eighteenth-century Parisian aristocracy is a hybrid figure coded
through conflicting narratives of the African savage and the aristocratic debutante.
Written by a French aristocratic woman whose fortune came from the slave trade, the
psychological depth given to the African body is innovative in the history of French
literature, but the psychology is not African. The cloistered African woman recounts her
story in a secularized confession to a visiting doctor, yet this subaltern figure has
completely internalized the same ideology that denigrates her. While her story describes
the subject formation of a French aristocrat, her African body betrays her. In fact, throughout her story, the material history of how her African body came to be in the center of Paris is systematically erased, along with her body. In the case of Ourika, the discourse formation that denies subjectivity to the African female body is spoken by that very body, creating a subjective fissure that ends in death. The oppression and confinement within disciplinary institutions that serve to homogenize society by quarantining transgressive women presents a counterpoint to the projection that defines the representation of subversive bodies later in the century. These projections reflect codes that constitute narratives of female domesticity, bourgeois progress, and miasmatic theory, to inscribe the hysterical feminine onto the revolutionary women in A Tale of Two Cities.

In order to represent a body as subversive in fiction, it is necessary to implicitly reference a normativity so as to define the body through its alterity to that norm. By using available social discourse, nineteenth-century novelists are often co-opting the same reform-minded gaze as their sociologically-inspired counterparts. However, fiction has its own history of referents with which to construct the body. Some may consider these tropes, or representational structures, elements of myth that are not motivated by historical specificity. However, the use of this mythical register is historically motivated because it is utilized to create distance from present circumstances. The chapter on Charles Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities is a case in point. Using Thomas Carlyle’s The French Revolution, which depicts the revolutionary women in Paris as Maenads in a violent Bacchic revelry, Dickens places the French Revolutionary of 1793 into a universalized register. Teetering between non-fictional texts as an attempt toward
grounding in historical specificity, and mythological registers, Dickens inscribes the body of the historical revolutionary with anxieties of social unrest that are exacerbated and distanced using mythological codes. The use of this universalized mythical pattern serves to delegitimize the French Revolution while reinforcing the patriarchal hegemony of the British middle class. The revolutionary in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* is secondary to the story of Jean Valjean, Marius, and Cosette, and is an elaborate historical backdrop to the story of the criminal Jean Valjean in the process of his own reformation. Here, the revolutionary body is equally informed through historical specificity, as the Conventionist and the insurrection leader of 1832, as well as a mythological register of idealized ancient Greek art. In the case of Hugo, his own political position in regards to violent revolution is inscribed through the stillness of Enjolras, as if his agency is limited because France is not yet ready for a republic. The revolutionary, either in 1793 or 1832, is easily identified as subversive through this very role. Indeed, this revolutionary garb is only superficial. As Madame Defarge subverts the panoptical gaze that provides social order, she is inscribed through a reactionary othering of Indian Mutiny and radical feminism, two concerns more native to the Victorian than the French revolutionary. The figure of Madame Defarge wears the British anxieties toward feminine political agency. The threat of an irrational, violent figure guiding a decentralized public order places the female as an antithesis to the logic of the patriarchal order.

In novels depicting subversive bodies at the end of the nineteenth century, the ghosts of those oppressed take their revenge by draining the blood and money (although one may very well represent the other) of the good, clean, and capitalist citizens. In the last part of this dissertation, entitled “The Blood-Sucking Monsters,” the figure of the
prostitute takes on disastrous proportions. Emile Zola configures the title character, Nana, as the avenger of the oppressed class, as a working class woman who rises socially because of the commodification of her own body. She drains the fortunes of all the men infatuated with her, and her contagious immorality infects even the most upright of women, Countess Sabine Muffat. The courtesan in *Nana* is a fantastic monster avenging the oppression of women and of the working class, but this fantasy is also a product of such oppression. The hypersexual female body that is not contained or disciplined through marriage can destroy the social order, as Nana’s rise and fall corresponds roughly to that of the Second Empire. The Prussian War begins as Nana lies dying of smallpox, and the working class takeover in the 1871 Paris Commune looms on the horizon.

Another return of the repressed Other functions in the figure of the vampire in *Dracula*. As a conglomeration of a multitude of referents to alterity and pathology, the vampire invades London by seducing the vulnerable women. Count Dracula, like the prostitute Nana, drains the blood and money of the British Empire, as he spreads his vampiric infection of animalistic desire, deviant sexuality, and untamed lust for power. While in the beginning of the century, the subversive body was contained behind walls to prevent the infection and disruption of the social order, by the 1890s contagious immorality infects even the good citizens as the proliferation of social scientific discourses constructs veritable monsters. The contagion in these two novels is fueled by capitalist self-interest, as Nana uses her own sexual body for her monetary benefit and Count Dracula enters London to buy up real estate and make slaves of good women thanks to the inadvertent help of the opportunistic Jonathan Harker.
Overall, the metropolis in nineteenth-century fiction appears paradoxical. The capital cities represent the national social order through the institutions that govern the masses, while its streets are simultaneously encoded as the center of degeneracy. The presence of foreign bodies, as colonial others and the working class whose lack of education denies their entry into the Symbolic order, fuels the conception of the capital city, and center of French and British empires, as a foreign place. The projection of monstrosity onto the metropolitan populace, and the discipline imposed on the masses to create social order, are two sides to the same coin. Constructing the body that is encoded into a conflicting ideological narrative as a monstrosity is the first step in a larger process of expanding institutionalized knowledge. This subversive body is individuated through its alterity to the dominant ideological narrative, and this individuation, albeit encoded as inhuman, is a product of discipline. The imposition of social order breeds the production of monsters.
Subversive Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Paris and London

Part One: Speaking Statues

Chapter One: The Possibility of Speaking in Stone:

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798)

Chapter Two: The Immured African Body in Claire de Duras’

*Ourika* (1823)
CHAPTER ONE

The Possibility of Speaking in Stone: Mary Wollstonecraft’s

_The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria_ (1798)

The French Revolution in 1789 presented a brief glimpse of hope for women to acquire equality. In September of 1792, the changes in laws of inheritance, marriage and divorce gave English observers the impression that the Revolution was taking a more feminist direction. Women in France were actively engaging in political acts by writing pamphlets, petitioning assemblies, speaking publicly, and joining political clubs or forming their own (Butler 15). Mary Wollstonecraft moved to Paris alone in December of 1792, most likely inspired by the changes occurring there (10). However, these hopes were shortly crushed. As her Girondist acquaintances were going to the guillotine, and her lover Gilbert Imlay was for a long time away on business, Mary Wollstonecraft left Paris for Le Havre to pursue him in January 1794 (11). By this point, the brief liberty women experienced was quashed by the fanatical rule of Robespierre, as women were forced out of the public sphere and back to a strictly domestic existence as the property of their husbands. Wollstonecraft’s writing can be situated as working against the trend that Joan Landes describes in her book, _Women and the Public Sphere: In the Age of the French Revolution_, as the systematic silencing of women that coincides with the nineteenth-century social order of bourgeois society (Landes 38). In _The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria_ the protagonist struggles to speak against the multiple forces that silence the informed female voice.
In Mary Wollstonecraft’s unfinished novel, published posthumously by William Godwin, the title character is a bourgeois woman imprisoned for attempting to escape from an unhappy marriage. Unable to forgive her husband’s debauched behavior, and not accepting her role as his private property, Maria attempts to go to Italy with her newborn baby to begin a new life. There she is captured and committed to an insane asylum and her infant daughter is taken from her, later to die. While there, she exchanges life stories with another inmate, with whom she falls in love, Henry Darnford, and her keeper Jemima, a lower class woman. After her escape from the asylum, Maria attempts to argue, through a written text read in court, against the chancery suit accusing Henry Darnford of seduction and adultery; but the judge rules against her wishes. Here, the text breaks off. Although Godwin includes several possible trajectories for the novel, they will not be considered in this essay.

A consistent thematic throughout the fragmented text is the stone that imprisons the female body, and the struggle of the protagonist to validate her experience through effective communication. A majority of the criticism of this text places it within Wollstonecraft’s larger feminist project for a woman’s legal voice. Much of this criticism discusses how this novel reiterates her political writings, particularly how this fits into her project set forth in *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*.

This chapter adds another dimension to that polemic by analyzing the text as primarily fiction, and by analyzing the metaphorical use of stone to represent the “wrongs” exacted against the representative woman of the text. Wollstonecraft’s use of a fictional mode allows her a more effective vindication of these wrongs. Previous criticism lacks the consideration of the avenues available in fiction to disrupt hegemonic patriarchal discourse through a

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3 In particular, I am referring to works of Janice Peritz, Alex Schulman, and Miriam Wallraven.
narrative of female subject formation. Moreover, this criticism does not consider how the narrative in *The Wrongs of Woman* is centered upon a crucial binary difference between the country and the city. In the country, the protagonist experiences a moral instruction through the contemplation of nature, and in the city she is repeatedly confined in patriarchal institutions. The city comes to represent these institutions that confine and silence the female body. Lastly, this chapter expands upon existing feminist criticism of this novel by first situating this subversive narrative of female subject formation within the context of contemporary constructions of the city. As of yet, no critic has considered the representations of the social institutions that confine the protagonist as part of a larger discourse formation around the city. Furthermore, I consider the imprisonment of the protagonist in relation to the work of Michel Foucault to understand how the bourgeois social order attempts to silence Maria through the discipline around the female body. Thus, the metropolis is representative both of the culture it embodies and of the efforts of social control in the institutions that confine the protagonist, and women in general.

The Country, “The Father of Nature” vs. the City

In *Maria*, the title character shares her story with Henry Darnford, another inmate at the madhouse, and the guardian of the madhouse, Jemima, after reading their own brief autobiographies. Upon receiving news of her infant daughter’s death, Maria, withdrawn and undesiring of Darnford’s company, sends him a written text previously destined for her daughter. In this text, Maria describes the freedom she experienced as a child before the death of her mother in the country village where she spent her youth. This freedom is
gradually attacked by restrictions and abuses of those with arbitrary authority over her: her despotic brother, her step-mother, and finally her husband George Venables. Immediately following her marriage, Maria and her new husband move to London to pursue his business interests, and it is in the city where speculation, vice, and imprisonment await her. As a bourgeois wife in the eighteenth century, Maria is bound to Venables in a way that makes her a legal extension of him. As Mary Poovey describes this contract in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*:

> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the legal status of women remained as it had been defined under Roman law. The law of “coverture” decreed that the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything. (6-7)

Thus, Maria is bound to George Venables as an extension of himself, and is, moreover, a piece of his property. He is responsible for her protection, and her actions are a direct reflection upon him. All of her property is automatically his; all of the inheritance bequeathed by her uncle is also his; and when she attempts to leave him, he is completely within his legal right, and actually appears like the responsible party, to imprison her in a madhouse. It is within these laws and customs that the novel’s plot functions, yet the discourse chosen for this narrative gestures beyond them. The text of *The Wrongs of Woman* is lambasting not just the strictures of marriage in the eighteenth century, but more so the social conventions and discourse around gender that informs and provides justification for these customs. In order to perform such a critique, the narrator utilizes key metaphors that represent such conventions and their effect on the female subject. One such metaphor is the stone structure that houses, contains, as well as creates knowledge around the female body. The primary figure for such modern conventions is
the city. A seminal text on the literary construction of the city in the eighteenth century, 
*The Country and the City* by Raymond Williams, provides valuable background for the 
function of the city in the novel as representative of the social structures of the national 
culture (148). Although Williams does not address a gendered experience of the city, this 
text is useful in understanding the contemporary views of the expanding metropolis, 
albeit from an exclusively masculine perspective.

When the autobiographical text is introduced, Maria has already been imprisoned 
in the madhouse by her husband, and her descriptions of the freedom she enjoyed in the 
natural setting of the country serve as fond recollections of a more harmonious state of 
being. The Romantic trope of the union of subject and object in the contemplation of 
nature informs her descriptions, and its antithetical form of imprisonment and corruption 
is elaborated in her depiction of London and its effect on the female subject. In her 
published letters to Gilbert Imlay entitled *Letters Written During a Short Residence in 
Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, Wollstonecraft begins to develop what Marilyn Butler 
calls a “heroicized self-portrait” as “an expressive romantic autobiographer” (24, 23) 
where the landscapes represent the narrator’s state of mind (22). Although Butler argues 
that the persona Wollstonecraft adopts in this text cannot be used to depict a woman 
facing the “sordid pressures of the world” that the novel medium requires (27), this 
persona is positioned in *Maria* as a previous state of innocence and morality which is 
ultimately imprisoned in arbitrary social convention as she moves to London. The 
characteristics of the country, according to Maria’s autobiography, are those of a 
nurturing self-reflection, freedom, health and moral growth. She first remembers her 
childhood in the country where the pleasure she took from the “charms of nature” helped
to form her imagination (123). She compares her childhood hopes to flowers in a green meadow (124). When Maria returns to the country to nurse her ailing father, she writes: “The icy hand of despair seemed to be removed from my bosom; and – forgetting my husband – the nurtured visions of a romantic mind, bursting on me with all their original wilderness and gay exuberance, were again hailed as sweet realities” (143). The cottages had hedges that seemed to smile back at her and she longs to interact with the chickens, cows, and dogs with “the playfulness of childish vivacity” (143). She recalls a “sublime calm..., when in some tremendous solitude, my soul rested on itself, and seemed to fill the universe” (144). After describing Maria’s rejection by other ladies who were formerly her friends, the narrator describes “real affections of life,” such as what Maria felt for Darnford, and which her former lady friends denied in their own marriages in order to hold up their reputation. These affections are characterized as:

buds pregnant with joy and all the sweet emotions of the soul; yet they branch out with wild ease, unlike the artificial forms of felicity, sketched by an imagination painful alive. The substantial happiness, which enlarges and civilizes the mind, may be compared to the pleasure experienced in roving through nature at large, inhaling the/ sweet gale natural to the clime (176-77)

Maria’s emotional life takes on the terminology of natural, botanical growth, and the pleasure from these real emotions involves a harmony with the natural elements. In several of the passages where the protagonist interacts with natural surroundings, Wollstonecraft invests Maria’s narrative of subject formation with philosophical concepts of the beautiful and sublime, as discussed by Danielle Mallinick in “Sublime heroism and The Wrongs of Woman: Passion, Reason, Agency.” As part of a larger dialogue with Edmund Burke’s ideas in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, Maria’s autobiography embraces instead the Kantian concept of
purposiveness, creating distance from Burke’s “delightful fear” (Mallinick 7-8). In fact, Maria uses this experience of the sublime to construct a social agency, and Wollstonecraft denies Burke’s “emotionally driven model” of the sublime as part of her project to construct the embodied female subject (13). Although these philosophical implications extend beyond the scope of this essay, Mallinick’s article is helpful in positioning Maria’s narrative of subject formation as a refashioning of the philosophical discourse used to define the moral subject. In short, for Maria, harmony in the country is a natural order guided by a divine authority, while the city is patterned according to the structures of man.

While the country and its natural surroundings contribute to moral guidance, the city is characterized by the disintegration of this conscience. When Maria moves to London following her marriage, she notes that while her sentiments were evolving and honing her intellectual faculties, her husband’s were thwarted as a result of “commerce and gross relaxations” (Wollstonecraft 137). Although London is associated with “preferment” and upward social mobility in Maria’s autobiographical text, it is equally associated with her marriage, and all of the “violence” this relation does to her “delicacy” (144). Through the eighteenth century, London has undergone significant growth, and by the time that this novel takes place, the city had become what Raymond Williams describes as “a contradictory reality: of vice and protest, of crime and victimisation, of despair and independence” (Williams 144). Its rapid expansion is described as a monstrous “wen,” which “had logically to be traced back to the whole social order” (146). Williams states that London “was producing and reproducing, to a dominant degree, the social reality of the nation as a whole” (147-8). For Maria, the city is largely
representative of the social order which imprisons her, figuratively and literally. Although she finds pleasure in its novelty, the independence she has imagined in the city is an illusion. She compares marriage to a cage and she is the bird: “I could not sometimes help regretting my early marriage; and that, in my haste to escape from a temporary dependence, and expand my newly fledged wings, in an unknown sky, I had been caught in a trap, and caged for life” (Wollstonecraft 138). Despite the connotations of independence that Raymond Williams discusses, this is only for men; as a woman, Maria experiences quite the opposite. Her marriage that she thought would be an experience of independence turns out to be a trap in which she is “caged for life” (138).

Moreover, George Venables is consistently speculating in trade (133), so much so that he becomes known as a “swindler” on the exchange (151). He often comes home drunk, and spends his time with prostitutes (139). His libertinism and attraction to vice make him “dead to natural affection”; this becomes apparent when Maria discovers that he had a child out of wedlock that he hardly supports, to which he responds, “So much the better” (141). Her husband’s state, moral, physical, and sentimental, is deteriorating so much so that Maria consults Mr. S__ (the man to whom she was solicited) how to retrieve her husband’s character. The vice and commercial interests of the city had drawn her husband

into a whirlpool, out of which he had not the energy to attempt to escape. He seemed indeed destitute of the power of employing his faculties in any regular/pursuit. His principles of action were so loose, and his mind so uncultivated, that every thing like order appeared to him in the shape of restraint; and, like men in a savage state, he required the strong stimulus of hope or fear, produced by wild speculations in which the interest of others went for nothing, to keep his spirits awake. (151)
The characteristics of her husband are the effects of the city. As his wife, Maria is subjected to the effects of this speculation and vice. Although she attempts to ameliorate their financial situation with monetary gifts from her uncle (139), she herself becomes part of that speculation when she is offered to Mr. S___ for 500 pounds (151). She is imprisoned in a marriage to the vices of urbanity: licentiousness, speculation, and the dulling of natural sensations from artificialities. The city has reduced her husband, and keeper, to a “savage state” where the delicate moral sentiments are overlooked for the “strong stimulus of hope or fear” brought about by his commercial speculations. As Williams explains Adam Smith’s view of the city, it is “a centre of freedom and order but in its very dependence as a market and manufacturing centre liable to breed a volatile and insecure people” (Williams 144). George Venables is precisely that: volatile and insecure, in a “whirlpool” of speculation out of which he does not have the energy to save himself; and Maria is, by default as his wife, trapped in it as well.

By the time she declares her divorce from him, Maria is yet another pawn in the speculative urban environment. Almost traded herself, she declares her divorce from him, albeit futile, and the next day George attempts to reconcile with her. He explains that he is “liberal in his way of thinking” and that he assumed that Maria would not mind because it seemed that Mr. S___ “was not disagreeable” to her (157). Disgusted, Maria begins to play the piano in an attempt to “drive the sophisticated sentiments” she had just been forced to listen to out of her soul, and she compares her feelings to the stifling miasma of the back streets of the city:

They had excited sensations similar to those I have felt, in viewing the squalid inhabitants of some of the lanes and back streets of the metropolis, mortified at being compelled to consider them as my fellow-creatures, as if an ape had claimed kindred with me. Or, as when surrounded by a mephitical fog, I have
wished to have a volley of cannon fired, to clear the incumbered atmosphere, and give me room to breathe and move. (157)

George argues that Maria’s romanticized sentiments are essentially a delusion that hides the fact that the world is governed by capitalist self-interest (156). Trapped in this capitalist social order, Maria is more akin to the “squalid inhabitants” of the metropolis than she would like to realize, as the urban poor are equally victims of the speculation that drives the city. In an attempt to remain above the miasma that envelops her in her prison-like marriage to urbanity, Maria wants to take drastic, violent measures (like the firing of a volley of cannon) to regain the “room to breathe” that she has lost in this “mephitical” environment. Maria’s disgust at being kindred to an ape is not only her revolt against her imprisonment in this marriage as the powerless piece of a capitalist’s property, but makes up a growing discourse on the urban environment that connects miasmatic theories of infection to lower classes of species as ways to explain as ontological the plight of the urban poor, as opposed to describing these urban bodies as an effect of the growing metropolis and capitalist system. Despite the repeated confusion between the narrator’s voice and that of the protagonist Maria, the choice of this comparison within Maria’s autobiography highlights a certain dramatic irony. Maria is as powerless and mute as these “squalid inhabitants” despite her education, upbringing, and uncle’s wealth. This juxtaposition provokes the reader to sympathize for Maria through this use of prejudices around the urban poor. The use of multiple perspectives is only available in fiction; to equate the middle-class woman with the voiceless urban masses makes the woman’s subjugation undeniable.
Denying the discipline that the marriage pact requires results in Maria’s overt imprisonment in a madhouse. Her impressions of her surroundings in the asylum resemble timely descriptions of the urban environment, as the madhouse is a material extension of her prison-like marriage in London. Williams discusses Wordsworth’s seventh book of *The Prelude*, “Residence in London,” where he describes next-door neighbors not knowing each others’ names, where “the human heart is sick” (Williams 149). Wordsworth describes the fast pace of the city, its “perpetual flow/ Of trivial objects” and how he has “looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed/ By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,/ Until the shapes before my eyes became/ A second-sight procession, such as glides/ Over still mountains, or appears in dreams” (151, 150).

Williams argues that these experiences are central in later descriptions of the city:

> Wordsworth saw strangeness, a loss of connection, not at first in social but in perceptual ways: a failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss of identity in the self, and then, in these ways, a loss of society itself, its overcoming and replacement by a procession of images: the ‘dance of colours, lights and forms’, ‘face after face’ and there are no other laws. (150)

In the city, the sheer numbers of people alienate the newcomer as the usual familiarity of the country setting is replaced by a multitude of strange and uninterested faces. The closeness, speed, and variety of sights causes what George Simmel later referred to as a “shock” in the city dweller, which firstly protects him by numbing him from a sensory overload, and secondly allows him to block out some of the superfluous sensory data in order to effectively function in such an environment. Maria, as a bourgeois wife mostly confined to the domestic sphere, does not directly experience this urbanity; its “mephitical vapors” penetrate and corrupt her marriage. When returning to the country to care for her dying father, Maria states that she has the “heavy weight of experience
benumbing [her] imagination” (Wollstonecraft 143). Immediately before the civil trial against Darnford, Maria realizes that “she had before disregarded” certain virtues “while chasing the phantoms of elegance and excellence, which sported in the meteors that exhale in the marshes of misfortune,” and her heart had fostered a “sickly sensibility” similar to Wordsworth’s expression that “human heart is sick” (177).

_The Wrongs of Woman_ begins with Maria completely alienated from society. After discovering she is confined in a madhouse, she attempts to gather her thoughts.

Many critics have noted the Gothic tone of the description of the madhouse (Crafton 369, Rajan 233, Wallraven 258), but in addition to the use of the Gothic mode, which will be discussed later, this description repeats Wordsworth’s impression of the city. She is locked in an individual cell, perceiving a dream-like “procession of images,” and a “loss of connection” both social and perceptual:

> Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind.  
> ... One recollection with frightful velocity following another, threatened to fire her brain, and make her a fit companion for the terrific inhabitants, whose groans and shrieks were no unsubstantial sounds of whistling winds, or startled birds...  
> The retreating shadows of former sorrows rushed back in a gloomy train, and seemed to be pictured on the walls of her prison,... To think/ that she was blotted out of existence was agony, when the imagination had been long employed to expand her faculties; yet to suppose her turned adrift on an unknown sea, was scarcely less afflicting. (Wollstonecraft 85-6)

The traditional Gothic description of the haunted house with whistling winds is the moldel for the narrator’s description of the madhouse, but here the natural elements of wind and birds is replaced by the “groans and shrieks” of “the terrific inhabitants.” The experience of the madhouse is about to drive her mad herself, and while ghosts are particular to a gothic haunting, the chimeric procession of “shadows” on her prison wall,
the floating image of her child, the disembodied shrieks of the other inmates, are all akin to the “failure of identity in the crowd of others” and a society replaced by “a procession of images.” Maria senses that she is “blotted out of existence” and “turned adrift on an unknown sea,” much like the “loss of identity of the self” that Williams describes as an effect of being part of the strange urban crowd which is a central experience of the city (Williams 150). From the perspective of the one who is imprisoned, we can see that the panoptic gaze has not been reconstructed. In fact, by walling off Maria from the rest of society, she has entered a phantasmagoric space that seems more threatening than her life outside the walls of the asylum.

Metaphors of Stone: Encased in Stone and Becoming Stone

*Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?* (88)

As the city represents the collection of social conventions and discursive structures through which the protagonist Maria must survive, the asylum and the various metaphoric references to stone and prisons draw a more specific view of how social conventions and gender prescriptions, mobilized through discursive structures, create a knowledge around and thereby confine the female body. Maria, at one point in her autobiography, describes these conventions as “the house without doors” (132). Like many asylums and prisons at the time, the madhouse where Maria is confined is situated on the banks of the Thames just outside of London (121). Many critics, such as Rajan, Crafton, and Peritz, focus on the revolutionary possibilities of the text, and rightfully so,
considering Mary Wollstonecraft’s previous *Vindications*. However, they fail to examine the extent to which the narrator of *The Wrongs of Woman* describes the nature of these conventions against which Wollstonecraft is prescribing revolt. To return to the gothic mode at the beginning of the novel, in her introduction to the novel, Marilyn Butler describes Wollstonecraft’s use of the gothic setting as combining “features of the sentimental and the jacobinical, for its plots can be read both as female fantasies about murderous but desirable males, and hostile representations of (in the words of the alternative title to Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*) ‘Things as they are’” (Butler 25). Put simply, the stone in the novel represents the delimitations of “things as they are,” as the restrictive social conventions the female body must navigate through. However, for this text, the use of the gothic is more than jacobinical, and delves into a more complex problem for the woman author forced to work within the available fictional discourse “as it is.” Tilottama Rajan describes Wollstonecraft’s use of the gothic mode as similar to that of many women writers:

The interest of women writers in the Gothic, as several critics have suggested, derives from its ability to suggest an experience of frustration and confinement, a world that is internally disordered and split with no possibility of transcendence. *The Wrongs of Woman* is a form of political Gothic, which retains the Gothic setting as a socially imposed metaphor, so as to exhibit critically the emotional excesses of the form and its complicity in the attitudes of patriarchy. (Rajan 233)

Thus the haunted structure of the madhouse and the uncanny procession of images that Maria experiences in the madhouse are obvious expressions of the “frustration and confinement” that Rajan describes. The Gothic uses metaphors that are socially imposed, in that there is a limited social discourse in which women writers may formulate desire. More importantly, in the case of *Maria*, the Gothic setting is an expression of social
imposition proper. The impossibility of transcendence in the Gothic mode illuminates the incongruence between female desire and the available discourse. Thus, Maria’s imprisonment in the madhouse here signifies through fictional modes the social conventions that contain female desire. Rajan’s notion of “political Gothic” is that the imprisonment in the text is both “a psychological condition and a social one.” This illustrates an injustice that “provokes the reader to revolt against the prison of things as they are” (Rajan 228).

Provoking the reader is done by depicting the horror of the various prisons of the text that represent unjust social conventions. The prison is repeated metaphorically throughout, and Wollstonecraft presents the character of Maria as representative of all women. In the title, “woman” is equated with Maria. The whole title is a reversal of the “rights” Wollstonecraft puts forth in her second Vindication, albeit a title chosen by William Godwin (Peritz 253). While in her political tracts, she argues for rights which were denied, in this piece of fiction she is illustrating how they are denied, i.e. the “wrongs” (Rajan 232). Wollstonecraft elaborates on her purpose for the novel in the Preface:

The Wrongs of Woman, like the wrongs of the oppressed part of mankind, may be deemed necessary by their oppressors: but surely there are a few, who will dare to advance before the improvement of the age, and grant that my sketches are not the abortion of a distempered fancy, or the strong delineations of a wounded heart. (Wollstonecraft 83)

Wollstonecraft describes women as “the oppressed part of mankind.” She is sure to explain that this is not a “vindication,” but “sketches” of oppression, which are not the product of anger. Instead, she “rather endeavoured to pourtray passions than manners” (83). While this text is not a product, but a portrayal, of the passions, it is important to
explore what she may have intended by manners. Manners are elements of prescribed behavior, the social conventions themselves as regards to speech. As a fictional text that illustrates the conventions that essentially “wrong” half of mankind, manners would play an important part in the representation of such wrongs. However, to focus on them would not allow the reader to move beyond them to new possibilities. Instead, it is the passions, the raw feelings in the human self, that are the focus of the text, which may very well be read in the sense of the “political Gothic” as the conflict between personal truth, experience, and feeling (i.e. passions) and the acceptable language and behavior through which they may find expression (manners). Wollstonecraft continues to articulate her goals for this novel: “exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (83). The bias of her contemporary society, highlighted by the passions of an exemplary woman, is represented consistently in the text in stone structures. In the asylum, Maria considers herself “buried alive” (92, 170) in “a tomb of living death” (106). The bias of these social conventions results in the thwarting of natural passions, so much so that she feels as if she is dead to the world, and “blotted out of existence” (85).

The erasure of Maria’s individual will and passions is made even more horrific by the description of her entry into the asylum. She is drugged by the woman whom she hired to help her escape to Paris, and wakes up without her child as she is carried into the madhouse. She is roused “by someone thundering at a huge, unwieldy gate. Attempting to ask where I was, my voice died away, and I tried to raise it in vain” (Wollstonecraft 169). In the time Wollstonecraft was writing, having a voice implied political agency.
Maria is unable to protest, and her description of the madhouse is rife with traditional Gothic horror:

The gates opened heavily, and the sullen sound of many locks and bolts drawn back, grated on my very soul, before I was appalled by the creaking of the dismal hinge, as they closed after me. The gloomy pile was before me, half in ruins; some of the aged trees of the avenue were cut down, and left to rot where they fell; and as we approached some mouldering steps, a monstrous dog darted forwards to the length of his chain, and barked and growled infernally.

The door was opened slowly, and a murderous visage peeped out, with a lantern. ‘Hush!’ he uttered, in a threatening tone, and the affrighted animal stole back to his kennel. The door of the chaise flew back, the stranger put down the lantern, and clasped his dreadful arms around me. It was certainly the effect of the soporific draught, for, instead of exerting my strength, I sunk without motion, though not without sense, on his shoulder, my limbs refusing to obey my will. (169)

The first horror to provoke the reader here is that Maria cannot see where she is, and her first indication of the madhouse is the sound of “locks and bolts” and “the dismal hinge” that signify her enclosure. When she does see her surroundings, it is all ruins, which, in this context of horror, further serves to exacerbate her metaphorical death through being imprisoned in a madhouse. To increase this effect, she is confronted by a violent dog, growling “infernally” as if signaling that she is entering the gates of hell. Then, an unknown man with a “murderous visage” picks her up, and she no longer has any choice in who touches her body; she is unable to exert herself and her limbs do not obey her will. At this point, Maria’s own body is a prison, and she is utterly powerless. To further the horror of the confinement within these conventions, while in the asylum, Maria describes the other inmates in the asylum as “petrified figures” “the only human forms she was doomed to observe, haunting her dreams with tales of mysterious wrongs” (92). The inmates of the asylum are imagined by Maria as extensions of the stone structure of the asylum itself. This raises the question of whether Maria, as well, will turn to stone.
Becoming stone, for Maria, implies complete submission to the unjust social conventions that imprison her in marriage. She describes in her autobiography the double standard imposed upon a woman in marriage:

A man would only be expected to maintain; yes, barely grant a subsistence, to a woman rendered odious by habitual intoxication; but who would expect him, or think it possible to love her? And unless “youth, and genial years were flown,” it would be thought equally unreasonable to insist, [under penalty of] forfeiting almost every thing reckoned valuable in life, that he should not love another: whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, / labouring to reform her embruted mate. (145)

The wife would never be allowed the leniency she is forced to grant her husband. In the marriage-prison, her will and her desires are void, just as in the Gothic scene of her forced entrance into the asylum. A man in this situation, with a wife behaving like Venables, would perhaps be granted separation from bed and board, and be forced to provide her a “subsistence.” However, the woman is required to deny her desires and conform to the ideal of morality and sentimentality, “moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone.” Becoming stone is to turn oneself into the embodiment of an ideal wife and, in the process, to deny the desires, imagination, and sensibility that make a woman human. Maria’s uncle empathizes with her plight, and comforts her by criticizing other women who do submit, at least “in appearance, and forfeit their own respect to secure their reputation in the world” (147). Maria herself exacts a more severe criticism against the “moralists” that prescribe such unnaturally harsh roles for women:

When novelists or moralists praise as a virtue, a woman’s coldness of constitution, and want of passion; and make her yield to the ardour of her lover out of sheer compassion, or to promote a frigid plan of future comfort, I am disgusted./ They may be good women, in the ordinary acceptation of the phrase, and do no harm; but they appear to me not to have those “finely fashioned nerves,” which render the senses exquisite. They may possess tenderness; but
they want that fire of the imagination, which produces *active* sensibility, and *positive* virtue. (144)

If a woman “sentimentalizes” herself into stone, she is denying her sensibility by denying her own sensations. Such a woman’s apparent virtue and tenderness is cold, passionless, and stone-like. Contrary to the frigidity of the “good women,” the woman who is sincere about her desires and maintains that “fire of the imagination” is willfully sensible and practicing virtue primarily by being honest about her own experience, sensual as well as intellectual. The virtue that Maria prescribes is one that grows out of sincere desire, and is not a performance of a husband’s expectations.

To sculpt oneself according to the expectations of a husband and society, according to the polemic of the narrative, is essentially to lose one’s soul and to turn to stone. This is a reversal of the Pygmalion myth. The myth of Pygmalion is constellated in Maria’s relation to Henry Darnford, a fellow inmate on whom she later wishes to bestow “the sacred name of ‘husband’” (174). After reading his brief autobiography, which is an inserted text in the previous chapter, Maria’s physical appearance is described, and a brief reference to Pygmalion immediately follows. The reader is offered an interpretation of the protagonist’s physiognomy:

Maria was six-and-twenty. But, such was the native soundness of her constitution, that time had only given to her countenance the character of her mind. Revolving thought, and exercised affections had banished some of the playful graces of innocence, producing insensibly that irregularity of features which the struggles of the understanding to trace or govern the strong emotions of the heart, are wont to imprint on the yielding mass. Grief and care had mellowed, without obscuring, the bright tints of youth, and the thoughtfulness which resided on her brow did not take from the feminine softness of her features; nay, such was the sensibility which often mantled over it, and she frequently appeared like a large proportion of her sex, only born to feel; and the activity of her well-proportioned, and even almost voluptuous figure, inspired the idea of strength of mind, rather than of body. There was a simplicity sometimes indeed in her
manner which bordered on infantine ingenuousness, that led people/ of common discernment to underrate her talents, and smile at the flights of her imagination. But those who could not comprehend the delicacy of her sentiments, were attached by her unfailing sympathy so that she was very generally beloved by characters of very different descriptions; still, she was too much under the influence of an ardent imagination to adhere to common rules. (104)

Signs of Maria’s mental processes are present on her face. Like many women, her appearance is often misinterpreted. Her figure may mistakenly be read as one who is only driven by feelings, but those with above-average discernment would recognize her finely-honed sentiments. Her “ardent imagination” is mistaken as flighty, but it is this imagination that allows her to move beyond the strictures of prescribed female behavior. In short, it is what makes her subversive. Her imagination provides comfort for her in the madhouse, and also allows her to think beyond its walls:

Having to struggle incessantly with the vices of mankind, Maria’s imagination found repose in portrayling the possible virtues the world might contain. Pygmalion formed an ivory maid, and longed for an informing soul. She, on the contrary, combined all the qualities of a hero’s mind, and fate presented a statue in which she might enshrine them. (105)

In light of the Pygmalion myth, Maria’s physiognomy presents the impossibility of a female body to fulfill his projected ideal because a woman’s mind may be read, in part, on her face. In order to fill Pygmalion’s mold, or the mold supplied by the contemporary social conventions, a woman would have to lose her soul. The imagination that prevents Maria from adhering to “common rules” allows her to reverse the Pygmalion myth to her own ends. The feminine projection is, however, contrary. Maria combines the qualities of the “informing soul,” and then she is presented with its form. Just before her escape, when she denies her husband’s wishes once more, Maria believes she had found in Darnford her ideal mate that reflects all that she desires. She considers him “plastic in
her impassioned hand – and reflected all the sentiments which animated and warmed her” (173). Although the Pygmalion reversal implies an agency for the female that was only permitted to men, this metaphor remains undeveloped because the novel is incomplete. It is impossible to know if the feminine reversal of the Pygmalion myth that Wollstonecraft uses to illustrate a feminine agency is tenable once she leaves the asylum.

Apart from co-opting the Pygmalion myth, there are other indications that hint at the possibility of breaking the stone structures that encase and imprison women. Upon realizing that she is bound to George Venables for the rest of her life, Maria states: “corroding melancholy took possession of my soul. Marriage had bastilled me for life. I discovered in myself a capacity for the enjoyment of the various pleasures existence affords; yet, fettered by the partial laws of society, this fair globe was to me an universal blank” (146). Here, the comparison between the “partial laws” and the prison is more explicit. Moreover, the prison she refers to is the Bastille. Considering Wollstonecraft’s engagement with Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in her own tract, *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) and her two *Vindications* (1790, 1792) her use of the Bastille to describe the prison of marriage is as a straw man. A prison that was stormed and destroyed because it represented unjust oppression, used to describe the confinement of marriage customs, represents a convention to be destroyed. Although a political Gothic novel could make wide use of such figures, by setting up the representations of confining social conventions as straw men, Wollstonecraft is much more subtle. She walks a finer line, because the definitions of gender extend far into various areas of human experience,
and to destroy those conventions that are equally utilized to construct human community as we know it, would be counter-productive.

One possible avenue to create fissures in the unjust social conventions “as they are” is represented in the structure of the madhouse, as calmly contemplated by the protagonist. Maria often looks out of a small window in her cell:

[I]t commanded a view of a desolate garden, and of part of a huge pile of buildings, that, after having been suffered, for half a century, to fall to decay, had undergone some clumsy repairs, merely to render it habitable. The ivy had been torn off the turrets, and the stones not wanted to patch up the breaches of time, and exclude the warring elements, left in heaps in the disordered court. (86)

In the first scene of Maria contemplating the view from her tiny window, the elements of nature that had once nourished her imagination are now “desolate” and the only living plant life, the ivy, had been torn off. Ivy also slowly destroys the walls of buildings, and in order to halt this natural process, and to repair the decaying structures, the ivy was removed and the unused stones left in disarray. In her autobiographical text, Maria’s emotional experience and moral self-reflection is often in terms of natural processes, such as “budding,” for example. Here, in the romantic contemplation of her view in this institution, this process was purposely halted. The clumsily repaired building can be interpreted as a weakness in the social conventions that imprison her, or an expression of Maria’s own desire fueled by her rage against her physical imprisonment. According to Jemima’s later autobiographical account, the overseer of the workhouse where she was forced to live purchased the madhouse with money stolen from the poor. Jemima states:

The overseer farmed the poor of different parishes, and out of the bowels of poverty was wrung the money with which he purchased this dwelling, as a private receptacle for madness. He had been a keeper at a house of the same description, and conceived that he could make money much more readily in his old occupation. He is a shrewd – shall I say it? – villain. (119).
The disorder of the desolate garden is explained by this later piece of information; it is one of “the secrets of her prison-house” that Maria promised to her daughter at the end of her autobiography (170). By bringing the poor into his workhouse, i.e. “farming” them, he gathered the funds to purchase the buildings for the madhouse, all for an easier way to make money. Much like Maria’s marriage, an institution that confines her so that George Venables may gain access to more capital, this asylum is also a capitalist project constructed for the sole purpose of confinement, and for others to not be able to view the so-called lunatics it holds.

Maria begins to recognize that her confinement is a result of male capitalist self-interest. In a later scene where Maria contemplates her view of the “desolate garden,” her thoughts are more coherent. In this description of the madhouse, her perspective is much different from the drugged glimpses of the asylum when she is first carried into the madhouse. Here, she contemplates “the most terrific of ruins – that of the human soul” (91). In this contemplation, she compares ruins “of the most exquisite workmanship” with the haphazardly repaired madhouse; “this living memento of the fragility, the instability, of reason, and the wild luxuriancy of noxious passions” (91). Maria’s thoughts are compared to an overflowing stream (yet another metaphor of nature) moving at a “destructive velocity” which allows for her “sublime concentration” (91-2), a textual clue that this is not the ravings of an angry woman, but the reflections of a moral subject unjustly imprisoned:

These are the ravages over which humanity must ever mournfully ponder, with a degree of anguish not excited by crumbling marble, or cankering brass, unfaithful to the trust of monumental fame. It is not over the decaying productions of the mind, embodied with the happiest art, we grieve most bitterly. The view of what
has been done by man, produces a melancholy, yet aggrandizing, sense of what remains to be achieved by human intellect; but a mental convulsion, which, like the devastation of an earthquake, throws all the elements of thought and imagination into confusion, makes contemplation/ giddy, and we fearfully ask on what ground we ourselves stand. (92)

Questioning the “ground” on which we stand in this excerpt is more than just Maria’s fear for her sanity, and more than the “twists and strains” of reality that Rajan asserts are another characteristic of the Gothic. Instead of provoking the effect of fear that the Gothic mode intends, like the ruins of the madhouse when she is first carried into the asylum, here Maria is more calmly contemplating her situation. This contemplation raises a poignant question for any revolutionary spirit. If the current conventions are to be discarded, what will happen to the social order? The disordered and crumbling construction she regards is the institution that houses her, and this is “unfaithful to the trust of monumental fame,” meaning it does not merit the appreciation of a monument that would be regarded as representative of a civilization. The power of this structure invokes an “aggrandizing” “melancholy” as an achievement of intellect, albeit a prison for the outcast woman. Her metaphor of the earthquake connects the mental nature of such social constructions and the physical prison that is the result. The use of the word, “giddy,” here can signify more than just dizziness or foolishness, although it may arguably be foolish to destroy all social conventions that order human interaction. Giddiness here is also “mad with anger, furious,” a definition which corresponds more effectively with the earthquake metaphor. Although Maria’s desire to destroy all of the social conventions that reinforce the walls of her prison is understandable, it would also destroy the ground on which she may argue for her liberty. In this sense, questioning the

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5 From the OED online. Access through Rutgers University Libraries. 1/14/11
“ground” on which we stand is also placing insanity, another definition of giddy for this time period, as akin to the thought that denies all social convention. This passage elucidates one major dilemma for Maria: to think outside all social convention is insanity because it is also such conventions that create meaning. Yet the totality of the existing conventions imprisons her. Rajan’s idea that the text points beyond itself in “the interactions between the text and its future reader” is one way to understand how the text points beyond the conventions it draws and simultaneously condemns. Although Wollstonecraft’s preface describes this novel as a continuation of her previous work on the unjust oppression of women through gender conventions, to read it as a simple political tract is to reduce the play of meaning that fiction provides, and upon which any possible subversion of dominant discourse depends.

Imprisoned in Discourse: or, the possibility of the speaking female body

All the world’s a stage, thought I; and few are there in it who do not play the part they have learnt by rote; and those who do not, seem marks to be pelted at by fortune; or rather sign-posts, which point out the road to others. (Mary Wollstonecraft, quoted in Crafton 368).

A woman who conforms to patriarchal expectations is merely imitating a prescribed role and she who does not is “pelted at by fortune.” Although the protagonist of The Wrongs of Woman coincides with the latter description, she serves as a sign for the reader which points toward the fissures in the wall of patriarchal discourse that imprisons woman. Maria is able to escape the madhouse when the master leaves with no plans of returning (Wollstonecraft 174). With the institution in disarray, Jemima escapes with

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6 According to the OED, definition 3a, giddy means “mentally intoxicated” or, in a quote of Johnson, “elated to thoughtlessness.”
her, when they are temporarily stopped by a strange unidentified man, and the narrator
returns to a Gothic mode for Maria’s last experience in this “abode of horror”:

A being, with a visage that would have suited one possessed by a devil,
crossed the path, and seized Maria by the arm. Maria had no fear but of being
detained – ‘Who are you? what are you?’ for the form was scarcely human. ‘If
you are made of flesh and/ blood,’ his ghastly eyes glared on her, ‘do not stop
me!’

‘Woman,’ interrupted a sepulchral voice, ‘what have I to do with thee?’ –
Still he grasped her hand, muttering a curse.

‘No, no; you have nothing to do with me,’ she exclaimed, ‘this is a
moment of life and death!’ –

With supernatural force she broke from him, and, throwing her arms round
Jemima, cried, ‘Save me!’ The being, from whose grasp she had loosed herself,
took up a stone as they opened the door, and with a kind of hellish sport threw it
after them. (174-5)

One of the “petrified figures” of the madhouse attempts to hold her back. Maria
questions the humanity of this man, because anyone of “flesh and blood” would not
prevent someone from escaping such a prison. The man throws a stone at her, and a
piece of this structure follows her. Representations of confining social structures are not
only in the walls of the madhouse. Several moments of the text where medical or legal
contexts are evoked show how the confinement of women extends further beyond the
marriage and actual prison, and directly into discourse. This raises the question of
whether the woman can actually speak, or if she is imprisoned by the preconceptions of
her gender.7 Any possibility of redefining these conventions equally rests at the level of
language.

The question of a subject’s madness is an exemplary context in which one’s
speech is filtered through a formidable preconception surrounding the verbalizing

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7 For a more in-depth theoretical discussion of the question of the speaking female subject, please see
Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Although Spivak is concerned with the possibility of a
voice in post-colonial discourse, the restrictions of available discourse to convey experience is quite
relevant to the woman in Wollstonecraft’s time.
subject. When Maria first attempts to converse with Jemima, she asks her, “‘Do you really think me mad?’” to which her keeper responds: “‘Not just now. But what does/ that prove? – only that you must be the more carefully watched, for appearing at times so reasonable’” (Wollstonecraft 87). Proving to Jemima that she had not lost her senses is the first step for Maria to have her story heard. She does so by at first eating the food brought to her; when her speech fails to communicate her experience, Maria is forced to perform her assigned role in this context: “she calmly endeavoured to eat enough to prove her docility, perpetually turning to the suspicious female, whose observation she courted,” (87). Proving her “docility” allows for Maria to begin to be recognized as a rational subject. As a veritable obsession in the eighteenth century, “docile bodies” imply disciplined bodies, as Michel Foucault illustrates in Surveiller et Punir; “la notion de ‘docilité’… joint au corps analysable le corps manipulable. Est docile un corps qui peut être soumis, qui peut être utilisé, qui peut être transformé et perfectionné” (Foucault 160).8 The body that can be manipulated and transformed also corresponds to the assumptions around the body of a moral subject, which Maria is attempting to prove here through the performance of docility. As Lisa Plummer Crafton argues in “‘Stage Effect’: Transgressive Theatricality in Wollstonecraft’s Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman,” in her “theatricality,” Maria is able to subvert and transgress the walls of her prison by practicing what she calls a “self-fashioning,” which here is her performance of docility (Crafton 377). Maria believes that misery had not yet “petrified” Jemima’s humanity, so that, by sharing narratives about their life experiences, there is the possibility of meaningful communication.

