

Correcting Arthur Munby: Philanthropy and Disfigurement in Victorian England

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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Correcting Arthur Munby: Philanthropy and Disfigurement in Victorian England

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“Correcting Arthur Munby: Philanthropy and Disfigurement in Victorian England” focuses on the life and works of Arthur Munby, a poet and amateur social scientist whose literary representations of working-class women and efforts on behalf of disfigured women have been overlooked in Victorian scholarship. This project examines Munby’s journals and poetry for evidence of the extent to which he fought institutional and symbolic oppression on behalf of working-class and disfigured people on three critical fronts: literary representation, the right to employment, and access to healthcare. I demonstrate the extent to which Munby combated oppression at the individual level of personal action, the symbolic level of representation, and the institutional levels of access and inclusion.

In Chapter One I examine Munby’s fifty-year writing career that. I argue that his literary accounts of working women are important in their attempt to change the symbolic level of working-class oppression in Victorian England. Instead of presenting pastoral images of country folk that sanitize the working-class, I argue that through his poetry, Munby sought to accurately represent the dialect, labor, and pride of working-class women.

In Chapter Two I argue that Munby's commitment to working-class women extended into the realm of employment and medical treatment through his relationship with a severely disfigured woman, Harriet Langdon. I argue that for Victorians, disfigurement was collapsed within the frame of disability, the two conditions conflated to such an extent that there was little appreciable difference. I argue that Munby's philanthropy was based on benevolence rather than exclusively on abjection.

In Chapter Three I explore the lack of access to hospital care for the disfigured and Munby's successful fight to help provide that access. I critique the Royal Hospital for Incurables where Langdon became a pensioner as fundamentally embedded in classist and ableist practices. I argue that while Munby provided immense aid to Langdon, he was deeply complicit in the negative rendering of the disfigured as unhappy, pathetic, and depressive individuals who can never marry or integrate fully into the social fabric of Victorian life. I use the journals as literary texts and argue that Munby is an unreliable narrator, unwittingly revealing his own prejudgments of disfigured life more than the reality of what it meant to live within a disfigured identity. I read against Munby's version of Langdon to reveal her subjectivity, normalcy, and capacity for joy.

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INTRODUCTION

This project examines the journals and poetry of Arthur Joseph Munby for evidence of the extent to which he fought institutional and symbolic oppression on behalf of working-class and disfigured people on three critical fronts: literary representation, the right to employment, and access to healthcare. In a time when working-class and disfigured people were routinely denied representation in each of these areas, Munby used his privileged class and gender position to advocate for and participate in social change in ways that deeply impacted the lives of working-class and disfigured people. On each of these three fronts, I demonstrate the extent to which Munby combated oppression at the individual level of personal action, the symbolic level of representation, and the institutional levels of access and inclusion¹.

Arthur Joseph Munby was born on August 19, 1828, and raised in York. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, and matriculated in 1847. Munby became a Bar student at his father's request, pursuing a law degree. He graduated with a BA in 1851 and an MA in 1856, and was subsequently admitted into Fig Tree Court, Inner Temple—home to so many other practicing barristers in London. Munby disliked law intensely and sought other occupation, in part as a voluntary, unpaid teacher of Latin at the Working Men's College and years later at the Working Women's College.² This work enabled him to participate in a literary and artistic circle most notable for John Ruskin

¹ I am indebted to Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins for this sociological frame. Harding's 1991 text *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge?* argued that gender oppression is structured along three main dimensions: the institutional, symbolic and individual. Collins' 1993 essay "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection" extended this frame to class and race, while I extend it further to include disability and disfigurement.

² Munby's years-long commitment to teaching at these colleges is further evidence of his lifelong devotion to the aid of working-class people. It is an area that Munby critics have entirely ignored.

who taught art there. In 1854, at the age of twenty-five, Munby met Hannah Cullwick, a maid-of-all-work, and the two began a lifelong love affair that culminated in their secret marriage.³ In 1860, Munby stopped practicing law and took a position as a civil servant at the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in London—a job he would hold for life. While Munby considered the position merely as a way to earn a living, it did give him sufficient free time and holidays off to pursue his amateur social scientist avocation: For his entire adult life, he interviewed working-class women about their jobs, labor, pay, and living conditions in ways similar to Mayhew and Engels. Eventually, Munby retired to a country home in Pyrford. Hannah Cullwick died in 1909, and Munby lived six months longer, dying of pneumonia on January 29, 1910.

Although Munby is not remembered today as being among the more recognizable Victorian writers and thinkers, his life can certainly be described as a literary one that merits closer inspection. In addition to the sixty-four volume collection of private journals that he kept throughout his life, Munby also wrote and published fourteen volumes, mostly poetry, that span his lifetime. The earliest publication, *Benoni*, was written during his undergraduate years at Cambridge and published in 1852; the last, *Relicta*, was published in 1909, less than a year before his death. In addition to his consistent publications, Munby was also a regular participant in the social and literary gatherings of his time. His acquaintances, with whom he discussed his opinions on the subjects of art and literature, included Browning, Dickens, Ruskin, Rossetti, Thackeray, and countless others.

³ Critical attention to Munby has focused primarily on his relationship with Cullwick and by extension, on other working-class women.