8 “the notion of docility... links the analyzable body to the body that can be manipulated. A docile body is one that can submit, that can be utilized, that can be transformed and perfected.” My translation.
Before moving to subversive forms of communication represented in the growth of Maria and Jemima’s friendship, Maria is further imprisoned in discourse through medical, and then legal, language. When asked why Maria cannot have visitors, Jemima responds that only the doctor assigned by the family has access to her (Wollstonecraft 87) because “the malady was hereditary, and the fits not occurring but at very long and irregular intervals, she must be carefully watched; for the length of these lucid periods only rendered her more mischievous, when any vexation or caprice brought on the paroxysm of phrensy” (88). In this medical explanation of Maria’s ‘insanity,’ her moments of lucidity and rational behavior are made suspect. Therefore, as much as she may seem to be reasonable, her later “phrensy” is all the more insidious. This explanation denies any possibility of rational communicative relations and it is obviously part of Venables’ plan to negate Maria’s will to gain access to her fortune. In the later chancery suit, when Darnford is sued for seduction and adultery, Maria’s supposed insanity serves to doubly silence her. Not only is a woman unable to speak in a court of law, but her inserted text can be read as the ramblings of a frantic woman. For instance, in the chancery suit, the counsel for George Venables argues that he “had borne with several defects of temper,” and that “after the birth of her child, her conduct was so strange, and a melancholy malady having afflicted one of the family, which delicacy forbade the dwelling on, it was necessary to confine her” (178). Through the preconception that Maria is biologically predisposed to mental illness, the validity of her argument is nullified. In the judge’s ruling, he officially negates Maria’s argument with precisely the patriarchal discourse that silenced her originally, attributing her argument to her female “feelings”: 
What virtuous woman thought of her feelings?... As to the charges brought against the husband, they were vague, supported by no witnesses, excepting that of imprisonment in a private mad-house. The proofs of an insanity in the family, might render that however a prudent measure; and indeed the conduct of the lady did not appear that of a person of a sane mind. (181)

As an insane woman, in these proceedings, Maria is doubly mute. In the context of this fragment of a narrative, the woman is forced to submit to the will of her husband. However, as a political novel, the reader’s reaction to the wrongs confining the protagonist may compel the refashioning of the confines of this discourse in the text of reality. Rajan argues that Wollstonecraft’s uses fiction “self-consciously to interrupt itself, to make us aware of reality as a ‘text’ or system of misrepresentation, but also of ideology as a form of textual desire” (Rajan 223). Wollstonecraft’s use of several genres, in a text that Peritz calls a “generic hybrid” (Peritz 251): the Gothic, Romantic, Sentimental, and even what came to be later known as realism through the narratives concerning lower-class women reinforces Rajan’s argument about the textual nature of reality. The melodrama of the court scene calls for an “imaginative reconversion into what they should be,” as Maria’s written remarks in the chancery court are prefaced by the narrator: “The sarcasms of society, and the condemnation of a mistaken world, were nothing to her, compared with acting contrary to those feelings which were the foundation of her principles” (Wollstonecraft 178). The judge’s decision is a shining example of the “sarcasms of society” and the “mistaken world;” for the reader to accept his ruling would make them complicit in violating the foundation of a woman’s principles, thus provoking the reader in the fashion of the political Gothic that Rajan articulates. This dialectic is also at work with Maria’s silencing, which Rajan argues is
akin to the mute in melodrama. The rhetorical function of the mute is to provoke the
desire of the readers “to give her a voice again” (Rajan 233).

Considering the custom of criminal conversation cases, Maria’s attempt to defend
herself is even more provocative. Elaine Jordan, in her article “Criminal Conversation:
Mary Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman,” the reading of Maria’s letter in court “is
the most fantastic element of the text” (Jordan 224). While it was possible for a wife to
be imprisoned in a madhouse, a woman was never given a voice in a court of law. This is
another instance in which fiction allows for a more poignant statement about the
injustices toward women. Furthermore, Venable’s adultery would have disqualified him
from suing Maria for separation in an ecclesiastical court or for divorce in Parliament,
and in a case of criminal conversation, the amount of damages awarded would have been
significantly reduced (225). Maria’s utter failure in this case is also a fictional
elaboration. In his article, “The Privatization of Pleasure: ‘Crim. Con.’ in
Wollstonecraft’s Maria,” Adam Komisaruk argues that Wollstonecraft is ambivalent to
the capitalist motivation of such cases, noting that she does not mention that a woman
cannot sue another for the seduction of her husband. He concludes that Wollstonecraft
inadvertently defends the privatization that drives such cases. He does not acknowledge,
however, that the female body is treated as the private property of her husband. It is this
privatization that Wollstonecraft is arguing against. To even evoke the possibility of a
woman suing another is evidence of Komisaruk’s blatant misreading of the prisons
Wollstonecraft carefully constructs in the novel, as well as ignorance of the solidarity
presented through the autobiographies of Maria and Jemima. Maria takes pity on
Venables’ child, and also constructs her autobiography as the story of many women. For
a woman to sue another would disrupt the solidarity of all women confined through the capitalist patriarchy.

In addition to provoking the reader’s desire to correct the wrongs that imprison the protagonist, the possibility for the woman to communicate her experience is to find and exacerbate the fissures in these discursive prisons. While Maria is imprisoned, the reader is presented with several inserted autobiographical texts, some of which have other stories inserted within them. Once Maria can honestly share her experience with Jemima, and be believed, the narratives of female experience multiply. Maria is first able to gain Jemima’s ear by appealing to her feminine emotions:

Jemima... could patiently hear of Maria’s confinement on false pretences; she had felt the crushing hand of power, hardened by the exercise of injustice, and ceased to wonder at the perversions of the understanding, which systematize oppression; but, when told that her child, only four months old, had been torn from her, even while she was discharging the tenderest maternal office, the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions, and Jemima determined to alleviate all in her power... (Wollstonecraft 88)

Once this human bond based on shared experience is acknowledged, Jemima, Maria, and even Henry Darnford, experience the desire to communicate and to relate, because they are all individuals oppressed under the current social structure, and all inmates in the same asylum (Peritz 256). Peritz’s argument for the “radical politics of communication” in the novel also places the text in the historical context of the debate on communication with the new French government, against which Edmund Burke protested bitterly (252). The three inmates sharing their stories is a politically subversive act in that it constructs “a heterogeneous sense of identity and community” (255) in what Peritz calls “speaking bodies,” which at the time of The Wrongs of Woman was a politically resonant gesture. The right to public speech was a key element of reform in response to the government
gagging acts and Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution (255). The women’s sharing of stories presents a “discursive collective” within the walls of the asylum, thus subverting the structure that confines them into a space of heterogeneous communication. Their community is identified in its relation to an oppressive structure of state power (256). Instead of attempting to destroy existing social convention, the text uses storytelling to reconstruct the idea of human:

...storytelling and accounting for oneself go together in Wrongs and they do so in a way that transforms sensibility into an ethical issue of responsibility, an issue of listening, speaking and otherwise responding to diverse and heterogeneous others. Unlike sympathetic benevolence, an ethic of responsibility makes social relations, and the passion to communicate they engender, fundamental to being human, so much so that autonomy, reason, and freedom only become possible in and through the way responsibilities to, for, and with others are taken up. (257)

These characters transform the prison into what Hannah Arendt calls a “polis,” a pluralistic space where people interact by speaking together (257). This polis allows for the communication of Jemima’s story, in which, like Maria, she too was forced into the madhouse, but as a servant desperate to leave the confines of a workhouse (Wollstonecraft 119). By giving voice to the desperately poor, Jemima’s story also subverts the patriarchal view of prostitutes by not conforming to the established narratives of either “penitent Magdalen” or “moral pathogen” (Peritz 259). While Julie McGonegal in her article “Of Harlots and Housewives: A Feminist Materialist Critique of the Writings of Wollstonecraft,” argues that Wollstonecraft represents the prostitute as lacking in virtue rather than driven by economic hardship, she neither considers the totality of Jemima’s autobiography, nor the radical mode of communication, inadvertently created through imprisonment in patriarchal structures, that traverses class boundaries. Within her story, Jemima recounts that while working for a seamstress, and
suffering the physical and sexual abuse that she unfortunately came to know well, she was often sent to the other shopkeepers with “Glutton, Liar, or Thief” written on her forehead (110). Like the label of “Insane” that imprisons Maria, this caricature demonstrates how bodies are muted through prejudices. However, due to their shared incarceration, the desire to share their stories and communicate overcomes the class-driven preconceptions of the two women. This experience of exchanging stories also brings about a change in Maria, now no longer disgusted to see herself as a fellow to the “squalid inhabitants” of the city (Peritz 259-60). Maria’s text in court also undermines the ideas that existing social relations are dependent upon private property. As she defends Darnford from civil prosecution, she is practicing an ethical responsibility, and argues for the marriage relation to be based on friendship, not capitalist self-interest (260). Legally, Maria’s text would have been impossible in the court of law in the 1790s, but its impossibility may provoke the reader, by breaching “historical limits” (261). Maria appeals to the jury’s own ethical judgments, which proposes a “radical contingency” that may further enable the consideration of “various” and thus heterogeneous discourse (261).

Overall, the text of *The Wrongs of Woman* reveals what constitutes the “clumsy repairs” to the “pile of buildings” in which the woman is confined: capitalist self-interest and the negotiation of private property. Looking at the use of repeated stone imagery in the text, this is the mortar which holds together her prison, as well as the city at large. The wife who refuses to be docile, and refuses to conform to the “ivory maid” that the husband, as part of patriarchal discourse, sculpts, is an “outlaw” (Wollstonecraft 146). Although the protagonist of the novel does not succeed, at least in the fragment that is left
to us, the text posits a solution in the formula of reading liminality and a multiplicity of
discourses, as Rajan and Peritz contend. The madhouse is also the space that allows for
Maria and Jemima to share their liminal autobiographies, within which there are several
biographies of other marginalized women. The discipline that is exercised through
Maria’s confinement also creates a heterogeneous space for these women to share stories.
As Foucault explains in his chapter “Les corps dociles” in Surveiller et Punir: “La
discipline parfois exige la clôture, la spécification d’un lieu hétérogène à tous les autres
et fermé sur lui-même. Lieu protégé de la monotonie disciplinaire” (Foucault 166).9 The
cloistering that discipline requires homogenizes public space by enclosing those that
would disrupt the monotony; consequently, within the walls of the institution, like the
madhouse for Maria, this discipline in turn creates a heterogeneous space. It is walled off
from the public eye, but it creates a space that is marked by its diversity. Also, this
separation from society creates a desire within Maria and Jemima to share their personal
histories, which crosses class boundaries that on the outside would have been impassible.
As a bourgeois woman, Maria would have had neither the opportunity, nor the desire, to
speak with a working-class woman like Jemima. The imposition of the boundary that
divides them from the social order conversely erases the class boundaries between them.
By traversing these class boundaries, Maria and Jemima are also able to escape their
prison.

The freedom that the novel implies is gained from participating in a
heterogeneous space points far beyond the nineteenth-century city to issues of
postmodernity and new conceptions of subject formation in a global community.

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9 “Discipline sometimes necessitates enclosure, the specification of a space heterogeneous to all the others
and closed in on itself. A protected space of the disciplinary monotony...” My translation.
Considering recent feminist scholarship, Wollstonecraft’s use of the liminal autobiography begins to posit an alternative to the hegemonic patriarchal discourse that imprisons her. Inderpal Grewal describes what she later calls “postmodern subjectivities” in her essay “Autobiographic Subjects, Diasporic Locations”:

It is imperative for us to examine new forms of subjectivity that are radically different from this European imperialist and state-nationalist subject that is binarily constructed and essentialist. This new subject, following the critiques of individualism within feminism that have been powerfully argued by Gayatri Spivak and Norma Alarcón, does not share the position of the subject as individual (i.e., unitary and centered and created out of the binaries of the Self-Other, Subject-Object) that has been part of the Western philosophical tradition. Rather, this new subject, or “subject(s),” as Norma Alarcón calls them, is heterogeneous as well as political, destroys binarism, and is inclusive. This subject provides a constant critique of nationalist and even insurgent agendas, of power relations that structure global economic flows, and will never be complete. For such a nonessential subject, difference would not be an obstacle to political praxis, since differences usually are taken to mean essentialist differences that are insurmountable for the formations of coalitions or of solidarity with various struggles. (Grewal 233-4)

The multiplicity and inclusion that characterize this new subject formation are already present in the madhouse, as Foucault describes. In Maria, the publicly recognized subject is obviously male, and in the Romantic era, stories of subject formation, such as Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister, are often restricted to the male subject. As Peritz discusses, in a time when having a voice and telling one’s story was a politically resonant gesture, the representation of subaltern women sharing their stories constructs a “heterogeneous sense of identity and community” (Peritz 255). In the madhouse, Maria and Jemima recount their own life stories, with crucial differences from the traditional subject formation of the Romantic era, characterized by the binary relation of self/other. In

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10 Although the bildungsroman often uses a male protagonist, there is a significant countercurrent, especially in German letters, of the novel of female subject formation, such as The History of Lady Sophia Sternheim by Sophie von LaRoche.
Jemima’s autobiographical account, Wollstonecraft uses the “tale of woe” of the fallen woman that characterizes some Sentimental literature. Yet by using this traditional narrative, Wollstonecraft subverts the walls of the asylum through the heterogeneous discourse driven by such confinement. Maria listens to the story of the working class woman Jemima that, as a microcosm of the whole novel, outlines the wrongs done against one woman. Jemima had been neglected and abused by her father, step-mother, and then her employer. She was raped by her master, forced to abort her pregnancy, and was twice thrown out onto the street and forced into prostitution (Wollstonecraft 107-114). The figure of the working class woman, that often functioned as Other, is now the subject of her own story. Moreover, Jemima’s autobiography contains the story of another woman, with whom Jemima identifies herself, as both self and other. When she is trying to find a home, a man would take her in if he did not already have a servant girl in his house pregnant with his child. Jemima advises him to turn her out, and the young girl, ashamed to return home, drowns herself in a watering trough (117). Jemima was compelled to work against this girl, yet at the same time identifies with her, as they both struggle for subsistence in a cruelly patriarchal world. She describes her reaction to the discovery of the girl’s body: “I thought of my own state, and wondered how I could be such a monster! – I worked hard; and, returning home, I was attacked by a fever. I suffered both in body and mind” (Wollstonecraft 117). Jemima is still troubled by the image of the girl’s dead body in the tub because it very well could have been her. She also injures herself when she drops a tub against her shin (117). Wollstonecraft elucidates the wrongs of woman through the use of a diversity of (auto)biographical narratives inserted into the novel. Jemima’s story is also, in part, the story of the girl who
drowned herself in that tub. The “other” in Jemima’s story is not used as a mirrored “other” of the self, but is always both a part, and a reflection of, the self. Jemima as subject is heterogeneous and inclusive; as a woman, her story is also the story of other women.

Maria’s story constructs an even more radically heterogeneous sense of identity by including more biographies of other women. Maria inserts the story of the nurse-maid’s sister, Peggy, who lost everything when her husband was killed in India, and who had to live off Maria’s charity (Wollstonecraft 128-130). More importantly, the servant girl that George Venables seduces is not depicted as “the other woman,” so to speak. She is depicted as an extension of Maria herself, and of the category of woman trapped in a subordinate social position (142). After escaping her husband, Maria hears the story of the landlady: “how she had been used in the world,” and how her alcoholic husband had drained all of her money (164-5). Peritz also discusses this radical construction of self in this novel - radical in that it opens up the term “woman” to question by promising something determinate, by promising unity and identity to this term, and repeatedly breaking that promise (Peritz 257). I would argue that the unity and identity that Peritz expects is the Western concept of identity that Grewal argues the subaltern autobiography disrupts. The autobiographies of Jemima and Maria do not construct the “subject as individual.” Instead, both women construct themselves as a conglomerate of other women. By constructing this “nonessential subject,” their difference is not an obstacle to political praxis; the two characters are able to escape their confinement.

One insurmountable difference, however, between the postmodern subjectivities and the feminine subjects as constructed in Maria, is that the heterogeneous community
may only exist within the walls of the madhouse. As such, the nature of the institution as insane asylum further invalidates these narratives in a public sphere. As a woman, and a woman committed to an asylum, Maria’s argument in court is useless, and may only serve to reinforce the prejudice against her that she is a woman overcome by her emotions. Perhaps it is in the nature of Wollstonecraft’s political Gothic for this heterogeneous community and identity to fail. However, in positing this rather idealized alternative to patriarchal discourse, Wollstonecraft also foresees developments in community and identity that would not even be feasible until well into the twentieth century. While the late-twentieth-century metropolis is constructed as heterogeneous and diverse, this community for women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is only possible behind closed doors. As literature on the metropolis progresses through the nineteenth century, discourse around the body in the city is multiplied, although not in the “radical contingency” that Wollstonecraft illustrates. Instead, the pseudo-scientific discourse that inscribes the female body as an object to be analyzed, studied, and mastered takes precedence over the heterogeneous autobiography. The development of multiple scientific discourses around the urban body functions largely to reinforce the expanding capitalist economic structure that is the “secret” that holds Maria’s prison together.
CHAPTER ONE

WORKS CITED


CHAPTER TWO
The Immured African Body in Claire de Duras’ *Ourika* (1823)

The narrative of the cloistered African woman in Claire de Duras’ *Ourika* takes place in 1804, when Napoleon instituted the *Code Civil*, which, according to Michelle Chilcoat in her article, “Confinement, the Family Institution, and the Case of Claire de Duras’s *Ourika,*” restored the status of women to pre-revolutionary times. This legislation “made woman completely subservient to her husband, gave fathers the right to have family members confined without demonstrating just cause,” and restored the hierarchical structure of the nuclear family (12). Claire de Duras, writing under such severe restrictions, first published her novel anonymously, as many women authors were using male pseudonyms because women’s voices in the public sphere were, according to this legislation, illegitimate.

Claire de Duras’ *Ourika* is the framed narrative of a doubly marginalized figure: a woman in a convent, and an African raised in the French aristocracy. Ourika’s autobiographical narrative is essentially a secular confession. As her body wastes away, she tells the story of her life to a visiting doctor, fascinated by the presence of this sophisticated and articulate African woman in an Ursuline convent, in the center of Paris, and in the center of Napoleon’s expanding empire. Based on the true story of a Senegalese girl brought to the Maréchal de Beauveau as a novel gift from the governor of Senegal, *Ourika* explores the restrictions suffered by women and the effects of racial discrimination. A veritable subaltern figure, Ourika speaks in the language of the colonizer. In fact, her whole subjective formation results from her identification with her
mistress and mother figure, Mme de B. Throughout her narrative, Ourika’s maturation coincides with a growing disconnection from the African body that imprisons her. Ourika’s coming of age is equally her demise because of the impossibility of her existence in the social order of Paris under Napoleon’s empire. In the center of the French Empire, a dying African woman tells her story to the doctor that cannot heal her, as she attempts to articulate the roots of the illness that ravages her body.

Critical trends concerning Ourika are largely restricted to analyses of race and colonial subjectivity. As of yet, critics have not approached the text in terms of a hybrid figure, an African woman raised in the French aristocracy in the center of an expanding metropolis. Ourika is the beginning of a growing anxiety of colonial Others in the capital city. Furthermore, as a text set in the city, it also calls for an analysis of disciplinary structures, since Ourika recounts her story from within the walls of the convent. The work of Michel Foucault is particularly helpful in this regard, not only in the use of such institutions that confine the woman who defies marriage, as discussed by Michelle Chilcoat. Criticism thus far does not address the docility of Ourika’s body, and Michel Foucault’s discussion of the eighteenth century’s fascination with bodies that can be analyzed and manipulated is particularly relevant to the representation of the enslaved, or cloistered, African.

The African Body in a City in Revolt

In The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria, the city is representative of the social institutions that confine the woman: marriage, subordinate legal status, and the conveniently vague diagnoses of madness. For the protagonist, Maria, the city is both the
cultural center and a space teeming with infectious vice and capitalist speculation. For *Ourika*, first published anonymously in 1823, the narrative of the cloistered Senegalese woman spans the French Revolution, from approximately the mid-1780s, when two-year-old Ourika was taken from a slave ship, to the beginning of the Napoleonic Empire. The real Ourika on whom the novel is loosely based was brought from Senegal by de Boufflers and given to the Maréchal de Beauvau in 1786 (De Raedt 20). The real Ourika died in 1799 reportedly of tuberculosis (De Raedt 19 footnote 2), but Duras extends the fictional Ourika’s life approximately five years (De Raedt 26 footnote 25), until after the Concordat of 1802, when monasteries and convents were officially reopened (Olds 33). Deborah Jenson asserts that the narrative ends “sometime after May 1804,” if one takes into consideration the reestablishment of the Ursulines convent in the faubourg Saint-Jacques (Jenson 45). The date of 1804 is also significant. This is the year that Napoleon declared himself emperor and instituted some of the most restrictive laws concerning women’s legal status. The *Code Civil* reversed some of the liberties offered to women during the Revolution, such as divorce, and made women completely subject to their husbands or fathers (Chilcoat 11-12). The various references in the text to specificities of time and place can easily be overlooked by modern-day readers. The Ursulines is a congregation dedicated to the education of young girls, and was renowned as a convent for the daughters of the privileged classes in the *ancien régime* (DeVinne 37-38). This particular convent closed its doors in October of 1792, marked by a gap in congregational chronicles that span the Terror, and was reopened at the end of the eighteenth century (41). The introductory scene of the doctor entering the convent includes a brief mention of the stones that were destroyed during the Revolution, which the sister claims they had
not yet had the time to fix. For Duras’ original audience in her salon, this would have been a clear reference to the Concordat, and the destruction of pivotal social structures which came to represent the Revolution for the Restoration-era aristocrats. Marshall C. Olds remarks upon this “insistent specificity as to time and place,” and also notes the political implications of this setting (33). The visiting doctor is from Montpellier, “a city renowned for both medical education and revolutionary fervor,” and “as a child of the revolution,” he is entering a restored convent, indicative of the church’s influence and thus justification for the aristocracy’s power, and “one of the most potent reasons for revolution” (Olds 33). Thus the setting for this narrative is a convent in the process of its own reconstruction, signaling what Olds considers “a return to the status quo ante bellum” (33). In this time period, the city of Paris is more than just representative of the social structures that confine Ourika (as is London for Maria). The changes taking place to these physical structures, like the Ursulines convent, are equally representative of the political upheaval, and subsequent restoration, of all of France.

As Ourika recounts her life story to the visiting doctor, she briefly mentions several crucial events of the French Revolution, all particular to the city of Paris itself: the execution of the king, the Terror, the execution of Maximilien de Robespierre, the end of the Terror, and the return of the émigrés (Olds 33). When Ourika suffers her first bout of depression Mme de B. calls for Barthez to examine her (Duras 14). Paul-Joseph Barthez was a physician to King Louis XVI and then to Napoleon Bonaparte (Olds 31). Despite his reputation and Mme de B.’s recommendation, Barthez does not realize that Ourika’s “illness” is more psychological than physical (Rosello 93). He takes her pulse and claims that there is nothing wrong with her (Duras 14). This is one of the very few
encounters that Ourika has with the outside, public world; she hears about public events as filtered through the salon discussion. When the Revolution becomes more heated, Ourika listens to the “grands intérêts moraux et politiques que cette Révolution remua,” which, she claims, also play an important role in forming her own ideas that the revolution degenerates into destruction (Duras 18). Ourika’s views dutifully reflect those of the salon circle. Two Parisian insurrections are briefly mentioned as well: “Bientôt il parut que ces hommes étaient décidés à ne rien respecter: les affreuses journées du 20 juin et du 10 août durent préparer à tout” (Duras 21). On June 20, 1792, protestors invaded the Tuileries Palace in response to the King’s veto of the measure to increase national defense. After the Duke of Brunswick declared that Paris would be destroyed if Louis XVI or his family were harmed, the sansculottes invaded the Tuileries again on August 10, 1792 (Cowles 26). The execution of King Louis XVI is also briefly mentioned in Ourika’s narrative, but in relation to the return of Charles from his stay abroad: “Charles arriva à Paris au commencement de février 1793, peu de temps après la mort du Roi” (Duras 21). Again, Ourika reiterates the political perspective of Mme de B., referring to his execution as “ce grand crime” (21).

Upon Charles’ arrival, the family retreats to the country in “Saint-Germain,” to escape the further tumult of the Revolution in Paris (22). The reputation of Saint-Germain-en-Laye is relevant to Ourika’s shelter from political realities of the time. In his Tableau de Paris, its twelve volumes published from 1781 to 1789, Louis-Sébastien

11 “vast moral and political questions the Revolution had so profoundly posed” (18-19). All translations of Ourika are from Ourika: An English Translation translated by John Fowles unless otherwise noted.
12 “It soon became clear that they had made up their minds to respect nothing, and after the terrible days in 1792 of June 20th and August 10th anything was possible.” (21)
13 “Charles arrived in Paris at the beginning of February 1793, a little after the execution of the king.” (22)
“That outrage” (22)
Mercier describes Saint-Germain-en-Laye as “encore là une ville” for those who do not want to live in the country, and where the general disposition of the inhabitants is characterized in the words “Tout va bien; le reste de l’univers peut se dissoudre” (Mercier 122). Saint-Germain is like a city outside of the city where, surrounded by nature, one may lead a leisurely existence far from any political conflict. Mme de B. and her family are buffered there from the dissolving social structures in Paris during the Terror.

Mercier characterizes the inhabitants as largely bourgeois, and he mocks them for their lives of leisure by referring to them as “walking foliage:” “plantes humaines qui font aujourd’hui ce qu’elles ont fait hier!.... Botanistes modernes, classez-moi ces végétaux ambulants, dont le sommet est couronné d’une perruque ronde, demi-poudrée” (Mercier 124). Despite their efforts to isolate themselves from the Revolution, Mme de B. is placed under house arrest there. Under the Law of Suspects, which sanctioned the arrest of any royalist or federalist sympathizers, Mme de B. is confined to her home, citing her poor health (Cowles, “French Revolution” 27; Duras 23). The death of Robespierre is also briefly mentioned and, like the death of the king, is referenced only in relation to the interior life of the family. His death ended a time of “horror” for Mme de B., and the guards left their home as her house arrest was terminated (Duras 23-4).

Despite the political importance of public events in Paris at this time, for Ourika they serve as signposts of changes in her own emotional life and that of Mme de B.’s family. In fact, Ourika’s sense of well-being is dialectically opposed to the peace enjoyed by the aristocratic society that surrounds her. While the family suffers from the

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14 “still a city there”; “Everything is fine; the rest of the universe may just as well disappear.” My translation.
15 “human plants that are doing today what they did yesterday!.... Modern botanists, classify for me this walking foliage, with the top crowned with a half-powdered wig” My translation.
political turmoil, Ourika is distracted from her own depression, which begins when she first overhears a conversation between a Marquise, Mme de __, and Mme de B. discussing how Ourika can never marry because she is “une négresse” (Duras 13). Mary Jane Cowles, in her article “The Subjectivity of the Colonial Subject from Olympe de Gouges to Mme de Duras,” discusses how this important moment of revelation in the text is the moment when Ourika experiences a “split in the self,” where she can no longer identify with Mme de B. because she is made aware of her racial difference (Cowles, “Subjectivity” 40). Cowles argues that Ourika’s confession of her life story to the visiting doctor is also a story of the development of her subjectivity, and how this development is problematized by the reality of her African body (29). Using Lacan’s ideas on the mirror stage, Cowles shows that Ourika’s identity is constructed first through identification with her adopted mother, Mme de B. This mother figure functions as a “je-ídéal,” an image external to Ourika’s body which provides her with a sense of wholeness for her own body. The self’s view of its own body is never complete without the use of a mirror, i.e., a view from another’s perspective. Thus, Mme de B serves as Ourika’s “mirror,” and as her first point of self-identification. This image of the self, as a whole body, is the foundation for a relationship to another. Several points in the text underscore Ourika’s existence through identification with Mme. de B. She states that as a child, she was consistently praised by Mme de B.: “Le succès donne du courage; on valait près de Mme de B. tout ce qu’on pouvait valoir, et peut-être un peu plus, car elle prêtait quelque chose d’elle à ses amis sans s’en douter elle-même: en la voyant, en l’écoutant, on croyait lui ressembler” (Duras 8).16 Ourika further describes the education she received

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16 “Popularity brings boldness of judgment and with Mme de B. one was as highly valued as one could be – perhaps overvalued, since without realizing it she lent something of her own character to her friends.
from Mme de B: “Elle guidait mon esprit, formait mon jugement: en causant avec elle, en découvrant tous les trésors de mon âme, je sentais la mienne s’éléver,. . . . je ne pensais qu’à plaire à Mme de B” (Duras 9). During her childhood, Ourika’s racial difference did not carry any symbolic meaning, as it did not affect her place within the social order she knew: “je n’étais pas fâchée d’être une négresse: on me disait que j’étais charmante; d’ailleurs, rien ne m’avertissait que ce fût un désavantage” (8-9). However, when Ourika is made aware of the symbolic importance of this racial difference, the self-identification with Mme de B and later with Charles becomes the painful mark of her solitude, and a mark of the impossibility of her entrance into the symbolic order of which Mme de B is a part. When she overhears a conversation between Mme de B and a Marquise only identified as Mme. de ____, Ourika is behind a lacquer screen, an interesting wall in the text which exemplifies her rejection from the symbolic order. In their overheard conversation, Mme. de B and the marquise discuss any feasible way that Ourika may marry, a traditional rite of passage for women at this time, and a concretization of female subjectivity for late-eighteenth-century aristocratic women. The Marquise’s character has been likened to the guillotine by critics, such as Michèle Bissière, who argue that Ourika’s internal rupture corresponds to the social rupture of the Revolution (Dimauro 6). However, I would argue against that assertion because this moment of revelation takes place before any mention in the text of political unrest. Moreover, Ourika’s discussion of the Terror reflects more the ideology of her aristocratic upbringing. Ourika describes the marquise as:

Watching her, listening to her, people began to feel they resembled her.” (8)

17 “She guided my intellect and formed my judgment. When I talked to her and discovered the treasures of her mind, I felt my own exalted.... I thought only of pleasing her” (9-10)

18 “I didn’t regret being black. I was told I was an angel. There was nothing to warn me that the color of my skin might be a disadvantage.” (9)
une personne d’une raison froide, d’un esprit tranchant, positive jusqu’à la sécheresse; elle portait ce caractère dans l’amitié: les sacrifices ne lui coutaient rien pour le bien et pour l’avantage de ses amis; mais elle leur faisait payer cher ce grand attachement. Inquisitive et difficile, son exigence égalait son dévouement, et elle était la moins aimable des amies de Mme de B. Je la craignais, quoiqu’elle fût bonne pour moi; mais elle l’était à sa manière: examiner, et même assez sévèrement, était pour elle un signe d’intérêt. Hélas! j’étais si accoutumée à la bienveillance, que la justice me semblait toujours redoutable. (Duras 11-12)

a bleakly practical lady with an incisive mind, and frank to the point of dryness. She was like this even with her friends. She would do anything for them, but she made them pay dearly for her concern on their behalf. Inquisitorial and persistent, her demands were matched only by her sense of duty. She was the least agreeable of Mme de B.’s circle and though she was kind to me in her fashion, I was afraid of her. When she interrogated you, even though it was with great severity, she meant well and to show her interest in you. But unfortunately I’d grown so accustomed to kinder methods that I was alarmed by her bluntness. (11-12)

The marquise’s blunt reason is painful for Ourika, and it is this moment of the overheard conversation that begins what Cowles argues is Ourika’s split subjectivity. Damon Dimauro states that the marquise embodies the “world’s contemptuous and unforgiving gaze,” that Ourika then internalizes as she grows to loathe her own dark skin (6). The marquise’s gaze is scrutinizing, and Ourika’s fear of her is also her fear of the social conventions that alienate her from the Symbolic order represented in a possible marriage, as well as the fear of being seen as a non-subject. In their overheard conversation, the marquise tells Mme de B. about Ourika: “elle devient charmante, son esprit est tout à fait formé, elle causera comme vous, elle est pleine de talents, elle est piquante, naturelle; mais que deviendra-t-elle? et enfin qu’en ferez-vous?” (Duras 12). Mme de B. admits that Ourika’s social position is “sans remède” (12) and the marquise continues:

19 “She’s become a charming girl and her mind is mature. Soon she’ll be able to converse as well as you. She’s talented, unusual, has ease of manner. But what next? to come to the point – what do you intend doing with her?” (12)
mais elle a quinze ans; à qui la marierez-vous, avec l’esprit qu’elle a et l’éducation que vous lui avez donnée? Qui voudra jamais épouser une négresse? Et si, à force d’argent, vous trouvez quelqu’un qui consent à avoir des enfants nègres, ce sera un homme d’une condition inférieure, et avec qui elle se trouvera malheureuse. Elle ne peut vouloir que de ceux qui ne voudront pas d’elle. (Duras 13)

But she’s fifteen already. To whom do you propose marrying her? With her intelligence, with the education you’ve given her? What kind of man would marry a negress? Even supposing you could bribe some fellow to father mulatto children, he could only be of low birth. She could never be happy with such a man. She can only want the kind of husband who would never look at her. (13)

The marquise notes Ourika’s similarity with Mme de B., affirming Ourika’s self-identification with her adoptive mother. Yet, her cold reason also exemplifies the nature of the social mores she asserts in her discussion. As Cowles argues, Ourika is caught between the “real” of her African body, and her conscious identification with, and intellectual formation from, the “colonizers,” the French aristocracy (Cowles “Subjectivity” 29). Ourika realizes her own body as foreign, and acknowledge her status as a member of a proscribed race. This moment of realization is traumatic for Ourika, as she is unable to put her reaction into words, mostly because her own language forms part of the symbolic social order by which she has just been shunned:

Il me serait impossible de vous peindre l’effet que produisit en moi ce peu de paroles; l’éclair n’est pas plus prompt: je vis tout; je me vis négresse, dépendante, méprisée, sans fortune, sans appui, sans un être de mon espèce à qui unir mon sort, jusqu’ici un jouet, un amusement pour ma bienfaitrice, bientôt rejetée d’un monde où je n’étais pas faite pour être admise. (Duras 12)

I could never describe to you the effect those few words had on me. Lightning does not strike more swiftly. I comprehended all. I was black. Dependent, despised, without fortune, without resource, without a single other being of my kind to help me through life. All I had been until then was a toy, an amusement for my mistress; and soon I was to be cast out of a world that could never admit me. (12-13)
Ourika cannot find language to express this rejection from the social order while telling her brief life story. The available language of subjectivity (and which is necessary in a life story that recounts the construction of the self) is the same language that denies subjectivity to a black body. Ourika realizes that her exotic Africanness is not just another alluring quality, as she described it when she was a child, but a mark of her abjection; she recognizes the symbolic meaning of this difference. Moreover, this realization gives Ourika an intense sense of solitude - in the words of Mme de B., “toujours seule dans la vie!” (12).20 Through her education as an aristocratic girl, Ourika has internalized this ideology of racial superiority, so much so that when she looks at her own hands, she believes to see those of a monkey (15). Knowing that her African body does not allow her to belong in the society that raised her forces Ourika to identify herself as Other.

From this place of loneliness and rejection, Ourika experiences more emotional fulfillment and sense of belonging at times of extreme political turmoil for Mme de B. because at these times she is most needed by her adoptive mother. When the salon society of Mme de B. diminishes because of the Revolution, so does the “unforgiving gaze” of this society, which the marquise articulates and which isolates Ourika. In the great disorder of the Revolution, Ourika felt less estranged:

dans ce grand désordre, je pourais trouver ma place; que toutes les fortunes renversées, tous les rangs confondus, tous les préjugés évanouis, amèneraient peut-être un état de choses où je serais moins étrangée; et que si j’avais quelque supériorité d’âme, quelque qualité cachée, on l’apprécierait lorsque ma couleur ne m’isolerait plus au milieu du monde, comme elle avait fait jusqu’alors. (18-19)

at the end of this great chaos I might find my true place. When personal destiny was turned upside down, all social caste overthrown, all prejudices had disappeared, a state of affairs might one day come to pass where I would feel

20 “always alone in the world!” (12)
myself less exiled. If I truly possessed some superiority of mind, some hidden quality, then it would be appreciated when my color no longer isolated me, as it had until then, in the heart of society. (19)

The rupture of social order allows Ourika the hope that her abjection may not last. The social upheaval and the ideas of the Revolution around human equality allow Ourika to hypothesize about her possible assimilation into French culture. More importantly, Ourika senses a reciprocal identification from Mme de B. while, in the midst of heated salon discussions, Mme de B. seems to communicate to Ourika through her gestures that they have a special bond:

L’espoir sitôt détruit que m’avait inspiré la Révolution, n’avait point changé la situation de mon âme; toujours mécontente de mon sort, mes chagrins n’étaient adoucis que par la confiance et les bontés de Mme de B. Quelquefois, au milieu de ces conversations politiques dont elle ne pouvait réussir à calmer l’aigreur, elle me regardait tristement; ce regard était un baume pour mon cœur; il semblait me dire: Ourika, vous seule m’entendez! (20)

The hope brought and so quickly destroyed by the Revolution did not change my mood. I remained out of sorts with my fate, and my discontent was softened only by the kindness and trust of Mme de B. From time to time, during those political arguments whose rancor she tried vainly to reduce, she would glance wistfully at me. Such looks were like balm. They seemed to say that I alone could understand her. (20-1)

The political tumult and the suffering of Mme de B. distract Ourika from her solitude, mostly because she feels a closer kinship to Mme de B. Although the Revolution offers Ourika a chance of hope for her full assimilation because it marks a rupture in a social order that rejects her black body as a subject, Ourika’s view of the Revolution mimics that of her French aristocratic upbringing. Ourika’s opinion of the Haitian Revolution is even more revealing:

On commençait à parler de la liberté des nègres: il était impossible que cette question ne me touchât pas vivement; c’était une illusion que j’aimais encore à
me faire, qu’ailleurs, du moins, j’avais des semblables: comme ils étaient malheureux, je les croyais bons, et je m’intéressais à leur sort. Hélas! je fus promptement détrompée! Les massacres de Saint-Domingue me causèrent une douleur nouvelle et déchirante: jusqu’ici je n’étais affligée d’appartenir à une race proscrite; maintenant j’avais honte d’appartenir à une race de barbares et d’assassins. (20)

About this time talk started of emancipating the Negroes. Of course this question passionately interested me. I still cherished the illusion that at least somewhere else in the world there were others like myself. I knew they were not happy and I supposed them noble-hearted. I was eager to know what would happen to them. But alas, I soon learned my lesson. The Santo Domingo massacres gave me cause for fresh and heartrending sadness. Till then I had regretted belonging to a race of outcasts. Now I had the shame of belonging to race of barbarous murderers. (21)

After becoming conscious of the symbolic meaning of her African body, and her solitude in French aristocratic society, it is no surprise that Ourika looks to the future Haitian people as her “semblables.” However these imagined fellow “nègres” are a far reach from her lived experience. In what can be considered a rather self-effacing turn, she claims to be ashamed of this association that she belongs to a race of barbarians and assassins. This opinion is more than just a manifestation of her training as an aristocratic girl in Paris. She is not just reiterating what she has learned. Working off of Cowles’ use of the mirror stage to explain Ourika’s self-recognition as a subject, Ourika must condemn the revolting slaves because she can only recognize herself as a whole person through identification with Mme de B. Associating herself with slaves would destroy the only way she is able to identify herself. Ourika describes this herself when she says: “L’opinion est comme une patrie; c’est un bien dont on jouit ensemble; on est frère pour la soutenir et pour la défendre” (22).21  Ourika defends the aristocratic French ideology that constructs her abjection because of her intense obsession to not be alone, and to

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21 “A view of life is like a motherland. It is a possession mutually shared. Those who uphold and defend it are like brothers.” (23)
belong to the society that formed her sense of self. Ourika cannot be a French woman, who marries, has children and creates her own home, but she can construct “une patrie” (a patrimony) for herself by articulating the opinion of an upper class French woman, like that of Mme de B.

While the family of Mme de B. suffers from the political turmoil of the Revolution, Ourika experiences a sense of belonging. Therefore, in her discussion of her life during the Terror, she often uses the term “nous” (“we”), instead of the more familiar “on,” which can also signify “one” or “people in general.” By condemning the Revolution, she can construct herself as a fellow subject in a society. Concerning Mme de B.’s poor health: “Charles, l’abbé et moi, nous restâmes auprès d’elle et nous lui donnions tous nos soins” (23); concerning the execution of Mme de B.’s friends: “Rien ne peut peindre l’état d’anxiété et de terreur des journées que nous passâmes alors” (23); and the final relief from Mme de B.’s nervous condition and poor health comes when Robespierre is executed: “Nous sûmes qu’en effet elle était au moment de périr, lorsque la mort de Robespierre mit un terme à tant d’horreurs” (23) (my emphasis). After Robespierre is executed, Ourika feels like a part of the family for having escaped such a calamity together: “On aurait cru que tous les liens s’étaient resserrés par le malheur; j’avais senti que là, du moins, je n’étais pas étrangère” (Duras 24).

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22 “Charles, the abbot and I, we stayed near her and we gave her all of our care.” My translation.
23 “Nothing could depict the state of anxiety and of terror of the days that we spent then.” My translation.
24 “We knew that in effect she was close to dying, when the death of Robespierre put an end to so many horrors.” My translation.
25 “It was as if misfortune had strengthened all the bonds between us. Then, at least, I did not feel myself an outsider.” (24)
repopulated by the end of 1795, Ourika is once again alienated from the illusion of a family: “les débris de la société de Mme de B. se réunirent autour d’elle, et je vis avec peine le cercle de ses amis s’augmenter. Ma position était si fausse dans le monde, que plus la société rentrait dans son ordre naturel, plus je m’en sentais dehors” (Duras 27). \(^{26}\)

It is important to note that after this point, most references to the first-person plural are in the form of “on,” which does not so much indicate membership in a group, as it may also refer to “one” or “someone.” One use of the reference to “our” is intensely meaningful to Ourika. When Charles discusses his desire to share the same kind of trust with his new fiancée that he shares with Ourika, one particular word stands out to her: “‘Je veux obtenir toute sa confiance, me dit-il,...; je veux qu’il y ait entre elle et moi une confiance comme la nôtre, Ourika.’ Comme la nôtre!” (30). \(^{27}\) As Cowles previously argues, Ourika finds a second self-identification through a mirroring with Charles; thus his use of the word “nôtre” creates a brief sense of belonging that she craves. This sense of belonging is dissolved when Mme de B.’s associates return from exile. As this society returns to its natural order, Ourika once again acutely feels her abjection. Ourika’s word choice here is a direct reference to the words of the marquise when Ourika first becomes aware that her African body is a mark of her rejection from the social order, an order that, because it is ideologically enforced, appears natural. In the overheard conversation, Mme de B. expresses hope that marriage for Ourika may be possible, and the marquise responds: “la philosophie nous place au-dessus des maux de la fortune, mais elle ne peut rien contre les maux qui viennent d’avoir brisé l’ordre de la nature. Ourika n’a pas

\(^{26}\) “The remnants of Mme de B.’s circle gathered round her again. I saw the number of her friends increase, and with no pleasure at all. My position in the world was so false that the more society got back to its usual ways, the less I felt a part of it.” (28)

\(^{27}\) “I want to have her entire trust.... I want a trust exactly like yours and mine.” (31) My translation: “exactly like ours.”
rempli sa destinée: elle s’est placée dans la société sans sa permission; la société se vengera” (13).28 The natural order is akin to the Symbolic order that Cowles discusses in her article on subjectivity. One crucial assumption of the ideology in which Ourika was raised was that only the white, upper-class European race applied; the ways of thinking and speaking that Ourika espouses assume their performance by a white body. The marquise uses the first-person plural here, “nous,” that does not include Ourika. Thus, the white aristocracy that it implies can avoid the ills, or evils, of fate because of their philosophy. In the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Academie Francaise*, published in 1762, the word is defined: “PHILOSOPHIE se dit aussi d'Une certaine fermeté & élévation d'esprit, par laquelle on se met au-dessus des accidens de la vie, & des fausses opinions du monde” (Encyclopédie).29 In a later edition, published in 1798, the “fausses opinions du monde” is changed to “fausses opinions du vulgaire.” It is interesting to note that after the French Revolution, the masses are referred to as the common people, “vulgaire,” and not just as others, “le monde.” The philosophy that the marquise refers to is the elevation of the mind that allows the French aristocracy to avoid certain bad fortune; however, if one is not within the natural order (i.e., in an African body), this philosophy is useless. Ourika’s “ills” come from having broken the natural order, so despite her “élévation d’esprit” from having been educated in the aristocratic sphere, her body denies her entrance into this social order. The word “nature” in this same dictionary is defined as “L'universalité des choses créées,”30 thus the order that the marquise asserts

28 "philosophy places us above the evils of fortune, but it can do nothing against the ills that come from having broken the order of nature. Ourika has not fulfilled her destiny: she has placed herself in society without its permission; society will take its revenge.” My translation.
29 "Philosophy also means a certain strength and elevation of mind, by which one may place himself above the accidents of life, and the false opinions of others.” My translation.
30 "The universality of created things.” My translation.
is supposed to be universal, i.e., ideologically driven. When the society of Mme de B. returns from exile, their “natural order” recalls the marquise’s cruel words. This order that the marquise asserts consists of the social conventions that deny, and essentially cloister, Ourika.

From Toy, to Inhuman Flesh, to Stone

...jusqu’ici un jouet (Duras 12)

In order to better understand the natural order that imprisons Ourika and denies her subjectivity, it is important to delineate the ways in which the African body is inscribed as subjugated or external to the social order. Several critics, in their excellent expositions on the French slave trade, mention the social practice of the ancien régime of taking in children that would be placed on slave ships. These are Christopher L. Miller in The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade, Rori Bloom in “Monkey-Girls of Old Regime France: Babiole and Ourika,” and Therese de Raedt in “Ourika: l’inspiration de Mme de Duras” (among many others). However, they do not extend their analyses to the presence of African children in the city of Paris. Although it is assumed that many aristocrats had residences in Paris, the only text that provides an historical context for the urban setting of the novel Ourika is Mercier’s Tableau de Paris. These “petits nègres,”31 to use Mercier’s term, are just the beginning of a growing presence of colonial others in the urban environment, which becomes so crucial to the fictional representation of urban bodies later in the nineteenth century. In the fifth tome of Tableau de Paris, Mercier describes this practice:

31 “little negros”
Le singe, dont les femmes raffolaient, admis à leurs toilettes, appelé sur leurs genoux, a été relégué dans les anti-chambres. La perruche, la levrette, l’épagneul, l’angora, ont obtenu tour-à-tour un rang auprès de l’abbé, du magistrat & de l’officier. Mais ces êtres chéris ont tout-à-coup perdu de leur crédit, & les femmes ont pris de petits Nègres.

Ces noirs Africains n’effarouchent plus les regards d’une belle; ils sont nés dans le sein de l’esclavage. Mais qui n’est pas esclave auprès de la beauté?

Le petit Nègre n’abandonne plus sa tendre maîtresse; brûlé par le soleil, il n’en paroit que plus beau. Il escalade les genoux d’une femme charmante, qui le regarde avec complaisance; il presse son sein de sa tête lanugineuse, appuie ses lèvres sur une bouche de rose, & ses mains d’ébène relèvent la blancheur d’un col éblouissant.

Un petit Nègre aux dents blanches, aux lèvres épaisses, à la peau satinée, caresse mieux qu’un épagneul & qu’un angora. Aussi a-t-il obtenu la préférence; il est toujours voisin de ces charmes que sa main enfantine dévoile en folâtrant, comme s’il étoit fait pour en connoître tout le prix.

Tandis que l’enfant noir vit sur les genoux des femmes passionnées pour son visage étranger, son nez aplati; qu’une main douce & caressante punit ses mutineries d’un léger châtiment, bientôt effacé par les plus vives caresses, son père gémit sous les coups de fouet d’un maitre impitoyable; le père travaille péniblement ce sucre que le Négrillon boit dans le même tasse avec sa riante maîtresse. (229-30)

The monkey, that the women go crazy over, admitted to their private chambers, called up to sit on their laps, has been relegated to the ante-chambers. The parakeet, the greyhound, the spaniel, the Angora rabbit, have obtained one by one a rank with the abbot, the magistrate, and the officer. Yet these cherished beings have suddenly lost their credit, and women have taken in little Negros.

These black Africans no longer embitter the looks from a beautiful woman; they are born in the heart of slavery. But who is not a slave when next to beauty?

The little Negro no longer abandons his tender mistress; burned by the sun, he only appears more beautiful. He climbs up onto the lap of a charming woman, who looks at him with complaisance; he presses his head to her breast, presses his lips to a pink mouth, and his ebony hands reveal the whiteness of a ravishing neckline.

A little Negro with white teeth, thick lips, satiny skin, pets better than a spaniel or an angora rabbit. Also he has obtained her preference; he is always next to the charms that his child’s hand unveils by frolicking, as if he was made to know the whole price of it.

While the black child lives on the lap of women impassioned by his foreign face, his flattened nose; that a soft and caressing hand punishes his mutinies with a light scolding, soon erased by more lively caresses, his father
moans under the blows of the whip of a pitiless master; the father painfully works the sugar that the little Negro drinks from the same cup as his laughing mistress.\textsuperscript{32}

In this passage, Mercier draws out the irony of the luxurious life of the child in his adoptive family, while his real father is enslaved to work the sugar that this child sips with his aristocratic mistress, oblivious to the suffering behind this commodity. In his typical satiric style, Mercier compares these children to pets, as the function they serve for the aristocratic woman is the same. As a voice, albeit critical, speaking from within the social order that denies Ourika, Mercier begins this vignette with the racialized comparison that Ourika herself makes upon her realization of being rejected from the symbolic order: “le singe.” The presence of African bodies in the Paris landscape is the result of what Mercier implies is a fashion trend. The Angora rabbit and the spaniel have taken a back seat to the newest fad, the African child, because he “pets better.” In the second and third paragraphs of this brief chapter, Mercier describes the physical acts of affection exchanged by the child and his mistress. He hints at how the typical revulsion of the aristocratic women to the African body is surpassed for the sake of novelty. Beneath his description of this superficial affection is the specter of the violence behind this practice; and this violence is made more apparent with the concluding comparison with the child’s real father. One particular specter is that of mutiny. As the child’s “mutineries” are punished by the soft, caressing hand of his mistress, there is an echo of the Haitian Revolution, which took place two years before the publication of this volume of \textit{Tableau de Paris}. Overall, the irony of the child’s luxurious but subjugated life as the pet of an aristocratic woman emerges when one considers his father’s pitiless existence as

\textsuperscript{32} My translation.
a slave on a plantation. Mercier also represents in this brief passage the erasure of bodily violence that makes this practice of “negro pets” possible. The child’s nearness to the beautiful, elegant woman (“il est toujours voisin de ces charmes”) points to the unfathomable distance from the violence of the slave trade.

While Claire de Duras’s novel attempts to explore the problem of subjectivity in an African woman brought up as a French aristocrat, she systematically hides the violence of the French slave trade, as Christopher L. Miller expertly points out in his chapter, “Duras and her Ourika, ‘The Ultimate House Slave.’” The erasure of the slave trade in the text of Ourika is even more poignant considering Claire de Duras’s financial stake in her mother’s family’s plantation on Martinique. According to Miller, many modern critics cite the narrative of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, found in his “Portraits littéraires,” that young Claire de Kersaint (before she married the Duc de Duras) went to Martinique with her mother to manage the estate, and this experience was an important part of her inspiration to write Ourika (Miller 160).33 Duras’s novel was also viewed as abolitionist because it was one of the first novels in French literature to construct an African character with psychological depth (161). However, thanks to the work of Heather Brady, in her article “Recovering Claire de Duras’ Creole Inheritance: Race and Gender in the Exile Correspondence of her Saint-Domingue Family,” which was awaiting publication when Miller finalized his manuscript, it is now clear that Claire de Duras never went to Martinique, as there is no proof of her voyage. Moreover, Brady states that Claire’s mother and aunt, Mme de Rouvray, were able to file inheritance claims in Philadelphia. Brady cites Deborah Jensen’s assertion that Claire never visited

33 Another important inspiration for her novel was without a doubt the real-life Ourika, discussed in detail by Therese de Raedt in her article “Ourika: l’inspiration de Mme de Duras.”
Martinique because she was able to establish her inheritance while still in the United States (Brady 53-4). Despite the fact that the Revolutionary government in France confiscated goods and fortunes from aristocrats, Claire had rights to her mother’s fortune, which came from colonial holdings. This money from her inheritance could have very well been used to purchase her estate at Ussé on the Loire (Miller 161). It is no surprise that while the slave trade frames the narrative, it is never mentioned in the novel, although Claire de Duras never witnessed its atrocities and could only write about what she knew (Miller 163). Thus, Ourika’s difference is reduced to only one element, color, so that Duras may avoid representing any of the violent reality of the slave trade (Miller 163), which would be quite unpalatable for her salon audience. Miller’s most poignant example of this erasure is the juxtaposition of Ourika’s melancholic reverie on the possibility of having a family if she had stayed on the slave ship. Stricken with frustration and rejection at the news of Charles and Anais’ new baby, Ourika imagines her life as a slave:

Pourquoi ne me laissait-on pas suivre mon sort? Eh bien! je serais la négresse esclave de quelque riche colon; brulée par le soleil, je cultiverais la terre d’un autre: mais j’aurais mon humble cabane pour me retirer le soir; j’aurais un compagnon de ma vie, et des enfants de ma couleur, qui m’appelleraient: Ma mère! ils appuieraient sans dégoût leur petite bouche sur mon front; ils reposeraient leur tête sur mon cou, et s’endormiraient dans mes bras! (Duras 38)

Why did they not let me follow my fate? So! I would be [je serais] the Negress slave of some rich colonist; burned by the sun, I would farm the land for another, but I would have my own humble hut to go back to at night; I would have a life’s companion [un compagnon de ma vie] and children of my color who would call me “Mother!” They would press their little lips on my forehead without disgust; they would rest their head on my shoulder, and they would fall asleep in my arms! (Miller 167)

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Miller notes the distance in this passage: it is a reverie within a fictional narrative, and thus doubly fictional. Also, Ourika consistently uses the conditional tense, making this scene purely hypothetical. Miller argues that the crossing of the Atlantic, the horrific Middle Passage that many did not survive, is “instantaneous, silent, and harmless” (167). He also states that this passage depicts slave life as “a perfectly ordered and fulfilling life – replete with family values” that Ourika may have “for the small price of cultivating someone else’s land during the day” (167). By then highlighting the high mortality rate and exceptionally low birth rate on slave plantations, Miller shows that this passage actually constructs a common defense of slavery: “here at least Africans live Christian lives; they are better off than they would be in Africa, and so on. No hardships, mutilating punishments, privations, or indignities are mentioned; no code Noir, no cause for revolt. It is practically a sales pitch” (169). Ourika’s disgust with the revolt in Saint-Domingue is echoed here, as well as the elements that formed her subjectivity and thus her voice: Mme de B. and her aristocratic education. Hiding the slave trade background of this novel, Duras explores the subject of racial discrimination and its effect on forming a subjectivity, all the while not bringing into question the roots of her own fortune, which arguably allowed for the salon (and writing) that made her famous. The impossibility of the situation presented in this passage is also evidence of the impossibility of Ourika belonging to the community she imagines, making her status as adopted African “pet” that much more restrictive and imprisoning.

This critical perspective on the social practice of adopting African children sheds new light on Ourika’s frightening realization of her African body’s symbolic significance. Ourika realizes that up until that point, she had been merely a toy for Mme
With Mercier’s vignette in mind, the episodes proceeding this moment of revelation in *Ourika* can be read with a kind of dramatic irony, as Ourika is more of a toy than she claims to acknowledge at the time. Moreover, Ourika’s status as a toy obliquely connects her to slavery because her body is an object to be manipulated. Like the slave forced to cultivate land, where his body is forced to act as a labor-producing machine, the African body as a novel toy in the aristocratic household is also manipulated for the sentimental pleasure of his keeper. The body that is denied subjectivity is just that, a toy. This also places Ourika in another trend of the eighteenth century, the fascination with mechanical, (read: easily manipulated) bodies. Michel Foucault, in his chapter “Les corps dociles” in *Surveiller et Punir*, describes this infatuation with mechanical bodies as an extension of bodily discipline from the military to more intimate spaces:

There was, throughout the classical age, a whole discovery of the body as an object and target of power. One would easily find signs of this great attention given then to bodies – to bodies that one can manipulate, fashion, stand up, that obey, that respond, that become useful or where forces are multiplied.... A docile body is one that can submit, that can be utilized, that can be transformed and perfected. The famous automatons, on one side, were not only a way to illustrate the organism; they were also political dolls, reduced models of power: an

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35 “All I had been until then was a toy, an amusement for my mistress; and soon I was to be cast out of a world that could never admit me.” (12-13)
Foucault describes the docile body as one that can be analyzed, and therefore manipulated. Although Foucault does not mention slavery in his discussion, it cannot be a coincidence that the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade coincides with the rise in the interest in docile bodies. For example, in the introductory section of this chapter, Foucault cites texts from 1636 (the docile body’s root in military training) to 1808, encompassing what he may consider “l’âge classique” (159-166). Christopher Miller states that the majority of slaves were transported out of Africa in the eighteenth century, while the term “traite des Noirs” can be traced to the use of “traite” in 1690 to mean “commerce with Savages” (Miller 7,11). This correspondence comes as no surprise.

For Foucault, analyzing the body is inextricably bound to the possibility of controlling it. He begins with the discussion of the military body, conditioned to perform routine in a precise order, and he extends this interest in controlled movement into areas that involve social control. The body that obeys and responds to command is one that is not a threat to social order because it is predictable. The rising use of slave labor in the eighteenth century is an example on a grand scale of controlling bodies for the production of commodities. Moreover, the body that can be trained and perfected is also completely subject to the existing avenues of power in that time and place. The “house slave” is one example on a small scale, in that the good slave is an African body that submits to the will of his keeper. For Ourika, although she may be treated as an endearing pet, to use

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36 My translation.
37 Another literary example of the anxiety around the controlled, docile body can be found in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s character of the automaton Olimpia in “The Sandman,” published 30 years after Frederick II’s death.
Mercier’s analogy, her story recounts her training and submission to prescribed behaviors as she performs the role of an aristocratic girl. The symbolic void of her African body, in that her body expels her from the social order in which she was raised, highlights her controlled docility. That is not to say that her case is different from that of any other child learning to perform prescribed roles in the aristocratic salon, but the assumption of Ourika never having belonged there in the first place highlights these learned behaviors. Thus, when she realizes that up to this point she had just been a “toy,” it means more so that she had just been a manipulated body, performing for the salon’s entertainment, and never for their acceptance.

In this sense, Ourika is doubly enslaved: she is not a subject in this society, and she is a docile body as she performs the will of Mme de B., sometimes even more fervently in hopes of gaining entrance into the society that denies her. Her status as “toy” crushes her hopes of ever belonging, and shows her previous behavior of aristocratic expectations in a cruelly ironic light. Immediately before Ourika recounts the overheard conversation that revealed her abject status, she recounts performing a dance from Senegal. Having been brought to France at such a young age, Ourika could never have understood the dance in its native element, and her performance in retrospect affirms her body as a controlled object devoid of recognizable subjectivity:

Mme de B. vantait souvent ce qu’elle appelait ma grâce, et elle avait voulu que je susse parfaitement danser. Pour faire briller ce talent, ma bienfaitrice donna un bal dont ses petits-fils furent le prétexte, mais dont le véritable motif était de me montrer fort à mon avantage dans un quadrille des quatre parties du monde où je devais représenter l’Afrique. On consulta les voyageurs, on feuilleta les livres de costumes, on lut des ouvrages savants sur la musique africaine, enfin on choisit une Comba, danse nationale de mon pays. Mon danseur mit un crêpe sur son visage: hélas! je n’eus pas besoin d’en mettre sur le mien; mais je ne fis pas alors cette réflexion. Tout entière au plaisir du bal, je dansai la Comba, et j’eus tout le succès qu’on pouvait attendre de la nouveauté du spectacle et du
Mme de B. often praised what she called my natural grace and she had taught me to dance to perfection. To show this talent of mine to the world she gave a ball – ostensibly for her grandsons, but really to display me, much to my advantage, in a quadrille symbolizing the four corners of the globe. I was to represent Africa. Travelers were asked for advice, books of costumes were ransacked, and learned tomes on African music consulted. At last a *comba* – the national dance of my country – was chosen. My partner covered his face in a mask of black crepe, a disguise I did not need. I say that sadly now. But at the time, it meant nothing to me.

I threw myself into the pleasures of the ball and danced the *comba* with all the success one might expect from so novel a spectacle. The audience were for the most part friends of Mme de B. and they thought the warmer their applause, the more she would be pleased. But the dance was in any case something fresh and different. It consisted of stately steps broken by various poses, ... I was totally ignorant of such violent emotions, but some instinct taught me how to mimic their effects. In short, I triumphed. I was applauded, surrounded, overwhelmed with congratulations. It was unalloyed pleasure. Still nothing troubled my sense of security. (10-11)

Ourika is an African woman by appearance only. In her account of the dance, she shows that her intentions were to please Mme de B., and to show off herself to her advantage, “à mon avantage,” which more than likely is a repetition of the words of Mme de B. This advantage is only her African body; Ourika speaks no African language and has no knowledge of African customs. In fact, to learn about the dance, they had to consult travelers and books on clothing and dance in order to construct what they (read: the French aristocracy) believed to be the *Comba*. They did not learn the dance from someone who already knew how to perform it, i.e., a Senegalese person knowledgeable of their own culture. The dance, instead, fulfills their pre-established ideas, and they
conveniently have an African body to perform it for them. While Ourika interpreted the attention given to her African body as something that makes her unique, when she realizes that she can never enter the social order, the *Comba* performance in hindsight is the confirmation of the docility of her African body. It is also a confirmation that her will and individuality, as a subject, are erased. As her language even shows, a point which will be discussed later in more detail, Ourika is trainable, and thus at the behest of the aristocrats who manipulate her. She is also analyzable; at the time she did not realize the significance of her lack of a veil. Her facial features were in full view in order to show the extent of her African features. Her success at this dance also deserves closer inspection. No one at the salon has studied African dance. How would they know if she performed it well? Ourika states that the knowledge of this dance seemed to come from inside her body: “I did not yet know any of those violent movements of the soul; but I do not know what instinct made me guess them.” Ourika has a French mind in an African body. She perceives that her success at this dance comes from her African instincts. She was judged according to how well she represents Africa. She does not understand how she succeeded because she does not understand the extent of her manipulation. She did not succeed because she is a good, knowledgeable *Comba* dancer; she succeeded at being the perfect *token* of Africa. Her objectification, as an African novelty to be owned and shown off to other aristocrats, could not be clearer. She is a pet who dances at the behest of her owner, Mme de B.

As Christopher L. Miller has stated, the African that is granted a voice in French literature is one who has assimilated into the culture (163); only the good, docile African can be heard, as he/she reiterates the ideology of the colonizing culture. Ourika’s docility
and denial of subjectivity make up her status as a mere toy within the “natural order” that the marquise asserts. The vengeance of the society that the marquise mentions is to make Ourika an unsubjectified body. Ourika’s realization of her exclusion from this order takes place in the first half of her account to the visiting doctor. The rest of her narrative recounts her struggle with this knowledge of her abjection, and her struggle to be recognized as a subject proper, and not just an automaton African body at the aristocrats’ disposal. The realization of her unmarriageability to another aristocrat, and her failed hopes at constructing a romantic relationship with Charles, both of which confirm her status as non-subject, begin a descent toward her inevitable confinement, or, as Damon DiMauro terms it, her reversion to stone (1). Three critics pay particular attention to Ourika’s confinement in the stone walls of the convent: DiMauro in “Ourika, or Galatea Reverts to Stone,” Linda Marie Rouillard in “The Black Galatea: Claire de Duras’ Ourika,” and Michelle Chilcoat in “Confinement, the Family institution, and the Case of Claire de Duras’s Ourika.” While DiMauro focuses on the fictional register and the intertextuality of the novel with eighteenth-century representations of the Pygmalion myth, Rouillard works off of the Galatea analogy to explore Ourika’s status as a commodified object. Chilcoat uses Foucault’s ideas on confinement to elucidate the status of women who do not marry and raise children. All authors lead to the conclusion of Ourika’s inevitable confinement within the stone walls of the convent. In the beginning of her account, Ourika states that being saved from slavery, and having Mme de B. as her benefactor, is like being reborn:

Me sauver de l’esclavage, me choisir pour bienfaitrice Mme de B., c’était me donner deux fois la vie: je fus ingrate envers la Providence en n’étant point heureuse; et cependant le bonheur résulte-t-il toujours de ces dons de l’intelligence? Je croirais plutôt le contraire: il faut payer le bienfait de savoir par
le désir d’ignorer, et la fable ne nous dit pas si Galatée trouva le bonheur après avoir reçu la vie. (Duras 7)

Rescued from slavery, placed under the protection of Mme de B. – it was as if my life had been twice saved. I have shown ingratitude to Providence by being to unhappy since. But does understanding bring happiness? I suspect the reverse if true. The privileges of knowledge have to be bought at the cost of the consolations of ignorance. The myth doesn’t say whether Galatea was given happiness as well as life. (7)

In the same sense that Galatea was a statue brought to life by the goddess Venus, Ourika receives a “second existence” through her extraction from slavery and her adoption by Mme de B. (Dimauro 1). However, her realization of her rejection from the social order begins a “psychological disintegration” that leads to her confinement and a “death-like state” (1). Her realization of being a toy could thus be read as the realization of her own constructedness. While she previously believed that her African body instinctively knew the Comba, it was really a representation of her as a commodified object. Ourika’s alienation from her own body produces a social paralysis; she is unable to marry within her station, and must always remain a child, yet she refuses to be a toy. This paralysis is represented in the dilapidated structure of the convent, which for Dimauro, evokes death (3). Representations of Pygmalion’s story in the eighteenth century interpreted the stone statues as “cold” (“froideur”) which in terms of Ourika’s inability to marry, can here be interpreted sexually (2). As her keeper, Mme de B. can also be seen as a Pygmalion figure, as she formed Ourika according to her ideals of a young woman (3). According to the Pygamalion myth, the statue is completely dependent upon the artist for her life, and he becomes the center of her universe, just as Mme de B. is the center of Ourika’s world.

While for DiMauro, Ourika’s reversion to stone is evidenced by her entering the convent and her “psychological paralysis” (2), the stone for Rouillard extends to the
doctor’s frame narrative, as Ourika “breaks out of the stony container of the doctor-
narrator’s text to give the reader Ourika’s perspective on the existence created for her”
(Rouillard 208). Duras rewrites the Pygmalion myth by privileging the voice of the
statue, and not that of the artist; she explores the “interior life of a being created to
assuage another human’s dilemma” (208). Ourika’s African body is owned by Mme de B. Upon realizing her status as a member of a proscribed race, Ourika is trapped from
becoming a wife in the life that she is accustomed to. A working man may deign to
marry her, but she would be miserable in such degraded society. She begins to despise
her own flesh because she views it as a veritable prison: “cette couleur me paraissait
comme le signe de ma réprobation; c’est elle qui me séparait de tous les êtres de mon
espèce” (Duras 15). 38 To further her alienation from her own body, Ourika covers
herself and removes the mirrors from her chambers in an attempt to forget the abject
status signified by the color of her skin (27). Rouillard reads this as her desire to
transform from flesh into “non-flesh,” as she views her own flesh as reduced to that of a
monkey. Ourika begins to hide her body shortly after she realizes her self-identification
with Charles: “j’étais plus lui que lui-même” (26). 39 As her sexual desire for Charles
develops, so does her resentment toward her own body, and her desire to hide her flesh so
that she may better appear to fit the mould of the aristocratic French woman she was
educated to be. Although there are hints in the text, which Rouillard expands upon, that
point toward the desire for Charles as incestuous (Rouillard 214), this desire leads Ourika
eventually to the convent, where she can think of Charles all the time (Duras 45).

38 “this skin color of mine seemed to me like the brand of shame. It exiled me from everyone else of my
natural kind.” (15-6)
39 “I was closer to him than he was himself.” (26)
Ourika’s “passion criminelle”\textsuperscript{40} is thus two sides of the same coin: a prohibition of sexual relationships with a closely related person, and simultaneously the prohibition of a relationship with someone of another race (Rouillard 214). However, there is more to this irony than what Rouillard explains, because Ourika herself is a fragmented subject. Her African body is a commodified object, the docility of which makes it even more valuable. However, Ourika’s training and education in an aristocratic sphere makes the recognition of her objectification unbearable. Moreover, the sense of self that Ourika learned was through identification with a French aristocrat, Mme de B. In short, Ourika sees herself as an aristocratic French woman trapped in an African body, so by the end of her tale she denies her body, and the natural sexual desires (for Charles) that stem from it. She finally sublimates this desire, and adores Charles in his absence as she confines herself in a convent. There she is able to think of him constantly without being driven by her body, which she abhors. Conversely, it is by denying her physical body that she turns into stone; she denies her desire, that is an affirmation of being alive, and resorts to the idealized mold that Mme de B. has constructed of her. Rouillard reads Ourika’s retreat to the convent as “a kind of de-animation, the feeling of being less than human and the need to be more than human.... It is almost as if Ourika has gone from living flesh to a mere representation of a human form, inverting Galatea’s journey” (215). This brings us back to the doctor’s first impression upon entering the convent. While before Ourika was cloistered in the social conventions that denied her subjectivity because of her African body, she dies in the real cloister, surrounded by the ruins and tombstones that signify the metaphorical death of her body. As Rouillard explains, her life “slips away from her as

\textsuperscript{40} “criminal passion” My translation.
she takes her place among the stones in a convent” (Rouillard 216). In both DiMauro and Rouillard’s analyses, Ourika’s sense of self is a construction of Mme de B. that is unable to live in the flesh and blood of an African body. Ourika erases her body, first with veils, then with the nun’s habit and the walls of a convent, where her desire is sublimated, and her elevated intellect from an aristocratic upbringing, and her only avenue to subjectivity, may remain intact. Entering the cloister is an extreme act of assimilation to social convention of the time, an act that eventually destroys her body, where upon her death, the reader may assume that she will become yet another tombstone among those that the doctor passed on his way to meet her.

An analysis of Ourika’s confinement would be incomplete without examining the ideas at the time around women’s necessity for family life and the role of the public institution, like the “hôpital” and the convent. The affirmation of Ourika’s subjectivity lies in the possibility of marriage. At puberty, she discovers her abject status based on her race from the overheard conversation between the marquise and Mme de B. Looking beyond the construct of race and confinement of her French mind within an African body, Ourika’s alienation begins with the realization that she can never marry. According to Michelle Chilcoat, Ourika’s “inability to identify herself beyond the constraints of family relations ultimately kills her” (Chilcoat 7). Ourika’s descent into illness begins at this discovery, affirming the idea that it is woman’s natural inclination to marry and bear children. In this sense, Ourika is breaking yet another form of the “natural order” the marquise asserts by not marrying. When Charles confesses to Ourika his love for Anais, Ourika faints (Duras 31-3). This recollection also prompts her to wish that she had stayed on the slave ship (32) and during her account to the doctor, Ourika
breaks into tears, and the doctor’s words interrupt the story to describe her physical reaction to her inability to marry (33). Philippe Pinel, one of the so-called “Ideological Philosophers,” was a prominent doctor who, with Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, worked with the Revolutionary government to institute education and health reform (Chilcoat 13). Through his work, madness came to be known as “aliénation mentale,” which Chilcoat defines as:

an illness or disorder of the individual’s natural (i.e., “normal”) functioning, often caused by thwarted social expectations including “chagrins doméstiques” and “dissentions intérieures.” In turn, confinement became the means for the cure that would result when the patient could recognize as good and necessary the social order that may once have seemed so alienating. (12)

Citing the work of Cabanis, Chilcoat explains that because of a weaker constitution, a woman who tries to construct an identity beyond the confines of the domestic sphere “will lose the already tenuous capacity for reasoning with which nature has endowed her” (13). Pinel draws the conclusion that marriage is a preventative measure against this “aliénation mentale” (13). In this light, Ourika’s pathological reaction to the recognition of her unmarriageability confirms her need for confinement. Ourika’s self-confinement serves to reinforce Pinel’s prognosis (15). In this sense, Ourika’s dread of solitude is also her exclusion from another market. She bemoans her loneliness in saying “je n’appartenais à personne; j’étais étrangère à la race humaine tout entière!” (15). In the marriage market, the woman is also property to be transferred to a husband. Ourika, like a good house slave, is distraught that she cannot be someone’s property. Ourika imagines her acceptance into the social order as belonging to a man in the institution of marriage.

41 “I belonged to no one; I was estranged from the human race entirely!” My translation.
Healing through Erasure

pour me guérir, vous avez besoin de connaître les peines qui ont détruit ma santé, je vous les confierai... (Duras 6)42

Like Maria in Wollstonecraft’s novel, Ourika’s confinement allows her to articulate her story (Chilcoat 15). Ourika’s retreat to the cloister creates a need to speak, like the women in the madhouse in Maria, and the doctor’s own reticence about the institution of the convent itself allows her story to be heard. The doctor is a child of the revolution, as previously stated, and his suspicion of the powers of the Catholic Church make him expect that his new patient is “une nouvelle victime des cloîtres” (Duras 3).43 As previously mentioned, the convent represents a return to an antebellum society, and this return to the social order is exactly what Ourika was attempting to perform by entering its walls. The doctor from Montpellier is already suspicious about the return to the previous order of the 1802 Concordat, and equally suspicious of the institution of the church. Because of these assumptions, he is willing to listen to Ourika’s narrative: “Je revis plusieurs fois cette jeune religieuse; l’intérêt que le lui montrais parut la toucher” (Duras 5).44 The doctor’s curiosity about her story is sparked by the sight of her African body and the elegance of her demeanor: “je fus étrangement surpris en apercevant une negresse! Mon étonnement s’accrut encore par la politesse de son accueil et le choix des

42 “in order to heal me, you need to know the pains that destroyed my health, I will confide them to you...” My translation.
43 “a new victim of the convent system” (3)
44 “I saw this young nun several times more. She seemed touched by the concern I showed for her,” (5)
expressions dont elle se servait” (4). Before she even begins her story, her first audience notices the incongruity of her body and mind. The doctor’s second observation is the disintegration of her body:

Je la questionnai sur sa maladie. “J’éprouve, me dit-elle, une oppression continuelle, je n’ai plus de sommeil, et la fièvre ne me quitte pas.” Son aspect ne confirmait que trop cette triste description de son état: sa maigreur était excessive, ses yeux brillants et fort grands, ses dents, d’une blancheur éblouissante, éclairaient seuls sa physionomie; l’âme vivait encore, mais le corps était détruit, et elle portait toutes les marques d’un long et violent chagrin. (Duras 4)

I asked for her symptoms.
“I experience a constant feeling of being weighed down,” she said. “I can’t sleep anymore. And I have a persistent fever.”
Her appearance only too exactly confirmed this unpromising syndrome. She was excessively thin. The sole things that gave light to her face were her extraordinarily large and luminous eyes and her dazzlingly white teeth. Her mind still lived, but her body was destroyed. She showed every sign of having suffered from prolonged and acute melancholia. (4)

Like Mercier in his vignette, “Petits Nègres,” the doctor here also notes the extreme whiteness of Ourika’s teeth, perhaps in relation to the darkness of her complexion. Congruent with Pinel’s theories, Ourika’s melancholy progresses to the point where her body disintegrates. Margaret Waller calls this process “the pathologizing of emotion,” because she has internalized the gaze of the social order that condemns her (Duras xv, xvii). Because of the significance of race and gender in this novel, critics have omitted Ourika’s similarity with other Sentimental, and proto-Romantic heroes, such as Goethe’s famed Werther. A victim of her own passions, Ourika tells her autobiographical tale of self-destruction through the frame narrative of a privileged listener. Through the use of familiar narrative structures, like the Pygmalion myth discussed by Rouillard and

45 “I had a strange shock. I was looking at a negress. I very soon found myself even further surprised by her welcoming grace of manner and the elegant simplicity of her language.” (4)
Dimauro, as well as Mme d’Aulnoy’s baroque fairy tale *Babiole* discussed by Bloom, the foreigner is rendered familiar. Bloom writes that:

> In *Ourika*, readers may see themselves in the novel’s reflection of real events, but more importantly they may recognize in Ourika’s essentially human longing for love an image of their own experience. In her turn to literary tradition, Duras may be at her most revolutionary when inviting her readers to find the foreigner familiar, objecting to the heroine’s objectification by eloquently insisting on the monkey-girl’s humanity. (Bloom 30)

Another element that allows Ourika’s story to be told is the familiarity of the narrative structure, as Bloom highlights how this text may be read as part of a larger abolitionist discourse, despite the systematic erasure of the African body it also performs.

The telling of Ourika’s story is not as clear-cut as Bloom’s argument for the humanity of the Other may depict. The “split self” that Cowles asserts is present also in Ourika’s language throughout the tale. Because Ourika denies her own African body, the violence of the slave trade is replaced in the narrative with the illness that ravages her body. Ourika cannot articulate her illness, but the doctor can see the violence that something in her past has done to her body. As Mirielle Rosello explains in “Ourika’s Mal:” “Ourika has always used the word sick to cover up for something else, something that she cannot even name” (Rosello 93). Although she was seen by the famous Dr. Barthez, he cannot heal her. Barthez only examines her body; he does not listen to her (Rosello 93). When the visiting doctor finally hears her story, her language contradicts the signs of her body, in ways other than a black woman speaking like a French aristocrat. Her deteriorating body carries the marks of a violent melancholy, but she claims to have never been happier (Duras 4). This statement seems delusional. This split in her consciousness is also present throughout her tale in the language she uses to
describe herself. From the beginning of her account of being purchased and given as a gift to Mme de B., Ourika speaks of herself as an object: “Je fus rapportée du Senegal” (Duras 7). The verb “rapporter” is used only for things, and here Ourika both acknowledges the purchase of her body, and also identifies this with herself. The times when Mme de B. explains to her guests how an African woman came to be in her salon, Ourika feels like a martyr: “Je souffrais le martyre pendant ces éclaircissements; j’aurais voulu être transportée dans ma patrie barbare, au milieu des sauvages qui l’habitent, moins à craindre pour moi que cette société cruelle qui me rendait responsable du mal qu’elle seule avait fait” (28). She blames Mme de B.’s society for having caused this illness or pain (“mal” can be translated as either) because it is in their company that she is reminded of her abjection. After the realization of her racial difference, she desperately tries to identify further with Mme de B., and later with Charles, yet when he confesses his love for Anais, she faints. At this point in her story, she refers to herself in the third person: “mais pourquoi avez-vous donné la vie à la pauvre Ourika? ... Qu’importait au monde qu’Ourika vécût? Pourquoi était-elle condamnée à la vie?... Retirez de la terre la pauvre Ourika!” (32). The use of the word “retirer” recalls her extraction from Africa. She uses this trope to ask to be taken out of her African body instead. In this excerpt, she is imagining an outside point of view taking pity on her. Throughout her tale, there is only Mme de B. who may have some compassion for her situation, and this could very well be a call to a mother figure, in a wish to be a pre-pubescent child again where her ignorance kept her content, and where her racial difference was a pleasant novelty instead.

46 “These explanations martyred me. I should have liked to be transported back to my uncivilized native land and its savage inhabitants – less frightening to me than this merciless society that declared me guilty of a crime it had alone committed.” (28-9)
47 But why have you given life to poor Ourika?... What does it matter to the world if Ourika lives? Why is she condemned to live?... Take poor Ourika off of this earth!” My translation.
of a rejection by the marriage market. At the same time, however, this outside voice is also asking why she was brought to France in the first place, and is perpetuating the “natural order” spoken by the marquise. Thus, this pitying voice is simultaneously the voice that condemns her existence in France. This is an expression of her own wishful thinking: that the social order that condemns her, and that she has internalized, might empathize with her instead. This desire begins to articulate the cause of her malady.

Through rhetorical questions and through the use of the internalized other’s voice, the unspeakable begins to emerge. However, at this point, her narrative halts, and the doctor notes her altered voice and tears. He asks if she wants to stop talking and she refuses: “‘Ce n’est rien, me dit-elle; maintenant le chagrin ne dure pas dans mon cœur: la racine en est coupée. Dieu a pitié de moi; il m’a retirée lui-même de cet abime où je n’étais tombée que faute de le connaitre et de l’aimer. N’oubliez donc pas que je suis heureuse: mais, hélas! je ne l’étais point alors’” (Duras 33).48 She claims that the root of her heart is cut, as if she can no longer feel pain for long. This numbness can be a sign of her reverting to stone, as previously discussed. In terms of her language, she is depicting her disconnection from her body and the passions related to it, both emotional and sexual. At several points, Ourika refers to her passion as criminal, making this break with her own heart an effort at rehabilitation. When she refers to herself again in the third person, she does not articulate possession of her heart, but refers to it simply as “the heart,” further distancing herself. She describes her reaction to Mme de B.’s departure for Paris to attend Charles’ wedding while she must stay in St. Germain to convalesce:

48 "‘It’s nothing’ she said. ‘The agony isn’t in my heart any more. The root has been cut off. God has taken pity on me. He led me back from the abyss. I threw myself into it only because I didn’t understand it – fell in love with it. You mustn’t forget that I’m happy now.’ She sighed. ‘Though that was the last thing I was in those days.’” (34)
I saw them, abandoning themselves to the intoxication of happiness, far from dying Ourika. Ourika only had them in life; but they did not need Ourika: no one needed her! This awful feeling of a useless existence, is that which tears the heart most profoundly.  

Here, the outside observer that she imagines is not compassionate. In fact, this internalized, yet objective, voice resembles more and more that of the marquise. Ourika’s training and education has instilled in her a logic to which Ourika’s body does not belong. A later reference to herself in the third person expresses a deeper fissure in her subjectivity: “Je mourrai, me disait-je, je veux mourir; mais je ne veux pas laisser les passions haineuses approcher de mon cœur. Ourika est un enfant déshérité; mais l’innocence lui reste: je ne la laisserai pas se flétrir en moi par l’ingratitude” (Duras 36). Ourika does not want her innocence to wither from ingratitude. She separates her heart from her passions, and despite her rejection by the social order, she claims to still have innocence. The fear of first appearing, then of being ungrateful, points to her internalization of the condemning gaze of the other, represented in the marquise. Furthermore, she is still a subject of her keeper, Mme de B. In other words, it was Mme de B. who gave her a second life after she was taken from the slave ship. As Ourika’s status as a toy reveals, her identification with Mme de B. (as a mother figure) is also as a mistress (as a slave-owner). In this sense, Ourika’s coming of age is also a becoming her own mistress. Because she has internalized the culture that rejects her, Ourika’s  

49 My translation. 
50 "I will die’ I used to tell myself, ‘I want to die; but I do not want to let my hateful passions near my heart. Ourika is a disinherited child; but her innocence remains: I will not let it wither in me from ingratitude.” My translation.
ingratitude is the recognition of the injustice of this social order. Ourika’s consistent guilt and fear of appearing ungrateful reinforces her solitude. She is afraid of any form of defiance toward her benefactor because she believes that Mme de B. had given her a new life. She recognizes that knowing she will always be alone had awakened some defiance in her soul: “le malheur avait déjà fait entrer la défiance dans mon âme” (14). However, she fears anyone recognizing any outward defiance: “Je n’ose dire combien j’étais ingrate pour ces soins de ma bienfaitrice” (15).\(^{51}\) This fear is at first of appearing defiant, and is congruent with that of a slave that fears punishment. However, at later points in her narrative, Ourika does not want to spoil her innocence by letting it wither out of ingratitude. She has internalized the condemning gaze.

By the end of her narrative, Ourika has effectively split her mind and spirit, “esprit,” from her body and emotions. She uses bodily metaphors to describe her criminal passion for Charles that she later renounces. Upon hearing of the birth of his son she states: “Qu’ils me firent mal! Hélas! c’était la voix de l’ami que je n’avais plus! et tous les souvenirs du passé, venaient à cette voix, déchirer de nouveau ma plaie” (Duras 38).\(^{52}\) Her unrequited desire for Charles is like a bodily wound that is reopened upon hearing the news of his son’s birth. Her “mal,” which can be translated as pain, illness, or evil, is from passion unrequited because of her African body. When Ourika falls ill again, after a painful reprimand from the marquise for her love for Charles, Ourika miraculously recovers, and then decides to enter the convent. Looking back upon her decision to devote her life completely to God and the family of all humanity, all

\(^{51}\) “misfortune had already introduced mistrust into my heart” (15)

“I do not dare say how I was ungrateful for the care of my benefactress.” My translation.

\(^{52}\) “It hurt most terribly, that voice of a friend I no longer had. Memory ripped the wound open again.” (39)
qualities associated with her African body are pushed aside: “Jouet insensé des
mouvements de mon âme, j’avais couru après les jouissances de la vie, et j’en avais
négligé le bonheur” (Duras 44). Ourika’s desire for pleasure in life is like a toy
disobeying her individual will. Her split subjectivity has also alienated her from her own
emotions when she describes her self as a toy in relation to them. This desire is never
fulfilled and thus, causes her pain, all because her body is African. She first refers to
herself as a toy following the Comba dance which was the realization of her denial of
subjectivity. This abjection was confirmed when she could never marry a man she loved
because of her racial difference. Ourika attempts to leave these associations behind when
entering the convent; yet her illness continues. All that is left to prevent her assimilation
into the role of the white aristocrat is her body, which is the next, and last, part of her to
be taken away. Ourika brusquely ends her narrative after recounting her retort to
Charles’ resistance to her vow. The doctor’s voice returns to state that his care for her
was useless, and that she died, as she had earlier expressed she wanted to (36). Her
assimilation is complete: “elle mourut à la fin d’octobre; elle tomba avec les dernières
feuilles de l’automne” (45). This one desire is fulfilled and, paradoxically, her wish is
granted only in her death. The body that imprisoned her is finally gone, and in an
exemplary metaphor from the northern European, and Parisian, climate, she falls like an
autumn leaf. She had finally entered the “order of nature” in Paris. Ourika has faded into
the background; her partial subjectivity as a French woman, and her African body, are
erased.

53 “The unreasoning toy of instinct, I had chased after the pleasures of life and neglected true happiness.”
(46)
54 “She died at the end of October, with the last autumn leaves.” (47)
Although the text of *Ourika* is unique because it is a fictional autobiography of a marginalized woman, Ourika’s voice is severely problematic. In the doctor’s early narrative, he notes that she speaks like a French aristocrat, and the values she has internalized reflect even the racism that marginalizes her. Ourika has been trained to be complicit in her own marginalization; so much so, that she essentially kills herself. The paradoxically elevated speech emerging from the body of an African woman recounts a life whose resistance is through an insistence on assimilation. Ourika’s desire to fall in love, which she views as expressive of her individual desire and will, albeit the imitation of a quite obviously prescribed behavior for women at the time, is thwarted because of her African body. Throughout her life, her resentment against this body grows, where the incongruity of her mind and her body constructs a struggle that manifests in physical illness. Ourika’s resistance to her imprisonment from a French aristocratic society in an African body is to enter the cloister and opt for a physical imprisonment. In a very conservative move befitting the Restoration Period, Duras constructs a humane, educated, enlightened black woman whose only resistance is to destroy the body laden with signs of otherness. Although it leans toward abolitionist doctrines in its representation of a humane African, Duras equally constructs a realistic world where the African body cannot survive.

The Senegalese woman dies like the last of the autumn leaves. There is a violent struggle in this text between the African body and ideology that destroys this body. In an innovative move, Duras instills the African with a humanity never before created in French literature. Even more innovative is the hybridity of the figure of Ourika. Although she makes every attempt to assimilate to her French aristocratic upbringing,
Ourika will always be an African woman. Considering that the text was written at the time of the Restoration in France, the significance of this African body cannot be discounted. Ourika’s body, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and in Paris, will always be read as barbaric, animalistic, and uncivilized. Ourika’s hybridity as an African woman imbued with all of the social graces that characterize the aristocracy is obviously untenable in the early Napoleonic era and in Restoration Paris; yet her brief existence veritably defies the social conventions of that time and place. Duras’ novel is innovative for representing a hybrid figure in the center of Paris in light of recent feminist scholarship on post-modernity and the global community. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan describe the importance of hybridity in contemporary feminist theory: “the dominant Western attitude toward hybridity is that it is always elsewhere or it is infiltrating an identity or location that is assumed to be, to always have been, pure and unchanging” (Grewal and Kaplan 8). Ourika is a hybrid in the center of Paris, a city that had recently experienced severe rupture in the Revolution and is in the process of reconstruction, as evidenced by the damaged convent that the sister has not yet had time to repair. Thus, Ourika defies Western assumptions of hybridity from the start of her framed narrative. The return to normalcy in of the Restoration may appear to disrupt this assertion; but in fact, the references to hybridity in Ourika’s narrative are coded as fantastic. In the dreaded overheard conversation between the marquise and Mme de B, the latter mentions the possibility of Ourika being able to remain above the common sort that would be destined to her as a negress, and the marquise responds: “Vous vous faites des chimères” (Duras 13).55 The chimera is traditionally a mythical beast with attributes

55 Fowles translates this as “Wishful thinking!” (14), but it states, more literally, “You are making chimeras for yourself!”
of several different creatures, and this reference is often used to refer to something as fantastic. The marquise is remarking the unrealistic nature of Mme de B’s expectations. She also implies that Mme de B has created for herself a hybrid subject which would never to able to enter the natural order that the marquise asserts. In part of Ourika’s failed efforts to rectify this difference, she struggles against her sense of loneliness with fantasies that fulfill her wish to be needed: “Je me créais des chimères pour satisfaire à ce nouveau sentiment; je me représentais Charles arrivant à Saint-Germain; on lui disait: Elle est morte. Eh bien! le croiriez-vous? je jouissais de sa douleur” (Duras 35).56

Here Ourika creates a beast of many creatures by taking pieces of realistic events and mixing them with those of her fantasy. This is where the construction of the hybrid leads, in a time when a restored monarchy in Paris is attempting to erase the destruction and social upheaval of the Revolution. As the real Ourika died at the age of 16 from tuberculosis, the black woman with aristocratic graces is left to the world of fantasy for the time being.

56 “I have myself daydreams to assuage it, I pictured Charles returning from his marriage to Saint-Germain. The servants would say: She has died. And would you believe it, I savored his imagined grief with joy.” (36)
CHAPTER TWO

WORKS CITED


Part Two: The Revolutionary

Chapter Three: The Hysterical Feminine Body of the French Revolution in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

Chapter Four: The Immaterial Revolutionary in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862)
CHAPTER THREE

The Hysterical Feminine Body of the French Revolution in

Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

By the time of Queen Victoria’s reign, industrial capitalism had already created
an exploited underclass that filled the lanes of London. The representation of the
working class in Victorian fiction is as merely part of the metropolitan landscape.
Dickens’ earlier works, such as *Oliver Twist* (1837) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843),
depict sympathetic but simplistic working class characters, while in later fiction such as
*Hard Times* (1854) and *Bleak House* (1852), the working class is clearly subjugated by
the tyrannical will of industrialists, yet are still not developed as complex personages. In
*Bleak House* the character of Jo is at fault for infecting Esther Summerson with small
pox, connecting the working classes with filth and disease even more strongly. Yet their
voices in relation to their subjugated status and the political injustice directed against
them are never fully articulated. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the working class is utterly
mute, and although their actions during the French Revolution are given some slight
justification, their actions are nonetheless belittled into a personal traumatic history. In
this mid-century novel, the working classes are inscribed through myth and sanitary
science that delegitimize their political agency.

*A Tale of Two Cities* is a novel focusing on the problems of the Manette/Darnay
family, whose unity is disrupted by the social upheaval in Paris. The story is set in the
turbulent time of the French Revolution, and alternates between the order of London and
the chaos of Paris. At the start of the novel, Dr. Manette is freed from prison, and the
reason for his imprisonment is revealed later in a court scene, where it is discovered that he was witness to the aristocratic Evremonde brothers’ rape of a peasant girl, the sister of Mme. Defarge. The doctor is finally reunited with his daughter, Lucie, thanks to the efforts of banker, and close family friend, Jarvis Lorry. In the process of this reunion, Charles Darnay, Lucie’s husband, is taken prisoner in Paris for the above-mentioned crime, and Sidney Carton dies on the scaffold in his place. It is a story about redemption, sacrifice, the power of a family overcoming even the most violent political upheaval, and the solidity of the English middle class. Dickens writes a novel about a revolution that essentially serves to stabilize the English national identity and recreate a social order through the valorization of bourgeois sacrifice in the figure of Sidney Carton. By juxtaposing London with the feminized disorder of Paris, the revolutionary in this text, ironically, reinforces the status quo. Fears of British imperial dissolution are projected onto the French revolutionary. While this figure would supposedly represent the rupture of the existing social structure and the implementation of a new one, the revolutionary in A Tale of Two Cities is over-determined. As an aggregate figure of the madding crowd, the body of the revolutionary is inscribed through various registers to signify an alterity, and overall functions as a scapegoat for the problems of the British Empire. Existing criticism of this novel focuses largely on how Dickens negotiates the movement of history, and how the figure of Madame Defarge is a projection of Victorian anxieties around women in the public sphere and colonial subjectivity. Thus far, no critic has examined Dickens’ construction of the crowd. In this chapter, I look at how Dickens constructs the revolutionary crowd in relation to the social reform work of Edwin Chadwick and the Poor Law Commission, entitled Report on the Sanitary Condition of
the Labouring Population of Great Britain. I further expand on scholarly work about Dickens’ construction of Madame Defarge by arguing that she is an aggregate figure of the whole revolutionary crowd, which is systematically feminized and inscribed with hysteria, all of which serves to reinforce a middle-class British identity.

The Madding Crowd: The Masses and Non-Fictional Discourse

The revolutionary body in A Tale of Two Cities is at first a crowd of anonymous people who are poor, filthy, and desperate. Before Madame Defarge emerges as the leader of the revolutionary actions depicted in Paris, there is a mob. In “The Invention of the Masses: The Crowd in French Culture from the Revolution to the Commune,” Stefan Jonsson discusses Edmund Burke’s consideration of the masses in Reflections on the Revolution in France. The notion of “the people” was first a numerical reference, where “the people is a phantom without qualities, speaking though the bare fact of numbers,” and appeared “as a series of abstract units measured according to arithmetic principles” (Jonsson 50). The metropolis played a dominant role in this conceptualization because, to put it simply, it is only in the city where the sheer numbers of people are tangible, and where the masses took on a political role themselves. Edmund Burke “tuned” the term, taken from a mathematical and numerical domain, to be used socially as “the masses” (51). Burke blamed the democratic ideas behind the Revolution for the violence in Paris, and his use of the term “masses” creates an inextricable relation between the numberless collective and violent instability. While most contemporary criticism of A Tale of Two Cities does not cite Burke’s ideas on the French Revolution, another commentator on the
political upheaval in France has received abundant critical attention. Dickens’ debt to Thomas Carlyle has been “exhaustively explored,” to use the words of Shifra Hochberg (Hochberg 99), and Carlyle’s use of organic and mythical imagery adds another dimension to Burke’s formulation of the crowd. According to Jonsson, Carlyle’s book, *The French Revolution: A History*, “describes political action of the masses as a force of destruction, which dissolves society into a storm of numbers” (Jonsson 54). Carlyle’s depiction of the Revolution makes his book less like an objective history, and more of an allegorical epic. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens’ largest debt to Carlyle is in the use of Bacchic imagery to represent the French mob. In addition to the well-recognized use of Carlyle’s representation of the masses, Dickens expands this representation to other registers, making the crowd in *A Tale* a mythic fantasy imbued with the realistic representation of the working classes in the nineteenth-century metropolis. The non-literary text at play here is Edwin Chadwick’s *Sanitary Report*, which in large is a reform-minded look at the working classes through the lens of miasmatic theory. In addition to the discourse of the developing social sciences, Dickens’ representation of the crowd is lastly informed by political upheavals in the British colonies, notably Ireland and India. The use of these various registers to describe the crowd works to distance the social unrest of the French Revolution from the British society, while at the same time projecting onto the French crowd the problems that threaten to dissemble the normality of the English bourgeoisie.

The first image in the novel of revolutionary Paris is “The Wine Shop,” where a cask of wine is broken and crowds of people jostle in to try to steal a drink (*A Tale* 36-38). The desperate mob sucking wine out from between the uneven cobblestones is the
first glimpse of the Bacchic imagery that Dickens uses to represent the revelry and violence of the Paris crowds. In the chapter “The Wine Shop,” the crowd forms to consume the blood-like substance:

A shrill sound of laughter and of amused voices – voices of men, women, and children – resounded in the street while this wine game lasted. There was little roughness in the sport, and much playfulness. There was a special companionship in it, an observable inclination on the part of every one to join some other one, which led, especially among the luckier or lighter-hearted, to frolicsome embraces, drinking of healths, shaking of hands, and even joining of hands and dancing, a dozen together. (A Tale 37)

The celebration over the consuming of wine evokes the intoxication experienced by a violent crowd driven by temporary sensual gratification. There is a childish joy in this passage, a joy which becomes gradually more violent as the novel progresses. The wine stains the clothing, hands, and faces of all who consume it, and they become more sinister:

Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees – BLOOD.