My project provides a needed reconsideration of Munby's life and work, as well as a more focused and nuanced examination of the rhetoric of disability and disfigurement in a variety of discourses (not just medical, but economic, psychological, religious, and—of special importance—the discourses of class and gender). I am not solely concerned with the recovery of a lost history or in rehabilitating Munby's image. While I am interested in complicating the historical record of Munby and the extent to which his interest in working-class women was fetishistic, humanitarian, or both, I engage contemporary debates about the language of disability and the ableist bias present in our literary histories and critical methods that have historically omitted the experiences and perspectives of disfigured characters. I am offering a form of metacritique: of the tendency within literary studies to further disable the disabled or deformed by repeatedly recasting their victimization as self-evident and unilateral; the inattention to the active efforts at self-representation on the part of the disabled; the overt framing of the disabled and deformed as objects (of oppression, cruelty, voyeuristic display) rather than subjects (with agency and desire).

A reconsideration of Munby provides several useful lessons for Victorian scholars. First, it paves the way for a fruitful merger of Victorian literary scholarship with the insights provided in Disability Studies. Munby's journals underscore the centrality of disability experience in Victorian culture despite its marginalization. The journals reveal the symbolic level of oppression attached to disfigured identity in the Victorian period as well as the ways that some in society sought to care for such "incurables." Munby's journals also illustrate the level of institutionalized oppression

faced by disfigured people who were prevented from earning an income because they were considered “too disfigured” to work alongside, and who were often prevented access to medical care.

While the disfigured were framed most consistently as objects of pity or horror, the self-referencing of people with disfigurements has remained largely a point of speculation. Examining Munby’s journals opens a window into how one severely disfigured woman self-identified. Studying the life writing of disfigured people can bring new understanding to how the body makes itself known in language. Such life writing is made more complex when it is embedded within the writing of an able-bodied person, as is the case with Mayhew’s depictions of the disabled and Munby’s portrayal of the disfigured. In such instances, I argue that Munby is an unreliable narrator, unwittingly revealing his own prejudgments of disfigured life more than the reality of what it meant to live within a disfigured identity.

It is only until very recently in literary studies—roughly within the last ten years—that a discussion surrounding disability has emerged in response to the challenge that Disability Studies scholarship presented. Scholars like Simi Linton, Lennard Davis, and Susan Wendell, all of whose work I discuss at length in my dissertation, drew needed attention to the social and political ramifications of disability as a constructed category akin in many ways to other historically constructed and overlooked identity categories such as race and gender.⁴ They sought to move disability out of the realm of the medical

⁴ See, for example, Wendell’s *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (1996), Linton’s *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (1998), and Davis’s *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (1995).

and pathological and into a recognition of disability as largely socially produced. Linton, Davis, and Wendell helped to demonstrate the extent to which disabled people had been erased in academic studies, as in life, opening a wide chasm which subsequent scholars in many academic fields including literary and cultural studies have sought to fill. One of the earliest voices in literary studies to call attention to the representation of disability in literature is Rosemarie Garland Thomson. In her groundbreaking 1996 work *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, she recognizes the lack of critical literary scholarship on disabled characters and the necessity of beginning to explore them in order to investigate how representation attaches meanings to bodies:

Although much recent scholarship explores how difference and identity operate in such politicized constructions as gender, race, and sexuality, cultural and literary criticism has generally overlooked the related perceptions of corporeal otherness we think of variously as “monstrosity,” “mutilation,” “deformation,” “crippledness,” or “physical disability.” [. . .] My purpose here is to alter the terms and expand our understanding of the cultural construction of bodies and identity by reframing “disability” as another culture-bound, physically justified difference to consider along with race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. In other words, I intend to introduce such figures as the cripple, the invalid, and the freak into the critical conversations we devote to deconstructing figures like the mulatto, the primitive, the queer, and the lady. (5)

Garland-Thomson's text provided a watershed moment. In its wake, literary scholars have begun to explore individual texts on the disability identities named above as well as on representations of mental disability. Among these, Martha Stoddard-Holmes' 2004 text *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* has been most useful to my work for its research on the self-perceptions of those with disabilities. Stoddard-Holmes frames disability narratives as melodramatic—intended to elicit sympathy and pathos. She argues that both the literary representations of the disabled in fiction and the few autobiographical self-representations of the disabled are fraught with melodrama.

While little has yet been written on the literary representations of disability in the Victorian period, virtually nothing has been written about disfigurement, particularly nothing about autobiographical accounts. Studying Munby's journals allows us a window into the perception of disfigurement and its collapse as a category into the frame of disability. As Munby's journals make clear, in Harriet Langdon's case, there was no appreciable difference: Being disfigured was treated by society as a disability, which sanctioned social exclusion.

Even more compelling is that these texts reveal not only Munby's attitudes, but they open a remarkable window into the self-perception of a disfigured woman that is at odds with her cultural rendering. Current trends in disability studies emphasize the urgent need for literature that is produced from within a disabled experience rather than literature about the disabled. Such primary texts provide a means of dispelling the negative symbolic value attached to disabled/disfigured identity and the correlating

institutional oppression that so often arises out of it. In *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, Simi Linton argues that the humanities have long since created cultural productions about the disabled, including literary productions, that are guilty of a conceptual error:

the idea that disabled and nondisabled people have differing capacities and entitlements when it comes to pleasure. This idea functions in different ways. Disabled people, across all disability groups, are thought to have compromised ‘pleasure systems.’ The capacity to engage in pleasurable activity—experiences sought for their own sake, for the stimulation and enjoyment they provide—is assumed to be out of reach of the disabled.

(111)

This assumption is evident in Munby’s journal entries. On one hand, he includes quotes and extensive descriptions of interactions he had with Langdon that evidence his intense and consistent aid on her behalf at the institutional level through his work to get her elected to the Royal Hospital for Incurables, the only such hospital in England for Victorian incurables. Beyond this, however, his journals also reveal a man deeply complicit in the negative rendering of the disabled/disfigured as unhappy, pathetic, and depressive individuals who can never marry or integrate fully into the social fabric of Victorian life. At this symbolic level, Munby falls short.

Yet his journals provide the lie to the cultural rendering of the disfigured as pitiful because close examination of them reveals Langdon’s agency, subjectivity, and capacity for joy. Herein lays one of the most remarkable gifts of Munby’s journal: a revelation of

a disfigured woman's self-rendering as whole rather than partial—as someone whose disfigurement causes disruption but is largely socially produced and described by Munby in ways that do not reflect Langdon's total experience. I have used Munby's journals as literary texts and have had to read against Munby's literary construction of Langdon as doomed to unhappiness; he proves to be untrustworthy in assigning her this label, but fortunately, like most unreliable narrators, his own words—and Langdon's that are subsumed within them—reveal that Munby's vision of her arises largely out of an ableist rhetoric that was pervasive in the period. It is a rhetoric that rendered the disabled and disfigured as melodramatic figures of pity and sorrow. Identifying and eliminating such bias has required new reading practices and methods when working through this archival material. I have used Disability Studies as a lens through which to make sense of these second and third hand accounts that exist in Munby's journals, since the reading practices within literary studies have often been produced out of a similar ableist rhetoric that has ignored disabled and disfigured characters or seen them simply as objects of pity or charity. I have had to reconstruct an image of Langdon through Munby's melodramatic rendering of her by using his own words to reveal the level of subjectivity and agency available to Langdon.

Many of Munby's critics, McClintock, Davidoff, and Pollock, focus their critical attention on Munby's journals as a means of interrogating race, class, and gender politics. They use his journals to uncover Victorian attitudes about these identity categories, focusing on Munby as an exemplar of exploitative privilege. None of them has remarked on Munby's relationship with Harriet Langdon. Only Munby's most recent critic, Barry

Reay has explored this link, but his reading completely omits a disability perspective. He reads Langdon as yet another of Munby's victims. My work uses Disability Studies as a lens through which to read not only Munby's attitude about disfigurement and disability, but larger Victorian attitudes by extension. Mine is a complex rendering of Munby that acknowledges his biases and assumptions about the disfigured, but also credits him for the extent to which he is able to break out of an ableist frame by insisting that Langdon had the right to work and actively seeking employment for her. Most compellingly, a Disability Studies perspective has enabled me to deconstruct Munby's rendering of Langdon as pitiful and reveal how Langdon saw herself—as hindered but capable of joy.

Yet, Munby's journals offer lessons to Victorianists beyond their relevance to Disability Studies. I am also committed to examining Munby's contribution to Victorian philanthropy. While his critics, McClintock preeminent among them, have dismissed Munby's philanthropy as motivated entirely by his erotic attraction to working-class women, I would argue that benevolence was a large part of Munby's motivation when working with Langdon and other working-class women, and further that charitable and self-interested motivations are not mutually exclusive. Instead of seeing Victorian philanthropy as centered solely on personal gain, I contend that it mingles such gain with a sincere desire on the part of the philanthropists to do good.

In Seth Koven's recent text on Victorian philanthropy *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, he argues precisely for such an over determined set of philanthropic motivations. Koven's attempt to uncover a mediated position between equally problematic extremes is enormously persuasive in its perception that erotic

attraction to the recipients of their philanthropy, whether conscious or not, did not prevent philanthropic Victorians from understanding “only too well that slums were real places of monotonous material deprivation and quiet human suffering which both rightly elicited their sympathy and called them to action” (4). It is precisely this rendering that most accurately describes the work of Arthur Munby in the context of his charitable pursuits via Harriet Langdon: a commingling of benevolence and prejudgment. I do not contest that there is an element of abjection in his interest in Langdon, nor an erotic attraction to working-class women. My point is that Munby’s critics have previously only focused on this side and ignored any genuine philanthropic interest, which I contend is a significant part of his motivation.

I argue further that the objects of such charitable attention were not without a degree of autonomy themselves. Specifically, while Harriet Langdon is the object of Munby’s charity in many senses, she is also able to keep him interested in her long enough to secure herself a permanent pensioner’s income. My intention is to complicate the perception that the donor of charity has all of the control while the recipient remains completely powerless and adrift in the philanthropist’s manipulations. Such a reading would render Langdon a passive victim adrift within circumstances entirely beyond her control; she was not. Similarly, the women in Munby’s poetic creations are depicted as strong, capable, and worthy of literary representation. He posits them as agents, not victims.

Methodologically, I use both Munby’s published poetry as well as his unpublished journals to underscore the conscientious effort that Munby made on behalf

of disfigured and working-class people. I am using both the journals and poetry as literary texts that reveal cultural attitudes about working-class and disfigured people; these writings are sources that both reflect and subvert the dominant ideology regarding class constructions and the construction of disability/disfigurement. Munby's poetry and journals provide a context for discussions about working-class and disabled identities; they present rich sources through which to examine the cultural response to poverty and disfigurement in Victorian England. They also provide compelling sources on working-class representation with a realist sensibility.