The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there. (A Tale 37-8)

The imagery of wine as blood recalls the elated violence of Euripides’ Bacchae, which is referenced in Carlyle’s use of myth to explain the movement of history. This oblique reference to cannibalism can be explained by a reference to another influential text for Dickens at this time. Dickens’ work with Wilkie Collins on the play The Frozen Deep involved reports on the ill-fated expedition of Sir John Franklin, in which the surviving men resorted to cannibalism. Dickens wrote in Household Words a description of the men’s desperate starvation, which led them to such a “dreadful,” “wolfish” “sin” (Cotsell...
Immediately following the description of the starving Parisians, Dickens expands on their “Hunger,” repeating the word, and capitalizing it, so that it takes on a character of its own. The madness excited by blood is also strewn throughout Carlyle’s text. For example, in his rendition of the siege of the Bastille, he writes “Blood flows; the aliment of madness” (Carlyle 18). In an equally mythic tone, Carlyle often equates the bloody destruction of the Revolution with renewal and rebirth: “O thou remarkable Dogleech, is it thy day of emergence and new-birth” (19). The rendering of history in terms of a mythic destruction and rebirth has been noted by several critics, such as Franklin E. Court, as an element also linked to the earthly pleasures and fertility of the Dionysian cult (Court 16). The crowd’s movements are instinctual, led by a deeper drive than thought: “Great is the combined voice of men; the utterance of their instincts, which are truer than their thoughts; it is the greatest a man encounters, among the sounds of shadows which make up this World of Time” (Carlyle 20). In a gesture toward future crowd psychology, Carlyle attempts to characterize crowd violence as driven by an inexplicable instinct to change history. Dickens borrows from Carlyle’s text a certain epic tone that places the actions of the revolutionary crowd into a larger historical continuum, and as part of an instinctual force devoid of reason.

In the depiction of the storming of the Bastille, Dickens also borrows from Carlyle his reference to the movements of the crowd as a force of nature, beyond the reach of human understanding. In Carlyle’s chapter, “The Fall of the Bastille,” he writes, “Ever wilder swells the tide of men; their infinite hum waxing ever louder” (Carlyle 17). For Dickens, the crowd storming the Bastille is a “living sea” that was rising “wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city” (A Tale 214). It is an “ocean of faces”
(219), and the frightening collective energy of the crowd can only be understood as uncontrollable natural phenomena: “through what agency they crookedly quivered and jerked, scores at a time, over the heads of the crowd, like a kind of lightning, no eye in the throng could have told” (213). The collective agency of the crowd is compared to a natural electric jolt. The movement of the crowd, and of history, is part of a natural landscape, and as Dickens personifies the collectivity the crowd is also placed into a pagan register: “A tremendous roar arose from the throat of Saint Antoine, and a forest of naked arms struggled in the air like shriveled branches of trees in a winter wind” (213). In this rather gothic image, which is bound with the haunted house Dickens previously describes in the “Echoing Footsteps” chapter, the crowd is fused into a landscape representative of death. Although the word “BLOOD” is written upon the wall in wine, hinting at the drinking of blood, this celebration is more bloody in the storming of the Bastille, where “Every living creature there held life as of no account, and was demented to a passionate readiness to sacrifice it” (214). Reason yields to the instinctual desire to sacrifice life, and Dickens describes this lack of reason as “demented.” This distances the narration from justifying the revolutionaries’ actions, and from recognizing any logic in their reaction to social injustice. While Carlyle draws the reader into the excitement with his epic tone, Dickens’ narration manages to keep a distance from the violence so as to add a sense of terror to Carlyle’s awe, and to delegitimize the revolutionaries’ actions.

The representation of the crowd in the Grindstone chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* contains a rewriting of a gruesome historical moment where Dickens masks overt bodily violence so as to characterize the crowd with a feminized madness. The action takes
place during the September Massacres of 1792, where the crowd exacted some of the
most obscene violence against aristocrats. The murder and dismemberment of Princesse
de Lamballe is one of the most poignantly gruesome of these acts, which Carlyle
describes thus:

She shivers back, at the sight of the bloody sabres; but there is no return:
Onwards! That fair hind head is cleft with the axe; the neck is severed. That fair
body is cut in fragments; with indignities, and obscene horrors of moustachio
grand-lèvres, which human nature would fain find incredible, --which shall be
read in the original language only.57 (cited in Sanders 42)

The original language that Carlyle references here is in Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s
Nouveau Paris, where the September massacres are described in much more detail. In his
article “‘Cartloads of Books’: Sources for A Tale of Two Cities,” Andrew Sanders argues
that Dickens “misremembered” the mutilation of the princess (Sanders 42); however,
considering Sanders’ discussion of Dickens’ use of other moments of Mercier’s texts,
Tableau de Paris and Nouveau Paris, Dickens more than likely altered this reference for
the sake of delicacy. Sanders discusses Dickens’ use of historical events in the novel,
and states that, inspired by Carlyle’s work, Dickens wrote to the latter asking for
recommendations of eye-witness accounts from Paris. Within these “cartloads of books”
was Mercier’s Tableau de Paris and his Nouveau Paris (Sanders 42-44). Several
chapters are informed by Mercier’s work, such as “Monseigneur in Town,” and Dickens’
reference to the Convulsionists and other details of the Marquis’ life in the chapter
“Monseigneur in Town” (Dickens 109-114, Sanders 44-45). The Princesse de Lamballe,

According to Andrew Sanders in “‘Cartloads of Books’: Some Sources for A Tale of Two Cities,” this
dition was in Dickens’ home library at the time of his death (Sanders 51).
according to Mercier, was guilty of only being a friend of Marie Antoinette. Her murder, according to Mercier, happened thus:

...elle est frappée de plusieurs coups, elle tombe baignée dans son sang et expire. Aussitôt on lui coupe la tête et les mamelles, son corps est ouvert, on lui arrache le cœur, sa tête est ensuite portée au bout d’une pique et promenée dans Paris; à quelque distance on trainait son corps. ...

Il est un fait que la pudeur laisse à peine d’expressions pour décrire; mais je dois dire la vérité tout entière et ne me permettre aucune omission. Lorsque Madame de Lamballe fut mutilée de cent manières différentes, lorsque les assassins se furent partagé les morceaux sanglants de son corps, l’un de ces monstres lui coupa la partie virginaire et s’en fit des moustaches, en présence des spectateurs saisis d’horreur et d’épouvante. (Mercier 87-88)

... she is struck by several blows; she falls bathed in her own blood and expires.

Immediately, they cut off her head and her nipples; her body is opened and they tear out her heart; her head is then carried on the end of a stake and paraded through Paris; a small distance behind they dragged her body. ...

It is a fact that decency hardly leaves any words to describe it, but I must tell the whole truth and not allow any omission. When Madame de Lamballe was mutilated a hundred different ways, when the assassins had shared amongst themselves the bloody pieces of her body, one of the monsters cut off her virginal part and made himself a moustache out of it, all in the presence of the spectators who were stricken with horror and shock.58

The murderers make every effort to disgrace the Princess. In addition to beheading, they cut off her nipples and her labias, which were worn as a moustache, much to the horror of the spectators. For the sake of “pudeur,” however, Dickens buries the bodily dismemberment of this incident with “false moustaches,” repetitive references to blood, wine, and the color red, along with the torn pieces of women’s dress, instead of focusing on the torn pieces of the woman’s body:

The grindstone had a double handle, and turning at it madly were two men, whose faces, as their long hair flapped back when the whirlings of the grindstone brought their faces up, were more horrible and cruel than the visages of the wildest savages in their most barbarous disguise. False eyebrows and false moustaches were stuck upon them, and their hideous countenances were all

58 My translation.
bloody and sweaty, and all awry with howling, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and want of sleep. As these ruffians turned and turned, their matted locks now flung forward over their eyes, now flung backward over their necks, some women held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks struck out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. The eye could not detect one creature in the group free from the smear of blood. Shouldering one another to get next at the sharpening-stone were men stripped to the waist, with the stain all over their limbs and bodies; men in all sorts of rags, with the stain upon those rags; men devilishly set off with spoils of women’s lace and silk and ribbon, with the stain dyeing those trifles through and through. Hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords, all brought to be sharpened, were all red with it. Some of the hacked swords were tied to the wrists of those who carried them, with strips of linen and fragments of dress: ligatures various in kind, but all deep of the one colour. (A Tale 260)

While Dickens does not directly describe the dismemberment of the Princesse, the image of the revolutionary crowd sharpening their weapons contains some oblique references to this horrific act. The crowd is smeared with a confused mixture of blood and wine while men are disguised with “False eyebrows and false moustaches” and wearing bloodied pieces of women’s dress. Instead of wearing bloodied pieces of a woman’s body, a woman’s dress is dismembered, and the “false moustaches” are left open to interpretation, without any description of how they came to be, or what their purpose is. Dickens’ alteration of this historical account serves to feminize the revolution, and the dismemberment of a female body would disrupt his depiction of the French Revolution as the work of an hysterical violent femininity. In this scene at the grindstone, Dickens disguises the violence against an aristocratic woman with Victorian anxieties.

Dickens’ alteration of these texts serves to fortify British identity by distancing the chaos of the French Revolution, and by constructing the French crowd as the hysterical feminine. Unaware of the intertextuality of this scene at the grindstone, Albert Hutter in “Nation and Generation in A Tale of Two Cities,” reads this passage as a
combination of images that the Victorians usually separated. Gender roles appear to be reversed, as the men wear pieces of women’s lace, and opposites in the Victorian mentality are fused: “murder and celebration, ritual and anarchy, violence and delicacy” (Hutter 102). Thus, Dickens hides the shamefully sexualized bodily violence done to the Princesse with a chimera of the Victorian imagination. Defying gender roles is only a beginning; the bloody violence combined with the bits of lace from women’s clothing constructs an image that violates the sanctity of the female, which Lisa Robson expands upon in her article, “The ‘Angels’ in Dickens’s House: Representation of Women in A Tale of Two Cities.” Robson argues that the “angel in the house” is a typical Victorian representation found throughout Dickens’ work that “idealizes women for their femininity” (Robson 204). While Robson discusses how Dickens manipulates this notion, represented by Lucie Manette, through doubling with Miss Pross and Madame Defarge, I am extending this concept of the idealized feminine to elucidate the potential for horror in this grindstone scene where bits of lace, typical of upper-class femininity, are co-opted by the revolutionaries. The blood-ridden scraps of dress are used to tie their swords around their waists. The “fragments of dress” show the deconstructed social order, as previous signifiers of class status are torn and reconstituted as weapons of war. To readers not familiar with Mercier’s work, this scene involves the imposition of signs of the feminine (lace and bits of women’s dress) onto the revolutionary violence. The feminization of the revolutionary crowds constructs an even further distance in the Victorian imagination from the stable British identity.

The blurring of gender boundaries in Dickens’ representation of the crowd is also a characteristic of the Dionysian celebration, but in the Victorian imagination this
blurring also dehumanizes the bodies in question. The “gnashing of teeth” in the Carmagnole and the revolutionaries in the Grindstone chapter referred to as “creatures” are only part of the animal comparison. The crowd is often unified in the form of one animal, as when the “tremendous roar arose from the throat of Saint Antoine” (*A Tale* 213). Like the instincts that drive the Revolution for Carlyle, this animalistic desire for vengeance also connects this bestial desire to political unrest largely because the underclass is associated with lower species:

In the hunted air of the people there was yet some wild-beast thought of the possibility of turning at bay. Depressed and slinking though they were, eyes of fire not wanting among them; nor compressed lips, white with what they suppressed; nor foreheads knitted into the likeness of the gallows rope they mused about enduring, or inflicting. (38-9)

Members of the crowd, and Madame Defarge, are also described several times as “tigerish” (38). The animal nature of the crowd is not always as threatening as the crowds in Paris. In the village of the Marquis, before his murder, the villagers are described as “sheep” (121) while the bear in the crowd at Temple Bar represents a carnivalesque image of the crowd as a whole, which also makes the English crowd humorous. The bear-leader, “a popular street character of the time, was impressed as an additional ornament, before the cavalcade had gone far down the Strand; and his bear, who was black and very mangy, gave quite an undertaking air to that part of the procession in which he walked” (159). It seems foolish that such a mangy creature would have an “undertaking air,” but this plays into the prejudice around the lower classes. As part of the national difference that makes up part of Dickens’ project in representing the crowds in revolutionary France, the English crowd is comic while the Parisian crowds are murderous and demonized. However, this distancing reveals as well an implicit need for...
this distance from working class violence for Dickens and his bourgeois readers. While intertextual research leads to representation of the Parisian crowd in Mercier, this image is equally informed by the much closer issue for the English readers in the working class crowd of London.

Edwin Chadwick’s *Sanitary Report*, published in 1842 not long after the London cholera epidemic, contains major components of Dickens’ representation of the working class in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and also *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House*. Chadwick sent a copy to Dickens (Poovey 117), among other writers. Dickens wrote in a letter to Henry Austin on September 25, 1842 that he admired Chadwick’s work. He further stated that he would read the report “with the greatest interest and attention” (House 331). He further agrees with Chadwick “in the great importance and interest of the subject, though I do differ from him, to the death, on his crack topic--the New Poor-Law” (House 330). Despite Dickens’ disagreement with the New Poor Law, which he does not further discuss, his representation of the working classes corresponds with that of Chadwick as described through miasmatic theory. Dickens elaborates dramatically the Victorian assumptions about the working class mob. References to miasmatic theory abound in Dickens’ description of the living quarters in Saint Antoine:

> Its abiding place was in all things fitted to it. A narrow winding street, full of offence and stench, with other narrow winding streets diverging, all people by rags and nightcaps, and all smelling of rags and nightcaps, and all visible things with a brooding look upon them that looked ill. (*A Tale* 38)

Focusing on the “smell” of the “rags and nightcaps,” Dickens references the miasmatic theory that invades representations of the working class as the body of the poor is inscribed through the environment. In this passage, the body actually blends in with its
surroundings, where “looking ill” takes on moral implications. According to Peter Melville Logan in *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose*, Chadwick’s *Sanitary Report* articulates “a theory of moral contagion, which he links to epidemic contagion,” in which the infectious miasma in the unclean environment produces the decay of the moral sense in the working class (Logan 150). Chadwick describes the working class body that is inscribed through the environment and which appears to emerge from a lack of sanitation:

That the younger population, bred up under noxious physical agencies, is inferior in physical organization and general health to a population preserved from the presence of such agencies.
That the population so exposed is less susceptible of moral influences, and the effect of education are more transient than with a healthy population.
That these adverse circumstances tend to produce an adult population short-lived, improvident, reckless, and intemperate, and with habitual avidity for sensual gratifications.
That these habits lead to the abandonment of all the conveniences and decencies of life, and especially lead to the overcrowding of their homes, which is destructive to the morality as well as the health of large classes of both sexes. (Chadwick 423)

It is through this particular representation of the working-class body that Chadwick argues for miasmatic theory and sanitation. The unsanitary environment leads to poor habits, and prevents the underclass from being inscribed with the codes of bourgeois society. This environment also breeds people that are incapable of conceptualizing into the future, and who live with the perpetual desire for gratification in the present moment. Chadwick attributes the overcrowding of their homes to poor habits attained through a noxious environment, and makes little consideration for economic influence on these circumstances. Chadwick constructs the working class as bound to a purely material
existence, and incapable of understanding the bourgeois social order. Logan describes the ideological connections between these highlighted characteristics:

Working-class improvidence and sensuality stem from an inability to see beyond the immediacy of the moment and its present, palpable sensations.... Disease is always accompanied in the social body by an unbridled sexuality, which is represented by the high rate of reproduction. So although Chadwick allows that the poor are reproducing at a frightening rate, he argues that they reproduce because they are diseased. (Logan 151)

The overabundance of sensuality and immediate gratification involves the lack of a moral sense which is bred into the middle classes. The working class is marked by an “incapacity for education” and the “reproductive body is immersed within the realm of the material and incapable of symbolic activity” (157). Both Dickens and Chadwick define the working class by inscribing their bodies in such a way so as to mute their agency within the bourgeois social order. The inability to enter the Symbolic, and the inscription of the body that defies the agency of the subject are main components to the construction of hysteria. Evelyne Ender, in Sexing the Mind cites Monique David-Menard’s definition of hysteria: “the expression of suffering bound up with the transgressions of the imagination or desire – hysteria as the pathological expression of the impossible – sketches the path to the philosopher’s claim that hysteria is bound up with the failure of the symbolic” (Ender 29). This description is especially helpful to describe the attempts of a member of the underclass to have a political voice. The symbolic implies a body that encodes itself within the dominant social order. This social pathology is a lack of the internalization of the dominant ideological narrative, and the desire for an impossible “jouissance” of speaking through the symbolic (29). George Sand describes hysteria in a letter to Flaubert: “Is it not a kind of unease or anguish, caused by the desire
of an impossible something or other?” (28). The impossibility of political agency for the working class, and their failure to enter the symbolic social order makes the action they take to enter that order an expression of the hysterical. By inscribing the working class with this hysteria, as they struggle unsuccessfully to enter the social order, Dickens manages to resolve the bourgeois interest that drives his representation of the working class in revolt. He reduces the threat of social upheaval by systematically denying a voice to the revolutionary. Any attempt on the part of the revolutionary to speak, and to be recognized as a member of the social order, then becomes a manifestation of the social pathology. The working class revolutionary is violent because he or she is morally diseased.

Although Chadwick’s study is inspired by an effort to reform the urban environment, his construction of the working class body also denies the underclass any possibility of social agency. By medicalizing the threats of working class “mass hysteria,” Chadwick also reaffirms a norm of cultured bourgeois sensibility (Logan 144). This sensibility can become overactive and the physical symptoms came to define the bourgeois female sensibility. While Logan describes the transfer of the possibility of hysteria from the over sensibility of the middle class through the reading of novels, he does not explore further how the Victorian bourgeois fear of revolt informs the construction of the working class body as a pathological entity. In Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864, Mary Poovey states that Chadwick’s efforts of inspecting and reforming the working class domestic sphere also served to minimize the threat of working-class organizations (Poovey 130). Logan writes that “Chadwick identifies that danger as a medicalized resistance to culture, so that the
unsanitary working class exists in a pathological condition, reduced to a pure physicality marked by riotous behavior and anomic desire” (Logan 147). The displacement and alienation of desire that Logan uses to describe Chadwick’s definition of the working class body can also help us to understand the systematic displacement of narrative registers used by Dickens. The difference of the working class from bourgeois cultural practices is medicalized. To demonstrate the inability of the working classes to enter into the symbolic, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the desire to speak is displaced into registers of myth, racism, and gender difference.

Mary Poovey describes the effects of Chadwick’s report using categories that also delineates Dickens’ symbolic displacement of the revolutionary crowd: class, gender, colonial subjectivity, and race:

> During the 1830’s, for example, contemporaries repeatedly remarked on both the existence of what many (reluctantly) called *class* and the differences class made: the 1842 *Sanitary Report* gave this difference physical as well as economic meaning when its tables showed working in certain trades living less long than did their leisureed governors. Gender, which had long been an important legal, medical, and occupational market, achieved new prominence during this period. The notion of a unitary British culture was also strained in the period by the geographical dispersal of an empire whose rulers rarely agreed on how various possessions should be governed. Add to this the varieties of attitudes toward “race,” which was a concept only just beginning to be stabilized in the 1840’s. (Poovey 2)

In her discussion of the formation of a single mass British culture, Poovey also outlines main categories of difference that govern the representation of the French working classes in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Poovey’s summary of Chadwick’s report delineates the categories through which Dickens signifies the unbridgeable gap between the working classes in France and healthy British self-regulation. There is the disruption of prescribed gender narratives, as in the dance of the Carmagnole and the Grindstone chapters, and the
feminization of the Revolution through the iconic registers of Madame Defarge and La Vengeance. The representation of crowds is also influenced by the fears of colonial revolt, as discussed by Priti Joshi, in “Mutiny Echoes: India, Britons, and Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*,” and Deborah Wynne, in “Scenes of ‘Incredible Outrage’: Dickens, Ireland, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.” Lastly, the representation of Madame Defarge, as an iconic image of the Revolutionary crowds, is also orientalized, including a racial difference in the discourse formation that individuates the revolutionary body. Before exploring the construction of the revolutionary through the various outsiders to the English middle class, it is important to discuss how this alterity functions to reinforce the English national identity that Dickens constructs.

Like Chadwick who, according to Poovey, defines the working class body through the application of a bourgeois domestic norm (126), Dickens also defines the working classes through a contradistinction to the bourgeois household. There are several moments in the text when the French Revolutionaries are defined against the comforting bourgeois sphere of the Manette home. Lucie Manette is first encountered by Jarvis Lorry, as visually framed by a mirror in the background, which itself is framed by a carving of Negro cupids:

As his eyes rested on a short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look, and a forehead with a singular capacity (remembering how young and smooth it was) of lifting and knitting itself into an expression that was not quite one of perplexity, or wonder, or alarm, or merely of a bright fixed attention, though it included all the four expressions – as his eyes rested on these things, a sudden vivid likeness passed before him, of a child whom he had held in his arms on the passage across that very Channel, one cold time, when the hail drifted heavily and the sea ran high. The likeness passed away, like a breath along the surface of the gaunt pier-glass behind her, on the frame of which, as hospital procession of Negro cupids, several headless and all cripples, were offering black baskets of Dead Sea Fruit to
black divinities of the feminine gender – and he made his formal bow to Miss Manette. (*A Tale* 29)

In this passage, blond haired, blue-eyed Lucie Manette’s image as a child fades to the present moment where she stands before a mirror framed by Negro Cupids. Lucie’s reflection framed by these images of hedonistic ritual to female goddesses recalls Chadwick’s description of Mexican Lepers, one of his most poignant illustrations for his argument for sanitation through a representation of a “hideously diseased population,” which combines an “unthinkable fecundity with grotesque disfigurement” (Logan 152). Chadwick connects these horrific images with the British working classes: “the description of the Mexican populace will recall features characteristic of the wretched population in the worst parts of Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, and Bath, and the lodging-houses throughout the country” (Chadwick 247). The crippled and headless racial others making an offering to a feminine deity in Dickens’ mirror frame recalls fertility cults. According to Logan, “[t]he images of these sexualized lepers, furiously reproducing despite their deformed and perhaps absent limbs,” reveals a gap in Chadwick’s logic that links disease and uncontrolled reproduction (Logan 152). However, this extreme example is also sharply juxtaposed to the bourgeois health and order, as part of Chadwick’s bourgeois patriarchal gaze, and is imbued with more racist overtones than his depiction of English working classes. Deformed Negro cupids in a fertility cult also reinforce the Dionysian aspect of the crowd, as it embodies a forbidden revelry, sexual promiscuity, fertility, and destruction. The revolution that the reader knows is foreshadowed here takes on the guise of this hedonistic cult. Dickens’ use of Lucie as an ideal feminine figure is further demonstrated by her innocent and attentive expression,
along with Lorry’s remembrance of her as a child, all in juxtaposition with the hideous object in the background.

The revolutionary crowd, through its juxtaposition to the normality of the bourgeois household tended by the ideal feminine in Lucie Manette, is an extensive construction of the institutionalization of the bourgeois order. This is made more evident in the haunting of the Manette household in the quiet corner of Soho. Entitled “Hundreds of People,” this chapter deals primarily with the neuroses of the Manette household, and the presence of the crowd lurks beneath the surface as the return of Manette’s troubled past. The construction of the revolutionary crowd as the return of the repressed will be dealt with in more detail in the last section of this chapter. Let it now suffice to say that the pathologizing of political unrest inserted into a narrative of personal trauma serves to erase any validity and legitimacy of working class revolt. In this chapter, Jarvis Lorry discovers Dr. Manette’s shoemaking bench, and the reader finds that Miss Pross is prone to “a fit of the jerks,” which she experiences when a heavy rain begins to fall and Dr. Manette is startled and falls ill (A Tale 106-7). Playing off of Miss Pross’ overactive imagination that “hundreds of people” are coming to see Lucie, combined with Dr. Manette’s irritating pacing, the sound of the rain is compared to a rushing crowd:

There was a great hurry in the streets, of people speeding away to get shelter before the storm broke;...
“Here they come, fast, fierce, and furious!”
It was the rush and roar of rain that he typified, and it stopped him, for no voice could be heard in it...
Perhaps. Perhaps, see the great crowd of people with its rush and roar, bearing down upon them, too. (108-9)

This haunting of the Manette household is the fear of crowd violence, along with the return of an as-yet-undisclosed traumatic event that precipitated the action in the story.
The echoing footsteps in the rain outside the Manette home facilitate Dickens’ later use of oceanic imagery to describe the maddening crowds in Paris as “a great storm in France with a dreadful sea rising” (212). This metaphoric convolution of sea and rain with footsteps is an aggregate view of the multitude, but it also allows for the erasure of the individual bodies in the crowd, as they are understood as mere numbers through the discussion of their feet. After the storming of the Bastille, Dickens writes: “Heaven defeat the fancy of Lucie Darnay, and keep these feet far out of her life!” (219). The footsteps are also juxtaposed with the domestic sphere: “Headlong, mad, and dangerous footsteps to force their way into anybody’s life, footsteps not easily made clean again if once stained red, the footsteps raging in Saint Antoine afar off, as the little circle sat in the dark London window” (213). The fear of the multitude and their relation to the domestic sphere as echoing feet is part of Dickens’ strategy to demonize the crowds through haunting, which reduces the violent political force to a personal memory. At the same time, the violent phenomena external to the English bourgeois household are linked to other bourgeois narratives that signify the dissolution of British society.

Subverted gender narratives and feminine madness are also constructed through the gaze informed by the ideal feminine, embodied in Lucie Manette. The echoes of the crowd come to life when Lucie encounters them dancing the Carmagnole outside the Bastille. While awaiting Darnay’s hearing, Lucie hears movement and shouting approaching her:

A moment afterwards, and a throng of people came pouring round the corner by the prison wall, in the midst of whom was the wood-sawyer hand in hand with The Vengeance. There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons. There was no other music than their own singing. They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison. Men and women danced
together, women danced together, men danced together, as hazard had brought them together. At first, they were a mere storm of coarse red caps and coarse woollen rags; but, as they filled the place, and stopped to dance about Lucie, some ghastly apparition of a dance-figure gone raving mad arose among them. ... No fight could have been half as terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport – a something once innocent, delivered over to all devilry – a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart. Such grace as was visible in it made it the uglier, showing how warped and perverted all things good by nature were become. The maidenly bosom bared to this, the pretty almost-child’s head thus distracted, the delicate foot mincing in this slough of blood and dirt, were types of the disjointed time. (A Tale 275-6)

The perversion demonstrated in this dance celebrating violence and death threatens the solitary, innocent Lucie. As they danced around her, the crowd appears to become one single entity, where the people that make up this mob, such as the wood-sawyer and la Vengeance, are subsumed into an aggregate identity: “some ghastly apparition of a dance-figure gone raving mad arose among them.” In relation to the idealized English woman, the people of the crowd meld into one mad figure. Any grace within this dance was made all the uglier because it is performed by the revolting working class. The “types of the disjointed time” consist of the English female purity and the foreign, aggregate monster of the working class mob. The lack of coherence in the mob also highlights their construction through Victorian anxieties of social dissolution.

Although the question of national difference is first posed with the juxtaposition of the haunted Manette London household to the violent crowds in the streets of Paris, this national difference is also influenced by uprisings of British colonial subjects. The need to distance an English identity from these colonial uprisings informs the representation of the revolutionary crowds. In “Scenes of ‘Incredible Outrage’: Dickens, Ireland, and A Tale of Two Cities,” Deborah Wynne explores the connection between
Dickens’ representation of the French revolutionary crowd and Irish Protestant revivalism in Ulster in the late 1850s. According to Wynne, during his reading tour, Dickens noted the “rough” and chaotic Irish crowds (Wynne 54). The “Hunger” that drives the crowd to drink the wine from the paving stones in “The Wine Shop” chapter was an important element that drove women to participate in the Irish Protestant revivals. According to Victorian commentators, poverty, long work hours, and lack of proper food made people vulnerable to the lure of religious revival (54-5). More significant to the relation between real Irish and fictional French crowds is that in the original publication of *A Tale of Two Cities* in Dickens’ own weekly magazine *All Year Round*, there were numerous features on “religious extremism, revivals, and public violence” (55). The appearance of features depicting crowds of colonial subjects and political unrest in Dickens’ own periodical reveals a certain intention to equate violent crowds in history to the revivalism in Ireland (56). Included with *A Tale of Two Cities* was Elizabeth Gaskell’s story *Lois the Witch*, based on the Salem witch trials. Wynne argues that this placement demonstrates the sentiment of other journalists at the time of the Irish Revival, which was seen as “a new outbreak of the traditional mass hysteria which was believed to characterise all popular demonstrations” (56). The role of women in the Irish revival was shocking to Victorian observers. One eyewitness, Edward A. Stopford, Archdeacon of Meath, describes the revivalist activities: “proceedings which fill the streets of Belfast at late hours of the night with hysterical young women, in company with hysterical young men.... I call for reform of what every policeman in Belfast sees to be indecent and wrong” (cited in Wynne 58). The presence of women in such “indecent” crowd behavior also recalls the women participating in the demonstrations of the French Revolution. Wynne writes:
“Hysteria (rather than social deprivation, political unrest, colonial rebellion, class resentment, or gender hostility) was, according to many writers, the common thread which united each manifestation of religious fervor” (58). By depicting the French revolutionary crowds as hysterical, Dickens works to “neutralize” the political motivations behind such uprisings (59). One such example of the feminized hysterical crowd in *A Tale of Two Cities* is the hanging of Foulon:

> The men were terrible, in the bloody-minded anger with which they looked from windows, caught up what arms they had, and came pouring down into the streets; but, the women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their bare poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions.... Then, a score of others ran into the midst of these, beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming, Foulon alive! Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass! .... With these cries, numbers of women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirlèd about, striking and tearing at their own friends until they dropped into a passionate swoon, and were only saved by the men belonging to them from being trampled under foot. (*A Tale* 221-222)

Madame Defarge leads the crowd to hang Foulon from a lampost, then to place his head on a pike, his mouth filled with grass (223). Although Wynne does not provide close textual analysis of this passage, she draws several interesting connections. Foulon was presumed dead, and when the crowd discovers he is alive, Defarge explains that Foulon has been resurrected (Wynne 57). The prominence of women, even in the role of preacher, during the revival attracted attention and bred more fears that the unrest could spread to the imperial center (59). In this passage, the women are demonstrating what could be described as a hysterical religious mania: they are in a “blind frenzy,” and they “whirlèd about” until they “dropped into a passionate swoon.” These are all features of those participating in the revival meetings, which involved “outbreaks of hysteria,
convulsions, and temporary loss of hearing and sight” (53). Through Wynne’s exploration of the prejudiced depictions of the revival in British journals, with added close textual analysis of these representations, her article on the feminine hysteria of the Irish Revivalists reveals this same narrative of the hysterical feminine at work in Dickens’ representation of the hysterical, feminized French crowd.

The representation of the French revolutionary crowd is constructed through intersecting narratives of historical accounts, treatises on social reform, and journalistic accounts of colonial uprisings. In her article “Mutiny Echoes: India, Britons, and Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*,” Priti Joshi discusses how the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was a “lens” through which Dickens viewed the crowd in the French Revolution, and how negative attitudes toward the Indian Mutiny serve to reinforce national identity, a project that also drives the depiction of the French crowds (Joshi 54). By analyzing propaganda cartoons in *Punch* magazine from 1857, Joshi shows how Dickens participates in a larger British reaction to the Mutiny, in particular, the massacre of British women and children who were thrown into the well at Kanpur, by constructing several fictions (including *A Tale of Two Cities*) that follow the same plot structure:

... the protagonist, often discontented or socially disruptive, while adventuring abroad falls in love with a woman who is the embodiment of English womanhood. Ennobled by this love to bury his differences and rivalries with his countrymen, he valiantly saves the lives of women and other innocents endangered by hostile foreign forces. (Joshi 75)

For Joshi, the events of the Indian Mutiny “animate” *A Tale of Two Cities* (80) in that the voyage of Jarvis Lorry and Sidney Carton to Paris during the Revolution is to save the family of Lucie Darnay, which, for Carton, involves sacrificing his own life for the husband of the woman he loves. Through the novel, Joshi argues, Dickens forges a
British identity in a foreign landscape, making the historical novel also an avenue to control contemporary anxieties about colonial revolt (86). The “borderless version of British nationality” that Dickens constructs in *A Tale of Two Cities* (83), where he makes Charles Darnay an honorary Briton, is through the juxtaposition of the English ideal to the hysterical, violent, revolting foreign crowd. Thus Joshi’s use of visual propaganda on British identity makes the French Revolution crowd that is informed through various discourses (if the textuality of images may be considered a discourse) the chimera-like beast that Dickens uses to valorize and stabilize a British identity. The lack of reason in the crowd psychology is counterpoised to the humble mathematical heroism of Jarvis Lorry; its drunken bloodlust is counterpoised to the self-sacrificing (and reformed alcoholic) Sidney Carton; and the raging, hysterical, indecent women are counterpoised to the innocent, domestic ideal of Lucie Manette. Although the crowd is often nameless unsanitary bodies, there is one who stands out as its villainous leader, who by herself threatens the gaze that inscribes stable bourgeois gender identities: Madame Defarge.

**The Embodied Mob: Madame Defarge**

As we saw in Peter Melville Logan’s interpretation of Edwin Chadwick’s work, the working class body is inscribed through its environment, where the poor sanitation that afflicts the working class homes creates the working class bodies that lack the sensibility of the Victorian middle class. According to this narrative, this environment in turn breeds a moral contagion through the environmental effects on habits, and provokes the working class person toward “drink, uncleanness, and sexual promiscuity” (Logan
According to Logan, for the working class in Chadwick’s report, “the individual body stands as representative of its general population rather than being significant in its particularity” (Logan 155). In other words, the person that can be categorized as working class is a representation of the aggregate class, and not seen as an individual in her or her own right. The notion of “the masses,” when used to reference the working class, depict a nameless number of bodies. Any member of that group is itself a representative of the group. This logic that Logan elucidates in the social reform texts of the 1840s has made its way into the representation of the working class crowd in historical fiction.

One working class revolutionary body that is singled out in *A Tale of Two Cities* is that of Madame Defarge. Her character is not explored as that of an individual with a personal psychology that reacts to its surroundings in complex ways. Instead, her function is to be representative of the French crowds as a whole. Her body is inscribed with the alterity that serves to reinforce the triumph of British identity in a chaotic foreign land. She is an icon of the crowd; a simplified version of the total aggregate. In “Madame Defarge as Political Icon in Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*,” Linda Lewis discusses how Madame Defarge is constructed through the feminine iconography of the French Revolution. In the Bastille scene, the crowd beats the Bastille’s governor Launay to death, and Madame Defarge, waiting to strike, then cuts off his head (*A Tale* 218). According to Lewis, this act is not attributed historically to a woman, but to the mob. For Dickens, Madame Defarge exacts this last, decapitating punishment as her hand performs the will of the revolutionary crowd (Lewis 42). Furthermore, Barbara Black, in “A Sisterhood of Rage and Beauty: Dickens’ Rosa Dartle, Miss Wade, and Madame
Defarge," argues that Dickens “feminizes” the revolution (Black 99), while Lewis presents Madame Defarge in the context of the “allegory of the female body as political icon” in French Revolution imagery (Lewis 36). Moreover, Madame Defarge is the icon of the revolutionary crowd in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Black points out the various female metaphors used to describe the Revolution’s elements: “La Guillotine” is referred to as “the great sharp female” and “that sharp female newly-born” while the Grindstone scene involves men wearing fragments of female dress (Black 99). Madame Defarge’s mutilation of Launay also equates her with the decapitating Guillotine.

The mythological register that Dickens borrows from Carlyle informs the characterization of Madame Defarge. Carlyle refers to the women revolutionaries in his chapter “The Insurrection of Women” as “Maenads” (Black 99). Linda Lewis calls Carlyle’s use of these mythical registers, “political Maenadism” (Lewis 31). In Carlyle’s version, women who took up arms were also referred to as fallen or castrating women: “Amazons,” “Judiths,” “Eve’s Daughters,” and “serpent-haired Extreme She Patriots” (38). While Carlyle uses abundant allegory in his book, Lewis argues, Dickens creates “a tribe of women” to mirror Carlyle’s Maenads: “women warriors who organize neighborhood gangs, participate in the bloodiest action of the Revolution, and provide evidence that political womanhood is a force to be feared and rejected” (Lewis 32). Both Black and Lewis assert that Dickens shares Carlyle’s disapproval of women in the political sphere. Also through Carlyle, or perhaps the cartload of books recommended by him, Dickens uses historical figures to construct Madame Defarge. Lewis cites several critics who liken Madame Defarge to Anne-Josèphe Théroigne, former courtesan and salonnière who, in the women’s march on Versailles in October of 1789, was
conspicuously wearing a “plumed hat, short riding skirt, and red revolutionary sash, saber at her side” (35). Often referred to as the “‘Amazon of Liberty,” Théroigne is said to have led the women of Paris to arm themselves. Lewis further argues that although there was not a unified women’s movement during the Revolution, Dickens caricatures radical feminism by assigning certain acts to female participants, like the cutting off of Launay’s head, that other histories do not (Lewis 37). This also serves to delegitimize any revolutionary sentiment. Lewis argues overall that Madame Defarge is an allegorical figure, although the “abstract qualities” that she claims Madame Defarge represents (31) are not as clear-cut. Lewis explain the tenor of this allegory as such: “If Madame Defarge is, as I argue, political womanpower unleashed, the allegory is plain: women, if given the power, will castrate the very civic state that in public art had been personified by the icon of a grand, serene female” (42). However, allegory is not an appropriate term for the complexity involved in Madame Defarge’s inscription through mythical and iconic registers. She is constructed with pieces of these registers, but functions more as a projection of British anxieties of political unrest. Her femininity is a tool used to conflate political unrest with radical feminism to further stabilize a British middle class national identity by delegitimizing the French Revolution.

To distance the possibility of political unrest, Dickens also inscribes Madame Defarge as a colonial other. Priti Joshi, in her analysis of iconography in response to the Indian Mutiny, discusses one particular image by John Tenniel that depicts the British lion pouncing upon a Bengal Tiger about to devour a supine, naked (read: helpless) woman and child. Joshi states:

Madame Defarge, with a “bright shawl” wrapped around her head like a turban and large, gypsy earrings (41), is Orientalized from the start, but becomes
Indianized first when her “shadow” falls, “threatening and dark, on both the mother and the child” (265) and then when she becomes a “tigress” with the single-minded obsession to destroy Lucie and her daughter (354). Both descriptions evoke Tenniel’s tiger menacing the helpless woman and child. (Joshi 79)59

Although Joshi does not reference Madame Defarge’s dark complexion in her “darkly defined eyebrows” (Dickens 41), Joshi uses both Madame Defarge’s clothing and bodily position in relation to the innocent English woman and her child to draw out the similarity with reactionary iconography, which also establishes Madame Defarge’s alterity with her similarity to the Indian body.

However, Joshi’s observations are called into question by the brief mention in Linda Lewis’ article about an antecedent to Madame Defarge in Mademoiselle Hortense in Dickens’ Bleak House, published in 1852 (Lewis 44). The presence of a tiger-like French woman before the Indian Mutiny of 1857 reveals a strong and preexistent anxiety toward colonial subjects. In Bleak House, Esther Summerson describes Hortense: “There was a lowering energy in her face, ... which seemed to bring before me some woman from the streets of Paris in the reign of terror” (Bleak 286). Both Madame Defarge and Hortense are described as being like a tiger, with Hortense’s “tigerish expansion of the mouth” (648) but more importantly, both women are associated with an uncomfortable gaze: “One face, and not an agreeable one, though it was handsome, seemed maliciously watchful of this pretty girl, and indeed of every one and everything there. It was a Frenchwoman’s” (224). When Esther allows her to kiss her hand, Hortense looks at her quite intently: “She looked at me more intently as she took it, and seemed to take note, with her momentary touch, of every vein in it” (286). Immediately

59 Joshi’s original page references in this excerpt have been replaced by references to the edition used in this chapter.
before Esther’s eyes meet those of her yet unknown mother, Lady Dedlock, Hortense is “maliciously watchful.” She is later described as “a sufficiently good-looking Frenchwoman” with an “expression” that is “something of the intensest” (283). Esther saw that Hortense “cast off her shoes and walked through the wet grass, on the day when it thundered and lightened” (284). Walking barefoot is also significant of the peasant background of Madame Defarge, as she is described walking to the Darnay’s apartment: “Thus accoutred, and walking with the confident tread of such a character, and with the supple freedom of a woman who had habitually walked in her girlhood, barefoot and bare-legged, on the brown sea-sand” (A Tale 354). Hortense has “fine black eyebrows” (Bleak 285), a “dark cheek” (647) and “black eyes” (648) which recall Madame Defarge’s “darkly defined eyebrows” (A Tale 41). Hortense’s intense and earnest nature frightens Esther (Bleak 285). When Hortense visits the Snagsby’s, Mrs. Snagsby has a hysterical fit and falls down the stairs, and afterwards even Mr. Snagsby finds her presence eerie when she “hovers” around the courtroom (515-16). He then compares her to a broom girl, suggesting a gypsy broom-peddlar: “I never had an idea of a foreign female, except as being formerly connected with a bunch of brooms and a baby, or at the present time with a tambourine and ear-rings” (516). The association with Madame Defarge’s gypsy-like appearance is clear with her shawl turban and “large earrings” (A Tale 40-1). Hortense’s intense hatred, while trapped by Mr. Bucket after being accused by Mrs. Bucket for conspiracy to commit murder, is such that she “would love to tear her limb from limb” (Bleak 652). This is immediately preceded by the statement that she would like to “kiss” her, possibly meant as ironic, but still equating a sensual show of affection to violent disarticulation. Likewise, in A Tale of Two Cities, Madame Defarge’s
violence is made all the more frightening because of her sexual allure. Considering Madame Defarge’s is preceded by Mlle. Hortense, a character from a novel published before the Indian Mutiny, Joshi’s observations prove instead that fear of colonial subjects inform Dickens’ women even before the Mutiny of 1857. The “tigerish” appearance of both Hortense and Madame Defarge also implies an aggressive sexuality that further separates these women from the ideal, domestic feminine.

Madame Defarge’s sexual allure is troublesome because of her apparent omniscience. Although she is often the object of a voyeuristic gaze, focused on sites of sexual significance in middle-class Victorian culture such as her hair, bosom, legs, waist, and legs (Lewis 35), it is the watchfulness of Madame Defarge which makes her such a frightening figure in the text. She is the scrutinized female body that gazes back. Her “watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything” implies that her mere presence could mean the possibility of being watched by her (A Tale 40). Her sure and conscientious character, “from which one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided” (40), makes her gaze threaten the voyeuristic male gaze used to describe her. As Madame Defarge makes her way through the Paris streets to the Manette apartment in order to kill Lucie and her child, the narrator describes certain sexualized sites on her body, and what lies under her clothing:

Such a heart Madame Defarge carried under her rough robe. Carelessly worn, it was a becoming robe enough, in a certain weird way, and her dark hair looked rich under her coarse red cap. Lying hidden in her bosom was a loaded pistol. Lying hidden at her waist was a sharpened dagger. (354)
The narrator’s voyeuristic gaze looks under her clothes, in an invasively sexual gesture; yet, what he finds are weapons. This excerpt exemplifies Barbara Black’s assertion that Madame Defarge points toward fin-de-siècle representations of “monstrous femininity” (Black 93), where the sexual woman exacts a kind of violence on society. Here, Madame Defarge does this quite literally. In instances such as this excerpt, she hardly acknowledges being looked at, but is still keenly aware of her surroundings. When the mender of roads enters the wine shop, she was “so particularly determined not to perceive that his being there had any connection with anything below the surface” (A Tale 175). Her incessant knitting is also an element of this watchfulness. She is constructing a register of the wrongs done against her class, and at several points in the narrative she is seen at the site of another wrong done to the working class, knitting. After the Marquis runs over a child, the father takes the dead child away, and “the one woman who had stood conspicuous, knitting, still knitted on with the steadfastness of Fate” (A Tale 117). Like an author, Madame Defarge’s knitted register also plans the fate of those who wronged her and her class, and this knitting becomes what Barbara Black calls “an image of voice” (Black 98). The French crowds are not given an articulate voice to express their political wishes in this text, because the working class cannot enter the symbolic order and because they are in the service of reinforcing a British identity. Yet, the revolutionaries that Madame Defarge represents are “heard” by their bodies: the Carmagnole, their costumes at the grindstone, and physical violence. Even Madame Defarge’s knitting is the mute performance of the effort to have a voice.
Revolution as Woman’s Revenge: Resort to the Hysterical

*Hold of it was lost in the raging fever of a nation, as it is in the fever of one patient.* (A Tale 270)

The representation of the revolutionary crowd and its icon, Madame Defarge, reveals a conglomeration of anxieties around the working class body in revolt. Dickens masterfully disguises the bodies from historical accounts, such as that of Mercier, in the clothes of Victorian anxieties so that the Parisian revolutionaries are reduced to a feminized mass hysteria. Peter Melville Logan’s interpretation of Chadwick’s *Sanitary Report* shows that the working class body is the locus of a moral contagion, infected through the unsanitary environment and bred into habits of sexual promiscuity, drink, and uncleanliness (Logan 150-151). A consistent pattern to Chadwick’s representation of the working class is the inability to educate the working class because they lack the moral sensibility that characterizes the bourgeoisie (156). More importantly, the working class body is immersed in the material world, and is incapable of entering the symbolic; their resistance to education leaves them outside the sphere of representation. The ideological assumption is that their lack of sensibility makes them unable to have a voice in the public sphere (157). Madame Defarge’s knitted register is an example of this silence. As only a material body, the working class is capable of a mute performance of speech and is never heard.

The feminization of the working class in *A Tale of Two Cities* adds yet another dimension to this silencing. Looking through the lens of bourgeois ideology, Chadwick pathologizes the working class. By depicting the revolutionary crowds as largely feminine, Dickens furthers this pathology by representing their revolt as the performance
of a particularly female malady: hysteria. The women’s behavior at the hanging of Foulon, in light of Deborah Wynne’s article on the crowd’s likeness to Irish revivalism, shows the crowd’s psychology leading toward an excess of emotion, physical symptoms of this excess such as fainting, and aberrant feminine violence. Logan writes that “hysteria undermines the authority to speak” (Logan 3) and is associated with women’s exclusion from the sphere of representation (9). Robbed of a voice, and yet struggling violently to obtain it, is what drives the violence of the Paris revolutionaries. The group struggling against the narrative into which they are inscribed, yet who is incapable of entering the symbolic sphere of representation because it is incapable of being educated in its codes, has recourse only to what is considered hysterical violence.

The narrator in *A Tale of Two Cities* constructs a personal history for Madame Defarge that serves to further mute the already caricaturized revolutionary by reducing the working class’s desire for social change to the revenge of a personal traumatic past. A central moment of the narrative is the revelation of the letter discovered by Defarge in North Tower 105, which had been written by Dr. Manette during his imprisonment. Here, Dr. Manette recounts a clandestine visit to a hysterical peasant woman, later discovered to be the sister of Madame Defarge, who had recently been raped by the Evremonde brothers. This framed text, revealed near the end of the novel’s narrative during the second trial of Charles Darnay, divulges the secret interrelation of the Manettes, Defarges, and Evremondes. The letter also centers the novel about the French Revolution in a much more personal, private conflict. Thus, Dickens reduces the public political conflict to the irrationality of feminine crowds. In the letter, Manette explains the circumstances surrounding his imprisonment in the Bastille. Positioned as central to
the unfolding of the previous narrative, it provides a personal reason for Defarges’ revolutionary activities. Although appearing late in the text, it presents the earliest scene in the novel’s chronology and provides an explanation for previous events. Lisa Robson notes the importance of this singularly voyeuristic moment in stating that “this rape generates the action which comprises the novel” (Robson 209). Framed as an inserted text, the account of Dr. Manette functions as a reductive allegory. The aristocracy has violated the lower classes, here in the form of Madame Defarge’s hysterical sister. In this framed parable about the origin of revolutionary violence, Dr. Manette describes being taken by two aristocrats to a country home. He passes through two locked thresholds, the outer gate and the door to the home, to find a hysterical female whose screams could already be heard outside. Central to the unraveling of this narrative is the gaze of the doctor upon a hysterical woman:

“The patient was a woman of great beauty, and young; assuredly not much past twenty. Her hair was torn and ragged, and her arms were bound to her sides with sashes and handkerchiefs. I noticed that these bonds were all portions of a gentleman’s dress....

“I saw this, within the first minute of my contemplation of the patient; for, in her restless strivings she had turned over on her face on the edge of the bed, had drawn the end of the scarf into her mouth, and was in danger of suffocation...

“I turned her gently over, placed my hands upon her breast to calm her and keep her down, and looked into her face. Her eyes were dilated and wild, and she constantly uttered piercing shrieks, and repeated the words, ‘My husband, my father, and my brother!’ and then counted up to twelve and said, ‘Hush!’” (A Tale 315)

The doctor observing the madwoman allegorizes the larger thematic of the novel of the English regard of the irrational political violence of the French Revolution. Albert Hutter describes this scene as “a microcosm of the larger narrative” (Hutter 90) and a “‘primal scene’ of the text itself” (91). The central moment of discovery is the doctor
encountering the hysteric. Pierre Briquet describes the gaze of the female hysteric as “blank,” “unfocused,” or “fixed on one object” (Ender 44) and argues that this is evidence of the “violence done to her mind by her emotions” (40). Here the woman’s eyes are “dilated and wild” and her screaming rants make no sense to the observer. The body of the hysterical patient is a spectacle, inscribed with signs that not only mark her sexual difference, but also her distance from the capacity for rational discourse. In Dr. Manette’s account, the peasant girl is unable to communicate and senselessly repeats the word, “Hush,” an ironic reference to her silencing. The emphasis on displaying and acting out symptoms in this encounter with the hysteric is made even more salient here with the narration of Dr. Manette himself. In his examination of Madame Defarge’s older brother who is dying of a sword wound, this personal shame is politicized and inserted into the discourse of the metaphorical rape of the underclass that is Dickens’ reductive definition of the Revolution:

“'She is my sister, Doctor. They have had their shameful rights, these nobles, in the modesty and virtue of our sisters, many years, but we have had good girls among us....

'We were so robbed by that man who stands there, as all we common dogs are by those superior beings – taxed by him without mercy, obliged to work for him without pay, obliged to grind our corn at his mill, obliged to feed scores of his tame birds on our wretched crops, ...

'Nevertheless, Doctor, my sister married.... She had not been married many weeks, when that man’s brother saw her and admired her, and asked that man to lend her to him – for what are husbands among us.” (A Tale 318-19)

In this allegory of the political conflict of the novel, the class distinctions are extreme, as well as the abuses of this power. Imprisoned by the aristocratic landowners, the peasants are mere property and are treated as such. In the words of the dying brother of Madame Defarge, the agency of self-definition, such as the status of being married, for example, is
illegitimate. Silenced by her inability to use the accepted public discourse that placed the individual as a recognizable member of a larger social order (i.e. the symbolic), the hysteric is left only to rant and rave, much to the perplexity of the privileged observer.

The use of the hysterical feminine as a generator of revolutionary violence that disrupts the domestic sphere takes on more significance when viewed in relation to Dickens’ life at the time of writing *A Tale*. Dickens’ own personal experience with this particular female malady may very well have come from the strained relationship with his wife, which took place not long before the novel’s composition. He publicly announced their separation in 1858 in a personal statement in *Household Words* (Bloom 135). In this statement published June 12, 1858, Dickens writes: “Some domestic trouble of mine, of longstanding, on which I will make no further remark than that it claims to be respected, as being of a sacredly private nature, has lately been brought to an arrangement;” all in order to dispel what Dickens terms “most grossly false” “misrepresentations” of his personal life (House 744). His intimate letters reveal a closer tie to hysteria. In what is known as the “violated letter,” written on May 25 1858, which was not intended for public circulation, Dickens states that his wife’s “increasing estrangement made a mental disorder under which she sometimes labours” (House 740). In an earlier letter to Miss Burdett Coutts from May 9 1858, Dickens claims that Catherine’s ineptitude as a mother was one reason for their separation in that she “never presented herself before them in the aspect of a mother. I have seen them fall off from her in a natural – not unnatural – progress of estrangement” (559). Since *A Tale of Two Cities* appears in April of 1859, there is the question whether Dickens’ marriage conflicts could have influenced this representation of a feminine “mental disorder” (Bloom 135).
In this light, Dickens’ own preface to the novel written in November 1859 takes on a new meaning. In the context of discussing the novel’s debt to Wilkie Collins’ *The Frozen Deep*, Dickens writes:

> As the idea became familiar to me, it gradually shaped itself into its present form. Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it myself. (A Tale xvii)

Although claiming a shared sensibility with his characters, this further begs the question how much of this text Dickens has suffered himself, or those dear to him have suffered. This reference to Dickens’ personal life does not at all imply that a similar trauma was experienced by either him or his wife; instead, it makes his interest in this particular female malady relevant to the writing of *A Tale of Two Cities*. In light of other critics’ assertions that Dickens identifies with the main male character of the novel, Charles Darnay, who is forced to leave his motherland because of its pathological revolt, the novel evokes sympathy for the man thrown into exile to avoid feminine rage.60

Dickens’ use of the hysterical woman as parabolic social body in the rape that generates the narrative inscribes the body of the revolutionary as the return of a traumatic past. While the revolutionary fights for a new social order that promises a better future for the disenfranchised working class, this novel silences any possibility of revolution by encoding it as hysterical return of past trauma. Moreover, the actions of the revolutionaries are completely pathologized through the lens of bourgeois domesticity and the privileged gaze of the doctor. The violation and theft of the young girl’s virtue constructs the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* as the vengeful return of a

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60 See Leonard Manheim, “A Tale of Two Characters: A Study in Multiple Projection” and Franklin E. Court, “*A Tale of Two Cities*: Dickens, Revolution, and the Other C... D...”
traumatic past in the figure of Madame Defarge. The Revolution inspired by the revenge for the rape of a peasant girl nullifies any possibility of a voice in public affairs for the working class in revolt. Instead, the French Revolution in this text is the vengeful female, traumatized and hysterical, who was never a part of the social order. Despite her rage against this order, her threat is exorcised through the sacrifice of the reformed Sidney Carton, and the bourgeois social order is reinstated.
CHAPTER THREE

WORKS CITED


CHAPTER FOUR
The Immaterial Revolutionary in *Les Misérables*

There is very little criticism on the revolutionary body in *Les Misérables*. Except for a brief discussion by Shoshana Milgram on Enjolras as the inspiration for the hero in Ayn Rand’s *Fountainhead*, there is little critical attention paid to the body of the revolutionary, and body politics in general, in Hugolian scholarship. Mario Vargas Llosa does, however, discuss Hugo’s ambivalent attitude toward the working class revolt of 1832 in “Les Civilisés de la Barbarie.” Although Vargas Llosa’s book *Temptation of the Impossible* is a politically informed discussion of the novel’s poetic endeavor, there is little attention paid to the political implications of the bodies represented. Likewise, Kathryn Grossman’s book, *Figuring Transcendence in Les Misérables*, focuses on the functioning of sublimation in the novel, again disregarding the representation of the material body. This critical trend reveals more about Hugo’s treatment of the working class body in his novelistic project; that is, the transcendence of material details to construct an idealized pattern of historical change. Throughout *Les Misérables*, Hugo is consistently in dialogue with the dominant voices of history as he pulls from myriad registers to represent the working class. He engages with contemporary discourses of sanitary science and miasmatism, political rhetoric, philosophy, and fiction. Despite the wealth of language and perspectives that Hugo utilizes in his representation of the working class, the small group of revolutionaries, the ABCs, is problematic. Throughout

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61 For the influence of Victor Hugo on the work of Ayn Rand, see Shoshana Milgram “Three Inspirations for the Ideal Man: Cyrus Paltons, Enjolras, and Cyrano de Bergerac” and “We the Living and Victor Hugo: Ayn Rand’s First Novel and the Novelist She Ranked First.”
his discussion of social issues, he depicts the social body as a female whose virtue must be defended at all costs. Through this overarching metaphor, and by skirting through multiple perspectives on working class revolt, the narrator of *Les Misérables* effectively avoids aligning with any stance either for or against the violent insurrection of June 1832. Just as the social body for Hugo is devoid of any sexual desire, so is the representation of the revolutionary devoid of materiality. Stuck between competing narratives of bourgeois progress and social justice, Hugo is quite hesitant to endorse revolution. In order to escape this political impasse, the violence of the revolutionary is contained through the aestheticized figure of Enjolras as a pure idealized possibility, without any messy materiality that could entrench the text in a polemic that Hugo stealthily avoids.

The role of the writer presented in *Les Misérables* is as a social diagnostician. While Hugo describes the movement of *Les Misérables* as one toward illumination, the writer is also diagnosing the ills of the social body in a kind of “clinique sociale” (III 30):62 “Nous avons partout sur elle le droit de lumière; nous contemplons ses beautés et nous mettons à nu ses difformités. La où elle a mal, nous sondons; et, une fois la souffrance constatée, l’étude de la cause mène à la découverte du remède” (III 29).63 The writer is the social doctor, bringing social ills to light. Through this diagnostic process, Hugo’s narrator proposes to cure social injustices by enlightening his readers on the true nature of these ills. Throughout his work on Hugo, Mario Vargas Llosa refers to the narrator as the divine stenographer, working off of Hugo’s use of the verb

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62 The edition of *Les Misérables* in the original French consists of three volumes. In parenthetical references, the Roman numeral is given to represent the volume along with the page number from that volume.

63 Citations in English are taken from the Charles E. Wilbour translation: “social clinic” (868). “We have everywhere upon it the rights of light; we contemplate its beauties and we lay bare its deformities. Where it is unsound we probe; and, once the disease is determined, the study of the cause leads to the discovery of the remedy.” (656)
“stenographier” in his *Choses Vues* (Llosa, “Les Civilisés” 96). The narrator’s perspective in *Les Misérables* is one that records historical events with a view toward the movement of history as a whole, in the most omniscient and disengaged manner possible.

Unlike the projection involved in Charles Dickens’ representation of the revolutionary in *A Tale of Two Cities*, for the narrator of *Les Misérables*, revolution is defined using the discourse of the social body, where society as a whole takes on the guise of the innocent, and immanent, feminine. Revolution is figured as a cut: “les révolutions comme la révolution du juillet sont des artères coupées; il faut une prompte ligature” (II 392-3). In revolution, these severed arteries beat everywhere, and a network of secret societies spreads over the country (II 416). It is also imagined in terms of purification: “La révolution est la vaccine de la jacquerie” (III 25). It is a sanguinary cleansing of the ills of feudalism. In the narrator’s differentiation between “émeute” and “insurrection” he states that a riot (émeute) is the attack of a fraction against the whole, while an insurrection is the war of the whole against a fraction (III 88). Linked with this bodily metaphor is also the moral sense; insurrection always grows from a moral phenomenon likened to resurrection (III 90), a sentiment that the narrator describes:

Le sens révolutionnaire est un sens moral. Le sentiment du droit, développé, développe le sentiment du devoir. La loi de tous, c’est la liberté, qui finit où commence la liberté d’autrui, selon l’admirable définition de Robespierre. Depuis 89, le peuple tout entier se dilate dans l’individu sublimé; il n’y a pas de pauvre qui, ayant son droit, n’a son rayon; le meurt-de-faim sent en lui l’honnêteté de la France; la dignité du citoyen est une armure intérieure; qui est libre est scrupuleux; qui vote règne. De là l’incorruptibilité; de là l’avortement des convoitises malsaines; de là les yeux héroïquement baissés devant les tentations. L’assainissement révolutionnaire est tel qu’un jour de délivrance, un 14 juillet, un 10 août, il n’y a plus de populace. (III 25-6)

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64 “revolutions such as the Revolution of July, are arteries cut; a prompt ligature is needed.” (715)
65 “Revolution is vaccination for Jacquerie.” (864)
The revolutionary sense is a moral sense. The sentiment of rights, developed, develops the sentiment of duty. The law of all is liberty, which ends where the liberty of others begins, according to Robespierre’s admirable definition. Since ’89, the entire people has been expanding in the sublimated individual; there is no poor man, who, having his rights, has not his ray; the starving man feels within himself the honour of France; the dignity of the citizen is an interior armour; he who is free is scrupulous; he who votes reigns. Hence incorruptibility; hence the abortion of unnoxious lusts; hence the eyes heroically cast down before temptations. The revolutionary purification is such that on a day of deliverance, a 14th of July, or a 10th of August, there is no longer a mob. (864)

The social body here is the feminized body defending her virtue. Referring to the incorruptible Robespierre, the social body is cleansed and kept virtuous through revolution. The “avortement de convoitises malsaines” (“abortion of unnoxious lusts”) to the contemporary reader recalls the termination of a pregnancy, although in 1862, this term also refers to the failure of a natural process. Nevertheless, this does not deny the figurative use of the denial of temptation in connection with the purity of the body, a trope most often associated with the female body. The sanitizing of the social body is also associated with deliverance and, in the dates mentioned in this excerpt, this process is repeated at several points in history as a return to a lost purity. For Hugo, the revolutionary is configured as the agent of this purification.

The Crowds, Cholera, Jean, and the Writer

The cleansing of the social body takes on a particular resonance for Paris in the 1830s. In 1832, Parisians experienced one of the most severe outbreaks of cholera, largely in working class neighborhoods, which has quite often been offered as one reason for the insurrection of June 1832 represented in Les Misérables, along with the funeral of General Lamarque, republican and left-leaning member of the Parliament. In their book,
L’Insurrection des Misérables, Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy state that this insurrection, although powerful enough to have threatened Louis-Phillippe’s reign, is almost absent from French historiography, and received only occasional reference in relation to the cholera outbreaks (Sayre and Lowy 3-4). Most of those participating in the June insurgency were workers hit hard by the unemployment crisis, and because of their poverty, they were also the most threatened by the disease that now we know is transmitted through the lack of sanitation (16). In his book, Et le Cholera s’abattit sur Paris 1832, Ange-Pierre Leca traces the progress of the outbreak from the fertile grounds for infection in the poor sewage and living conditions of the city, to the after-effects of riots and the loss of over one fifth of the Parisian population. Leca states that according to La Gazette Médicale from June 9, 1832, General Lamarque is reported to have died from cholera on June 1, after which rumors abounded that the working class was being purposely poisoned. This was not proven to be true, but Leca describes how the working class began to perceive the epidemic as a curse directed toward them: “Premiers atteints, assistant impuissants à la fuite des riches, perdant souvent par là même leur emploi, ils ressentent l’épidémie comme une malédiction dirigée contre eux” (207).66 Thus the plight of the working class: their abuse at the hands of industrialists, the lack of sanitation and proper medical care given to them in the worst epidemic to strike Paris since the Plague. The “misérables” are the forgotten populace who struggle for a voice in the decentralized insurrections in June of 1832. To exemplify this aggregate invisibility in the novel is the hero and criminal Jean Valjean. Although this essay will not discuss the protagonist of the novel, and will instead focus on the marginal characters of the

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66 “The first reached [by the disease] powerlessly assisting the flight of the rich, in the process losing their own employment, they resent the epidemic like a curse directed against them.” My translation.
revolutionaries, Jean Valjean is a representative type of these working classes. He lacks a stable identity. He is never given a last name: “Valjean” is a contraction of “voilà Jean.” He takes on several different personas to hide his criminal past. He is Monsieur Madeleine, the kind mayor of a small town suspected by Inspector Javert to be an escaped prisoner; he is Ultime Fauchelevant, the brother of the groundskeeper at the convent in Paris where he hides out with Cosette; he is Monsieur LeBlanc to Marius; and he is Urbain Fabre, another manifestation of the initials U.F. In Michal Peled Ginsburg’s discussion of teaching *Les Misérables* in comparison with Dickens’ *Bleak House*, Jean Valjean reads like a Foucauldian analysis *avant la lettre*. A member of the invisible working classes, he is unidentifiable until under the gaze of the law or charity (Ginsburg 144-5). Hugo engages in discourse around the masses in Paris, which he also terms “*tristes plantes humaines*” (“sad human plants”) to also indicate their lack of voice and agency. They are considered part of the Parisian landscape. However, for Hugo, these masses can be educated, and they can become veritable subjects:

C’est surtout dans les faubourgs, insistons-y, que la race parisienne apparait; là est le pur sang; là est la vraie physionomie; là ce peuple travaille et souffre, et la souffrance et le travail sont les deux figures de l’homme. Il y a là des quantités profondes d’êtres inconnus où fourmillent les types les plus étranges depuis le déchargeur de la Râpée jusqu’à l’équarrisseur de Montfaucon. *Fex urbis, s’écrie Cicéron; mob, ajouté Burke indigné; tourbe, multitude, populace. Ces mots-là sont vite dit. Mais soit. Qu’importe? qu’est ce que cela me fait qu’ils aillent pieds nus? Ils ne savent pas lire; tant pis. Les abandonnerez-vous pour cela? leur ferez-vous de leur détresse une malédiction? la lumière ne peut-elle pénétrer ces masses? Revenons à ce cri: Lumière! et obstinons-nous-y! Lumière! lumière! – Qui sait si ces opacités ne deviendront pas transparentes? les révolutions ne sont-elles pas des transfigurations? Allez, philosophes, enseignez, éclairez, allumez, pensez haut, parlez haut, courez joyeux au grand soleil, fraternisez avec les places publiques... Faites de l’idée une tourbillon. Cette foule peut être sublimée... (II 134-5)
It is in the suburbs especially, we insist, that the Parisian race is found; there is the pure blood; there is the true physiognomy; there this people works and suffers, and suffering and toil are the two forms of men. There are vast numbers of unknown beings teeming with the strangest types of humanity, from the stevedore of the Rapée to the horsekiller of Montfaucon. *Fex urbis*, exclaims Cicero; *mob*, adds the indignant Burke; the herd, the multitude, the populace. Those words are quickly said. But if it be so, what matters it? What is it to me that they go barefoot? They cannot read. So much the worse. Will you abandon them for that? Would you make their misfortune their curse? Cannot the light penetrate these masses? Let us return to that cry: Light! and let us persist in it! Light! light! Who knows but that these opacities will become transparent? are not revolutions transfigurations? Proceed, philosophers, teach, enlighten, enkindle, think aloud, speak aloud, run joyously towards the broad daylight, fraternise in the public squares.... Make thought a whirlwind. This multitude can be sublimated. (517)

Using language that characterizes efforts of social reform to analyze the working class crowds, such as “the Parisian race,” “the true physiognomy,” Hugo engages with previous discourse on crowds, such as Burke’s condemnation of the urban masses, to argue for their education and sublimation. While Burke argues that the instability of the masses can provoke violence (Jonsson 53), Hugo proposes universal education to achieve the equality about which Burke is so suspicious. The habitual disregard for the suffering of the masses is unacceptable for Hugo; they must be enlightened. Through education, they will be able to free themselves from such tutelage to become active subjects. This passage also evokes the role of the writer for Hugo: to sublimate this crowd. It is no surprise that the publication of *Les Misérables* led to a higher literacy rate. Pierre Hamp, cited in Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, states that by 1862, illiteracy had greatly diminished in France. As the population began to patronize bookshops, authors took their heroes from the crowd, and Hugo is an example of this (Benjamin 769).

As part of a larger trend in the nineteenth-century novel in realist and proto-naturalist modes, the narrator in *Les Misérables* extends the analogy of the social
investigator to mining through the levels of social strata. Thus, the act of writing is a digging and uncovering, a bringing into the light: “À une certaine profondeur, les excavations ne sont plus pénétresables à l’esprit de civilisation, la limite respirable à l’homme est dépassée; un commencement de monstres est possible” (II 276). In this larval stage of social identity, the urban poor are considered the lowest level possible: “le troisième dessous. C’est la fosse de ténèbres. C’est la cave des aveugles. Inferi.” (II 277). The comparison to an inferno makes this strata otherworldly, as Hugo compares the plight of the misérables to Ugolino (II 277). This low stratum of society is compared to beasts with no sentiment of community, who are only capable of contemplating what Edwin Chadwick in his Sanitary Report terms their “habitual avidity for sensual gratification”:

Les silhouettes farouches qui rôdent dans cette fosse, presque bêtes, presque fantômes, ne s’occupent pas du progrès universel, elles ignorent l’idée et le mot, elles n’ont souci que de l’assouvissement individuel. Elles sont presque inconscientes, et il y a au dedans d’elles une sorte d’effacement effrayant. (II 276)

The savage outlines that prowl over this grave, half brute, half phantom, have no thought for universal progress, they ignore ideas and words, they have no care but for individual glut. They are almost unconscious, and there is in them a horrible defacement. (623)

The creatures of this stratum are inhuman and almost without conscience -- in Chadwick’s words “less susceptible to moral influences,” or unconscious (inconscient can imply both a lack of conscience and the unconscious). Here, the lack of thoughtful reflection and indifference to others and the community are both combined to define the working classes. Most importantly, this class is illiterate, exemplifying the lack of

67 “At a certain depth, the excavations become impenetrable to the soul of civilisation, the respirable limit of man is passed; the existence of monsters becomes possible.” (621)
68 “the third substage. It is the grave of the depths. It is the cave of the blind Inferi.” (622)
illumination in this cave that is “below everything” (475). These groups, according to Hugo, are an enemy to progress.

Exemplifying the lowest level of the social scale, who are unconscious, illiterate, and an enemy to Progress, are the members of the Patron-Minette group. Although there are four individuals described separately, Montparnasse, Claquesous, Gueulemer and Babet, they are still not completely differentiated. Hugo compares them to mythical monsters:

À eux quatre, ces bandits formaient une sorte de Protée, serpentant à travers la police et s’efforçant d’échapper aux regards indiscrets de Vidocq... défaisant leur personnalité comme on ôte son faux nez au bal masqué, parfois se simplifiant au point de ne plus être qu’un, parfois se multipliant au point que Coco-Lacour lui-même les prenait pour une foule.

Ces quatre hommes n’étaient point quatre hommes; c’était une sorte de mystérieux voleur à quatre têtes travaillant en grand sur Paris; c’était le polype monstrueux du mal habitant la crypte de la société. (II 281-2)

These four bandits formed a sort of Proteus, winding through the police and endeavouring to escape from the indiscreet glances of Vidocq..., throwing off their personalities, as one takes off a false nose at a masked ball, sometimes simplifying themselves till they are but one, sometimes multiplying themselves till Coco Lacour himself took them for a multitude.

These four men were not four men; it was a sort of mysterious robber with four heads preying upon Paris by wholesale; it was the monstrous polyp of evil which inhabits the crypt of society. (626)

Hugo describes these characters not as human beings, but species (“espèces”) that are not individuated, but are parts of the night (“désagrégés de la nuit”) (II 283, 284). Just as Jean Valjean is invisible until under the gaze of the law, other members of the voiceless working class have very fluid, often indistinguishable, identities. The Patron-Minette group is explicitly described by the narrator as parts to a larger, monstrous whole that threatens the social order and bourgeois progress.
Although Hugo may depict the working classes as dangerous and unreliable, when the masses are inspired by an ideal, they become a sublime entity of “the people” (II 134). The group of the ABCs is an example of the lower classes infused with this idealism. Hugo places them on a higher level of the social mine as:

un des compartiments de la mine supérieure, de la grande sape politique, révolutionnaire et philosophique. Là, nous venons de le dire, tout est noble, pur, digne, honnête. Là, certes, on peut se tromper, et l’on se trompe; mais l’erreur y est vénérable tant elle implique d’héroïsme. L’ensemble du travail qui se fait là a un nom: le Progrès. (II 278)

one of the compartment of the upper mine, the great political, revolutionary, and philosophic sap. There, as we have said, all is noble, pure, worthy, and honourable. There, it is true, men may be deceived and are deceived, but there error is venerable, so much heroism does it imply. For the sum of all work that is done there, there is one name: Progress. (623)

The ideal of social progress unites this group, and it is this moral conscience that elevates them to a higher social level. This is the group that attempts to engage with progress, and to elevate themselves in a heroic effort to being members of a French republic. In an image of the interior of a cafe, Hugo provides an example of the crowd in the process of its sublimation. They converse, joke and debate on taste, in an image of the people that is joyous and welcoming, to contradict the prejudices of Burke, for one, that insist on the irrationality and violence of the working class crowds. While Dickens struggles with a veritable anxiety of crowd psychology, for Hugo, the collectivity is joyous and celebratory:

Et les sarcasmes, les saillies, les quolibets, cette chose française qu’on appelle l’entrain, cette chose anglaise qu’on appelle l’humour, le bon et le mauvais goût, les bonnes et les mauvaises raisons, toutes les folles fusées du dialogue, montant à la fois et se croisant de tous les points de la salle, faisaient au-dessus des têtes une sorte de bombardement joyeux. (II 220)
And the sarcasms, the sallies, the jests, that French thing which is called high spirits, that English thing which is called humour, good taste and bad taste, good reasons and bad reasons, all the commingled follies of dialogue, rising at once and crossing from all points of the room, made above their heads a sort of joyous bombardment. (581-2)

The interior of the cafe is a space of the exchange of ideas, while the wine shop of *A Tale* is always somber and suspicious. In fact, the collective movements of the crowd, as in the Carmagnole, are outside in the street, as if the crowd is too wild to be housed. For Hugo, this collectivity defines the sublimated *peuple*, the working class crowd imbued with ideals that becomes an instrument of progress. In fact, the Patron-Minette group specifically lacks a sense of community, while in *A Tale*, the community only forms as a result of violence, either at the guillotine or at the celebration of the death of an aristocrat such as Foulon. In *Les Misérables*, the enlightened crowd represented in the ABCs is an integral part to forming a more just nation, while in *A Tale*, the crowd is perpetually an externality to bourgeois individualism necessary for social order.\(^6^9\)

Writing from within the social order that does not recognize these working class bodies as subjects, Hugo takes on a much more complex representational structure than the projection of anxieties that Dickens espouses. Mario Vargas Llosa, in his article “Les Civilisés de la Barbarie,” looks at Victor Hugo’s personal experience in June of 1832. Vargas Llosa writes that Hugo was an enthusiast for the Restoration, although two of his plays were censored, and had even better relations with the July Monarchy (“Civilisés” 101). In a personal anecdote, Hugo was walking in the Tuileries on June 5 when fighting broke out, and he had to hide behind one of the columns that separate the boutiques near Passage du Saumon (100). From Hugo’s correspondence with Sainte-Beuve from June 7

\(^{6^9}\) See Cates Baldridge, “Alternatives to Bourgeois Individualism in *A Tale of Two Cities.*”
1832, Vargas Llosa notes that Hugo expressed his solidarity with Saint-Beuve’s petition for the freedom of the press (which is restricted when a state of siege is declared), and that France is not yet ready because it must form gradually (101-2). Vargas Llosa concludes that at the moment when Hugo was hiding from the gunfire on June 5, he was more sympathetic to the forces of order than the insurgents (102). Moreover, in *Les Misérables* there are only two brief references to cholera. When Marius and Cosette are together in Paris, the narrator states that they did not perceive at all the cholera that decimated Paris (III 38). Another brief mention of cholera is following Hugo’s discussion of the problems with the social order during the reign of Louis-Phillippe:

“...le choléra ajoutaient à la sombre rumeur des idées le sombre tumulte des événements” (II 409). This is perhaps an oblique reference to the rumor that the working class was being poisoned; nevertheless, Hugo’s depiction of social unrest in this time has only miniscule room for material conditions in Paris. Referencing Louis Chevalier’s work on *Les Classes Dangereuses*, Vargas Llosa argues that historical exactitude takes a back seat to the fictionality of the text. This raises the question, however, of what constitutes this fictionality. For Vargas Llosa, the “divine stenographer” has a god-like omniscience over the movement of history. Hugo’s narrator, in this ultimate omniscience, compares the bodies of the revolutionaries to those from ancient Greece and Rome. While the historical particulars provide a backdrop for the fictional text, the ultimate subject, or the “ciment de ses episodes” (the cementing force of these episodes) is the mysterious hand of God (“Civilisés” 105). Thus, the account of the revolution is remarkably disengaged politically in the elegant metaphorical reference to classical antiquity; and, although the narrator attempts to dig to the depths of society to shed light on even its darkest regions,

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70 “…the cholera, added to the dismal tumult of ideas, the dismal uproar of events.” (729)
his project ends there. While refusing to engage in Burke’s condemnation of the working classes, Hugo does not grant them the autonomy they seek on June 5, 1832. He instead takes them out of historical context and places them in a transhistorical register of the equally de-historicized and idealized Greek and Roman texts. Thus the fictionality of the novel lies in how the revolutionary, paradoxically, is a return of the past, viewed from a god-like omniscience.

Reviving the Conventionist in 1832: G. and Enjolras

Hugo’s own ambiguous position in relation to the insurgents of June 1832 and the July Monarchy leads the representation of the revolutionaries in the text to be uncannily disengaged from the politics at hand. Instead of directly verbalizing the lack of employment and poor living conditions that enabled the spread of cholera, or even the mistaken yet formidable rumor that the working classes were being poisoned, the revolutionaries from 1832 in Les Misérables attempt to perform a previous revolution, the Terror of 1793. In their discussion of Hugo’s representation of this insurrection in Les Misérables, Sayre and Löwy describe French Romanticism in general as a “refusal of the present”:

Selon notre conception, le phénomène romantique ne se définit pas seulement comme mouvement littéraire et artistique, mais représente plus essentiellement une vision du monde, une des principales formes de conscience moderne, se manifestant dans tous les domaines de la vie culturelle et non pas seulement dans la littérature et les autres arts. Présente à toutes les époques de la modernité – de la fin du XVIIIe siècle jusqu’à nos jours – la vision du monde romantique est dans son essence un refus du présent; les aspects de ce présent qu’on récuse – et qui font souffrir – sont spécifiquement ceux qui caractérisent une société capitaliste, régie – et réifiée – par la valeur d’échange, par la toute-puissance de l’argent. Face à ce monde aliéné le Romantique porte un regard nostalgique vers un passé
According to our conception, the romantic phenomenon does not define itself only as a literary and artistic movement, but represents more essentially a world vision, one of the principal forms of modern conscience, manifested in all areas of cultural life and not only in literature and the other arts. Present in all the epochs of modernity, from the end of the eighteenth century until today, the romantic world vision is in its essence a refusal of the present. The aspects of this present that it challenges, and that cause suffering, are specifically those that characterize a capitalist society, governed and reified by exchange value, by the omnipotence of money. Faced with this alienated world, the Romantic carries a nostalgic regard toward a pre-capitalist past, mythic or real, and denounces the degraded present in the name of incarnate values, or values imagined as such, in the pre-capitalist past.... For an important current exists, itself taking diverse forms of revolutionary romanticism, where the ideal past is conceived as only a partial prefiguration of what can become a future liberated society.71

It is impossible to consider Hugo’s Romanticism without situating his writing within the context of issues of industrial capitalism in Paris. The “revolutionary romanticism” posits an ideal in a past economic system. While the present state of affairs is unacceptable, the revolutionary points toward an idealized past that he imagines as purer than the corrupted present. However, this idealized past is likewise taken out of its own historical context. The aspects of the present that are reified by exchange value lead the romantic revolutionary to look longingly toward an ideal past. This idealized past makes up a part of the future state of affairs that the revolutionary projects. Indeed, the reified present is replaced by a reified past.

In *Les Misérables*, the barricade scene in Tome 3 becomes a place of mythical transformation, where anybody present at the barricade is transformed into an idealized

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71 My translation.
remnant of the past. When the dazed and forlorn M. Mabeuf ascends the barricade to replace the flag, he is seen as a ghost of 1793 (III 181). This ghost is embodied in the figure of Conventionist G. at the beginning of the novel. In Chapter 10, entitled “L’évêque en présence d’une lumière inconnue” ("The Bishop in the Presence of an Unknown Light"), we are introduced to a dying Conventionist (I 38). After hearing the Conventionist’s servant looking for a doctor, Bienvenue Myriel leads the reader to the first glimpse of the revolutionary body in the novel. Myriel’s first impression of the Conventionist G. is that he is a complete outcast: “hors la loi, même hors la loi de charité” (I 41). Kathryn Grossman, in her book Figuring Transcendence in Les Misérables, notes that by the end of Napoleon’s rule, the former hero of 1793 had become an outlaw (Figuring 11). Myriel crosses several natural barriers to the excommunicated place that is the home of the Conventionist, in an almost comic exaggeration of G’s seclusion: “Il enjamba une fosse, franchit une haie, leva un échalier, entra dans un courtil délabré, fit quelques pas assez hardiment, et tout à coup, au fond de la friche, derrière une haute broussaille, il aperçut la caverne” (I 39). In a time of the Restoration, the old Conventionist is a pariah living in profane space, which Myriel is the first ever to enter (I 39). However, instead of being depicted as a criminal, the body of Conventionist G. is seen through the lens of the Christian compassion of Myriel. Yet, the link to the church is also imbued with certain allegiances to the monarchy, which makes the conversation between the old revolutionary and the bishop a representation of ideological confrontation. Conventionist G, even in his dying moments, defends his

72 “an outlaw, even to the law of charity.” (34)
73 “He jumped over a ditch, cleared a hedge, made his way through a brush fence, found himself in a dilapidated garden, and after a bold advance across the open ground, suddenly, behind some high brushwood, he discovered the retreat.” (33)
actions of 1793, and does not become the passive object of the inscription of Christian
law by confessing his wrongs. Similar to Madame Defarge’s disruption of the
voyeuristic gaze in Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, G. is yet another figure from the
French Revolution that resists such inscription.

In fact, he overtly struggles against being inscribed through the gaze of
Christianity, or any law at all. Conventionist G. offers his hand to Myriel when he
arrives, but the priest does not take it. G. then diagnoses himself, stating that he is “a bit
of a doctor”; first saying that he will heal, and then that he will die in three hours (I 40).
G. maintains a certain authority over himself, not only in his argument with Myriel, but
also in his demeanor: “G. semblait mourir parce qu’il le voulait bien. Il y avait de la
liberté dans son agonie” (I 41).  

G., with his self-possessed manner, erect figure, and vibrating voice, was one
of those noble octogenarians who are the marvel of the physiologist. The
revolution produced many of these men equal to the epoch: one felt that here was
a tested man. Though so near death, he preserved all the appearance of health.
His bright glances, his firm accent, and the muscular movements of his shoulders
seemed almost sufficient to disconcert death. Azrael, the Mahometan angel of the
sepulchre, would have turned back, thinking he had mistaken the door. (35)

G.’s physiognomy is indicative of an epoch, and serves as a model for the revolutionary
type that is developed later in the description of the ABCs. Early criticism notes these

74 “G__ seemed to be dying because he wished to die. There was freedom in his agony;” (35).
type characters as generalities of larger ideological positions. Charles Baudelaire, arguably quite knowledgeable about nineteenth-century Paris and its people, comments on the early parts of the novel:

Il est bien évident que l’auteur a voulu, dans Les Misérables, créer des abstractions vivantes, des figures idéales dont chacune, représentant un des types principaux nécessaires au développement de sa thèse, fût élevée jusqu’à une hauteur épique. C’est un roman construit en manière de poème, et où chaque personnage n’est exception que par la manière hyperbolique dont il représente une généralité. (Baudelaire 563)

It is quite evident that the author wanted, in Les Misérables, to create living abstractions, ideal figures of which each, representing one of the principal types necessary for the development of his thesis, is elevated to an epic height. It’s a novel constructed like a poem, and where each character is exceptional only in the hyperbolic way that he represents a generality.75

The body of G., a mystery to the physiologist, is resistant to the gaze of Myriel. This encounter of Christian charity with the dying member of France’s first defeated representative congress is an allegory of an ideological confrontation that only ends with the death of G. For Baudelaire, the characters are poetic generalities, which references the way these type characters of the novel pose as ideological positions. During the barricade fighting in Book Five, the narrator even admits to this generalization: “On a été entouré d’idées combattantes qui avaient des faces humaines” (III 282).76 It is in this sense that the novel places these ideological positions in conflict to interrogate the reader: “[C]’est un livre interrogant, posant des cas de complexité sociale, d’une nature terrible et navrante, disant à la conscience du lecteur : « Eh bien ? Qu’en pensez-vous ? Que concluez-vous ? »” (Baudelaire 563).77 Baudelaire describes the type of Myriel as “la

75 My translation.
76 “He was surrounded by combating ideas which had human faces” (1062)
77 “It’s an interrogating book, posing socially complex cases, of a terrible and distressing nature, saying to the conscience of the reader, ‘So? What do you think of it? What do you conclude?’” My translation.
charité hyperbolique,” as a generalization of the moral stance of the bishop (563). In *Character and Meaning in the Novels of Victor Hugo*, Isabel Roche supports Baudelaire’s description of characters constructed around a generality, as she describes Myriel as a “flat,” “symbolic” character that, quoting E.M. Forster, is “constructed around a single idea or quality” (Roche 70). Citing Patricia Ward’s argument in her 1972 article, “Nodier, Hugo, and the Concept of Type Character,” Roche states that the Romantic type character “is an individual who takes on universal characteristics and proportions not through his ‘general representative nature’ but ‘historically because his individuality makes him recognizable to all subsequent generations’” (59-60). The realist type character is also at play in the representation of the working class through miasmatic theory and the aggregate crowd, and is based on scientific and social generalities. Although Hugo uses a realist mode of passing thresholds into private spaces in an act of revealing a character, his characters are not developed according to social generalities, such as the exaggerated class difference between Defarge and the Evremondes. Instead, for Hugo they embody universal historical truths (68). In his book, *The Temptation of the Impossible*, Mario Vargas Llosa goes even further to argue that the characters, “seen through the lens of romanticism,” are in fact “schematic principles” or even “caricatures or stereotypes,” where they are “emblems of mutually incompatible virtues or vices” (*Temptation* 56) instead of the social generalities that inform the realist construction of character. Thus, Dickens constructs his characters based on an aggregate class, such as the aristocracy and the working class, while Hugo uses both realist and romantic devices. The characters of *Les Misérables* are universal schematic principles and social generalities, working together to construct an idealized pattern of historical change.
If Myriel is the representation of Christian charity, and of the position of the church in the restoration, then what is the generality represented by G.? In his article “La Gaffe di Victor Hugo,” (“The Victor Hugo’s Mistake”) Sergio Luzzatto notes that G’s identity is “cifrato,” (encoded) as if the narrator did not want to divulge the true identity of the socially outcast Conventionist (Luzzato 240). Presented as a person of beliefs antithetical to the Christian charity of Myriel, G. refutes Myriel’s condemnation of the violence of ’93, and also refutes the inscription of a dying man in need of repentance. G. diagnoses himself, taking the authority of the doctor to inscribe and interpret the signs of the ailing body. He also does not appear to be dying; he would surprise the physiologist with his gestures of health. He is a living past, albeit with one foot in the grave:


...his legs only were paralysed; his feet were cold and dead, but his head lived in full power of life and light. At this solemn moment G___ seemed like the king in the oriental tale, flesh above and marble below. (35)

Because of the liveliness of his mind, his gradual paralysis and death makes a fantastic figure of him, from an oriental fairy tale. G. is half alive, and half statue. The description of the revolutionary body is repeated later in the figure of Enjolras, as if the past of 1793 is an absent cause that remains encoded in the text as an idealized past. The repetition of G. in the body of Enjolras refers back to this cipher. Also repeated in the figure of Enjolras is the single falling tear. As the end nears, G. looks up to the sky: “Il regarda le ciel, et une larme germa lentement dans ce regard. Quand la paupière fut
pleine, la larme coula le long de sa joue livide” (I 47). Another bodily gesture that is repeated later in relation to the figure of Enjolras is someone getting down on their knees before him. The bishop sees that the time of G.’s death is near, and he kneels down before him to give the benediction. When he looked back up, the Conventionist’s face had become august and he died (I 47). The representation of a stoic and outlawed revolutionary of the past in the figure of G. is highlighted by his metamorphosis into marble as his body becomes paralyzed. The use of the marble imagery also supports Goncourt’s criticism of Hugo’s characters in the novel: that they lack vitality, and are more bronze or alabaster than flesh and bone (Luzzatto 241). In his death, G. becomes a monument of history, and the old Conventionist returns in the insurgents’ interpretation of the battle in the barricade scenes. Luzzatto interprets the placement of G. at the beginning of the novel as a move of the narrator to place the entire novel under the same rubric of 1793 (240). As the first representation of the revolutionary body in the novel, which is repeated again in the representational registers for the later revolutionaries, the Conventionist becomes a lens through which the insurgents categorize and validate the revolutionary actions of 1832. Thus, the revolutionary is constructed as an emblem of this return to a purer state of being, and gestures toward a state of nature that has been lost in the modern world.

The question of religion and national identity for Hugo is first posed in the juxtaposition of Conventionist G. and Myriel, where G. argues his belief in science against Myriel’s position as a Catholic priest. In his dying moments, G. acknowledges God as “le moi de l’infini” (“the me of the infinite”) as he looks up at the sky (I 47).

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78 “He looked up into the sky, and a tear gathered slowly in his eye. When the lid was full, the tear rolled down his livid cheek” (39).
These opposing positions are gradually synthesized in the narrative as Hugo links the belief in Progress with the recognition of the will of God. The group of ABCs (the abaissés – the debased) is the sublimated lower classes -- more importantly, they are sublimated through the repetition of an idealized past. For the ABCs, their belief in progress takes on a religious meaning:

Tous ces jeunes gens, si divers, et dont, en somme, il ne faut parler que sérieusement, avaient une même religion: le Progrès.

All these young men, diverse as they were, and of whom, as a whole we ought only to speak seriously, had the same religion: Progress.

For the young revolutionaries, progress is their religion. Before his death, Enjolras describes them as “les prêtres de la république” (III 159). The veneration of an idealized past is referred to only with solemnity, as if the story of 1789 were a religious text. They are equally children of this past, their paternal blood replaced by the “pure blood of principles.” The sanctity of the idealized French Revolution is perpetuated through the imitation of this past in the present of the barricade fighting of June 5. The historical moments of ‘89 and ‘93 return from the past as a kind of gospel. While this

79 “the priests of the republic” (966).
serves as a lens through which the revolutionary activities of June 5 may be valorized, it
simultaneously serves to contain the threat of contemporary social upheaval. The
material conditions of the 1832 insurrections are erased as Hugo instead inscribes them
with the ideal of a past representative democracy.

In several moments of the narrative, the insurgents identify themselves through
the repetition of past figures from the ‘89 revolution. In the cafe Musain, Enjolras gives
orders to members of the group to gain support. Grantaire, though a skeptic, wants to
help (if only because he reveres Enjolras) and says he plans to speak to the people in that
quarter about Robespierre and Danton. After Enjolras agrees to send Grantaire to the
barrière du Maine, Grantaire leaves and returns dressed for the occasion:

Il sortit, et revint cinq minutes après. Il était allé chez lui mettre un gilet à la
Robespierre.
- Rouge, dit-il en entrant, et en regardant fixement Enjolras.
  Puis, d’un plat de main énergique, il appuya sur sa poitrine les deux
  pointes écarlates du gilet.
  Et, s’approchant d’Enjolras, il lui dit à l’oreille
  -- Sois tranquille. (II 423)

He went out, and came back in five minutes. He had been home to put on a
Robespierre waistcoat.
“Red,” said he as he came in, looking straight at Enjolras.
Then, with the flat of his huge hand, he smoothed the two scarlet points of
his waistcoat over his breast.
And, approaching Enjolras, he whispered in his ear:
“Set your mind at ease.” (741)

Grantaire’s reassurance to Enjolras that he will fulfill his duty is in part through the
performative aspect of righteous revolt à la Robespierre. Considering the fluidity of
identity of the lower classes, such as Thénardier/Jondrette, Claquesous/Cabuc, and of
course Père Madeleine/M. Fauchelevant/Jean Valjean, this costume of Robespierre
makes the body of the revolutionary, otherwise the nameless urban body, superscribed through an idealized past. Thénardier changes his identity for personal profit, while Jean Valjean alters his identity to fit into his surroundings and to raise Cosette. The revolutionary is identified as such through the repetition of an idealized pre-industrial capitalist past to project a future social body that is purer than the present.

The performance of Mabeuf at the barricades is a return of the Conventionist G., a repetition of a past that refuses to die. In *Les Misérables* as well as in *Notre Dame de Paris*, the narrator laments an “eroded relationship between past and present,” to use the words of Isabel Roche, and places himself in the role of a “double historian” to interpret for the reader the historical link between the fictional world and the world from which Hugo writes (Roche 107). For instance, Père Mabeuf is hardly a revolutionary: “M. Mabeuf avait pour opinion politique d’aimer passionnément les plantes, et surtout les livres” (II 239). He is also afraid of any violence:

La vue d’un sabre ou d’un fusil le glaçait. De sa vie, il n’avait approché d’un canon, même aux Invalides. Il avait un estomac passable, un frère curé, les cheveux tout blancs, plus de dents ni dans la bouche ni dans l’esprit, un tremblement de tout le corps, l’accent picard, un rire enfantin, l’effroi facile, et l’air d’un vieux mouton (II 240).

The sight of a sword or a gun chilled him. In his whole life, he had never been near a cannon, even at the Invalides. He had a passable stomach, a brother who was a curé, hair entirely white, no teeth left either in his mouth or in his mind, a tremor of the whole body, a Picard accent, a childlike laugh, weak nerves, and the appearance of an old sheep. (597)

Isabel Roche describes Mabeuf as having an unwavering innocence (Roche 81).

Mabeuf’s financial situation becomes more desperate as he is forced to sell off almost all

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80 “Monsieur Mabeuf’s political opinion was a passionate fondness for plants, and a still greater one for books.” (596)
of his belongings, including his books. Unthinking and distraught, he heads toward the street fighting: “Le père Mabeuf rentra chez lui, prit son chapeau, chercha machinalement un livre pour le mettre sous son bras, n’en trouva point, dit : Ah ! c’est vrai ! et s’en alla d’un air égaré” (III 81). Mabeuf is gradually losing his sanity by heading toward the barricades. As he approaches, Enjolras and his group see him zigzagging through the streets as if he were drunk, with his hat in his hand even though it was raining (III 120). When he reaches the barricades, he refuses to leave despite Enjolras’ warning. Mabeuf has lost his mind, and consequently his identity, and another is inscribed on him by the insurgents:

Il s’avancait presque au premier rang de la colonne, ayant tout à la fois le mouvement d’un homme qui marche et le visage d’un homme qui dort.

-- Quel bonhomme enragé ! murmuraient les étudiants. Le bruit courait dans l’attroupement que c’était – un ancien conventionnel, -- un vieux régicide. (III 121)

He advanced almost to the front rank of the column, having at once the motion of a man who is walking, and the countenance of a man who is asleep.

“What a desperate goodman!” murmured the students. The rumour ran through the assemblage that he was – an ancient Conventionist – an old regicide. (935)

Bernard Leuilliot, in his article “Quatrevingt-Treize dans Les Misérables,” argues that the character of Mabeuf seems to be invented only to satisfy the desire of the insurgents for the repetition of the past (104). Guy Rosa interprets this moment as a reconciliation of Myriel and G., as the body of the sheepish Mabeuf is inscribed with revolutionary meaning. In his notes to the text, Rosa states that Mabeuf is as apolitical as Myriel and that at the barricade he is able to do what he was previously incapable of (III 572). The

81 “Father Mabeuf went into the house, took his hat, looked mechanically for a book to put under his arm, did not find any, said: ‘Ah! it is true!’ and went away with a bewildered air.” (907)
return of the Conventionist G. and the idealized past revolution becomes more spectacular as the narrator frames these moments in terms of a theatrical staging.