Throughout Munby's literary career, the most common subject matter in each of his published works is the life of the working-class. Thousands of his poems deal with the common daily experiences of working-class men and especially women, whose labor and dialects are faithfully represented. Rather than demonstrating an unhealthy erotic obsession with such women, I argue that Munby was part of the most prominent literary movement of the period: realism. Particularly, his work exhibits a deliberate and consistent attempt to preserve working-class speech. In order to accomplish this, Munby took great care in conversing with working people in their dialect, later transcribing such talks complete with translations of unfamiliar words. These words and phrases would then find their way into Munby's literary texts. In this sense, his attempts at accurate representation make him possibly the least studied realist writer of the period. Placing him alongside writers such as Barnes, Burnett, and Hardy underscore a similar commitment to the representation of dialect and the larger Victorian impulse of preservation. His commitment to the accuracy of realistic representation is akin to the

philosophy of George Eliot in *Adam Bede*; both argue that homely people are worthy of representation as they are.

Much of the inspiration for Munby's literary texts came from his life long companion and wife, Hannah Cullwick, and from the thousands of casual interviews Munby conducted with working-class people throughout his life. These interviews were recorded in his journals with the faint hope of a future audience—a hope that was not fully realized until fifty years after his death when the deed box he had left to his alma mater, Trinity College, Cambridge, was opened and the contents read.

Munby's preoccupation with the working-class was not solely a realist project but was also in keeping with the rise of the social sciences in the 19th century and with the increasingly industrializing nation. The age of industrialization brought a corresponding interest in the poor whose labor fueled the marketplace. Works by Henry Mayhew, Edwin Chadwick, Frederick Engels, William Acton, Gustav Dore, and James Greenwood began to codify the poor and their living conditions through various means of surveillance. Chadwick's domain was sanitation and the public streets, Engels and Mayhew focused largely on the living and working conditions of the poor, Greenwood on the environment in the workhouses, Acton on the conditions of prostitution, and Dore on photographic illustrations of London street scenes and life. As Mayhew did in *London Labor and the London Poor*, Arthur Munby conducted personal interviews with the working-class throughout his adult life, detailing in his journals their responses primarily to questions about working conditions: he chronicled the wages, hours, and treatment of workers in hundreds of different job types.

Ostensibly, Mayhew, Engels, Chadwick, Greenwood, Acton, and Dore serve as social rehabilitators, concerned overtly with observing the poor in order to improve the conditions in which they live. Yet there is also a voyeuristic impulse and a covert desire to police and sanitize class, race, and gender boundaries. For many of these social scientists, the borders are geographic/spatial, while for Acton, who wrote a treatise on prostitution in Victorian society, it is the female body that is being policed. As with the Contagious Diseases Acts that monitored prostitutes and authorized their incarceration, Acton's text is as much about the containment of the impure female body—a condition he felt familiar with, having worked for nearly twenty years as a gynecologist. In each case, the reformers claim to be working for the edification—physical and moral—of the working class, including female prostitutes, but alongside the philanthropic impulse is a fear of contamination and a subsequent desire to contain/maintain boundaries.⁵ Beneath the guise of providing better houses or improved streets is the desire to first survey how extensive the damage is and then to keep it from polluting or spreading to the non-working-class population. Similarly, beyond the desire to improve the lives and morals of Victorian prostitutes is the desire to keep “their” disease from spreading among the population. As Judith Walkowitz has noted in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, the lock hospitals existed to incarcerate the female prostitutes, not their clientele. The women's bodies, like the streets and houses in the slums, become sites of social

⁵ In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), Stallybrass and White link physiological and topographical differences, such that lowness in class terms is equated with the “lower” passions and parts of the body. In this way social topography is mapped against bodily topography, and the lower bodily sphere becomes synonymous with the lower classes. Pamela K. Gilbert's 2004 text *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* extends this work by demonstrating how medical mapping of diseases in urban spaces was a means by which Victorians could impose order on what they often perceived as the terrifying chaos of urban slums.

contagion.⁶ There is a similar ethic at work in Engels, whose descriptions of the atavistic Irish in *The Conditions of the Working Class* underscore his observations that they have contaminated and polluted the English working-class.

By combating the monolithic critique of Munby's social scientific interventions as solely erotic, however, I am reminded that these other social scientists likely had multiple and conflicting motivations as well, in which the altruistic and erotic comingled. Engels, for example, whose anti-Irish rhetoric in *Conditions of the Working Class* is so inflammatory, took an Irish woman, Mary Burns, as his common law wife. While abject readings of Engels' relationship with Burns are certainly possible, nevertheless, his ability to expose the hostile and dangerous working and living conditions in England demonstrated enormous sympathy with working-class subjects and enabled important social reforms. Such apparent contradictions are the center point of Seth Koven's *Slumming*. In it, he comments on precisely the kind of paradox that exists in Munby's life and work: "Eros and altruism, self-gratification and self-denial, the desire to love the poor and to discipline their disruptive power: these seemingly opposed impulses were tightly and disconcertingly bound to one another" (284). Koven's text argues compellingly for a philanthropy enmeshed in personal gain.

As an amateur social scientist, Munby has received his fair share of criticism from scholars. The first scholarship on Munby was Derek Hudson's 1972 biography. Once

⁶ Anne McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather* (1995) that women's bodies were mapped as sites of colonization since both women's bodies and colonial territory were conceived of as territory ripe for exploration/exploitation. She uses the work of H. Rider Haggard, for instance, to demonstrate how geographical space was delineated via a woman's body: breasts, navel, and pubic mound, as depicted in the map Haggard provided in the front of his novel *She*, which centered on an evil African queen who threatened to invade England. Such maps provided compelling visual rhetoric to conquer supposedly uninhabited or dangerously inhabited spaces.