In the scenes at the barricades, speech is secondary to the movements and placements of the bodies of the insurgents. The performance at the barricades is considered by Vargas Llosa as one of the most modern moments in the novel, where the narrator, “the divine stenographer,” disappears behind the characters and allows the characters’ actions to speak for themselves (Temptation 47). In a further veiling of the usually omniscient and overpowering narrative voice, the scene is presided over by the dead porter shot by Cabuc hanging out of the second-story window. In an eerie representation of the reader/spectator, as well as the eyes of a higher authority, the dead man watches the tragedy play out beneath the window. Hugo describes the view of this spectator as if it were from outside the movement of history:

D’en bas, à la réverbération de la torche enfouie dans les pavés, on apercevait cette tête vaguement. Rien n’était plus étrange, à cette clarté sombre et incertaine, que cette face livide, immobile, étonnée, avec ses cheveux hérissés, ses yeux ouverts et fixes et sa bouche béante, penchée sur la rue dans une attitude de curiosité. On eut dit que celui qui était mort considérait ceux qui allaient mourir. Une longue traînée de sang qui avait coulé de cette tête descendait en filets rougeâtres de la lucarne jusqu’à la hauteur du premier étage où elle s’arrêtait. (III 174)

From below, by the reflection of the torch hidden among the paving-stones, this head was dimly perceptible. Nothing was more strange in that gloomy and uncertain light, than that livid, motionless, astonished face with its bristling hair, its staring eyes, and its gaping mouth, leaning over the street in an attitude of curiosity. One would have said that he who was dead was gazing at those who were about to die. A long trail of blood which had flowed from his head, descended in ruddy streaks from the window to the height of he first story, where it stopped. (976-7)
Vargas Llosa argues that the barricade scenes are highly theatrical, and that the insurgents are actors representing an idea of history where they are the agents of a divine hand ("Civilisés" 97). The scope of this conflict is vastly expanded with the body of the dead porter inscribed as the spectator from beyond the grave. However, the director of this scene is from an even more omniscient view than that of the dead porter. Thus, through the over-arching theatre metaphor, Hugo’s narration deprives the actors of their own free will. For example, in his performance, Mabeuf is continually incoherent. As he sits behind the counter in the Corinthe, he is oblivious to the fighting around him: “Quand on ne lui parlait pas, sa bouche remuait comme s’il répondait à quelqu’un, et dès qu’on lui adressait la parole, ses lèvres devenait immobiles et ses yeux n’avaient plus l’air vivants” (III 180). His mind appears to not be in the present moment while he is at the barricade; yet when Enjolras calls for someone to replace their fallen flag, Mabeuf appears. The other insurgents then inscribe Mabeuf with a new identity. Someone yells: “C’est le votant! c’est le conventionnel! c’est le représentant du peuple!” (III 180).

Mabeuf takes the flag from petrified Enjolras, and walks up the makeshift stairs to the barricade:

Cela était si sombre et si grand que tous autour de lui crièrent :  Chapeau bas !  A chaque marche qu’il montait, c’était effrayant ; ses cheveux blancs, sa face décrépite, son grand front chauve et ridé, ses yeux caves, sa bouche étonnée et ouverte, son vieux bras levant la bannière rouge, surgissaient de l’ombre et grandissaient dans la clarté sanglante de la torche ; et l’on croyait voir le spectre de 93 sortir de la terre, le drapeau de la terreur à la main. (III 181)

It was so gloomy and so grand that all about him cried: “Hats off!” At each step it was frightful; his white hair, his decrepit face, his large forehead bald and wrinkled, his hollow eyes, his quivering and open mouth, his old arm raising the

82 "When nobody was speaking to him, his lips moved as if he were answering somebody, and as soon as anybody addressed a word to him, his lips became still and his eyes lost all appearance of life.” (981)
83 "’It is the voter! it is the Conventionist! it is the Representative of the people!’” (981)
red banner, surged up out of the shadow and grew grand in the bloody light of the torch, and they seemed to see the ghost of '93 rising out of the earth, the flag of terror in its hand. (981)

Mabeuf’s actions are doubly performative. The look of the dead porter, a view outside of the movement of history, makes Mabeuf’s apparently supernatural and colossal figure a return of the past in a moment of transhistorical identification (181). Moreover, both Mabeuf and the dead spectator have the same open-mouthed, surprised expression. The insurgents take their hats off to Mabeuf, saluting this return of ’93. The play of light and shadow in this scene also makes the appearance of Mabeuf a return from the dead of Conventionist G. In his article, “Jeux d’Ombre et Lumière dans Les Misérables de Victor Hugo,” Guy Imhoff explores the play of light and shadow, where the use of light represents a moral or metaphysical enlightenment which reveals previously hidden sentiments. However, considering Vargas Llosa’s discussion of the theatricality of the barricade scenes, and the fluid identities of the actors, this light is more representative of the gaze that re-inscribes the body with an identity from an idealized past. Through knowledge of this past, the insurgents gain legitimacy. As Mabeuf moves out of the darkness into the light as a symbolic representation of the Terror, he is also liberated from his own personal troubles to become an icon in a transhistorical struggle for justice.

Mabeuf’s death is essentially a suicide as he, unprepared for battle, climbs the barricade to his death. His theatrical suicide is also a return of 1793. In her discussion of heroic suicide in The Body and the French Revolution, Dorinda Outram argues that the emulation of Senecan stoicism in the public suicide of the elite was part of the culture of Revolutionary France, and had become extremely rare by the time of the Empire (Outram 90-91). The theatricality of such public suicides not only reinforced notions of individual
autonomy and self-possession, but also allowed the public person to collapse his personality into theatrical role, “making role bear the entire meaning of a political process” (101). In this sense, the player becomes what he imitates in the public eye; he becomes what he appears to be (101). Thus, in the case of Mabeuf, the inscription of his body with the signification of the Conventionist from 1793 is doubly inscribed by the narrator through his representation of a heroic suicide à la 1793. When he is shot by the National Guard, Mabeuf falls back with his body erect and his arms in the form of a cross, in what Sergio Luzzatto interprets as an image of the crucifix (Luzzatto 239). He has martyred himself for the Republic. Since Mabeuf’s actions are symbolic of the recreation of national identity enacted in the French Revolution, his bullet-ridden coat is declared by Enjolras to be their new flag (III 182). Grossman argues that through this technique of aggrandizement, the sheepish and unwaveringly innocent Mabeuf becomes an icon of past and future republics. Furthermore, the childless Mabeuf becomes a paternal figure for the insurgents. He finds a family in the ABCs while they in turn inscribe upon him the symbol of a patriarchy (Figuring 123). Ironically, the careful treatment of Mabeuf’s body distracts the insurgents and compromises their safety, making this return of ’93 more meaningful than defending their barricade.

There is no question that Enjolras is the leader of the ABCs, and that his words, orders and bodily movements are indicative of the cleansing of the social body that for Hugo defines the revolution. He is the agglomeration of all of the members of the ABCs:

Il composait, dans sa pensée, avec l’éloquence philosophique et pénétrante de Combeferre, l’enthousiasme cosmopolite de Feuilly, la verve de Courfeyrac, le rire de Bahorel, la mélancolie de Jean Prouvaire, la science de Joly, les sarcasmes de Bossuet, une sorte de pétillement électrique prenant feu à la fois un peu partout. (II 423)
He was composing in his thoughts, with the philosophic and penetrating eloquence of Combeferre, the cosmopolitan enthusiasm of Feuilly, Courfeyrac’s animation, Bahorel’s laughter, Jean Prouvaire’s melancholy, Joly’s science, and Bossuet’s sarcasms, a sort of electric spark taking fire in all directions at once. (741)

Enjolras is the “logic” of the revolution and is likened to Robespierre, in another deferral to past figures (II 198). While Madame Defarge is orientalized and the description of her body enacts a sexualized unveiling, descriptions of Enjolras are remarkably immaterial. He still seems like a child and looks only 17, when he is actually 22 years old (II 197). He is angelically beautiful and represents the chastity of the pure social body: “Devant tout ce qui n’était pas la république, il baissait chastement les yeux. C’était l’amoureux de marbre de la Liberté…. ces longs cils blonds, ces yeux bleus, cette chevelure tumultueuse au vent, ces joues roses, ces lèvres neuves, ces dents exquises” (II 198).84

He is often compared to ancient Greek statuary, as Grantaire venerates him by saying, “Quel beau marbre!” (II 207).85 When executing Cabuc for killing the innocent porter, Enjolras’ face is described as “blanche et froide” (“white and cold”) also like that of a marble statue (III 198). His determination and moral righteousness can be read on his body through its identification with an idealized ancient Greece:

Enjolras, avec son visage de femme, avait en ce moment je ne sais quoi de la Thémis antique. Ses narines gonflées, ses yeux baissés donnaient à son implacable profil grec cette expression de colère et cette expression de chasteté, au point de vue de l’ancien monde, conviennent à la justice. (III 158)

Enjolras, with his woman’s face, had at that moment an inexpressible something of the ancient Themis. His distended nostrils, his downcast eyes, gave to his

84 “Before everything but the republic, he chastely dropped his eyes. He was the marble lover of liberty. ... those long fair lashes, those blue eyes, that hair flying in the wind, those rosy cheeks, those pure lips, those exquisite teeth” (563).
85 “What a beautiful statue!” (571)
implacable Greek profile that expression of wrath and that expression of chastity which from the point of view of the ancient world belonged to justice. (966)

After the execution, Enjolras has the immobility of marble (III 160). When the barricade is compromised, a tear slowly falls down his cheek in repetition of the Conventionist’s tear at the beginning of the novel. As the situation at the barricade worsens, Enjolras is compared to a young Spartan (III 281) and even the last of the barricade fighting is compared to a struggle worthy of a Trojan mural (III 299). The narrator tells, in one example of the multiplication of narrative voices, that after the fighting, a witness later recounts that there was an insurgent they called “Apollo,” obviously referring to the leader Enjolras. This apparent praise of the insurgents is also taking them completely out of historical context, not only in an effort to inscribe them with an idealized past. This reference to ancient artwork makes them an artistic commodity, where valorizing their bravery is simultaneously inscribing them as unintelligible and mute.

Further proof of the immateriality of the revolutionary body is the virginal purity of Enjolras. His “visage de femme” is not the reversal of gender roles, as in the Carmagnole of A Tale, but is rather the lack of masculine imperfection (III 158). His “lèvres de vierge” (III 160) have only given two kisses in his life, both to the corpse of the paternal figure Mabeuf (III 304), once on Mabeuf’s head just after he fell from the barricade (III 182), and once on the hand hanging out of the shroud when he is laid out in the cabaret (III 303). In a conversation at the barricade, Bossuet describes how Enjolras has never had a woman: “Un homme sans femme, c’est un pistolet sans chien; c’est la femme qui fait partir l’homme. Eh bien, Enjolras n’a pas de femme. Il n’est pas amoureux, et il trouve le moyen d’être intrépide. C’est une chose inouie qu’on puisse
être froid comme la glace et hardi comme le feu ” (III 267). Enjolras’ virginal existence is an anomaly in the philosophy of Bossuet where a woman is a compliment to a man. Bossuet’s description voids Enjolras of any sexual passion, and makes him seem even less human. Enjolras is strictly homosocial. The praise he receives from other men is not at all erotic, but instead constructs his body as the masculine counterpart to the immanent, pure feminine of la République.

In a modern moment in the narrative, akin to that of the body of Mabeuf, Enjolras is shown silenced with his body still signifying. At the end of the chapter entitled “Quel Horizon On Voit du Haut de la Barricade” where Enjolras takes over the narrator’s position in a digression on progress and equality, he is silenced:

Enjolras s’interrompit plutôt qu’il ne se tut ; ses lèvres remuaient silencieusement comme s’il continuait de se parler à lui-même, ce qui fit qu’attentifs, et pour tâcher de l’entendre encore, ils le regardèrent. Il n’y eut pas d’applaudissements, mais on chuchota longtemps. La parole étant souffle, les frémissements d’intelligences ressemblent à des frémissements de feuilles. (III 246)

Enjolras broke off rather than ceased, his lips moved noiselessly, as if he were continuing to speak to himself, and they looked at him with attention, endeavouring still to hear. There was no applause; but they whispered for a long time. Speech being breath, the rustling of intellects resembles the rustling of leaves. (1031-2)

In a strange repetition of the moving lips of the distraught Mabeuf, Enjolras moves his lips as if speaking, as the narrator then moves back to an omniscient position to discuss the inner feelings of Marius in the next chapter. As Janice Best argues in “Quel Horizon l’On Voit du Haut de la Barricade,” the barricade is a space of conflicting discourses, and

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86 “A man without a woman is a pistol without a hammer; it is the woman who makes the man go off. Now, Enjolras has no woman. He is not in love, and he finds a way to be intrepid. It is a marvellous thing that a man can be as cold as ice and as bold as fire.” (1049)
the deviation from a singular narrative voice demonstrates this, as Enjolras temporarily takes the place of the “divine stenographer,” to use the words of Vargas Llosa. The emotional distance from the fighting at the barricades that Enjolras consistently demonstrates (Best 242) is here enacted by the narrator. Moreover, as the words of the omniscient narrator meld with those of Enjolras, he in turn is elevated to this god-like, immaterial position.

Yet, the most theatrical, and modern moment in the novel, when the omniscient narrator temporarily disappears, is during the deaths of major figures such as Mabeuf and Enjolras. The leader of the ABCs remains uninjured throughout most of the fighting, and by the end of the barricade, he is the only one left standing (III 305). In this final standoff with the National Guard, Enjolras crosses his arms and presents his chest to be fired upon (III 305):

As soon as Enjolras had folded his arms, accepting the end, the uproar of the conflict ceased in the room, and that chaos suddenly hushed into a sort of sepulchral solemnity. It seemed as if the menacing majesty of Enjolras, disarmed and motionless, weighed upon that tumult, and as if, merely by the authority of his tranquil eye, this young man, who alone had no wound, superb, bloody, fascinating, indifferent as if he were invulnerable, compelled that sinister mob to kill him respectfully. His beauty, at that moment, augmented by his dignity, was resplendence, and, as if he could no more be fatigued than wounded, after the terrible twenty-four hours which had just elapsed, he was fresh and rosy. (1081)
As Peter Brooks argues in his discussion of Delacroix’s work in “History Painting and Narrative,” it is the penultimate moments that Romantic artists such as Delacroix depict, because they carry the most significance in a larger historical narrative:

The extended narrative of what leads up to the represented moment, and then a briefer mention of its results, implies that we can grasp the full meaning of that moment only when we conceive it as the culmination of an unfolding narrative, a moment carefully chosen among many in order to illustrate, to the highest degree, the historical significance. (6)

The visual performance of Enjolras before his death, as well as that of Mabeuf at the barricade, although in a written text, begs to be interpreted through the visual positioning of the body. Thus, the moment of Enjolras’ death is only briefly described: he is nailed to the wall with his head hanging, much like another crucifixion image and another repetition of Mabeuf (III 307). In these theatrical moments of the novel, when the narrator stops interpreting for the reader and describes the bodily movements of the characters, it is the moment immediately before the final resolution of the ideological conflicts at play. In this moment, Enjolras is most representative of the ideological position of a revolutionary, which is circumscribed by the narrator in describing Enjolras as a work of art. He is stoic; covered with others’ blood and not hit by any bullets, in a sepulchral solemnity of the scene which highlights the sculptural nature of his bodily gestures. In another heroic suicide emulating those in 1793 who emulated the Stoics, Enjolras is an emblem of multiple returns of the past: the Conventionist G., Mabeuf, all of which is circumscribed with the heroic suicides of a previous Revolution. In fact, Karl Marx addresses this same phenomenon in the return of Napoleon in Louis Bonaparte in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:
Men make up their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. (15)

One way the ABCs validate their own actions in 1832 is by performing actions from 1789 and 1793. Any present political action must be validated with a language from the past. Thus, in order to be revolutionaries and not criminals, they must dress themselves and their actions with the garb of a previous revolution. In this light, the revolutionary is not as revolutionary as he may want to believe.

From Materiality to Immateriality: The Reified Revolutionary

A return to Victor Hugo’s reflections during the June days of 1832 can shed more light on the reversion to 1793 and the body of Enjolras as the young and beautiful Greek marble sculpture. Hugo writes to Sainte-Beuve:

Oui, c’est un triste, mais un beau sujet de poésie que toutes ces folies de sang! Nous aurons un jour une république, et quand elle viendra, elle sera bonne. Mais ne cueillons pas en mai le fruit qui ne sera mûr qu’en août. (quoted in Sayre and Löwy 121)

Yes, it’s a sad, but a beautiful poetic subject, all this bloody folly! We will one day have a republic, and when it comes it will be good. But let’s not gather the fruit in May that will not be ripe until August.87

87 My translation.
In short, Hugo believes in the struggle for a Republic, instead of the current constitutional monarchy, but feels that the time is not yet ripe. While he places the revolutionaries in a sympathetic light, the body of Enjolras is not inscribed with futurity. Instead, he embodies an idealized sculpture. His angelic beauty, along with metaphors of virginity and homosociality, go even further to imply that the revolution is still a child. The fruit is not ripe enough to pick, and Enjolras’ body is not yet ready for a sexual encounter.

Enjolras is not undressed by the narrator, as in the case of Madame Defarge, and the narrator of *Les Misérables* consistently refers his lack of sexuality. Moreover, his purity is related to the lack of contact with women: “il ne semblait pas savoir qu’il y eut sur la terre un être appelé la femme. Il n’avait qu’une passion, le droit, qu’une pensée, renverser l’obstacle” (II 197). Furthermore, throughout the narrative, Enjolras does not speak to a woman. At one point the narrator displaces himself to the view of a “grisette” to further describe Enjolras’ beauty:

> Si quelque grisette... voyant cette figure d’échappé de collège, cette encolure de page, ... fut venu essayer sa beauté sur Enjolras, un regard surprenant et redoutable lui eut montré brusquement l’abîme, et lui eut appris à ne pas confondre avec le chérubin galant de Beaumarchais le formidable chérubin d’Ezechiel. (II 198)

> Had any grisette... seeing this college boy’s face, this form of a page, ... tried her beauty upon Enjolras, a surprising and terrible look would have suddenly shown her the great gulf, and taught her not to confound with the gallant cherubim of Beaumarchais the fearful cherubim of Ezekiel. (563)

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88 “He did not seem to know that there was on the earth a being called woman. He had but one passion, the right; but one thought, to remove all obstacles.” (563)
If a young wayward girl were to encounter Enjolras, she would also remark upon his angelic, innocent beauty. However, he would shun her, because he is not the cherubim of playwright Beaumarchais but that of Ezechiel, an Old Testament prophet who predicted an apocalypse. Through this comparison, the body of Enjolras is moved from a material register to one that is divine and asexual. The stoic stillness of his marble-like body in the previously discussed scenes is idealized to the point of frigidity. He is not interested in women; he has none of the imperfections of other men; he is married to “la République.” Enjolras does not speak to any women throughout the novel, and his relations with other men are not sexualized either. His interactions with other men remain strictly homosocial, just like the adolescent who has not yet explored his sexuality.

More importantly, Enjolras’ purity is incongruent with his politics. Although Hugo constructs the revolutionary as the agent of social purification, this over-arching metaphor of the immanent feminine social body and her virginal defender also erases the specific historical conditions of June 5, 1832. Enjolras’ beautiful features do not appear to be those of someone at risk of contracting cholera, and his rosy complexion does not fit someone who was just fighting at a barricade. To represent the revolutionary without any materiality defies some important traditional assumptions about those who participate in a working class revolt. To take the revolutionary out of historical context is in turn denying the practical equality that he is fighting for. One purpose to Enjolras’ virginal stoic beauty is to construct a rebel hero fighting for progress, but this progress is never clearly defined and applied to the construction of his lived experience. In the figure of Enjolras, the revolutionary is paradoxically reified. He is timeless, and untouched by
material, bodily concerns (like sex and hygiene). He is a rebel without a clear cause, and he is timelessly beautiful. In her essay on Ayn Rand’s *Fountainhead* entitled “Three Inspirations for the Ideal Man,” Shoshana Milgram offers an interesting perspective on one reception of the character Enjolras. Milgram argues that the hero of *Fountainhead* is modeled after Enjolras, because they both play the role of “executioner and a religious figure,” with hair blowing in the wind (Milgram 183). Enjolras embodies a sense of purpose (184). As the logic of the revolution, Enjolras is already an abstract ideal and not a body struggling for subsistence. His marble-like austerity, and the celebration of his masculinity that Milgram points out (185-6) shows Enjolras to be more of a commodified image of an attractive rebel leader than a common criminal in an insurrection. Hugo does not adopt the perspective of the forces of order on this revolutionary to depict Enjolras’ body as particularly immoral, untamed, or dangerous. In fact, upon first inspection he seems to be sympathetic to the rebels’ cause. However, beneath the male community that forms around him and the obsequious yet fraternal love he receives from Grantaire, Enjolras is an empty shell. Perhaps at a loss to construct a decentralized revolt, or because a marginal character does not need much psychological depth, Hugo makes the revolutionary a pure, timeless essence of the past.

What can be revolutionary about the construction of Enjolras is that he is a serious stock character that is heroic and idealized, but he only serves as an elaborate backdrop to the travels of Jean Valjean. He is a stand-in for youthful idealism with the will for a revolution, but with none of the visceral force that leads the workers to fight. He is a rebel for the sake of Progress whose practical applications are never clearly defined. He is a revolutionary taken out of history, which is an impotent position indeed. The use of
such an immaterial revolutionary in a historical novel recalls Karl Marx’s assertion in 

*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:* “…all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice.... the first time as tragedy, the second as farce” (Marx 15).
CHAPTER FOUR

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Subversive Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Paris and London

Part Three: Blood-Sucking Monsters

Chapter Five: A Prostitute Drains the Blood of an Empire:

Emile Zola’s *Nana* (1879)

Chapter Six: Invading Degeneracy in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897)
CHAPTER FIVE

A Prostitute Drains the Blood of an Empire: Emile Zola’s *Nana*

By the end of the nineteenth century, the working class body represented in fiction effectively has no voice. It is the site of various narratives linked to social dissolution. In Emile Zola’s *Nana*, criticism of the Second Empire is displaced onto the body of the prostitute, where the moral corruption of high capitalism is configured as an insidious force of destruction manifested in the body of the sexualized woman. Where Maria and Ourika, at the beginning of the century, spoke with a moral reflection that was unable to be recognized in the discourse available for women at the time, the courtesan Nana is given the mentality of a child, and is the unconsciously avenging product of the degenerate underclass.

In *Nana*, Emile Zola’s exemplary novel about the excesses and fall of the Second Empire, the narrative centers on the figure of a working class prostitute who rises to stardom and wealth through her sexual allure as a commodity fetish. More than the demonization of the prostitute, this courtesan is the embodiment of the ills of the Second Empire and its growing metropolitan capital of Paris: commodity fetishism and consumerism, moral decay in unabated sexual desire, and infectious disease. Nana’s fetishized body is inscribed with the physical and moral infection that eats away the social structure of the Empire. Like the monster in more traditional horror stories like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Nana is constructed of projected fears of social dissolution. While Frankenstein’s monster is a product of the fears of the dehumanizing potential of scientific and technological advancement, and
Count Dracula is an over-determined Other in terms of sexual, racial, and even economic norms, Nana is constructed through the multiple fears projected onto the female body. The sexual feminine body is blamed for inciting men’s desire and disrupting the nuclear family by violating the sanctity of the marriage pact with moral decay and physical disease. Moreover, the working class prostitute is doubly insidious. In the ideology of this narrative she embodies a destructive revenge against the moneyed classes as she inserts herself into a system of commodity circulation, exponentially increasing her potential for infectious destruction. Like the vampire, who infects humans with degeneration through the exchange of bodily fluids, in popular fears around the body of the prostitute, she infects her lovers with syphilis and a moral deterioration through the same type of exchange. In addition, the courtesan drains her lovers of their money, weakening their economic capacity just as the draining of blood weakens the physical constitution. In the end, the monstrosity inherent in the construction of the prostitute’s body through various biological and social discourses eventually overcomes her physical body, as the moral decay she circulates throughout Paris is unveiled, and the face of Venus rots away.

The positioning of Nana’s body as the fictional source of Parisian society’s pathological excess has been extensively discussed, notably by Peter Brooks, Charles Bernheimer, Bram Dijkstra, and Sander Gilman. Critics have also discussed the use of the scientific discourse of miasmatism in the construction of Nana’s body, notably Catherine Bordeau in “The Power of the Feminine Milieu in Zola’s Nana.” However, critics have overlooked the narrative’s structure around the spread of immoral infection. The narrative has also been evoked as the process of unveiling Nana, which is discussed
by Janice Best and Therese Dolan. Yet, I argue that this unveiling equally coincides with the dissemination of moral corruption through contact with Nana. Janice Best explores the difficulty in the transposition of the novel into a play, but she does not supply a satisfying explanation. Best does not acknowledge that the difficulty in this generic transposition resides in the fact that Nana’s construction depends on the use of scientific discourse that naturalizes bourgeois domesticity. Another important critical trend explores how the novel uses the repetition and simulacra of Nana to posit the growth of mass media in the era of high capitalism as contributing to the degeneration of the Empire. Although this work is useful in distinguishing the various paths of Nana’s dissemination, the repetition of her image extends beyond the scope of this chapter. My focus here is how the body of Nana is the locus of a moral infection which is constructed through discourse around the working class female body. With the exception of Sander Gilman and Bram Dijkstra, critics have not considered how Nana’s deviance from the role of the domestic mother and how her working class origins are both used to configure her body as the site of a contagious immorality. In this chapter I add to Gilman and Dijkstra’s work by considering that Nana is unconscious of the effects of her body, which includes her inability to raise a healthy child. This lack of awareness in Nana simultaneously denies the woman’s agency, and also posits a contagious social pathology as an instinctual drive in the body of the prostitute.

90 See Nicholas Rennie “Benjamin and Zola: Narrative, the Individual, and Crowds in an Age of Mass Production,” Anna Migdal Gural, “Nana, Figure de l’Entre et de l’Autre,” and Frank Wagner, “Nana en son Miroir.”
In late nineteenth-century France and Britain, scientific and medical discourse around women serves to naturalize the role of the bourgeois mother. In his work, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, Bram Dijkstra characterizes the restricted role of the married woman as “the household nun.” In this ideal organization of the social molecule, the wife’s sexuality is strictly for the purposes of reproduction. According to this ideal, she enters into the marriage pact as a virgin, educated only in managing the household – that is, only as far as the capricious female mind can be molded. The woman is expelled “from participation in practical life” and placed “on a lofty pedestal” (Dijkstra 4), meaning that she is free from any external economic concerns, and of course, free from disease. In this state, having only sexual relations with her husband, she is “man’s exclusive and forever pliable private property” (Dijkstra 334). Moreover, the “normal” sexual desires of this wife, according to the popular book *Married Life and Happiness* by William J. Robinson, MD (published by the Eugenics Publishing Company in 1922), are “‘satisfied with occasional relations – not more than once in two weeks or ten days’” (334). Although this text was published 30 years after Nana, Dijkstra uses it to demonstrate the assumptions about women’s role as part of a rather extreme effort to control female sexuality and reproduction. Dijkstra also gestures toward the extreme homogeneity endorsed later through the discourse of eugenicists. Within the strictures of this marriage pact, female sexuality is channeled toward (re)productive ends, as this element of humankind’s baser animal instincts is sublimated toward the good of Western society.
However, the construction of the idealized, pure wife necessitates the counter-construction of the vehemently sexual woman exemplified in the prostitute. In Bram Dijkstra’s description of this discourse on female sexuality, the innocence of the wife necessitates the ultimate corruption of the prostitute. Even moreso in practice, the “acculturated ‘sexlessness’” of the wife creates an intensely sexual allure to those working class women walking the streets and defying this marriage role:

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the massive spread of prostitution in urban centers. During no period, before or since, was the sight of prostitutes so common, so much taken for granted. Prostitutes were an integral element of social life, their presence a logical result of the normal workings of the law of supply and demand. Moreover, once the men of the middle classes had ‘elevated’ their wives to the position of spotless, quasivirginal household nuns, once they had made them into delicate possessions which needed special handling, they discovered that they had fashioned in their own minds bleak monsters of sexual frustration. (Dijkstra 355-6)

With men idealizing a marriage partner who denies sexual desire, those who do not fill that mold become intensely sexualized. Moreover, the creation of the ideological category of the “household nun” also implies the projection onto working class women of “bleak monsters of sexual frustration.” Because the idealized bourgeois wife is so devoid of sexual desire, an uninhibited and destructive sexuality is projected onto the body of the working class woman, and the phantasm of the prostitute is the culmination of these forbidden desires. Dijkstra’s use of the word, “monster” is revealing considering Franco Moretti’s definition of “the modern monster:” “Il mostro, dunque, serve a spostare gli antagonismi a gli orrori che si manifestano dentro la società al di fuori della società stessa. ...Il mostro, l’assolutamente inumano, serve a ricostruire una universalità, una
coesione sociale che – di per sé – non sarebbe più convincente” (Moretti 105). The dialectic of “household nun”/prostitute -- of controlled, domesticated sexuality versus uncontrollable desire -- is an antagonism whereby the ideal role is not only reinforced through the elaboration of its ideological opposite (the monster). The monster itself is made even more inhuman so as to naturalize the ideological ideal. The more inherently monstrous the prostitute, the more normal and human the bourgeois wife becomes. In the case of Nana, this dichotomy is not static; indeed, her monstrosity is gradually unveiled throughout the novel. In what Fritz Andersen, in “Corpus Delicti,” considers as a project within Naturalism to examine the limits of human nature (75), the conflict he sees between idealized beauty (in Nana as Venus) and realistic discourse on the body slightly misses the mark. Instead, in this novel, the limits of human nature are negotiated in part through the irony Zola constructs with Nana’s superficial beauty, and the death this beauty entails. The movement of the narrative involves the unveiling of the monster within the prostitute, and this deviant sexual monster that emerges is informed through the hygienicist project as well as anthropological discourse.

Representation of the prostitute in fin-de-siècle Paris is largely informed through the work of Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, whose hygienicist project is presented in his book, La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe Siècle. Throughout his work, Parent-Duchâtelet tested the limits of miasmatic theory to move toward a method that Alain Corbin calls “sociologie empirique” (empirical sociology) (Vincelette 198). When faced with a growing syphilis epidemic, Parent-Duchâtelet looked to the prostitute as the cause of what he considers a “plague” and a symbol of “l’ordure morale” (moral filth) (Parent-

91 "The monster, therefore, serves to displace the antagonisms and the horrors that are manifested within society to outside the society itself. ... The monster, the absolutely inhuman, serves to reconstitute a universality, a social cohesion that – in and of itself – would no longer be convincing.” My translation.
Duchatelet 178, Vincelette 198). In addition to the concern around the prostitute’s body as the site of infectious disease, her deviant sexuality places her within a growing sociological discourse of a dehumanizing racial anthropology and evolutionism. This discourse, in turn, pathologizes the sexuality of the prostitute. In *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*, Sander Gilman discusses in detail the correlation in pseudo-scientific discourse between the racially inferior African woman and the prostitute. Guiglielmo Ferrero, coauthor of *La Donna Delinquente* with Cesare Lombroso, argues that prostitution is “the rule in primitive societies” (Gilman 99). As the so-called “primitive” is associated with “unbridled sexuality,” a further demonization of the prostitute due to the fact that most regulations regarding prostitution were in the interest of public health -- to control the spread of syphilis, which was already a medical concern (99). In the novel *Nana*, there is even a discussion of how criminality falls under the medical model. At one of Nana’s salons the men are discussing criminology: “Ces messieurs concluaient contre les nouvelles théories criminalistes; avec cette belle invention de l’irresponsabilité dans certains cas pathologiques, il n’y avait plus de criminels, il n’y avait que des malades” (Zola 321). Indirectly referencing the work of Lombroso and Parent-Duchâtelet, and providing a certain metatextual irony on the figure of Nana herself, the discussion at her salon references the synthesis of pathologies that defines the prostitute. She is defined through her primitive sexuality as a carrier of

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92 For a look at hygienicist debates around the body of the prostitute, see Mélanie Vincelette, “Libido Scien."
93 “The gentlemen were condemning all these new-fangled theories of criminologists: how very clever of them to have dreamed up the idea of diminished responsibility in certain pathological cases! So there weren’t any criminals now, only sick people!” (301). Excerpts in English are taken from the Douglas Parmée translation.
disease, both of which are social ills that this pseudo-scientific discourse is attempting to contain and possibly diminish.

The exploits of the courtesan Nana are marked by a hypersexuality often attributed to overwhelming bestial instincts in the woman. When these instincts are not controlled through social conventions (such as the marriage contract), they emerge laden with animal characteristics, much like the correlation in pseudo-scientific discourse between the assumed “lowest” human, the African woman, and the highest ape, the orangutan (Gilman 85). When Nana first appears on stage, her body is barely covered by a gauzy tunic, and during her lascivious bow at the end of the act, she turns to show the nape of her neck where her red hair resembles the fleece of a beast (Zola 44). She appears later on stage naked “avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair” (53).94 On stage, Nana seems unaware of how her sexual allure affects those who see her. She maintains an air of innocence as she shocks the crowd with her nudity:

Personne ne riait plus, les faces des hommes, serieuses, se tendaient, avec le nez aminci, la bouche irritée et sans salive. Un vent semblait avoir passé, tres doux, chargé d’une sourde menace. Tout d’un coup, dans la bonne enfant, la femme se dressait, inquiétante, apportant le coup de folie de son sexe, ouvrant l’inconnu du désir. Nana souriait toujours, mais d’un sourire aigu de mangeuse d’hommes. (53)

Now there was no clapping, and no one thought of laughing. The men had a strained, earnest look on their faces; their nostrils were taut, their mouths parched and burning. It was as if the softest of breezes had passed through, full of secret menace. This good-natured girl had suddenly become a disturbing woman offering frenzied sexuality and the arcane delights of lust. Nana was still smiling, but it was the mocking smile of a man-eater. (25)

In this vision of her astounding stage appearance, there is a rift between what the onlookers perceive (including the narrator) and what Nana is aware of. Like an animal,

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94 “serenely confident in the irresistible power of her young flesh” (25).
she is instinctual and lacks a self-consciousness that defines the rational human. She is equally oblivious to the moral violence she exacts with her naked body on stage, even when the effect is not just a shameful sexual excitation, but one of fear. Further in the novel, when Nana is alone with Count Muffat, he contemplates her nudity while again she is unaware of the effect of her male gazer’s desire:

Nana était toute velue, un duvet de rousse faisait de son corps un velours; tandis que, dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis profonds, qui donnaient au sexe le voile troublant de leur ombre, il y avait de la bête. C’était la bête d’or, inconsciente comme une force, et dont l’odeur seule gâtait le monde. Muffat ferme les paupières, pour ne plus voir, l’animal reparut au fond des ténèbres, grandi, terrible, exagérant sa posture. (217)

Nana was very hairy, her body covered all over in the velvety down of a redhead. She was the Golden Beast, a mindless force whose very scent could poison the world. Muffat was continuing to look, obsessed and possessed to such an extent that when he closed his eyes to stop watching, the beast loomed up again still larger out of the darkness, terrifying and even more menacing. (192)

What terrifies Muffat is precisely the animalistic nature of the female. Prompted also by his fear of women in his first sexual relationship outside of his marriage, Muffat sees the hair on Nana’s body reflecting in the candlelight as illuminating the beast inherent in the female. The fact that this beast looms still larger when he closes his eyes highlights the “Golden Beast” as a mythical projection. As someone who has made his wife into a “household nun,” Muffat has equally constructed Nana as a “bleak monster of sexual frustration,” to use the language of Dijkstra. Dijkstra expands upon the popular conception around the courtesan’s unconscious animal nature in his discussion of the effects of open prostitution of women in the working class. He states that: “inevitably the effect of its prevalence, and virtually every male’s acquaintance with aspects of the
phenomenon, led many, under the expert guidance of the bio-sexists, to the convenient conclusion that something deep in woman’s nature was at fault” (Dijkstra 356). What is perceived as “deep in woman’s nature” is the animal within the prostitute, as Zola repeatedly borrows from anthropological discourse to construct Nana through the male gaze. Overlooked by many critics, the moral infection that Nana spreads is inextricably linked to her sexuality, and this is posited as something deep and instinctual in women’s nature. The scent of her body, in a reference to the prostitute as miasma, can infect all of her surroundings. One instance of this spread of animalistic desire is in the comic scene where Muffat enjoys humiliating himself by acting like an animal in one of his private moments with Nana (Zola 412-13). Through the eyes of Muffat, Nana is the beast that, in turn, brings out the beast in man (Dijkstra 335).

By looking at the dynamic of Muffat’s sexual relationships, the dichotomy that Dijkstra outlines is more apparent. Muffat’s wife, Countess Sabine, is a foil to Nana. As part of Nana’s construction as a “bleak monster of sexual frustration,” the wife of Muffat is the controlled female sexuality that the courtesan monster serves to naturalize. The description of her home echoes the ancient tradition of the aristocracy, as well as the strict morals of its inhabitants:

C’était un vaste bâtiment carré, habité par les Muffat depuis plus de cent ans; sur la rue, la façade dormait, haute et noire, d’une mélancolie de couvent, avec d’immenses persiennes qui restaient presque toujours fermées;...
...On entrait dans une dignité froide, dans des moeurs anciennes, un âge disparu exhalant une odeur de dévotion (Zola 83).

This huge, square building had been occupied by the Muffat family for more than a century; the tall, sombre façade with its large slatted shutters, rarely opened, looked asleep, as melancholy as a convent;...
...it merely looked solemn, with an atmosphere of dignified formality, of bygone customs, heavy with the piety of a vanished age. (54)

Here, the dynamic of miasma is also applied to Sabine, but her home breathes an air of “devotion.” In her article, Catherine Bordeau expands upon this appropriation of ideas of miasma to describe the feminine milieu. Bordeau argues that through environmental influence, citing the personification of nature in naturalist writing, women can exercise influence over men (Bordeau 96-7). Bordeau’s argument about the power of female odor is limited, however, because she does not address the connection between miasma and the working class, previously discussed in the chapter on *Les Misérables*. Nana’s odor is used to construct the spread of her infection while that of Countess Sabine remains effectively cloistered. Zola is sure to repeat that Sabine does not sleep with anyone (Zola 89). Moreover, Countess Sabine’s body is hardly seen; instead she is largely identified by the rather disembodied ideals she promotes. The plump sensuality of Nana’s naively naked body, and the instinctual drives inherent in the female sex, are drastically contrasted with the incorporeal, ethical presence of the Countess.

To further exemplify her inability to uphold the domestic duties of the good wife, Nana is the inept mother of a sickly child. The poor health of Nana’s child is rarely considered by critics, yet it is indispensable in considering Nana’s defective biology as part of Zola’s larger project to trace her hereditary pathology. Little Louiset, who she had when she was 16, does not have a father, and is kept with her Aunt Léonie (Zola 61). He is described as “maladif, le sang pauvre” (267), and Count Muffat resents him: “le petit Louis et ses plaintes tristes d’enfant rongé de mal, quelque pourriture léguée par un

95 “sickly, anaemic little boy” (246).
père inconnu” (405).96 The few times that Nana becomes serious in the novel are when she is reminded of how sickly her child is. He develops eczema on his neck, pustules in his ears, and yellowing skin (309). However, Nana’s capricious mind quickly forgets her maternal responsibilities (308). As a result of the neglect of her child, Nana falls ill with small pox that she reportedly caught from Luiset. On their way to see Nana on her deathbed, Lucy tells Caroline Héquet that Nana came back to Paris because Luiset was sick: ‘‘’Paraît que l’enfant est mort de ça; enfin un enfant lâché et pas soigné’’” (426).97 Nana is driven away from her maternal and domestic duties by her insatiable sexual appetite and fascination with material status. Furthermore, her child’s ill health is also an indication of her biological weakness, and that of his unknown father. Louis is the result of sex outside the marriage pact, and this deviance is physically pathological. Nana’s animal sexuality and her consequent ineptitude as a mother are exemplified in her ostentatious behavior at the Grand Prix de Paris at the Bois de Boulogne. The horse of Vandeuvres is named after her, and she makes a crude reference to the jockey that “mounts her,” all while neglecting her son who falls ill afterward (346, 357). Her pelvic thrusting and sighs during the last legs of the race make her affiliation with the beast overtly sexual (353); and when her namesake wins the race, it was unclear whether the crowd was cheering for the woman or the beast (355).

The discourse of pathology that identifies Nana is built up further with culturally constructed codes of class difference. The deviance of unregulated female sexuality is even more pronounced in Nana because of her working class background. This further reinforces her representation as a human who is less psychologically advanced than the

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96 “the miserable little brat Louis, always complaining of feeling ill, who was afflicted with some unsavoury secret disease inherited from his unknown father.” (389)
97 “Apparently that caused the child’s death, you know, a child left on its own and neglected” (411).
upper class men with whom she surrounds herself. Unrestrained sexuality characterizes
the working class in this novel, which here is represented in the numerous animal
comparisons and the even more deviant sexual practices of homosexuality and
transvestitism. Because the working class is not fluent in the cultural codes that organize
sexuality and gender roles, these gendered codes defining Nana’s behavior in Montmartre
are in disarray. Nana briefly returns to the working class life when she moves in with
Fontan, after which she resorts to walking the streets with her childhood friend Satin
(258). The two working girls bond through their disgust with being abused by men (246)
and this friendship develops into a lesbian relationship. Nana and Satin’s brief love scene
that is interrupted (266) serves a double purpose: one, to demonstrate that rampant
female sexuality defies its usefulness in homosexual relationships that do not produce
children. Second, working class women, the “lusty creatures of the working class”
according to Djikstra, are even more overtly sexual and animalistic because of their
hereditary disfunction. A possible third purpose to this brief love scene would be for its
own erotic value; the allure of Nana’s shocking nudity on stage is again repeated as the
demonized bisexual women break yet another barrier of prescribed sexual behavior,
much to the excitement of the readers/spectators. Thus, homosexuality is represented as
a natural extension of the undomesticated sexuality of the working class woman. In this
bourgeois logic, when the female sex is not contained in the home, under the tutelage of a
husband, and the female comes from the uncivilized background as a working class
woman, the sexual drive is unbounded and leads to homosexuality and the disruption of
prescribed gender roles. Although Nana has risen in social status, she is still drawn
toward this lifestyle; the monstrous sex drive of the working class woman is impossible to control.

The Golden Fly

Nana’s upward social mobility, compelled by her sexual allure and the manipulation of the aristocratic men infatuated with her, results in the physical and/or financial ruin of all those in her proximity. Fauchery encapsulates Nana’s infectious rise in an article he writes for *Le Figaro* entitled *La Mouche d’or*. Muffat reads the article to her while they are alone in her chambers as Nana naively admires her naked body in the mirror:

La chronique de Fauchery, intitulée *la Mouche d’or*, était l’histoire d’une fille, née de quatre ou cinq générations d’ivrognes, le sang gâté par une longue hérédité de misère et de boisson, qui se transformait chez elle en un détraquement nerveux de son sexe de femme. Elle avait poussé dans un faubourg, sur le pavé parisien; et, grande, belle, de chair superbe ainsi qu’une plante de plein fumier, elle vengeait les gueux et les abandonnés dont elle était le produit. Avec elle, la pourriture qu’on laissait fermenter dans le peuple, remontait et pourrissait l’aristocratie. Elle devenait une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction, sans le vouloir elle-même, corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige, le faisant tourner comme des femmes, chaque mois, font tourner le lait. Et c’était à la fin de l’article que se trouvait la comparaison de la mouche, une mouche couleur de soleil, envolée de l’ordure, une mouche qui prenait la mort sur les charognes tolérées le long des chemins, et qui, bourdonnante, dansante, jetant un éclat de pierreries, empoisonnait les hommes rien qu’à se poser sur eux, dans les palais où elle entrait par les fenêtres. (215)

Entitled “The Golden Fly,” Fauchery’s piece was about a tart, the offspring of four or five generations of alcoholics, her blood tainted by a long heredity of deep poverty and drink, which in her case had taken the form of unhinging the nervous balance of her sexuality. She’d been brought up on the streets in a working-class Paris slum and now, a tall and lovely girl with a magnificently sensual body, like a plant flourishing on a dung-heap, she was avenging the poor, underprivileged wretches from whom she’d sprung. While the
people were left to rot in degrading circumstances, she would carry this pollution upwards to contaminate the aristocracy. She was turning into a force of nature and, without any intention on her part, a ferment of destruction; between her plump white thighs, Paris was being corrupted and thrown into chaos; she was making it rot in the same way as, every month, women make milk go sour. At the end of the article came the comparison with the fly; a golden fly, the colour of sunshine, escaping from its dung-heap and bringing with it the deadly germs of the carriôn allowed to fester by the roadside; dancing and buzzing, as dazzling as a previous stone, it would slip through the windows of palaces and poison the men inside merely by settling on them. (190)

This article articulates that the destruction Nana brings about is a force of nature which transgresses social boundaries and ultimately overpowers them. As Brian Nelson describes in his article “Nana and Consumerism,” the synopsis of Fauchery’s article describes the “contaminating incursion of the biological into the social realm” (Nelson 185). Although Nelson later states that sexuality is superscribed as biological when it is really culturally determined (187), he does not recognize that class difference is also culturally constructed. Instead of the working class biology disrupting the fragile balance of social codes, I would argue that the biological distinctions inscribed on the working class are more reflective of Zola’s use of hygienist discourse. Nana’s working class background, as the daughter of a laundress and a drunk, corresponds to the iconography constructed through the work of Parent-Duchâtelet as well as Pauline Tarnowsky, both of which “assumed a central role in late nineteenth-century discussions of the nature of the prostitute” according to Sander Gilman (Gilman 95). Both studies catalogued the family background of the prostitutes analyzed, and most of them were children of alcoholics (95). This narrative of the working class woman creates a hereditarily-determined behavior ultimately using biological discourse to describe class difference. The social circumstances of poverty, and the attendant foray into alcohol abuse, are constructed in
Fauchery’s article as a biological force infecting her blood, making historically and socially contingent factors a part of her inherent, biological constitution. This bad blood manifests itself in her present state of being as a nervous disorder of her female sexuality. The term “détraquement” can also refer to a machine that has broken down, as if the parts that should function harmoniously together are no longer properly connected. Nana’s defunct biology disrupts the balance of culturally constructed codes that communicate sexuality. Nelson further describes this relation of biological and social discourse in Fauchery’s article: “Nature is seen as underlying social structures, undermining the discreteness of the human order, threatening to absorb man within its stronger organic logic” (Nelson 186). Concerning the novel’s logic of a progression toward decomposition, Nelson is correct to imply that, when left to its own devices, nature will breed the disintegration of mankind’s constructions. Nana is depicted in this biologically encoded narrative as a force bubbling up from the rotten depths of society. The process of fermentation, which is fitting to describe someone from a long line of alcoholics, describes her social rise through intoxicating and poisoning the upper classes. Also, the working class was “allowed” or “left” to ferment; this bubbling up is due to a lack of oversight and regulation. Nana is corrupting Paris just as unconsciously as a woman having a period can turn milk sour, and this force must be contained or society itself will sour, a reference to the miasmatism that informs the body of the prostitute in hygienicist texts. Because she acts upon an inherent biological nature linked to her femininity and working class heredity, she is oblivious of the immorality and the destructiveness of her actions. While Muffat reads the article to her, Nana continues to admire herself in the mirror, not even recognizing that it is about her.
The beautiful exterior of the golden fly hides the insidious biological processes of decomposition, fermentation, spoilage, and infection. The fly moves from refuse and corpses to live men, and in the act of consuming them, poisons them by causing financial ruin, unabated sexual desire, mental illness and physical death. This fly enters palaces through the window, in an unconventional way, just as Nana enters the lives of the aristocracy through the social melting pot of the variety theatre. This is not the traditional pattern of upward social mobility through the bourgeois values of hard work and moral living. Nana’s beauty makes her a commodity in itself, something worth having and exchanging, just like the gold that colors the fly. Moreover, the value is imaginary because it is a surplus value created by the demand of the market. Her value as a kept woman far exceeds the value of the (sexual) services she provides. It is precisely because of her commodification, exemplified in her equine namesake, that Nana is capable of spreading her infection. She “avenges” the rogues that produced her, but the biological discourse of her rise and destruction makes her actions of working class revolt more like the spread of a rotten infection than an impetus for social change. In fact, her political beliefs are remarkably pro-Empire. She herself looks down upon the poor and celebrates the emperor: “que Dieu nous conserve l’empereur le plus longtemps possible!” (Zola 319). The return of the repressed classes, biologically manifested in the body of Nana, is instead a force of nature with no social consciousness. The culture of the Second Empire allows for her circulation. She loves the Empire because unconsciously, she wants to consume it and destroy it.