Munby's deed box was opened in the 1950's, it sat unnoticed for about twenty years before Hudson began transposing the journals and piecing together Munby's biography. Although the deed box contained both Munby's and Cullwick's vast collection of journals, Hudson focused predominantly on Munby, and Cullwick became a secondary figure of far less significance. In 1984, Liz Stanley began the work of reclaiming Cullwick as an important figure in her own right who could illustrate to Victorian scholars the scope of a working-class woman's life. Stanley published a biography of Cullwick that consists mainly of her journal entries themselves—just as Hudson did for Munby—yet she represented Cullwick as having a good deal more personal power than Hudson portrayed her as having, particularly for her continued, lifelong resistance to being recognized as Munby's wife. Stanley argued that such independence underscored Cullwick's autonomy and control in her relationship with Munby.

Subsequent scholarship by Leonore Davidoff (1983), Griselda Pollock (1993), Anne McClintock (1995), and Barry Reay (2002) has gone beyond Hudson's and Stanley's biographical frames to a more in-depth critical interpretation of Munby's motivations for focusing on working-class women and specifically on his relationship with Hannah Cullwick. The idea for my dissertation began with my fascination with Anne McClintock's two chapters on Munby and his wife in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, the longest and most influential work that had then been written on Munby and Cullwick. McClintock focused on Munby's erotic investment in working-class women and the racial and colonial implications of his attraction to women "in their dirt." She depicted Munby's interactions with the working-

class, particularly with working-class women, as predominantly exploitative.

McClintock focused on Munby's marriage to Hannah Cullwick, arguing that Munby gained immense erotic gratification from Cullwick's physical strength and his own comparative delicacy. She argues that his feminization via his relationship with Cullwick, and via his frequent interviews with thousands of other physically strong working-class women, enabled him to momentarily escape the restrictive constraints of middle-class Victorian masculinity: "He avidly set down in his diary encounters with working women in which he was made to feel deliciously female" (McClintock 101). Similarly, Davidoff argued that Munby used his privileged position to compel women to be photographed, and hence objectified, for his personal pleasure, and that he undervalued the difficulty of working women's labor. McClintock agrees, though she credits Cullwick with more agency than did Davidoff.

Most recently, Barry Reay's 2002 book *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily Deformation in Victorian England* continues the scholarship on Munby and Cullwick. Predictably, Reay responds to Munby negatively, as previous critics had, though with considerably less plausibility. In his chapter on noseless women, which I refute in Chapter 2, Reay presents Munby as a voyeur intent on cruelly debasing disfigured women whose injuries horrify him in their reminiscence of death. As with Griselda Pollock's work on Munby, Reay argues that the photographs of Langdon were one element of eroticized control and power in which his working-class subjects became spectacles on display.

Of these Munby critics, McClintock's work especially provides a fascinating contribution to the scholarship on Victorian and colonial studies, yet its fixed scope has left room for future scholarship, including my own. While McClintock and Davidoff make plausible arguments that demonstrate Munby's problematic erotic motivation for involvement with the working-class, they ignore core aspects of Munby's ideology as a philanthropist. There is no mention of his literary representations that force positive recognition of working-class women on the public. Likewise, there is no evidence that either scholar was aware of, or at least pursued, Munby's pedagogical work or his effort on behalf of the disfigured. These omissions do damage to Munby in their one-sided representation of him as selfishly and erotically motivated when there were far more socially conscious and politically conscientious aspects of his life, including his response to oppression of the disfigured and his commitment to the education of both working men and women. His seven years of voluntary teaching at the Working Men's College, for example, provides direct evidence against McClintock's sweeping claim that "He was utterly indifferent to working men" (78).

In addition to contributing to Victorian scholarship on disability and philanthropy, and offering a reading on an unstudied voice in realism, my dissertation provides a more balanced and arguably more accurate version of Munby that has yet been undertaken. I seek to correct the one-sided interpretation of Munby by reviewing his various philanthropic pursuits in seeking employment and hospital admittance for a disfigured woman. His representations of women's voices in his poetry further underscore his appreciation for working-class women's speech and labor. The archival work that I have

done in Munby's journals reveals his consistent effort on behalf of working-class and disfigured people. I focus heavily on Munby's years-long relationship with Harriet Langdon not only because it underscores his philanthropy, but because it provides a necessary corollary to his relationship with his wife, Hannah Cullwick. Indeed, the Munby-Langdon relationship allows us to reassess his relationship with his wife by providing clear evidence that Munby's interactions with working-class women were far from simply prurient. Scholars have been too quick to dismiss Munby's benevolence and genuine care for working-class people, his wife preeminent among them. My work provides an alternate reading that offers new ways of looking at Munby's relationship with Cullwick.

While much Victorian scholarship from the 1970's to the present has been written in an attempt to see the period through the lens of gender, race, and class-based oppression, until recently, very little has been said about the intersections of these identity factors with disability and disfigurement and the consequences they have had on the lives of Victorians in this minority group. Likewise, little has been written on the social activism of those who sought to combat ableism alongside classism. Studying Munby uncovers not only the symbolic levels of class and ability-based oppression, but the institutional ones as well. While several Victorian scholars have rightly called into question Munby's motivation for his interactions with working-class women, *nothing* has been written to acknowledge the contributions Munby made on behalf of working people in general and disabled/disfigured women in particular. My dissertation provides this alternate reading, the other side of the coin, to give a more balanced assessment of

Munby as a whole, as well as to help fill the immense gap in disability scholarship in the period. Munby's activism bridged the false dichotomy between the realm of ideas and that of action. He repeatedly acted as the mediator between the working-class and the various axes of power that they were prevented from accessing. These chapters demonstrate Munby's mediation into the literary world and its power of cultural representation and inclusion. Alongside other realists of the period, he forges a positive space for working-class women in the symbolic realm: his depictions of the working-class divulge their voices, their strength, and their autonomy. His books reveal a class of women who are proud of their labor and their identity as working-class.