The golden fly enters through the palace windows, and unwittingly spreads a devastating infection behind a glittering veil of golden beauty. Through the character of
Muffat, Zola traces the insidious effects of Nana’s contagious pathology. When he first enters Nana’s dressing room with the prince at the behest of Bordenave to find Nana naked from the waist up, he blushes, sweats, and has a fit of vertigo like the one when he first met Nana in her apartment on Boulevard Haussmann (Zola 150-1). The odor of decomposing tuberoses reminds him of human flesh (151), an eerie foreshadowing to the disintegration of his class by such a thing of superficial beauty. After meeting Nana, he suffers an existential crisis, so much so that he at first believes Nana is the devil, and he is terrified by her slow possession of him (156, 186). Muffat is shocked by these effects, because in his marriage, his desire is contained and regulated. He feels a pious repugnance toward his wife, while Nana represents all of the desires that he had repressed through his adherence to a religious morality. Muffat recognizes his fall only three months after Nana first slept with him. He discovers that she lied to him again about where she was (205-7). He goes to the Théâtre de Variétés to find her, and as he heads toward her dressing room, the description of his surroundings (seen through his eyes as free indirect discourse) hints toward what he sees as the depths of immorality and decay to which he has fallen:

C’était, le long de ce puits, comme des gueules de four ouvertes sur les ténèbres. Le comte avait tout de suite vu les vitres de la loge éclairées, au premier étage; et, soulagé, heureux, il s’oubliait, les yeux en l’air, dans la boue grasse et la fade puanteur de ce derrière de vieille maison parisienne. De grosses gouttes tombaient d’une gouttière crevée. Un rayon de gaz, glissé de la fenêtre de madame Bron, jaunissait un bout de pavé moussu, un bas de muraille mangé par les eaux d’un évier, tout un coin d’ordures embarrassé de vieux seaux et de terrines fendues, où verdissait dans une marmite un maigre fusain. Il y eut un grincement d’espagnolette, le comte se sauva. (208)

...giving the impression, all the way up this sort of pit-face, of oven-doors opening out on to the gloom. The count had seen straight away that the windows of the dressing-rooms on the first floor were all lit up. Happy and relieved, still looking up, he relaxed, amidst the stale stench and sticky mud of this backyard of an old
Paris house. From a broken gutter large drops of water were dripping, while a stray beam of light from Madame Bron’s window cast a yellow patch on to a few mossy cobbles, the foot of the wall eaten away by water from a sink, a real rubbish tip cluttered with old pails and cracked earthenware pots and pans; a limp euonymus provided a touch of green. The count hears the scraping of a window-latch and made himself scarce. (182)

In this forbidden view of the bowels of the theatre, Muffat sees the unkempt, rotting interior of its pretty face. The discarded human artifacts (pots, pails) are taken over by natural forces of dripping water and moss; the biological is taking over the social sphere and, to the morally upright and sheltered Muffat, this is like the gates of hell. This view of dirty broken vessels is also a commentary on the fallen women in these rooms; when the body is not controlled and kept tidy, nature will eat away at what man has created.

During another interior monologue in free indirect discourse, Muffat bewails the fallen morals as he gazes up at the house where his wife is supposedly sleeping with Fauchery.

The golden fly has destroyed Muffat’s “household nun:”

Son estomac le faisait tellement souffrir, dans une angoisse d’incertitude affreuse, qu’il se serrait contre la porte, pour se calmer, avec le grelottement d’un pauvre. Puis, comme, malgré tout, il ne détournait pas les yeux de cette fenêtre, sa colère se fondit dans une imagination de moraliste: il se voyait député, il parlait à une Assemblée, tonnait contre la débauche, annonçait des catastrophes; et il refaisait l’article de Fauchery sur la mouche empoisonnée, et il se mettait en scène, en déclarant qu’il n’y avait plus de société possible, avec ces moeurs de Bas-Empire. (225)

In his dreadful agony of uncertainty, his stomach cramp was so acute that he had to hang on to the door for relief; he was shivering like a tramp. Then, as he still couldn’t tear his eyes away from the window, his anger took a moralizing turn; he imagined himself as a deputy speaking in front of some assembly, thundering against debauchery and prophesying doom, reproducing Fauchery’s ideas about the poisonous fly and taking the stage himself as he declaimed that society was falling apart, that modern depravity was reminiscent of the most decadent period of the Roman Empire. (201)
Muffat’s appearance in this long agonizing walk through the Paris streets that are still under construction is like that of a beggar which, along with his physical pain, marks his internal moral decay. For Muffat, narratives of health are connected to moral codes, by which Nana is inscribed with a pathological alterity. Muffat’s moral descent is manifested in his physical pain. His reaction to his debasement is to refashion Fauchery’s article for his own use and proclaim the internal decomposition of the Empire.

For the nineteenth-century male, when the prescribed narrative of the bourgeois nuclear family is disrupted, the whole social order is disrupted. Muffat then realizes that he has not been thinking about God to help him in his emotional crisis. Yet, when he finds a church, he is unable to pray, and heads “machinalement” (“instinctively”) to Nana’s (228). His deity has been replaced. As the coup de grâce to her consumption and infection of Muffat and his family, Nana attends the engagement party of his daughter Estelle. When the band begins to play the waltz from La Blonde Vénus, the play that brought Nana to stardom, Fauchery and the cuckolded Count Muffat shake hands, much to the pleasure of Countess Sabine (379). Nana, the known mistress of Muffat, is present at their family celebration, and the sound of the waltz announces the disintegration of the aristocracy:

Maintenant, la fêlure augmentait; elle lézardait la maison, elle annonçait l’effondrement prochain. Chez les ivrognes des faubourgs, c’est par la misère noire, le buffet sans pain, la folie de l’alcool vidant les matelas, que finissent les familles gâtées. Ici, sur l’écroulement de ces richesses, entassées et allumées d’un coup, la valse sonnait le glas d’une vieille race; pendant que Nana, invisible, épardue au-dessus du bal avec ses membres souples, décomposait ce monde, le pénétrait du ferment de son odeur flottant dans l’air chaud, sur le rythme canaille de la musique. (380)

Now, the crack was widening and soon the whole house would crumble. In working-class slums, families dragged down by drunkenness finish up in utter destitution, with larders emptied and mattresses stripped to satisfy the mad
The social strata is cracking, and as Nana passes through the crowd, this fissure winds through the substance that binds this class together and the inherent putrid nature of Nana’s sexuality breaks down their social conventions. Penetrating like an odor in warm air, Nana corrupts the good wife -- making Sabine sleep with Fauchery -- and is already corrupting the marriage between Daguenet and Estelle Muffat, as Daguenet visits Nana in her bed immediately after his wedding (381). More importantly, this description shows the replacement of one female odor with another, to use the terms of Catherine Bordeau. While previously, the home was characterized by the moral rigidity of Mme. Muffat, now Nana’s odor spreads through the home, creating a crack that is the beginning of its destruction. Bordeau argues that *Nana* marks a shift in the conception of power, where the feminine milieu causes physiological reactions in men and represents the power of the female nature over the male body (Bordeau 104). However, she does not consider the link to miasma. In this excerpt from *Nana*, the courtesan’s putrid smell carries the madness and immorality of her working class origins. This odor is not restricted to just one female body; it is the carrier of a disease that is the biological codification of all of the characteristics of the working class that defy narratives of bourgeois health and moral order. On top of this invasive odor, the music of the waltz from *Le Blond Vénus*, as an invisible immaterial presence, is the paradigmatic reflection of this miasma. Because of Nana’s dissemination through popular culture, her commoditized body’s infectious odors
have penetrated the sanctity of Muffat’s cloister-like home, which marks the fall of the aristocracy.

Aristocratic decadence, referenced in Muffat’s lamentation of the decaying morals in the Empire, is a common theme throughout the end of the nineteenth century. In his famous text, Degeneration, Max Nordau argues that the aristocracy exhibited a tendency toward degeneration because of their abhorrence of activity and an over-stimulation from luxurious living that he believes can lead to perversion and corrupt morality (Glover 66). Although the Muffats are originally presented as extremely religious, this rigidity leads to Muffat’s fascination with Nana, and later, the family’s moral corruption. The corruption of Count Vandeuvres is even evident before his fall, when while in Nana’s salon, she notices his increasingly nervous imbalance: “Depuis quelque temps, Nana le voyait nerveux, avec un pli cassé de la bouche et de vacillantes lueurs au fond de ses yeux clairs. Il gardait sa hauteur aristocratique, la fine élégance de sa race appauvrie; et ce n’était encore, par moments, qu’un court vertige tournant sous ce crâne, vidé par le jeu et les femmes” (Zola 319-20).98 Here, the narrator implies that the aristocracy is an already dying race, decaying from its own internal imbalance from living in so much luxury. Vandeuvres is already mentally unstable because of his obsessive gambling and womanizing. He makes an easy victim for Nana’s insatiable appetite:

Nana allait d’une bouchée avaler son dernier château, pres d’Amiens; et il avait comme une hâte de tout balayer, jusqu’aux décombres de la vieille tour batie par un Vandeuvres sous Philippe Auguste, enragé d’un appétit de ruines, trouvant beau de laisser les derniers besants d’or de son blason aux mains de cette fille, que Paris désirait. (301)

98 “For some time past Nana had noticed his taut lips and a flicker in the depths of his pale eyes which suggested that he was in a nervous state. He still maintained his haughty, aristocratic poise, the effete, elegant refinement of his family breeding, but there were times when for a few brief seconds his head, emptied by gambling and women, had started spinning” (299).
Nana would certainly make short work of his last château near Amiens. He seemed in a hurry to liquidate everything, even the remains of the old tower built by a forebear under Philippe Auguste, in a desperate urge to make a clean sweep of everything; he felt it was a smart thing to do to let the last gold bezant of his coat-of-arms end up in the possession of this tart whom all Paris was itching to have. (279)

Soon afterward, having been caught betting on his own horse, Vandeuvres is excluded from further horse races, and he lives up to an earlier reverie that he expresses to Nana (320). After he loses all of his money on women and horses, he burns himself alive in his stable (357). The already weak-minded aristocrat is subsumed with popular culture, willing to hand over remnants of his royal heritage to an iconic courtesan. The death of the aristocracy is equally an economic shift, where sacred icons of a feudal economy become trinkets to the monster of high capitalism. Lost in Parmée’s translation of this excerpt is the metaphor of consumption: Nana swallows his château in one gulp.99 Through the proliferation of surplus value in the late nineteenth-century capitalist economy, the tedious material emblem of royalty is consumed into a much faster and more fluid system of exchange; so that the desire for one commoditized female can relinquish what took centuries to construct.

Nana’s destruction of social structures is likened to an invasion, whose power equals only that of the Empire. Nana has conquered Paris; she possesses Muffat “with the jealous despotism of an angry God” (412); she has devoured the fortunes of Philippe Hugon (388), Xavier de Vandeuvres (301), Foucarmont, Steiner, la Faloise, and Fauchery (407). She corrupted the sanctity of the family by forcing the good wife, Countess Sabine, into an extra-marital affair and by destroying the only two sons of Madame

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99 This same comparison is used to describe her consumption of LaFaloise’s inheritance: “Each acre provided just one mouthful” (393).
Hugon. All of this destruction she has wrought unknowingly, unconsciously, all with “son air bon enfant” (75). In the admiring eyes of Labordette and Mignon, she is like an invading warlord, an Old Testament plague, and an otherworldly being exacting revenge with a whole country of beaten men at her feet (422). The dissemination of her innately atavistic drives brings about monumental changes:

Elle, c’était avec autre chose, une petite bêtise dont on riait, un peu de sa nudité délicate, c’était avec ce rien honteux et si puissant, dont la force soulevait le monde, que toute seule, sans ouvriers, sans machines inventées par des ingénieurs, elle venait d’ébranler Paris et de bâtir cette fortune où dormaient des cadavres. (419)

Nana had used something else, a tiny object, a little thing that people made jokes about, a dainty, naked tidbit, a tiny slit, unmentionable and yet possessing the power to shift worlds, so that by its unaided efforts, without any help from workmen or machines invented by engineers, she had sent Paris tottering and built up a fortune on buried corpses. (405)

Without the teams of workers, machines, and engineers, and with just the “little nothing” that is at once shameful and powerful because of the desire it provokes, Nana has rattled all of Paris. She has spread the nervous disruption of her sexuality that unhinges the conventions of French society. Such a small bit of feminine biology has dismantled the entire system of codes that organize the social structure. The body of the inherently corrupt prostitute has the power to infect and destroy whole social structures through her dissemination as a commodity in the age of high capitalism. In the logic of infection that is the underlying structure of this narrative, class difference is subsumed into biological discourse. Nana is unaware of the infection she spreads, and ignorantly consumes the fortunes of those she inadvertently destroys. She is a projection of the ills of high capitalism. The commoditized body of a courtesan is enabled by mass media’s
dissemination of popular icons, which is a process that continually adds surplus value to the commodity. Zola’s professed socialism is evident in the representation of economic circulation that spreads a moral infection. However, apart from demonizing capitalism, Zola is simultaneously adopting hygienicist discourse imbued with bourgeois ideology. The political unconscious of this novel betrays an extreme unease with the rising up of the working class. Nana’s rise is unconscious and dangerous, and although her power is likened to that of an Empire, her revenge is driven by a hatred of authority. For instance, she sees all men responsible for the wrongs done to her by Fontan (300), and despite her childish greed, when she receives lavish gifts for her name day, she destroys them for her own amusement (389-90). She amasses great wealth by unknowingly using her body as a commodity, but at the same time, she shows a disdain for money. Through the perspective of Labordette and Mignon, Zola describes her completed destruction as the golden fly:

Son oeuvre de ruine et de mort était faite, la mouche enlevée de l’ordure des faubourgs, apportant le fèrment des pourritures sociales, avait empoisonné ces hommes, rien qu’à se poser sur eux. C’était bien, c’était juste, elle avait vengé son monde, les gueux et les abandonnés. Et tandis que, dans une gloire, son sexe montait et rayonnait sur ses victimes étendues, pareil à un soleil levant qui éclaire un champ de carnage, elle gardait son inconscience de bête superbe, ignorante de sa besogne, bonne fille toujours. (422)

She’d completed her work of death and destruction; the fly which had taken off from the cesspit of the slums with its germs capable of putrefying society had poisoned those men merely by settling on them. It was fair, justice had been done, she’d avenged her world, the world of beggars and the under-privileged; and while the fiery red of her pubic hair glowed triumphantly over its victims stretched out at her feet, like a rising sun shining in triumph over a bloody battlefield, she herself remained, a superb, mindless animal, oblivious of what she’d done, never anything but a ‘good sort of girl’... (409)
Repeating the metaphorical register that informs the plot, Zola’s use of free indirect discourse, immediately after stating the Labordette and Mignon were watching her, implies that it is they who are thinking that Nana’s revenge is “just.” However, immediately following this excerpt, the narration is from the point of view of Nana, where her mansion seems annoying and trivial (422). The construction of Nana as completely ignorant of the destruction she causes is beginning to fray. It is unclear who believes that “justice had been done,” Labordette and Mignon, or Nana herself. This ambiguity brings some important critical observations into question.

The Empire Rots and the Bloody Commune Rises

In *Figures of Ill Repute*, Charles Bernheimer states that the disintegration of Nana’s physical body corresponds to the degeneration of the Empire (Bernheimer 213). In “Destinée Féminine et Destinée Historique dans *Nana*,” Marjorie Rousseau takes this correspondence even further. She argues that Nana is the embodiment of the Empire and her life corresponds to the span of Napoleon III’s rule from 1851-1870. She also highlights important similarities between Nana and the Emperor, as well as popular criticism of him. For example, she states that his fragile health corresponds to that of Nana’s son, Louis (Rousseau 171-174). Yet, Rousseau does not consider any correlation between the body of Nana and the scientific discourse on public health related to the prostitute; instead, at the end of her essay, she focuses on Nana as the incarnation of a force moving toward democracy which advances in an irresistible and uncontrolled way. According to Rousseau, because Nana effectively blurs social boundaries, she embodies a
confused republican ferment (179). In her conception of Nana as the embodiment of the times, its excesses as well as its discontents, Nana’s body represents both the Empire and its own unraveling. At the very end of the novel, as Nana’s decomposing body lies there alone in the dim light, Zola describes, in gruesome detail, the face of Venus rotting away: “Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l’avait pourri” (Zola 438). Bernheimer reads Nana’s infection of small pox (la petite vérole) as a hidden reference to syphilis (la grande vérole), as if the infectious disease the prostitute threatens to spread has finally turned upon her and destroyed her beautiful exterior (Bernheimer 224). Rousseau, in her analysis of Nana as the embodiment of the times, does not look at the rotting corpse, but the empty room with the sounds of people yelling outside drifting into the window: “La chambre était vide. Un grand souffle désespéré monta du boulevard et gonfla le rideau. ‘À Berlin! à Berlin! à Berlin!’” (Zola 438). For Rousseau, the room empty for only the rotting body of the excesses of the Empire indicates a void at the head of the power structure (Rousseau 179). Although Rousseau briefly mentions the beginning of hostilities in 1870, she does not develop her interpretation further. This void at the head of France’s political structure during the Prussian War allowed for the communist takeover of Paris by the Communards. When the infection bred in the filth of the working class slums behind Nana’s pretty face is finally unveiled, in Rousseau’s words, the despairing breath of the people lifts the curtain from the political scene: “plus personne n’en tient les rênes, seul

100 “Venus was decomposing; the germs which she had picked up from the carrion people allowed to moulder in the gutter, the ferment which had infected a whole society, seemed to have come to the surface of her face and rotted it.” (425)
101 “The room was empty. From the boulevard below there came a great desperate gasp, making the curtains billow. ‘On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!’” (425).
un souffle de désespoir semble pouvoir soulever le rideau de la scène politique”
(Rousseau 179). In her disregard of the miasmatism used to construct the spread of
Nana’s infection, Rousseau also leaves a void in her argument as to what is represented in
the air that lifts the curtain and carries the voice of the people. This void is the Paris
Commune.

In 1879, the year the novel was published, the story of a prostitute who is
inscribed as irrational and destructive just for the pleasure of the power, and who
conquers Paris, would also have obvious references to the Paris Commune. Louise
Michel recruited many prostitutes for the cause, and this adds another dimension to the
social destruction wrought by Nana. In The Arcades Project, Walter Benjamin cites
several reactionary pamphlets that illustrate the demonization of the Communards. From
one by Charles Louandre, Les Idées subversives de notre temps, the Commune is
depicted as an “orgy of power, wine, women, and blood” (Benjamin 795). This brief
passage illustrates the popular characterization of this first European experiment in
communism. In this conception, the Communards disrupted the family in the chaotic sex
of an “orgy,” the prostitutes who were recruited by Louise Michel were the women the
Communards enjoyed, and the Communards were violent for the sake of pure
destruction. Benjamin cites another poem entitled “Les Ruines de Paris” that reads:
“There are your fruits, bloodthirsty Commune;/ Yes,... you wanted to annihilate Paris”
(Benjamin 790). In the logic of infection that structures this narrative, Nana’s blood is
tainted with a hereditary corruption from the working class slums. The unveiling of this
disease on the face of Nana corresponds with the end of the Second Empire. Moreover,

102 “no one holds the reins anymore, only a breath of despair seems to be able to lift the curtain of the
political scene.” My translation.
Nana’s desire to destroy men’s fortunes, and the city of Paris, is coded as an unconscious
drive of which she is not aware. In his use of hygienicist discourse, Zola denies the
agency to Nana, making her drives an effect of a force deep within her body. If Nana is
an embodiment of the time, as Rousseau suggests, I would argue that the bloody forces
erupting from within her body, imbued with the filth of the working class, are more than
just the Empire turning in upon itself, which Bernheimer asserts. Nana’s body is erupting
with signs of the Commune.

The “red flag” of the Commune appears early in the text. From the first
appearance of blood, Zola informs the reader that it is a sign. Steiner stabs himself on a
pin in Nana’s white skirts to leave a blood stain, to which she responds in a serious tone:
“Maintenant c’est signé” (134). Although a literal translation is, “Now it’s signed,”
Parmée includes the connotation of an implied agreement in his translation: “Now we’ve
signed a pact” (106). In her article, “Pricking the Male Ego: Pins and Needles in
Flaubert, Maupassant, and Zola,” Mary Donaldson-Evans reads this as a sign of Nana’s
threat to male authority. However, looking at the larger narrative context, this
appearance of blood near the body of Nana begins a progression of blood stains that are
always linked to Nana’s body. Certainly the “pact” between Nana and Steiner could
imply their future relationship, but a pact signed with blood is laden with more
desperation and determination, like the voice of the people floating through the hotel
window at Nana’s death. When visiting the Variety Theater to obtain a role in
Bordenave’s new play, Nana and Muffat are in Mathilde’s dressing room where there is
“une chaise tachée de rouge, comme si on avait saigné sur la paille” (282). During
their conversation, Nana touches the bloody chair: “Elle avait baissé la tête, elle grattait

103 “and a chair with red stains that looked like blood on its rush seat.” (258)
Nana scratches at the surface of the fabric as if she is reopening a wound. A republican ferment is seeping out from under the surface of the filthy dressing room in the space of blurred social boundaries, the Variety Theater. As an emblem of the disintegrating Empire, Nana is disconnected from the material functions of her body, and is found unconscious in a pool of blood after a miscarriage (363-364). If the menstruating woman can turn milk sour, the amount of uterine blood here is enough to spoil a whole city. Moreover, the city is spoiled because of its disregard for the material conditions of its existence, the alienated labor of the working class.

Later in the text, blood is a stain of bodily violence. Distraught over his unrequited love for Nana, George Hugon stabs himself in the chest with scissors, leaving a blood stain on the rug which Zoe cannot completely wash away: “En effet, la tache reparaissait, d’un rouge pâle, sur une rosace blanche du tapis. C’était, au seuil même de la chambre, comme un trait de sang qui barrant la porte” (Zola 400). The red stain becomes a measure, for Count Muffat, of the number of men who have walked across it, and a measure of the circulation in and out of Nana’s chambers. He is afraid to step on the stain, as if it were a living thing (406). Nana is preoccupied and distraught by the image of Georges falling with a red hole in his shirt, an image remarkably parallel to one being shot (399). The death of a young, naive idealist haunts Nana and seems to block the door to her bedroom, and to the circulation of her commoditized body. The sign of blood erupts from blurred social boundaries, from within the embodied Empire – Nana --

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104 “She was looking down, picking with her nail at the bleeding wound on the rush seat on her chair.” (260)
105 “And indeed, it kept reappearing, a pale red stain on a white rosette in the carpet, like a rim of blood blocking the doorway to the bedroom itself.” (384)
despite herself, like the image of a young man with a red hole in his chest that blocks the circulation of commodities that enrich the decadent Empire.

Here, as in most histories of fin-de-siècle Paris, the Commune is erased. Like the massacre of the Communards by Adolphe Thiers and the forces of order in May of 1871, the romantic ideal of leveling class status that bubbled up from the working class slums and was released by the fall of the Second Empire, disappears. By the time Nana hears that Georges Hugon is dead, the stain on the rug is gone: “mais elle s’en était allée enfin, les pieds l’avaient usée” (Zola 420). The bloody sign of the Commune is equally erased by the economic circulation of high capitalism. Thus, as Nana’s putrid body lay in the hotel room, the people of the city, whose voices travel on the air that scarcely lifts the political curtain, are like bleating herds led to the slaughterhouse: “et ce vertige, ces masses confuses, roulées par le flot, exhalait une terreur, une grande pitié de massacres futurs” (434). The masses literally exhaled the terror of future massacres, although the killers are unclear: the Prussian army or the forces of order in the “Semaine Sanglante” of May 1871. What is clear in this novel is that the red flag of the Commune is erased, and the people of Paris face an impending massacre.

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106 “but it had finally vanished, rubbed off by the tread of feet.” (406)
107 “this confused, whirling mass of people streaming by created a feeling of terror and immense pity for the massacres to come.” (420)
CHAPTER FIVE

WORKS CITED


CHAPTER SIX

Invading Degeneracy in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

Criticism of Bram Stoker’s most famous novel, *Dracula*, is far too often focused on its multiform rewritings in popular culture, which will not be considered in this chapter. I focus strictly on *Dracula* as a nineteenth-century novel that represents bodies in the urban environment. In fact, the body of the hyper-sexual degenerate monster that invades London is embedded in discourses that are particular to the nineteenth-century city: sanitary science and developing germ theory, fears of syphilis and the prostitute’s contagious immorality, the growing number of colonial subjects as foreign bodies in the seat of the British Empire, and the degeneration of the criminal as well as that of the decadent aristocracy. The story of the deviant Transylvanian Count has provoked abundant criticism concerning the definition and subversion of Victorian gender roles as well as psychoanalytic discussion of the sexualized seduction involved in vampirism. While that work is valuable in understanding how Stoker constructs the insidious threat of the monster, it too often overlooks the construction of the vampire’s body as the projection of particularly urban fears.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse attempting to contain the subversive figures in the urban environment explodes into multiple pseudo-scientific

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108 For recent work on Francis Ford Coppola’s cinematic adaptation, see Thomas L. Reed, “‘Belle et le Vampire’: Focus and Fidelity in *Bram Stoker’s Dracula,”* Jacques Coulardeau, “The Vision of Religion in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula,”* and Erik Marshall, “Defanging Dracula: The Disappearing Other in Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula.”

discourses. These discourses, in their attempt to explore the biological, genetic, and social roots of what is perceived as problems, have in effect established their unmanageability. The further the roots of such problems are discovered, the more and more difficult they are to contain. As discussed in the previous chapter on Emile Zola’s *Nana*, the similarities drawn between humans and animals are culturally constructed codes for class difference, as it is the animal in man that must be civilized into acceptable social behavior. However, the more this social discourse is developed, the more the possibility of containing this animal diminishes. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, when a wolf escapes from the London Zoological Gardens, its keeper has this to say:

... there’s a deal of the same nature in us as in them theer animiles. Here’s you a-comin’ and arskin’ of me questions about my business, and I that grumpy-like that only for your bloomin’ ‘arf-quid I’d ‘a’ seen you blowed fust ‘fore I’d answer. ... But, Lor’ love yer ‘art, now that the old ‘ooman has stuck a chunk of her tea-cake in me, an’ rinsed me out with her bloomin’ old teapot, and I’ve lit hup, you may scratch my ears for all you’re worth, and won’t git even a growl out of me. ... But, there, you can’t trust wolves no more nor women. (Stoker 126)

In properly demotic English, the working class zookeeper tells a journalist how a wolf escaped from the zoo, as the reader assumes it is Count Dracula’s doing. As in *Nana*, there is the association of the poorer classes with animals, both considered lower on the evolutionary scale. Gothic novels, such as *Dracula*, are preoccupied with defining humanity and what is means to be human. As Andrew Smith discusses in his book *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle*, Gothic texts explore the instability of subjectivity, often through discourses of “gender, biology, and desire” (Smith 28). The construction of frightening situations in Gothic fiction forces characters to negotiate the limits of their own perception and agency. In *Dracula*, the
distinction between bestial violence and humane behavior is consistently blurred. Moreover, the work of desire in Gothic texts involves the projection of prohibited fantasies, and the attempt to assimilate or sublimate these forbidden ideas and behaviors into morally acceptable grounds. Thus, in the narrative logic of Dracula, the monster is both a construction of fantasy and fear, of desire and its forbidden nature. In turn, the destruction of the monster is the assimilation of these fantasies of desire into dominant narratives of social order. Consequently, the monster is necessarily an enemy to humanity, and according to Franco Moretti’s dialectical definition, it represents the absolutely inhuman, where social antagonisms are displaced as outside of society itself, and the monster’s defeat is a demonstration of a reconstituted universality (Moretti 105). Thus, those who combat the monster become representatives of humanity itself, and by destroying the monster, they cure a social fissure to recreate a narrative of universal humanity. However, this universality is, from the start, an illusion, and the projected fissure represented in the monster is its product. Moreover, the reintegration of this monster does not involve the recognition that its constituent anxieties originate within society. In essence, the delusional destruction of the monster only enacts the erasure of any possibility of this recognition.

In Dracula, the vampire personifies anxieties of class difference, colonialism and immigration into England proper, and the spread of infectious disease, notably sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis. In this chapter, I elaborate on Moretti’s dialectic by exploring how the fears surrounding class, race, infection and sexuality, are subsumed into the discourse of degeneration. The concept of degeneration elucidates the roadblocks to humanity’s (read: Western European man’s) bodily and social evolution.
The title of Max Nordau’s famous text that criticizes the decadent upper classes whose passivity leads to a love of the strange and perverse (Glover 66), degeneration also involves a conglomerate of other disciplines. According to David Glover in his book, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction*, discussions of degeneration involved the early criminology of Cesare Lombroso in addition to the reconsideration of the physiognomical studies of Johan Caspar Lavater, in which character may be read from facial structure. According to Melissa Percival in her introduction to the collection of essays in *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater’s Impact on European Culture*, Lavater’s ideas permeated cultural production in the nineteenth century, such as literature, art, medicine, and the social sciences, and were also a formative tool in the construction of realist character (Percival 20). Glover argues that the discourse on degeneration further involves the intersection of zoology, economics, and the biological sciences (Glover 68-72). Overall, the discourse of degeneration is quite fluid. David Glover explains that, although this discourse provides the cultural codes, or what he calls the “semantic matrix,” for the characterization of Count Dracula, the concept of degeneration itself is only defined through what he terms a “relay” in a “bio-political trajectory” (69). Similar to the construction of pathology in *Nana*, the diagnosis of so-called degenerative traits uses arguments constructed through several fields, such as medicine, biology, and social sciences, but does not follow the system of inquiry of any single field. For instance, in his discussion of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Glover characterizes the diagnosis of sexual perversion:

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110 For further exploration of Lavater’s influence on European culture, see *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater’s Impact on European Culture*, edited by Melissa Percival and Graeme Tyler.
The medical expert’s attention would move from the minutiae of the sexual act to the classification of various maladies and diseases, and from there to the future disposition of the species, before returning to the sexual act again. In this way the diagnostic treatment of the human body could be connected to a program for administratively regulating hereditary traits, paving the way for the extension of state activity into modern eugenics. (69)

Thus, the relay moves from minutiae to scientific systems of classification, to a projection onto a future disposition of humanity, and back to the observable physical phenomenon. Glover implies that a similar relay is at work in the recognition of degeneration:

“Degeneration” was never a unitary concept, but instead consisted of a relay of representation loosely inscribed in a whole cluster of professionalized disciplines and cultural practices. Because its objects were nowhere consistently or satisfactorily defined, we might best see the various attempts at theorizing degeneration as a set of overlapping hypotheses competing with each other to define the true dimensions of the culture’s crisis, its sources and parameters. Hence their broad and often uncertain scope, ranging from worries about the dissipation of natural talent, through narratives of the rise and fall of nations, to moral panics about disease and infection. (67)

At the root of theorizing degeneration is the attempt to define a cultural crisis which is driven by fear of social dissolution (the social fissure that Moretti asserts). It serves to naturalize social differences through biological discourse, such as we saw in the golden fly metaphor in Nana. Moreover, this relay works to designate a pathology, encoded as blockages to evolution, a concept which itself is a biological encoding of social progress. The displacement of social anxieties that Moretti discusses is performed by jumping through various fields of knowledge which constitutes the discourse of degeneration. Through this bio-political relay, discourse of degeneration goes further than just a simple displacement of social anxieties. Its use of the concept of evolution essentially grafts a
biological coding onto culturally constructed ideas of social progress. Now, the alterity to biologically coded social progress is configured as the biologically inherent pathology of the monster; thus, the monster is degenerate. More inclusive of other discourses than the decomposition narrative of *Nana*, in the discourse of degeneration, the alterity is mobilized, and threatens a reversion to previous political and economic structures inextricably bound to biological evolution. Conclusively, the monster is a conglomerate of degenerative traits which, though coded through biological discourse, are socially determined and historically contingent because they are constructed from contemporary social antagonisms.

**The Return of the Repressed East**

“*The very place, where he have been alive, Un-dead for all these centuries, is full of strangeness of the geologic and chemical world. There are deep caverns and fissures that reach none know whither. There have been volcanoes, some of those openings still send out waters of strange properties, and gases that kill or make to vivify. Doubtless, there is something magnetic or electric in some of these combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in strange way; and in himself were from the first some great qualities.*” -- Dr. Abraham Van Helsing  (*Stoker* 278)

Count Dracula is “Un-dead” because his body defies accepted biological processes. According to this excerpt from Doctor Abraham Van Helsing, the body of Count Dracula is a product of his environment, thus including miasmatic theory in the degeneration narrative that defines him. Because the monster that invades the center of the British Empire is foreign, several critics have elaborated on the movement of the
Count as colonization reversed.\textsuperscript{111} I would argue that the use of the colonization narrative is another element of the discourse of degeneration, where biologically encoded ideas of social progress are defied and reversed. A dominant assumption in the narrative that justifies colonization is that the European powers are civilizing the savages in the colonized lands as part of a larger project of global social progress.\textsuperscript{112} The Count is from the atavistic East, where communities are characterized by a lack of reason, overwhelming religiosity, and superstition. In the novel, tensions are developed between London and Transylvania to provide justification and a birthplace for the Count’s alterity. While London is characterized by capitalism and a mercantile economy, Transylvania is associated with feudalism and a rural peasant culture (Smith 142). Jonathan Harker’s opening journal reads like an imperial travelogue as the bourgeois English male, in an attempt toward further upward social mobility, descends upon the mysterious East of Europe. Harker criticizes the inaccuracy of the train timetables and maps as he enters what he describes as “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (Stoker 10). As he interacts with the local people, they perform religious gestures which Harker describes as “that strange mixture of fear-meaning movements” (16), such as pointing two fingers at him to guard against the evil eye (14), and he is offered a crucifix, which he considers “idolatrous” (13). When he asks the innkeeper about Count Dracula, the man crosses himself and refuses to speak further (12). He also sees peasants kneeling before a shrine (15). The lack of reason in an uncivilized environment is also manifested physically. Harker notices that in the Czechs and Slovaks, “the goitre was painfully


\textsuperscript{112} See Christopher L. Miller, The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade, as cited in Chapter Two of this dissertation, “The Immured African Body in Claire de Duras’ Ourika.”
prevalent” (15). Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal define this malady as an enlargement of the thyroid gland due to iodine deficiency which may cause brain damage (footnote, Stoker 15). The lack of progress in the East is encoded in terms of biology; this deficiency implies that they are physically incapable of higher mental faculties.

Jonathan’s journey takes place during the eve of St. George’s Day, which is celebrated in England, but in Transylvania, on this night “all evil things in the world have full sway” (12). When Harker is taken by the driver (who is really the Count) to the Castle Dracula, he sees the flickering blue flame which has a double significance. In medieval folklore, the blue flame is said to rise from the plague dead, which plays into the construction of the vampire and his dissemination through fears of infection.113 This is the first incident that Harker thinks he is dreaming, because he cannot understand any logic behind it. His experience in Transylvania pushes the limits of his conception of social organization. For the bourgeois professional, the progress of civilized nations has not yet reached this stretch of Europe. Transylvania is a remnant of the past that has remained latent, much like the degeneration that manifests when bitten by the vampire. Harker himself states that “the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill” (40). Moreover, Dracula is a remnant of the feudal past, an antiquated economic system that was phased out in Western Europe by the rise of a middle class. Likewise, this economic system does not allow for a middle class of which Harker is a member.

Interestingly, by the time that Harker is able to leave Transylvania, he himself has

113 As the Count explains in a later conversation with Harker (27), on Saint George’s Eve, the flame is said to mark the places where there is buried treasure. It is this treasure that the Count collects from the Transylvanian landscape which permits him to purchase real estate in London, and thus spread his vampirism. The driver repeatedly stops the coach and creates a stone marker at the place of each blue flame, presumably to find the place during the day (19). This is a possible explanation for the mass of gold that Harker later finds in the Castle.
become all of those qualities that he criticizes upon his entry into Transylvania: he is irrational (in fact, in a fit of hysteria), powerless, and is possessed by such a fear as he had originally mocked in the superstitious peasants.

Harker’s reversion can be explained as the result of his imprisonment into a system of discipline effectuated by the Count to force him to conform to the quasi-medieval social order of Transylvania. Several critics have read Harker’s mental breakdown as the effect of his emasculation, at the hands of the Count, on his already fragile ego. However, this breakdown is caused by more than just his exposure to transgressive sexuality in the Count’s castle. The invasive sexual advances of the Count and his three vampire women could very well have exacerbated Harker’s fear, but this fear originates in his inability to recognize his place in the archaic social order of Transylvania. Harker’s encounter with the superhuman powers of the Count, in a strange land where the community recognizes and is subservient to those incomprehensible powers, causes Harker to doubt his own perceptions. At several points in his travel journal, he remarks that he believed he was dreaming (Stoker 19, 40-41), and when Harker sees the Count leave dressed as him, he laments being a prisoner without the protection of the law that even is afforded to a criminal (47). First trapped in the castle, Harker then loses his public persona when the Count leaves in his clothes, further disrupting Harker’s conception of his identity. In light of the representation of imprisonment as an effort to discipline the body to conform to the expectations of the social order, as discussed in Part One of this dissertation, Harker’s imprisonment in the castle takes on more subtle implications. In the castle, he is locked in an emblem of  

\[114\] See Dejan Kuzmanovic, “Vampiric Seduction and the Vicissitudes of Masculine Identity in Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” and Andrew Smith, Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic in the Fin-de-Siècle.
atavistic feudalism, where an aristocratic monster controls his movements. Moreover, Harker’s imprisonment is in part through his obligations to the Count as his solicitor. In the same journal entry where Jonathan declares that he had become a “full-blown solicitor,” he enters the Count’s castle (21). This statement implies that his desire for upward social mobility led him on a quasi-imperial mission to the atavistic Translyvanian society, and this desire leads him to cross the threshold into his future prison. When the Count opens the door, he states:

“Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!” He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone. The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince. (22)

The vampire requires complicity from his victims to begin the spread of his moral and physical degeneracy, much like the prostitute for her infectious immorality. The Count is like stone until the moment when Harker steps over the threshold, after which the Count moves immediately toward him. Andrew Smith, in his book, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle*, argues that Harker’s “latent degeneracy” makes him susceptible to the Count’s powers (Smith 143). Smith argues that although the middle classes in the Victorian age represent “modernity, money, ambition, and a sense of justice” (143), this vision of middle class ethics is impossible for Harker to maintain in a foreign land that has not yet seen the growth of this class and the social order and ideology it imposes. This ideology grows out of the economic relationships and the subjectivity these relationships formalize which in turn organizes avenues of social and political agency. Alone, Harker cannot defend himself against
Dracula, because the laws and assumptions of social equality that grew along with the middle class have not yet developed in Transylvania. In fact, Harker’s social advancement depends on submitting to the Count’s wishes, and his struggle against subjugating himself to the Count’s despotic order initiates his psychological crisis.

More importantly, Harker’s original fear develops from his failed resistance to the discipline that the Count imposes. The Count forbids him to leave the castle, and almost all of the other doors in the castle are locked (Stoker 31-21). Stoker utilizes the specter of disciplinary institutions used to regulate the bodies in the urban environment, yet it is reversed in the same way that the narrative of colonization is used construct the monster’s invasion. While Christopher Craft argues that this psychological crisis is caused by Harker’s repressed homosexual desire, Dejan Kuzmanovic refutes that assertion in his article “Vampiric Seduction and the Vicissitudes of Masculine Identity in Bram Stoker’s Dracula.” Kuzmanovic presents a more inclusive psychoanalytic approach to Harker’s crisis by asserting that it is a necessary stage in the development of a mature, masculine ego (Kuzmanovic 416-18). While Kuzmanovic discusses Harker’s maturation in terms of the function of the Freudian ego, which is dependant upon the recognition of one’s place within a larger social structure, Kuzmanovic does not amply consider the effect of disciplined conformity to an archaic feudal social order on the Victorian middle-class professional. While I make no attempt to refute these psychoanalytic analyses of Harker’s repressed desire or his ego development, I do aim to add to these analyses by looking more closely at how Harker’s desire to resist his imprisonment adds to his psychological crisis.
Harker’s mental deterioration at Castle Dracula is a direct result of the incomprehensible Symbolic order imposed by the despotic Count, and its consequent refashioning of Harker’s subjectivity. On May 12, a conversation with the Count confirms that Harker’s own opportunism and professional obligations have brought about his imprisonment:

‘Do you wish me to stay long?’ I asked, for my heart grew cold at the thought.
‘I desire it much; nay, I will take no refusal. When your master, employer, what you will, engaged that someone should come on his behalf, it was understood that my needs only were to be consulted. I have not stinted. Is it not so?’
What could I do but bow acceptance? It was Mr. Hawkin’s interest, not mine, and I had to think of him, not myself; and besides, while Count Dracula was speaking, there was that in his eyes and in his bearing which made me remember that I was a prisoner, and that if I wished it I could have no choice. The Count saw his victory in my bow...
(Stoker 37)

The bourgeois narrative of upward social mobility that leads Harker to Transylvania turns against him, and makes him complicit in his own imprisonment. In addition to controlling Harker’s movements within the castle, the Count also controls Harker’s possible avenues of communication. When Harker tries to get a letter to Mina, written in shorthand, through the Szgany gypsies, the Count intercepts them. He burns Harker’s letter to Mina and politely asks Harker to reseal the letter to Mr. Hawkins. Harker has no choice but to obey and writes: “I could only redirect it and hand it to him in silence” (46). Then Harker finds that the Count has confiscated his notes and stationery as well as his clothes, so that it may appear that Harker himself is mailing his own letters, which the Count forced him to write beforehand (45-7). As these excerpts show, Harker is repeatedly reminded of his subjugation, and his powerlessness against the refashioning of
his identity in Transylvania. After lamenting the “gloom and mystery” that seemed to surround him, Harker finds pleasure in his view from the window. This is cut short when he sees the Count descend the exterior castle wall, face downward like a bat (39). Almost two weeks after seeing the Count crawl down the wall, Harker, out of fear and desperation to escape his imprisonment, decides to take action and try it himself:

I have seen him myself crawl from his window; why should not I imitate him, and go in by his window?.... I took off my boots, and ventured out on the desperate way. I looked down once, so as to make sure that a sudden glimpse of the awful depth would not overcome me, but after that kept my eyes away from it. I knew pretty well the direction and distance of the Count’s window, and made for it as well as I could, having regard to the opportunities available. I did not feel dizzy – I suppose I was too excited – and the time seemed ridiculously short till I found myself standing on the window-sill and trying to raise up the sash. (49-50)

As a result of this imposed discipline within the castle, Harker begins to act like the Count, all while believing that he is attempting to resist Dracula’s orders by deviating from the avenues of movement dictated to him. He does not recall the details of the climb, and exceeds his expectation of being dizzy and afraid. As the social climber he is, Harker’s “regard to the opportunities” allowed him to complete the task. In this room, Harker finds a heap of gold, gathered by the Count from the blue flame markers on St. George’s Eve as well as the Count himself. This so frightens Harker that he climbs again on the exterior castle wall back to his chambers. Once more, in his desire to obtain the key to escape from the castle, Harker climbs into the Count’s chambers from the exterior castle wall. Despite his disgust with the Count’s ”lizard-like” behavior, Harker eventually succumbs to the influence of the castle, and willfully imitates the Count, while at the same time acting on the desire to resist his imprisonment. In his efforts to defy the Count, he has become more like him.
The scene of Harker’s seduction by three vampire women, that has gained so much critical attention, is precipitated by his efforts to defy the Count. His next act of resistance is on May 15, when, after seeing the Count leave through his window, Harker attempts to explore the castle. He discovers a room that appears to have been inhabited in old times by the ladies in the castle, with whom he then identifies: “Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter” (Stoker 40). Although Kuzmanovic asserts that Harker’s assumption of a feminine role is evidence of his passive submission to captivity (Kuzmanovic 416), this is problematized when we consider that Harker’s presence in this room is precipitated by his efforts to defy the Count. He does this by imagining himself in a different narrative around his presence in the room, one in which he is virtuous and absent from the public role as solicitor that led to his imprisonment. Harker decides to fall asleep there in another act of resistance:

The Count’s warning came into my mind, but I took a pleasure in disobeying it.... I determined not to return tonight to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where of old ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars. (Stoker 41)

Harker’s revolt against the strict avenues of behavior that the Count imposes is expressed through his reverie of imitating the women of bygone days. The feminine role that Harker embraces here is interpreted by Kuzmanovic as a “gender inversion of the generic motif shared by both gothic romances and Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novels: the heroine is kept captive by an aggressive masculine figure who proclaims to wish her well but whom she sees as a threat to her integrity” (Kuzmanovic 416). Thus Harker erases

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115 Notably Christopher Craft’s essay, “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s Dracula.”
his culpability by inserting himself into a fictional narrative. It is unclear whether the
sexual encounter that follows is a dream, a delusion, or an encounter with the undead,
because the women seem to be a direct manifestation of his desire. Despite his terror,
Harker recognizes his desire that they kiss him, a recognition of his own seduction and
possible degeneration: “I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss
me with those red lips” (Stoker 42). In a long, sensual description, one woman slowly
approaches him and comes quite close to biting his neck:

Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one’s flesh does when the
hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer – nearer. I could feel the soft,
shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the
hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my
eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – (42-3).

This scene has been exhaustively explored as representation of sexual deviance, repressed
homosexual desire, or castration. Kuzmanovic interprets this scene as a nightmarish fear
of castration, where the “supersensitive skin” of the neck is likened to that of the penis
while the teeth suggest castration (Kuzmanovic 118), while Christopher Craft argues that
it represents gender inversion where it is the male penetrated by the female (Craft 446).
David Glover argues that Harker’s seduction is an attempt “to betray him to the
corruptions of the flesh and cut him off forever from respectable domesticity” (Glover
70), an interpretation which is informed by popular fears around syphilis and the
prostitute. Glover continues his analysis by noting that the blond vampire who initiates
the approach to Harker represents “‘the enemy within,’ a source of male hysteria and
demoralization,” a combined fear and fantasy of “sexual chaos” (70). All of these critics
interpret this scene as a manifestation of Harker’s desires and anxieties, without
considering that it is a direct result of Harker’s defiance of his imprisonment by the Count.

To look at this scene from a broader perspective, an illicit sexual encounter with a strange woman is also the defiance of his marriage pact with Mina, which Glover considers, and this threat to his domestic happiness may also be seen as his emasculation through his submission to the woman. Through his effort to defy the Count, and the imprisonment he imposes, Harker has simultaneously deviated from his marriage pact with Mina. Thus, when the Count arrests Harker’s seduction by claiming, “This man belongs to me!” he is then aligned with Harker’s beloved wife (Stoker 43). This statement appears to be a homoerotic declaration, but by looking more closely at how Harker’s possible avenues of movement within the castle were orchestrated, it becomes clear that the Count has constructed a double bind. The Count saves Harker from castration and adultery by reasserting his dreaded power over him. The Count is simultaneously his tyrant, protector, and liberator. The Count reaffirms the damsel-in-distress narrative into which Harker inserts himself earlier, but the previous role of the Count in that narrative is displaced by the blond female vampire. She has Harker trapped and threatens his integrity, and it is the Count then who rescues him. Thus, not only is Harker’s gender identity disrupted, as he becomes the feminine counterpart to the more masculine Count Dracula, but Harker’s effort at resistance has been co-opted by the Count as if Harker’s resistance had been part of the Count’s disciplinary agenda all along. Through his blithe shifting of roles, the Count has effectively placed himself as the only way that Harker may escape imprisonment. Whether Harker obeys or revolts, he is still always submitting to the will of Count Dracula.
Although he is never shown to have been bitten, Harker’s moral fortitude as a rising middle-class professional has degenerated, so that by the time he is able to leave the Castle, he is hysterically raging from what doctor’s would term a “violent brain fever” (Stoker 95). When the Count is spotted in Piccadilly by him and Mina, Harker experiences another hysterical fit, and must be taken home. The possibility of an atavistic being in the crowd in central London evokes primarily a fear of further social decay, especially since Dracula may blend in with the metropolitan crowd (Glover 74). Harker’s second hysterical fit is a result of his guilt for having precipitated this presence by acting on a capitalist opportunity. The Count is the phantasm of metropolitan fears: colonial invasion of racial others and atavistic, degenerative, criminal beings who threaten further degeneration of the social spheres they invade. In this scene, the phantasm has come to life.