Beyond the symbolic level of inclusion, Munby also demonstrates his immersion into the pragmatic world of access to social power by insisting that disfigured women be allowed to work and receive needed medical care. When society refused to hire or aid the disfigured, Munby made every effort to fight on their behalf until they had reached a successful outcome—employment and medical support. This exhibits Munby's willingness to combat institutionalized oppression. My dissertation first addresses Munby's literary contributions as a writer, and then segues to his efforts to find employment and a hospital candidacy for a disfigured woman. Taken collectively, my chapters reveal a new and decidedly more favorable account of Arthur Munby's philanthropy than has ever been uncovered.

Chapter 1: Of Sooty Face and Horny Hands: Unfit for Poetic Representation

In the first chapter, I argue that Munby's representations of the working-class in his poetry offers them a place of inclusion in a literary world where they were far too often erased or misrepresented. This inclusion is his method of combating symbolic oppression by contesting who counted as worthy of representation and by challenging the stereotype of the working class both as ugly and unimportant in their servility. Being erased from literary and cultural existence is a basic tenet of social oppression. The privileged have the power to deny inclusion to segments of society that are deemed unworthy of representation, and that very lack of representation perpetuates and fosters social discrimination and oppression. Munby's lifelong inclusion of working-class dialect and labor in his published works is an attempt to re-value the symbolic meaning attached to working-class people. In this sense, his work is in keeping with Victorian realists who attempted to more accurately represent the people and events of their time. Munby's particular brand of realism was to focus intently on the voices of the working-class through dialect inclusion, as well as on the details of their physical labor. Especially noteworthy in his poetry is the sense of pride and independence with which he embodies his poetic speakers. I compare Munby's poetry both to a literary predecessor, William Wordsworth, and a successor, George Bernard Shaw, because of their inclusion of working-class women's voices in their literature. I also contextualize Munby with Thomas Hardy, William Barnes, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Emily Bronte—writers who made similar attempts to represent working-class dialect in their writing. Munby's poetry is filled with the dialect of working-class people, predominately women. He

includes their speech patterns, syntax, word choice, and phrasing. Munby's inclusion of Yorkshire dialect was part of a contemporary literary movement for dialect preservation that, in its turn, was part of a larger preservationist impulse in Victorian England—as demonstrated in the work of Ruskin and Morris.

Munby makes every effort to accurately represent working-class voices. He grew up in Yorkshire and was able to speak the dialect himself as well as hearing it spoken around him. He also made painstaking notes of unfamiliar dialect words during interviews and conversations with the working-class, copying down their phonetic pronunciations and translations in his journals. By contrast, Wordsworth's poetic speakers typically occupy a pastoral space that is much sanitized both linguistically, as he argued was necessary in his "Preface," as well as spatially. The landscape of Munby's work, by contrast, is more realistically represented as the urban environment of the working-class servant woman. Munby's pastoral servants are also truer to life. He frequently catalogues their physical labor in minute detail, regardless of how manual or dirty the labor is. While Munby's critics argue that he revels in this dirt for erotic gratification, I argue that such depictions reveal far more honestly the conditions in which the servant class worked, and more significantly, that such depictions of women "in their dirt" serve to foil the insistence that only sanitized versions of reality are worthy of literary representation. Munby's sensibility echoes George Eliot's who insisted in *Adam Bede* that the working-class should be depicted just as they are—homely and wonderful—and that there should always be "men ready to give the loving pains of a life

to the faithful representing of commonplace things” (154). Munby was precisely one of those men.

Shaw’s *Pygmalion* also deals with the literary representation of working-class women’s voices. It is not until Eliza can mimic hegemonic discourse that she gains access to social power in the realm of *Pygmalion*, or I argue, for Shaw in England in reality. Shaw’s work for the BBC to insist on a “proper” English pronunciation, complete with written guidelines, erases the multitude of dialects that remain “unclean.” Social power is available only to those who give up their authentic voices/dialects and take on the language of the middle and upper classes. Munby, by contrast, values the working class voice/dialect as it already exists. Through repeated use of dialects in his poetry, as well as through frequent commentary in his journals on the interviews he has with those who speak in dialect, I argue that Munby consciously and deliberately values the voices of the working-class. They do not need sanitizing or changing in any way to be worthy of literary representation. In “The Defense of Poetry” (1821), Romantic poet Percy Shelley claimed that “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (140). In the nineteenth century, that was especially true. Writers had power to influence how those in their society felt, thought, and acted. Munby used his power to the greater good. He served to introduce readers to the working class as they were—to break down barriers of class difference and insist on representation for those whose lives were often erased. He made working-class women’s voices visible by including their dialect in his poetry, he depicted working women’s bodies as beautiful, and he made working women’s labor visible and valued for its demonstration of strength.