The Invasion of Count de Ville

“This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten the helpless.”

Jonathan Harker’s journal, June 30 (Stoker 53-4)

When Dracula comes to London, he uses the name Count De Ville, as if the degeneracy he represents in fact comes from the city (Stoker 239). Andrew Smith notes that while Transylvania is associated on an abstract level with “irrationality, desire, disease, and the possibility of social decline,” these were also characteristics of popular criticisms of London as a “breeding ground for degenerates” by Andrew Mearns, W.T. Stead, and William Booth (Smith 142). Andrew Smith also cites Daniel Pick’s argument
that the Count’s association with Eastern Europe and disease tapped into a popular anxiety of “a perceived ‘alien invasion’ of Jews from the East who, in the view of many alarmists were ‘feeding off’ and ‘poisoning’ the blood of the Londoner” (Smith 35). When the Count is spotted in Picadilly by Jonathan and Mina, she describes him as a “dark man,” with “a beaky nose and black moustache and pointed beard,” as his racial difference stands out in comparison with the other Londoners (Stoker 155). Although the horror of Count Dracula’s invasion of London is the violent perversion of innocent women, the personification of invading degeneracy uses other strategies to take over London and to threaten the future of the middle class. The Count purchases property at Carfax, then also in Picadilly, Mile End, and Bermondsey (262). Harker notes that he has houses “on the far east of the northern shore, on the east of the southern shore, and on the south” (229). Harker projects that the Count’s next purchases will be in the north and west, and possibly the City itself (229). In this manner, he may distribute his boxes of earth, and safe lairs, for full access to all of London. Moreover, the anonymity of city life allows Dracula to move freely throughout the city because it would not be surprising to see someone of such strange, foreign features walking the streets of a metropolis. When the Count is spotted by Harker on the streets of Picadilly in broad daylight, no one pays him any heed.

More importantly, the Count’s invasion is precipitated by his hoarding of money (which he supposedly gathers from the Transylvanian landscape) and the services of Jonathan Harker. As a representative of British imperialism, Harker travels to an ancient

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116 Further anti-semitism is demonstrated by Jonathan Harker when the hunters follow the last box of earth to Dracula’s castle. Harker describes one of the handlers, Immanuel Hildesheim, as “a Hebrew of rather the Adelphi Theatre type, with a nose like a sheep, and a fez,” as he practices what Auerbach and Skal describe as “a casual contempt for Jews” which “was part of a gentleman’s idiom” in the Victorian age (Stoker 302, footnote).
land for his own economic advancement. In his article, “‘The Invisible Giant,’ Dracula, and Disease,” Martin Willis states:

Always represented as self-improvement and well-deserved success..., Harker’s middle-class appropriation of power and status is the vehicle by which Dracula spreads the disease of vampirism across Britain. Harker’s own personal advancement is rooted in a dubious moral economy of superiority over the foreigner and his culture allied to exploitative trade in property. (Willis 319)

Because of Harker’s own moral weakness and adherence to exploitative imperial practices, the Count is given access to London, although Harker, at the time, interprets his behavior as innocent and well-deserving advancement. This implicates Harker personally in the spread of this degeneracy (Willis 321). While capitalism surely facilitates the Count’s invasion, Moretti argues that Dracula himself is a metaphor for capitalist monopoly. He is a rational entrepreneur who invests his gold to expand his lordship over the British Empire, beginning with its center, London (Moretti 106). Moretti applies Karl Marx’s metaphor of the vampire to Stoker’s novel: “Il capitale è lavoro morto, che si ravviva, come un vampiro, soltanto succhiando lavoro vivo, e più vive quanto più ne succhia” (Moretti 115). Marx here is using an old metaphor of money as the life-blood of the economy, which can be traced back to Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. However, in the Victorian era, industrial capitalists do not perform any labor themselves; instead they “suck” the value from workers, while simultaneously imposing upon them the renunciation of the pleasure they themselves enjoy (115). The social relations created by capitalism, such as the alienated labor of the worker, make it possible for capital to be dehumanized, and for the vampire to have a body, yet be incorporeal and un-dead (114).

117 “Capital is dead labor, that is revived, like a vampire, by only sucking off of living labor, and the more it sucks out of it, the more it lives.” My translation.
Also like capital, Dracula must constantly expand his dominion because accumulation is intrinsic to his nature. Moretti places the vampire as the capital of 1897, in a resurgence after 20 years of recession, who does not tolerate any competition to his expansion (116). This capitalist monopoly is imagined as a feudal figure from the past, which free exchange was supposed to eliminate. In this sense, Dracula is both the final product and the negation of the bourgeois century. Taken to its limits, the free exchange allows such capitalist accumulation that, when unchecked, becomes a monopoly and destroys the economic freedoms that free exchange was supposed to uphold (116-117). This interpretation of Dracula’s invasion is evident when Harker attacks the Count at the Piccadilly house, attempting to stab him through the heart, but he misses: “As it was, the point just cut the cloth of his coat, making a wide gap whence a bundle of bank-notes and a stream of gold fell out” (Stoker 266). As the Count jumps out the window, Seward hears the “‘ting’ of gold, as some of the sovereigns fell” (267). Instead of blood pouring out of the Count, it is gold, as if his body is made of money. The Count’s accumulated capital has allowed him to invade London, and when he is attacked, he bleeds money. As a monster constructed of urban anxieties, the destructive effects of capitalism lie beneath the discourse of degeneration that is used to construct the body of the Count. The use of evolutionary discourse encodes culturally constructed ideas of class difference; however Moretti does not explore his analogy further to trace how the biologically inherent degeneracy of the Count is also a product of the expanding capitalist system of imperial Britain.

On the surface of this discourse of degeneration is the evolutionism that posits animal characteristics as biologically encoded markers of cultural alterity. In the
discourse around the urban working class, the inscription of these markers implies a lack of culture altogether, which marks the inability to enter the Symbolic order. Yet, this traditional deprecatory marker is actually used to the Count’s advantage. The Count’s use of animal forms allows him to defy the human body’s restrictions of movement and travel. The Count’s presence is consistently marked by animals such as the bat, dog, and in particular, the wolf. When Harker is trapped in the castle, he sees the Count crawl out of a window in “lizard-like fashion,” “with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings” (Stoker 39). After Lucy is first bitten, she sees a “great bat” outside her window (90). She perceives the bat again, on the night of September 17, along with a “gaunt, grey wolf” the same night the wolf Berserker is missing from the zoo (131). When Dracula enters England, he is in the form of a dog, which is the only living thing that is seen debarking from the Demeter when it runs aground in Whitby (78). Yet, this shapeshifting is not part of the folklore Stoker studied, such as Emily Gerard’s The Land beyond the Forest; the Count’s ability to transform his victims into his likeness is also not part of the traditional vampire folklore (Auerbach and Skal, footnote 212). Count Dracula’s ability to do so is a product of a nineteenth-century imagination.

In fact, Dracula embodies contemporary tensions within the discourse of degeneration, which serve to legitimate the middle class by discrediting both extremes of the social scale. Moretti notes that, although Dracula is an aristocrat by birth, he does not live like the nobility because he lacks servants (Moretti 114). The Count appears to do all his own housework, which would seem dangerously effeminate to the Victorian, and according to Auerbach and Skal, “inhuman” (footnote Stoker 32). David Glover discusses two categories of degeneration in the late nineteenth century, notably in the
writings of Francis Galton, such as *Hereditary Genius* and *Natural Inheritance*. One strain is the degeneration of the upper classes that Galton uses to discredit aristocratic privilege, claiming that the aristocracy regresses toward mediocrity due to “‘the tainted offspring of forefathers beggared in their bodies by luxury and riotous living, and of fathers who sapped their manhood in vice’” (cited in Glover 67-8). Another strain in Galton is the degeneration in the lower classes, also typified by the writings of the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley and the zoologist E. Ray Lankester, both of whom were writing about the threat to nationhood from the lower rungs of society. The “urban-industrial focus” of this perspective argues that workers had to adapt themselves to a “degraded environment,” which thus led the numbers of “criminopathic paupers” to grow (Glover 68). Galton argued that the conditions of working class life erased “any semblance of common humanity” (68). He also took an interest in the work of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, whose characterization of the criminal influenced Max Nordau’s extension of this argument for his book *Degeneration*, all of which underlies the construction of Count Dracula (Fontana 25).

The analysis of the criminal by Lombroso uses the same relay of signification that Glover describes in the discourse on degeneration. Historically contingent elements such as class status are not considered as meaningful environmental factors, but instead are displaced as mere triggers of an innate biological disposition that defies the natural process of evolution. In his article “Lombroso’s Criminal Man and Stoker’s *Dracula*,” Ernest Fontana argues that Lombroso’s “pseudoscientific conception of the criminal personality” underlies the construction of Count Dracula (Fontana 25).118 For Lombroso,

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118 This interpretation is also confirmed by Andrew Smith, who cites Daniel Pick’s *Faces of Degeneration* and Leonard Wolf’s *Annotated Dracula*. See Smith 35.
the criminal is an “atavistic being,” and is in “defiance of the evolutionary cycle” (25).

The Count’s animal-like physiognomy, although arguably lupine with the pointed ears, excessive hair, and protruding canine teeth, also corresponds to Lombroso’s description of the criminal physiognomy. Jonathan Harker describes his first view of the Count:

His face was a strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse – broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. (Stoker 23-4)

According to Lombroso, the aquiline nose is “‘like the beak of a bird of prey’,” the “‘eyebrows are generally bushy in murderers and violators of women’,,” and there is also “‘a protuberance on the upper part of the posterior margin’ of the ear, ‘a relic of the pointed ear characteristic of apes’” (cited in Fontana 26). Fontana links the Count’s protruding teeth with Lombroso’s argument that the criminal often has “‘supernumerary teeth.” Also, the “broad” “squat” fingers of the Count are like those who commit crimes according to Lombroso (26). Moreover, Dracula’s uncanny ability to crawl down the walls of his castle relates to the “extraordinary agility” that Lombroso cites in the criminal. One such example is a celebrated thief of advanced age who escaped his captors by “leaping from a high rampart at Pavia.” The criminal also tends to have great
mobility and strength in their large toe, giving them a “prehensile foot” that may be used for grasping. These characteristics may be the source, according to Fontana, of the Count’s lizard-like crawl down the walls of his castle. Also the Count’s “very massive” eyebrows almost meet over the nose, which corresponds to Lombroso’s criminal type (26). Furthermore, the criminal, is described by Lombroso as a “relic of a vanquished race” (25). The Count himself describes the ancestry of the Szekeleys as descendants of the Huns by stating that: “‘We Szekeleys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship” (Stoker 33). This warrior race of centuries before is not only a remnant of a feudal barbaric past, but this also expresses the racial impurity of the Count’s ancestry, that Transylvania is a “polyglot” state (Glover 73). It is important to mention that other physiognomies in the novel signify a morality contrary to the Count. Glover describes Van Helsing’s physiognomy as demonstrating “moral fitness” while the Count’s is “deviant,” (Glover 67). Dr. Van Helsing, the foil to the Count, has “bushy brows” which are mentioned three times (Stoker 107, 163, 168), and which Mina Harker interprets as evidence of a firm resolve (168). She describes Dr. Van Helsing as:

a man of medium height, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes one at once as indicative of thought and power; the head is noble, well-sized, broad, and large behind the ears. The face, clean-shaven, shows a hard, square chin, a large, resolute, mobile mouth, a good-sized nose, rather straight, but with quick, sensitive nostrils, that seem to broaden as the big, bushy brows come down and the mouth tightens. The forehead is broad and fine, rising at first almost straight and then sloping back above two bumps or ridges wide apart; such a forehead that the reddish hair cannot possibly tumble over it, but falls naturally back and to the sides. Big dark blue eyes are set widely apart, and are quick and tender or stern with the man’s moods. (163)
In contrast to the Count’s physiognomy, Van Helsing has a straight nose, unlike the Count’s thin nose with “peculiarly arched nostrils.” Moreover, the forehead of the Count is “lofty” and “domed” while Van Helsing’s is “broad and fine, rising at first almost straight.” The Count’s mouth is “fixed and rather cruel-looking” while Van Helsing’s is “large, resolute” and “mobile.” The mobility of Van Helsing’s features allow for emotions to be read on his face, while the Count is persistently cruel and animal-like. In his physiognomically-informed narrative, the Count’s body becomes a complex projection of a largely culturally constructed alterity that is posited as deeply ingrained in his genetic structure.

In addition to his physical characteristics, the Count’s criminally encoded mental capacities equally distinguish him as a degenerate type. Mina Harker, in a conversation with Dr. Van Helsing, states that “The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind’” (Stoker 296). According to Dr. Van Helsing, although the Count Voivode Dracula, was “no common man” in his time, and in fact was “spoken of as the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest” (212), his mind has not evolved since then. Like the criminal, the Count does not have what Van Helsing calls “a full man-brain,” but a “child-brain,” (296). Van Helsing uses the example of animals to describe the functioning of the criminal mind; they do not learn “by principal, but empirically,” meaning the criminal cannot learn by abstracting principles from previous experience. Instead, the “criminal always work at one crime – that is the true criminal who seems predestinate to crime ....; and until he have the purpose to do more, he continue to do the same again every time, just as he have done before!” (296). According to Stoker’s notes
for the novel, the Count “goes through life entirely by instinct” (Frayling 343); and like the living Voivode Dracula who “won his name against the Turk” (Stoker 212), the Count instinctually repeats this same action by attempting to invade London (296). In Van Helsing’s elaboration of the Count’s mental process, he states that “in a difficulty he has to seek resource in habit” and by abstracting principles from their knowledge of the Count, Van Helsing can predict that the Count returns to Transylvania when his plan to invade London is defeated (296). All of these various signs of degeneration make the Count a counter-current to the evolution of the species. The threat this body poses to Western society is a social and biological reversion to the past, both the biological past of the animal and the economic past of feudalism. Moreover, it is in the Count’s irressible instinct to invade London. While Moretti does not consider how the alterity of the Count is constructed through the discourse of degeneration, his argument that the monster is the projection of society’s internal ills is still viable. However, the transfer of degeneracy in the bite of the vampire pulls his argument into question because the clear dialectic Moretti constructs, as the ills within society projected outside, is disrupted by the spread of this infection. The vampiric infection is modeled according to miasmatic theory which posits a constitutional weakness in the infected that predisposes them to disease. This inherent weakness of the supposedly innocent victim of the vampire seriously complicates the projection Moretti asserts is at play in the novel.

Like the miasma that characterizes the degradation of the working class body, the Count also embodies this prejudice against the working class even in his aristocratic form. The disease etiology that informs the construction of vampirism also illustrates the ambiguities within the discourse of degeneration. All of the Count’s lairs are
characterized by a malodorous air which harkens to the possibility of infection. At the castle in Transylvania, the Count’s tomb in his chapel has a “deathly, sickly odour” (Stoker 50); and during the team’s exploration of the Carfax house, Jonathan Harker records that:

[The long disuse had made the air stagnant and foul. There was an earthy smell, as of some dry miasma, which came through the fouler air. But as to the odour itself, how shall I describe it? It was not alone that it was composed of all the ills of mortality and with the pungent, acrid smell of blood, but it seemed as though corruption had become itself corrupt. Faugh! it sickens me to think of it. Every breath exhaled by that monster seemed to have clung to the place and intensified its loathsomeness. (221)

The odor of the Count’s lairs is representative of the Count himself, who Martin Willis describes is “personification of disease” (Willis 310). While miasmatic theory inscribes the body through its environment, the Count complicates that concept of transfer by inscribing his lairs in London with the stench first found in his castle in Transylvania. Moreover, the Count moves like a disease, in the form of pestilential vapors. After Renfield is brutally attacked by the Count, he also recounts seeing a mist: “He came up the window in the mist, as I had seen him before” (Stoker 244). The Count enters Renfield’s room through an inch wide opening in the window (245), just as the un-dead Lucy re-enters her tomb through a crack in the door. However, according to Willis, the appearance of Dr. Van Helsing marks a turn from miasmatism and sanitary science to germ theory. Vampires travel in the same manner as an infection; however the mode of infection is more complex. Although Willis does not comment on the bodily contact and fluid exchange necessary for vampiric infection, this process is akin to germ theory. Moreover, the intimate contact necessary for vampiric infection recalls the fears around prostitution and syphilitic infection, especially considering the repeated images of fallen
women and the threat to the bourgeois family. Although the bacteria that causes the
disease had not yet been discovered (or this knowledge was not available to Stoker), the
mode of transference is well-documented, and it is reasonable to assume that Stoker’s
representation of vampiric infection is modeled on this specifically urban nineteenth-
century anxiety.

As the embodiment of the degenerate infection that subverts the evolutionary
process, the Count exhibits a sexual deviance that also threatens the narrative of social
progress referenced by the middle-class nuclear family structure. Glover argues that the
Count “underscores the sexualized threat” at the heart of degeneration, which is capable
of turning to such perverse forms as “‘homosexuality’ or ‘hysteria’” (Glover 69). Yet,
the only characters in the novel who are actually bitten and who turn into vampires
themselves are women. Although there are several references to the Count’s
homoeroticism, the only completed physical contact and the exchange of bodily fluids
(i.e. the vampire sex act) is with Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. In an effort to create
his own harem, like the three women in his castle, the Count first goes after Lucy, whose
weak morality predisposes her to the Count’s degeneration. The Count chooses his
victims those who are “kindred to him; that is, who contain the innate biological and
psychological potential of savage reversion,” (Fontana 25). Andrew Smith argues that
vampirism involves an “awakening rather than merely functioning like a disease” (Smith
35), although he does not consider the implications of miasmatic theory where the
transfer of disease is precipitated by a weakness in constitution (Willis 302). There are
several signs that Lucy Westenra is predisposed to vampirism through a weak moral
sense and physical constitution. In a strange parallel with Dracula and his three women
at the castle, Lucy had three suitors (Stoker 58). She is at first troubled by having to choose between the three and writes to Mina: “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it” (60). Van Helsing himself, after her death, refers to Lucy as a “polyandrist” (158).119 Lucy also has a history of sleepwalking which he inherited from her father (Willis 315), which is a frequent characteristic of the epileptic-criminal type according to Lombroso (Fontana 26). The vertigo that she recounts experiencing when first bitten by the Count is frequently experienced by epileptics during a seizure according to Lombroso (Fontana 27). As Lucy’s health subsequently deteriorates, her sleepwalking is linked to appearances of the Count, either in the form of a bat (Stoker 90) or as scratching at the window (103, 131) as the Count, in his various forms, continues to feed off of Lucy’s blood. Lucy as a vampire, or “Bloofer Lady” is a direct inversion of the assumptions around motherhood. As a vampire, she is voraciously sexual, and much more seductive than her purer human self (Moretti 125). As the “Bloofer Lady,” child-slang for “beautiful lady,” she abducts small children by luring them away at night, and they are later found with bite marks on their necks. The team finds the tomb empty; yet they see the “Bloofer Lady” as Lucy, but quite changed. They see a dark-haired figure come toward them in the white cerements of the grave holding a fair-haired child at its breast (Stoker 187). Dr. Seward is stunned:

As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile.... with a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. (188)

119 In fact, the number three is significant to vampires in this text, as it is in fairy tales and Christian iconography: the Count has three brides, three houses, forces Jonathan Harker to write three letters, and even the novel is divided into three sections (Auerbach and Skal, footnote 60).
Smith describes her as a “grotesque parody of her former self” and is an image of the “unfit mother” (145). Christopher Clausen, in his article “From the Mountain to the Monsters,” writes that Lucy has changed “from a decorous young lady into an abandoned coquette” (Clausen 245). In a reversal of the mother role, she drains the blood out of children instead of allowing them to suckle from her. According to Smith, although she preys on children and not men, she is changed into a version of the street-walker, which refers to female moral failings and child neglect, most notably in her attacks on working-class children (Smith 145). The children are sick after being bitten, but none of them develop into vampires. The connection between moral failings and physical health are also here in the “bloofer lady” as they are in the discourse on prostitution, where the streetwalker is a seductive woman carrying disease that can destroy the bourgeois family.

The reversion of Mina Harker is all the more perilous and invasive because it dramatically reverses ideological narratives of gender, sexuality, and health. It is difficult to find signs of a predisposition to degeneracy in Mina. Although Mina’s independence and self-reliance extends beyond traditional domestic roles, her motherly nature remains intact. A former schoolmistress, her typing ability moves her toward “subversive – undomestic – ground” (Auerbach and Skal, footnote 54), but she later makes fun of the “New Woman” thereby reaffirming her belief in traditional female roles. All of her independent abilities, such as using shorthand, typewriting, even her ability to be hypnotized, are used in service of her husband or Van Helsing’s team. The scene of Mina’s final intimate encounter with the Count caused quite a commotion, and “went against all decency” for some Victorian readers (Glover 71). When the team hurries to
the Harker’s room to warn them that the Count entered the building, they break down the
door and Seward sees over the fallen Van Helsing:

On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and
breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the
bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side
stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the
instant we saw we all recognized the Count – in every way, even to the
scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands,
keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped
her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her
white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down
the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The
attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s
nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. As we burst into the
room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard
described seemed to leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish
passion; the great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and
quivered at the edge; and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the
blood-dripping mouth, champed together like those of a wild beast. With
a wrench, which threw his victim back upon the bed as though hurled from
a height, he turned and sprang at us. (Stoker 246-7)

There are several reversals here of the mother-child relation and of the sex act itself. The
Count’s clothing is torn open, as he forces Mina to drink from his bosom, like a kitten
forced to a saucer of milk. This pose is also a perversion of motherhood, but unlike Lucy
who sucked the blood from children, Mina is the child here drinking from the breast of
Count Dracula. This parody makes the Count both degenerate criminal and mother,
giving birth to other degenerates to expand his race of vampires (Glover 70). The Count
is never seen biting and penetrating the flesh of anyone, although the blood on his lips is
most likely that of Mina. Here, Mina is drinking his bodily fluids as she is forced into
complete submission to swallow the tainted nourishment (and infection) the Count
provides. In this scene, the sexual act of fellatio is equated with the act of suckling at a
mother’s breast. Lucy, when infected, sucks the blood from children instead of suckling
them. Mina’s act of submission is a stronger sexual perversion because she is in the place of the child. Mina’s screams of “Unclean!” demonstrate the reversion of several ideological narratives at play in the novel (Stoker 248). The bourgeois family is disrupted and the good wife is infected through a sexualized act where she is in the position of a child performing a fellatio-like suckling at the breast of a male body. While the fluid exchange in this infection involves the evolving germ theory that Willis discusses, she reads her infection as a mark of filth which is associated with miasma. Mina’s private body has been invaded by all of the evils associated with urbanity: prostitution, infection, racially impure blood from a body that threatens middle-class stability through its encoding through both the working class and the aristocracy. While the Count previously inserted himself in the role of Mina during Harker’s attack at the castle, Dracula inserts himself here in the position of the husband and mother. Mina’s infection performs her marriage to a masculine mother, stripping her of her identity as the mother figure for the vampire hunters, and inserting her in the narrative as an infected child prostitute. Because she has consumed the Count’s blood, she is now the conduit to the destruction of all of the ideology she has used to construct her identity. Infected, she is now the destroyer of all she holds dear.

Similia Similibus Curantur

Moretti argues that the destruction of the monster implies the reconstitution of a universal humanity. This observation still holds true, but not in the way that Moretti may have intended. Moretti further describes the novel as a refined effort of the nineteenth-
century to not recognize itself (Moretti 130). This statement comes closer to describing the real implications of Dracula’s defeat. Just as Jonathan Harker imitates the Count in what he perceives as resistance to his imprisonment, the vampire hunters are oblivious to the fact that their successful efforts at defeating the Count are performed in ways that imitate the monster. The team must be as toxic as the element they are trying to destroy.

In order to purify the city and defeat the invasion of Dracula, the team of hunters must first control his accumulation: of houses, money, and women. Although the monster is the one constantly accumulating capital as the personification of a capitalist monopoly, several members of the vampire hunting team also benefit from such consolidation and accumulation. When Hawkins dies, Jonathan Harker is left his whole fortune (Stoker 143). Arthur receives his father’s estate, the title of Lord Godalming, and the entirety of the Westenra estate as well (151). Arthur uses his aristocratic title to gain access to the Piccadilly house (233) and because of their unlimited funds, they are able to chase the Count all the way back to Transylvania. While in London, they act like criminals. They illegally enter homes (220), bribe officials (233) and lie to police about the suspicious death of Mrs. Westenra (137). In the beginning of the novel, Harker looks down upon the use of crucifixes as “idolatrous” in his overall criticism of the superstitious religious practices of the Transylvanian people. Yet, the team often uses a crucifix to guard against Dracula, as in the Harker’s chambers when they discover him attacking Mina (247). While Van Helsing claims that the “resources of science” will help them to defeat the Count (210), the efforts of science are actually replaced with the use of religious artifacts (Clausen 244). The communion wafer is used to sanitize Dracula’s lairs, seal Lucy’s tomb, and to protect Van Helsing from Mina, and Mina from the
Transylvanian vampires during their voyage to Castle Dracula (Stoker 187, 317). In an attempt to protect Mina, Van Helsing blesses her by placing a communion wafer on her forehead, which unexpectedly burns into the flesh, leaving a permanent mark, which further indicates her tainted body (258-9). Fontana likens this mark to another aspect of Cesare Lombroso’s work on the so-called primitive peoples of the Camorra, where the heads of the group would tattoo their women as marks of proprietorship. After the rite of drinking his blood in what may also be a perversion of Holy Communion, she is marked as both Dracula’s child and wife (Fontana 26). In fact, it is not Dracula who scars Mina, but Prof. Van Helsing as he tries to claim his own proprietorship over her. The scar on her forehead thus marginalizes her from both parties; she is unclean, but still belongs to the vampire hunters. This scar also resembles the scar on the Count’s forehead, which he received when Harker made a vain attempt to kill him. The confusion over who actually scarred Mina reveals more about the purity of the vampire hunters. Smith characterizes their efforts to cleanse London of the social ills that were internal to society all along:

> At some level the vampire hunters become monstrous in the process, and so the novel’s ostensible search for purity and models of bourgeois ‘decency’ collapses under its inability to develop a coherent moral vision which keeps the degenerate at bay. After all when Harker looks in the mirror at Castle Dracula and expects to see the Count reflected in it, he sees only himself. So, in the end Dracula produces a fantasy of a purified London... which in the end it does not quite believe in. (Smith 146).

Moretti’s formulation is undermined by the team’s inability to cohere to a moral vision of what, exactly, a “purified London” would be. Much like the fluidity of the discourse of degeneration, that transgresses the boundaries of distinct fields of inquiry, the vampire hunters, in their quest for the knowledge and “cure” for vampirism, blur the boundaries of
science and religion, moral and immoral, and essentially humanity by becoming monstrous themselves.

Driven by the naive belief in their own goodness, the team of vampire hunters engages in their most monstrous behavior in their attempts to destroy the one vampire created during the narrative: the “Bloofer Lady.” Van Helsing uses blood transfusions to rejuvenate Lucy after she is first bitten. Taking blood from all three of her suitors, Van Helsing actually imitates vampirism, stating that Lucy “wants blood, and blood she must have or die” (Stoker 113). Just as the drinking of blood involves an erotic contact, Lucy states that “Arthur feels very, very close” to her after the transfusion (117). The next of her former suitors to give her blood is John Seward, which is purposely kept from Arthur so as to not make him jealous (118-119). After the death of her mother, Lucy takes her last transfusion from Quincey Morris, her third suitor (136). She is called a polyandrist after receiving the blood of three men, as they are essentially feeding her their own blood, allowing her to consume fresh blood like the vampire she is to become. Van Helsing manages to keep Lucy alive for a bit longer with these transfusions, but this is still a vampiric act, sublimated through a medical apparatus.

While Smith mentions that the defeat of the monster involves the assimilation of the Other (Smith 36), I would argue that this assimilation is incomplete because, despite the sublimation of the vampiric acts of Van Helsing and the rest of the team, they are completely unaware of this assimilation. When sexual connotations arise from their efforts, they are quickly overwritten by the team’s righteous quest to regain the purity and order of London. When Van Helsing and Seward first enter Lucy’s tomb to prove Van Helsing’s idea that the “Bloofer Lady” is Lucy as an un-dead, there are several sexual
implications (Stoker 173). The flowers on the tomb hang “lank and dead, their whites turning to rust and their greens to browns,” and the wax from Van Helsing’s candle made from spermiceti whale oil is referred to as “sperm”: “Holding his candle so that he could read the coffin plates, and so holding it that the sperm dropped in white patches which congealed as they touched the metal” (175). In this instance, Lucy’s proximity to the prostitute becomes clear as her “flowers,” her womanhood, is wilted and fallen; and as the two men enter her tomb, the sperm drips and congeals. Moreover, John Seward feels uneasy about violating the sanctity of the coffin: “It seemed to be as much an affront to the dead as it would have been to have striped off her clothing in her sleep whilst living” (176). Yet, following Van Helsing’s order, he does so anyway. Arthur is also reluctant to accompany them to Lucy’s tomb. However, when Van Helsing admits to having given her his blood as well, and the sanctity of Arthur and Lucy’s fluid exchange is broken, he is willing to go (184). In his determination to prove that Lucy is a vampire, Van Helsing begins an insidious process of objectifying Lucy that, instead of scientific exactitude, he demonstrates the condemning patriarchal gaze on the body of the ailing woman. In this scene, the men line up in front of the tomb to block the path of Lucy, as the male gaze traps the fallen woman and regards her as a performance of Dr. Van Helsing’s theories of vampirism. Van Helsing and Seward’s previous discussion of Charcot (171) takes on a dramatic resonance here, as the men watch the fallen woman act out her animalistic reversion before their terrified, yet fascinated, gaze. Lucy continues to reveal her atavism as Van Helsing manages the spectacle:

Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness. Van Helsing stepped out, and, obedient to his gesture, we all advanced too; the four of us ranged in a line before the door of the tomb. Van
Helsing raised his lantern and drew the slide; by the concentrated light that fell on Lucy’s face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe. (187)

Lucy then attempts to once again seduce Arthur, and Van Helsing jumps between them wielding a crucifix, to break her spell over Arthur (188). Van Helsing’s organizes a scene where the men may watch the “beautiful lady” and her degeneration into a sexually ravenous streetwalker. In their condemning analytical gaze, the men ignore the homosociality they construct through participating in the performance of the doctor’s gaze on the hysterical woman. Gaining knowledge of the signs of vampirism inscribed on the woman’s body, that Lucy had become a vampire, they are spurred on to more heinous acts of patriarchal dominance.

Smith notes the characteristically masculine violence in the staking of Lucy Westenra to enable her return to mortality and to purify both her, and the city of London, from the specter of the streetwalker (Smith 146). Yet, this purification of the prostitute anti-mother that the vampire Lucy represents involves an even more heinous sex act. The scene is narrated by a male doctor who believes in the righteousness of the act, but by looking past the men’s self-justification, the scene resembles a gang rape. Lucy’s husband Arthur is chosen by Van Helsing to kill, and purify, Lucy, which he calls “a privilege to the one best entitled to it” (Stoker 192). Arthur dutifully drives the phallic object deep into Lucy’s body, as the others look on:

The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst
Van Helsing’s choice to have Arthur perform this act is like a forced return, for Lucy, to the sanctified sexual contact between husband and wife, albeit here violent, forced, and before an audience of men. Franco Moretti argues that Lucy’s bodily movements resemble an orgasm while Arthur takes an erotic satisfaction from the act (Moretti 125). The writhing, quivering, twisting body of the helpless woman inscribed as a monster as the stake is driven into her is more than just an orgasm. The erotic satisfaction is not expressed in the body of Lucy, or by Arthur Holmwood. Surrounded by his friends, whose spirits are lifted by the sight of the agony suffered by this “Thing,” that is not referred to as Lucy, Arthur is the heroic enforcer of a corrupt patriarchal hegemony. The result of this staking is a stronger male camaraderie, and this righteous homosociality hides the sexual violence performed on the passive female body. The universal humanity that is recreated in the destruction of the vampire does not recognize its own monstrosity.

While Van Helsing may appear to be a stand-in for the efforts to sanitize the city, his practices are deluded and only serve to imitate the violence performed by the Count. The Count invades the Harker’s bedroom and forces Mina into several sexually subversive roles. Likewise, Van Helsing orders the penetration of Lucy’s un-dead body in an equally violent enforcement of the rights of the husband. The fluidity of the multiple pseudo-scientific discourses used to construct the Count leave little room for the human. They elaborate so extensively on pathology that what may remain as acceptably human is pushed to the margins. Universality is reconstructed in the defeat of vampirism by dehumanizing others, which reveals the degeneracy behind the team’s seemingly
noble efforts. The forbidden fantasies of sexual desire used to create the monster are acted out in the naive and righteous belief that the team is ridding society of these ills. In the case of Jonathan Harker’s mental deterioration, it is clear that his efforts to defy the power of the Count only cause him to become more like the monster. As shown in his experience with the three vampire women in the castle, the Count actually co-opts his resistance, as if Harker’s attempts to evade his discipline were part of the Count’s plan all along. While Glover states that Van Helsing’s physiognomy represents a morality that is contrary to the Count, this construction of a foil to the Count also begins to blur when we consider the heinous, dehumanizing acts that Van Helsing directs, like the staking of Lucy Westenra. The resolve that is read on Van Helsing’s brow may not be as humanely inspired as the reader would at first assume. However, the monstrosity of the vampire team extends beyond just the organization of Van Helsing. If the Count appropriated Harker’s resistance into his larger plan of subjugation, the vampire hunters’ ignorance of the inhumanity of their actions may imply that they are driven by a deeper atavistic instinct over which their limited consciousness has no control.
CHAPTER SIX

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CONCLUSION

By closely analyzing and comparing the fictional representation of subversive bodies in paradigmatic narratives of nineteenth-century Paris and London, the “political unconscious” of the text becomes clear. A dominant movement through the century in the representation of subversive bodies is one from the vague possibility of speech to absolute silence. This silencing is performed through inscribing the body with social anxieties, a process that succeeds in co-opting the body’s alterity to the dominant middle-class ideology in order to reinforce the social order that the represented body appears to subvert. In this progression through English and French fiction in the nineteenth century, the use of subversive figures to reinforce the dominant ideology becomes gradually more complex and subtle. In texts from the early nineteenth century, the subversive female bodies attempt to produce effective speech by struggling against the inscriptions that signify a madwoman, in *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, and the African savage in *Ourika*. In Wollstonecraft’s 1798 novel, the female body is represented as a moral subject that is confined in the patriarchal discourse that inscribes the female body with irrational over-emotionality that taints even her most rational objections to unjust treatment. The more Maria speaks against unjust social conventions, the more her own language of dissent reinforces them. There is the vague possibility for articulate speech from the female body in *Maria*, as there is for Ourika as she recounts her autobiography to a privileged listener. Yet, Ourika’s entrapment in patriarchal European discourse is all the more binding because she does not have access to any language of dissent. Ourika only knows to speak the language rife with the ideology that asserts the silence of the
African body. Thus, she is even more complicit in her own subjugation than Wollstonecraft’s Maria, who must navigate through the confining structures of patriarchal discourse. Ourika’s double bind is that the only avenue to her subjectivity is also toward the destruction of the black body that denies her entry to the Symbolic order. Her body is also representative of the material conditions of the slave trade and the commodification of African bodies that precipitate her presence in Paris. Duras’ narrative stealthily erases these conditions, and as Ourika begins to put into words her feelings of abjection, her body inscribed with these conditions is also erased.

While these subversive bodies may be imprisoned behind stone walls, these walls in turn can create a heterogeneous space of various bodies whose shared fate enables the development of a diverse community. While the community of marginalized women that traverses class boundaries in *Maria* allows for the protagonist’s temporary freedom from the asylum, the hybrid figure of Ourika is cloistered because her black body denies her any sense of community beyond that of the Catholic Church. Ourika’s resort to the convent is at the same time a denial of her own desires and emotions which she associates with her flesh. Maria, on the other hand, uses these sentiments to argue for the embodied female subject’s right to agency and speech. Both texts in Part One of this dissertation are strongly influenced by polemics inspired by the French Revolution, such as women’s legal rights and the freedom of slaves, after which both England and France experienced a strong backlash against the democratic ideals established during the brief representative government in France. Edmund Burke condemned the principle of democracy for inciting violence; and despite Wollstonecraft’s consistent philosophical rebukes, the fear of the female voice in politics drives the prejudices against women that lead to Maria’s
imprisonment. For Ourika, the drastic measures of Robespierre to push women back into the domestic sphere continued through the *Code Civil* of 1804, and into the Restoration. Because of the prescribed domestic role, Ourika’s inability to marry in her station condemns her to the convent. In addition to the restrictions of women, the revolt in the French colony of Saint-Domingue reinforced the preconceived notions of African savagery, so that Ourika’s voice is doubly problematic because her body is also inscribed as belonging to a race of barbarians and assassins. Because of these inscriptions upon the women’s bodies, their efforts at speech are futile. The narratives of social dissolution their bodies imply supersede any effort they may make to articulate themselves as equal members of society.

While the novels written by women in the early nineteenth century attempt to give a voice to subversive urban bodies, by mid-century the revolutionary bodies are encoded through miasmatic theory, and their voices mimic the prejudices against the underclass. For writers such as Charles Dickens, specificity takes a back seat to Victorian anxieties despite his oblique references to texts that aimed at objectivity, such as Mercier’s *Nouveau Paris*. Depicting a revolutionary in France sets the scene for inscribing the working class bodies in revolt with threats to English middle class stability and national identity. Inscribed over the filth and purely sensual existence of the working class is also the savagery of colonial others, as Madame Defarge is dressed in anxieties of Indian revolt. By inscribing the French revolutionary as a feminine, pathological, racial Other, Dickens effectively alienates this body from historical specificity of fighting against unjust social conventions. Indeed, Dickens constructs a ghost to be exorcised through honest work and bourgeois self-sacrifice. Likewise, for Victor Hugo, the revolutionary is
taken out of historical context and supplanted as an idealized figure that is also the return of the ghost of 1793. In an effort of absolute narrative omniscience, Hugo engages with several discourses around the working class, such as the miasmatic theory that inscribes the working class body through its environment, and the “mob” concept of Edmund Burke. Hugo argues that these bodies can be enlightened in the codes of the dominant social order and presents the revolutionary Enjolras as one such enlightened body. However, Enjolras is devoid of any complex psychology, personal past and sexual desire. He is an empty shell of a young idealist. His body is taken out of historical context, and the working class body struggling for enlightened public recognition is sublimated to a safe, universalized, and otherworldly being. Through an extended metaphor, Hugo inscribes Enjolras with an asexual purity that can cleanse the corrupt feminized social body, and Enjolras’ language reflects a dedication to pure, immaterial ideals. This idealism is constructed through references to progress coded through metaphors of religion, the “incorruptible” Robespierre and the Conventionist. The revolutionaries validate their actions by inscribing themselves (and Mabeuf) through references to 1793, an inscription that instead takes them away from their own historical specificity, such as their abuse at the hands of industrialists and the lack of available medical care for those dying of cholera. Hugo fails to insert these revolutionary bodies into a feasible narrative of social progress because they are not inscribed with the historical conditions that precipitated the insurgencies. He positions the ABCs against the lower rungs of the working class so as to differentiate them from narratives of social dissolution. Enjolras’ body is presented as the monumental Greek marble statue, like that of the Conventionist, to remove him from the dissolution implied in the rise of the working class. Enjolras’
death, however, is a tragic reinforcement of the social order in part through the narrator’s efforts to ennoble him. The revolutionary body in *Les Misérables* demonstrates that there is not yet an accepted narrative of upward social mobility and political agency for the urban working class.

By mid-century, the body that defies the existing social order has begun to be inscribed with narratives of infection encoded through sanitary science. By the end of the nineteenth-century, the pestilential vapors that cause illness in miasmatic theory are further inscribed with the corruption of high capitalism. Thus, in Emile Zola’s *Nana*, the upward social mobility of the working class woman is represented as an extension of a larger social pathology. The metaphor of the golden fly informs the narrative structure of the novel as Nana rises from the corrupt working class slums by profiting from the commodification of her body. In previous texts discussed in this dissertation, commodification was not encoded as a danger to the social order; in fact, previous representations of the body as an object of exchange were only evidence of the body’s silencing. Maria is almost sold to her husband’s friend for five hundred pounds, which causes her to divorce her husband and argue against the status of women as the private property of their husbands. Ourika, as an example of the “Petits Nègres” analyzed by Mercier, is a mere toy and token of Africa for her mistress and mother figure, Mme de B. Enjolras’ influence on the characterization in Ayn Rand’s novels as the attractive, young, idealist hero demonstrates a commodification that Hugo may have not intended, although removing the revolutionary body from historical context can only precipitate its reification. In *Nana*, the courtesan’s consumption of aristocratic fortunes represents the
ills of the Second Empire’s decadence and the subsumption of previous economic systems into the fast-paced exchange of high capitalism.

More importantly, the body of the prostitute that represents the decomposing Second Empire is constructed through codes from various intersecting narratives that signify social dissolution. These narratives that threaten the destruction of the social order are in the service of the dominant ideology because they function as elaborate projections. Nana’s social advancement from her body’s commodification defies the bourgeois work ethic as well as the role of the domesticated woman in the nuclear family. In her rise, she carries with her the immoral corruption of the working class, a culturally determined class difference encoded as biological, which she then spreads to the upper classes. Nana’s pathology is constructed through a narrative of immoral infection that reinforces the male hegemony by constructing a monster of sexual frustration that dies of a hideous infection. The exponentially increasing exchange value of Nana’s body facilitates this infection which leads to the fall of the Second Empire. In this narrative, Nana’s body is inherently corrupt because her feminine sexuality is not domesticated in marriage, and because her working class heredity is innately dysfunctional. Moreover, Nana’s body is not inscribed as having individual agency. She is unconscious of the destruction she performs as if the bestial instinct from her corrupt heredity drives her social advancement that ultimately destroys the Second Empire. By representing the body of the prostitute through discourses of social reform which designate pathology as deviance from bourgeois gender roles, as in the hygienicist project of Alexandre Parent-DuChâtelet, socially constructed differences are inscribed on the body as an inherently biological disposition. Therefore, any speech or political agency is directly considered a
product of this pathology. There are no fissures in social constructs through which the
subversive body may attempt to speak for itself, as in Maria, because the convolution of
morality and biology in these discourses places a threatening corruption deep within the
body itself.

The inherent pathology of the subversive body is paramount in narratives of social
dissolution at the end of the nineteenth century. However, inscribing the subversive body
as ill begins in Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria. While passionate
ravings that define a madwoman would be expected in a madhouse, Maria makes an
immediate and deliberate attempt to appear docile to Jemima so that her story may be
heard. Maria’s emotionality is only coded as pathology when she is outside the asylum
and her text is read in court. The doctor in this novel is part of the order that condemns
Maria, because she may only be seen by one designated by her husband. Through the
privileged narrative of the doctor in Ourika, she is able to recount her story of abjection,
largely because the doctor is ambivalent to the social order that rejects her and condemns
her to the convent. He is from Montpellier, which is coded as sympathetic to the
Revolution, and critical to the Restoration of the monarchy and the Catholic Church. He
views Ourika as another victim of the cloisters. His sympathy and fascination compels
her to speak, just as the shared experience of incarceration in Maria permitted their
shared autobiographies. Charles Dickens also utilizes the privileged gaze of the doctor to
witness and later recount the rape that generates the revolutionary actions in the novel.
Yet, Dr. Manette himself becomes mentally ill after his imprisonment in solitary
confinement for having witnessed this rape. His neurotic repetition of shoemaking is a
direct connection to Dickens’ horror toward the treatment of prisoners in Pennsylvania’s
Eastern State Penitentiary, a panoptical structure where prisoners were placed in solitary confinement with only a window to the sky and a daily activity such as shoemaking to teach them the value of work. Dr. Manette’s neurosis is thus a disruption of the stabilizing analytical gaze of the doctor, which contributes to the demonization of the irrational French crowd. In *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo adopts the gaze of the doctor when he depicts the omniscient narrator as a social diagnostician. The privileged and omniscient gaze attempts to negotiate the various narratives used to inscribe the working class body. Yet, the body of Enjolras is at the margins of this gaze. During the barricade scenes, the narrator arrests his interpretation of the scene and instead presents detailed descriptions of bodily movements. The narrator is only present to describe the youthful beauty of Enjolras’ body, which only serves to insert him into the overarching metaphor of purifying the corrupt social body. In Naturalist fiction, such as the work of Emile Zola, the narrator adopts the authority of the doctor’s gaze. In *Nana*, the whole of Parisian society is viewed through the narrative of infection. The authority of the gaze that designates pathology is used differently throughout the century, and moves from representing the avenues through which unjust social conventions inscribe the female body, to being disrupted or marginalized by mid-century. In *Ourika* the doctor allows for her story to be told because he is positioned against the authority of the Catholic Church. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the authority of the doctor is representative of the compassionate diagnostic gaze that serves to protect the social order by diagnosing its ills. In *Les Miserables*, this gaze is omniscient and informs the narrator’s project of an accurate depiction of the internal functioning of French society; yet the body of the revolutionary

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is at the margins of this view. Zola’s narrator also diagnoses social ills, and inscribes the prostitute’s body as the root of a pathology that corrupts the Empire.

The several intersecting narratives of social pathology that construct the body of the vampire in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* are facilitated by the two medical personages in the text, Dr. John Seward and Dr. Abraham Van Helsing. While the novel consists of various journalistic accounts, the scenes of Lucy Westenra’s blood transfusions, her staking, and the scarring of Mina Harker, are orchestrated by Dr. Van Helsing and narrated by Dr. Seward. The body of the blood-sucking hypersexual demon is created through intersecting narratives of colonialism, infectious disease, and capitalist economics, all of which are activated through moments of sexual perversion. All of these narratives are in turn subsumed into the discourse of degeneration, which also utilizes the early criminal anthropology of Cesare Lombroso, and the sociology of Max Nordau. In this discourse, biological evolution is conflated with social progress, so that the bodies that defy the dominant ideological narrative of bourgeois work ethic, gender roles, and the economic system that manifests this ideology, are inscribed as degenerate. Moreover, through the discourse of degeneration, these multiple narratives that posit cultural alterity as an inherent biological disposition are mobilized. The threat of Count Dracula is an infection that provokes the devolution of its victim. Count Dracula threatens to activate an atavistic reversion to previous forms that are irrational, animalistic, violent, sexually deviant, superstitious, and feudal. In *Dracula*, the discourse of degeneration subsumes the authority of the doctor’s gaze. Driven by the naive belief in their own good will, Dr.’s Seward and Van Helsing perform acts that indicate an atavistic reversion. The

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121 The rape of Mina Harker is not orchestrated by Van Helsing, but is another act of Dracula’s sexualized violence that is narrated by Dr. Seward.
staging of Lucy Westenra performs a brutal sexualized violence driven by superstitious belief. It is in this sense that the discourse of degeneration has constructed veritable monsters.

Through the proliferation of scientific discourses that create a knowledge around the urban body, notably that of the working class, the representation of subversive bodies in fiction is constructed through the intersecting narratives that signify social dissolution through the invasion of a body outside of the social order. By the end of the century, the threat to the social order is posited as an instinctual, hereditary, and biological corruption within the subversive body which is mobilized through the discourse of degeneration. Through the nineteenth century, the discourses that signify alterity to the social order multiply, but the essential ideological narrative against which alterity is identified essentially stays the same. In this dissertation, Michel Foucault’s assertion that knowledge around the body serves to effect discipline becomes clear through the consideration of narrativization. The discourses around the body that proliferated from the dominant ideological narrative of health and social progress structure the characterization of subversive bodies in the urban environment in nineteenth-century fiction. This dominant ideological narrative is the basis for the secondary narratives that construct the conditions and effects of bodies that are external to the social order. Deviations from the dominant ideological narrative are recounted through stories of invasion, decomposition, and devolution. Through reading fictional narratives in relation to the narrativization of bodies presented in scientific and sociological texts based on urban reform, it becomes clear that discipline is unconsciously exercised.
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