Chapter 2: Making the Disabled: Harriet Langdon, Victorian Incurable

In this chapter I turn from a critique of Munby's representation of the working-class in literature to another major societal institution that was of equal importance: the economy. Working-class people were often unable to find work that sustained them and instances of poverty and starvation were widespread. This inability was made more complex for those with a disfigurement or disability. This is the first of two chapters in which I examine Munby's relationship with a working-class woman named Harriet Langdon who suffered from the autoimmune disease lupus. Her condition caused her physical pain and discomfort and also disfigured her face by destroying her nose and causing sores and redness of her skin.

In this chapter I argue that Munby combated the symbolic representation of the disabled as non-productive. While the majority of Langdon's society assumed that her disfigurement unfitted her for work and hence made her inconsequential in an industrial society, Munby made repeated, long-term efforts to help Langdon find employment, demonstrating his acceptance of her as a productive member of society, and his recognition that disfigured people had as much right to earn a living as anyone. At work in the symbolic level of oppression of the disabled in the Victorian period is also the assumption that they be relegated to the private realm, to be taken care of by themselves or by their families. By contrast, Munby believed in the societal responsibility to support the disabled—not as charities to be pitied, but as individuals capable of helping themselves so long as those around them were willing to offer employment.

I argue further in this chapter that the disabled are made more disabled by the refusal to employ them, and that Munby's journals offer repeated examples of this constructed nature of disability. Disablement was largely (though often falsely) conceived of as an inability to work and hence a uselessness within the industrial system, while disfigurement was presumed to render one useless in the marriage market. Yet for Langdon, there was no practical difference. I argue that disfigurement was collapsed into the frame of disability. In terms of their interactions with Langdon, most Victorians made no distinction between disablement and disfigurement. The result of both was a denial of work and an insistence on social isolation. Munby records that potential employers assume incapacity where none exists. It is their refusal to hire Langdon that creates disability as much as her biological condition does. Munby's journals make palpably clear that Langdon's primary problem is not an inability to work, but an inability to be employed—something entirely outside of her control. By writing letters, posting ads, and going in person to potential employers, Munby does everything he can to help Langdon change her situation.

I argue finally that institutions are interconnected and typically have related systems of dominance and oppression that impact members of society. Consequently, the same denial of access that Munby and Langdon discover when seeking employment for her is reproduced in the medical institutions. Langdon's condition was not curable, but it was treatable. Yet because of her class position, she could not obtain the hospital care that she desperately needed. Here again Munby works on her behalf, acting as intermediary between Langdon and a healthcare system that required wealth. He was

able to secure a ten-week treatment for her at Gray's Inn Road Hospital that was immensely beneficial. All told, Munby acted as an invaluable intermediary between Langdon and potential employers, as well as the staff at the hospital. He used his gender and class privilege to combat the discriminatory institutions and challenge some of the symbolic representations of disfigured women.

Chapter 3: Opening Institutions: Munby Makes Room for the Undesirables

In this chapter, I examine Munby's engagement with a major societal institution that attempted to exclude the working-class: health care. The majority of the chapter continues my evaluation of Munby's philanthropic relationship to Harriet Langdon. I turn from his effort to finding Langdon work to his attempts to help her gain a pensioner's place in the first hospital in existence in England for the care of incurable patients: The Royal Hospital for Incurables. Ultimately, Munby's dealings with the RHI demonstrate his philanthropic impulse. He sought to provide access for working-class people to a societal institution that would likely otherwise have been denied to them.

My focus in this chapter is in part on a detrimental aspect of institutionalized oppression faced by disfigured/disabled Victorians—the lack of access to hospital care—and on Munby's fight to provide that access. I also provide a criticism of the Royal Hospital for Incurables as fundamentally embedded in classism and ableism. The admitting system of the RHI maintained and perpetuated disability through discriminatory practices that required the disabled to raise funds for the hospital in order

to gain entry. Studying the foundation and early history of this hospital⁷ and Arthur Munby's involvement with it allows us to understand some prevalent Victorian attitudes regarding disability and disfigurement. The amount and kind of help available to Victorians with chronic incurable diseases was vastly insufficient. There were no hospitals for incurables prior to 1854, but even after this massive gap was partially filled by the RHI, access to this hospital was extremely circumscribed, not only because of its tiny size, but also because of class constraints. The hospital saw itself as fulfilling a need among the working-class. Its assumption was that the wealthy had the money to hire whatever help might be needed, and the poor were taken care of by the Poor Laws, which provided work houses to satisfy the requirements of the destitute classes. Hence, the RHI saw itself as fulfilling the needs of the working as opposed to the pauper class.

The problems with such assumptions were multiple, not the least of which was that the incurable/disabled pauper classes did not receive medical care from the workhouse system. In fact, by nature of the various physical conditions and diseases from which they suffered, many could not work at all. The work houses were set up to address the needs of the able bodied poor. The fate of disabled paupers was often left to whatever local charities might be found to assist. More often, though, they were left to fend for themselves. Langdon was in just such a predicament. Although she clearly could work, her disabled status was worsened by a society that refused to give her work. As I argued in Chapter 2, Langdon's disability was largely socially constructed. The RHI was the last option, other than abject poverty and starvation, left available to Langdon.

⁷ The Royal Hospital for Incurables underwent a few name changes through the decades, and still exists today, over one hundred and fifty years later, under its current name: the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Munby's journals for me is the glimpse they offer of a disfigured woman's perception of herself. While Munby does combat symbolic oppression by acknowledging Langdon's right to work, he also contributes to it by viewing her partially through the rhetoric of victimization. He perceives her as pitiable and doomed to a solitary, dejected life. Despite his perception of her, I use his journals to argue for Langdon's level of agency in conjunction with other Victorian incurables: Joseph Merrick, and Gissing's Clara Hewett. I argue that all were able to achieve a degree of autonomy via the very disfigurement that society attempted to use to ostracize them. The relationship each has with a mediator figure is best described as a paradoxical blend of agency and dependence. Further, Munby's journals offer fascinating proof that Langdon was *not* inextricably bound to a life of misery but was capable of joy and enthusiasm because she understood herself to be more than just her disfigurement.

CHAPTER 1: OF SOOTY FACE AND HORNY HANDS: UNFIT FOR POETIC REPRESENTATION

Arthur Munby's writing career spanned over fifty years. *Benoni*, his first volume of poetry, was written during his undergraduate days at Trinity and published in 1852. He went on to publish thirteen additional volumes over the course of his life; the last, *Relicta*, was published in 1909, just a year before his death. Munby's poetry is currently not heavily anthologized¹, nor was it widely read during his lifetime, yet it provides a remarkable window into the lives of working-class women that more accurately represents and validates their experiences than the poetry of predecessor William Wordsworth or successor George Bernard Shaw. While it has been almost entirely ignored by contemporary Munby scholars who have focused instead on his copious journals, this poetry is significant in its appreciation of the value of working women's language, appearance, and labor. Munby made them the lifelong focus of his poetic representations. The women in his poems are portrayed undertaking a variety of manual labor from kitchen scullery work to plowing fields.

Munby published his own literary aesthetic in the preface to his long narrative poem *Dorothy, A Country Story*. In it, Munby asserts that working-class women are fit subjects for poetry as they are and that an accurate representation must include both the details of their labor and the visible signs of it. For Munby, their rough hands and sun-reddened skin were badges of honor earned through honest labor, and such details ought to be represented faithfully in their literary depictions. This makes Munby perhaps the

¹ To my knowledge, there are only a few of Munby's poems represented in one anthology: *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* (1999).

least studied Victorian realist. Like Eliot, Hardy, and Dickens, discussed at greater length below, Munby sought to provide accurate, realistic depictions of the working-class. What is more uniquely characteristic of Munby's brand of realism is his extensive attention to dialect, particularly Yorkshire, and his laboring female speakers who assert class pride, autonomy, and independence. His depictions are not sanitized. His heroines are not exceptional for their beauty or refinement; they are common, everyday working-class women who are worthy of representation exactly as they are.

In this chapter I compare Munby's poetry to many of his contemporaries—Hardy, Dickens, Barnes, Gaskell, Hodgson Burnett, and Charlotte and Emily Bronte—as well as to two major 19th century authors who also focused their work on similar themes: Munby's favorite predecessor, William Wordsworth, and a historical and literary successor, George Bernard Shaw. Each of these men defines what should be considered appropriate subject matter for literature in different ways. Each is also equally interested in “low” or rustic language and the people who speak it. Finally, these authors profess to depict the bodily labor and physical appearance of working-class women. Despite the similarity in themes, however, Munby values working women's language, appearance, and labor through realistic and positive representations; he neither elevates nor denigrates them as Wordsworth and Shaw do.

The Victorian era, while rife with sensation novels and popular mysteries was simultaneously the moment of the rise of realism in literary representation. The popular fiction itself often highlighted social problems. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, for example, is a text that underscores the gender politics of the period, class

divisions, and the impact of strict divorce laws, while the works of H. Rider Haggard and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle expose a nation invested in containing empire. High literature, meanwhile, while often divested of the more sensationalized aspects, was equally concerned with wider social issues. Dickens' works particularly illustrated the conditions of the working-class in relation to the work house, Poor Laws, scant education, ill health, and a general inability to maintain a living in an increasingly industrialized England. George Eliot, too, makes a pointed and impassioned plea for realism in her works. In *Adam Bede* she argues that her vocation as a novelist is to expend her

strongest effort [to] avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind.

The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. (243)

Eliot asserts a compelling argument to create characters in fiction as they appear to her in real life: flawed and beautiful simultaneously—perhaps beautiful because of their very irregularities.

Munby's work has much in common with the realist project of representing working-class characters in ordinary settings and realistic conditions. The works of Hardy, Eliot, and Gissing held a mirror to society that revealed a largely objectionable reflection of the social condition. It is during this moment of realism that Munby wrote his own works that represented working-class experience, focusing on the labor and

physical reality of working-class women, and particularly on their voices. While dialect is present in some of these authors' works, few presented women's voices with the attempted accuracy and passionate self-direction that Munby employed for his working-class heroines.

Many Victorian writers like Hardy, Dickens, and Barnes do take working women as fit subject matter in their literature, but they frequently emphasize such women as the more sanitized exceptions to their class—deserving of recognition for their exceptional beauty and relative delicacy compared to other working-class women. Typically, a Victorian working-class heroine is distinguished from her contemporaries either by especial beauty or unusual intelligence and refinement. Mary Barton exemplifies the former and Jane Eyre the latter. While both heroines are in much lower social classes than their pursuers, each has a unique gift of beauty or refinement that sets her apart from others in her class. Likewise, Wordsworth's rustics are falsely elevated in language and unrealistically sanitized in appearance. Shaw's preeminent depiction of a working woman, Eliza Doolittle, is conversely denigrated as dirty and disgusting, her voice, labor, and body shown as beneath contempt and her life unworthy of consideration until her linguistic and bodily conversion to the upper class.

By contrast, Munby's representations of working-class women, pervading every volume of his poetry, depict strong, assertive individuals who speak very often in dialect and whose language, bodies, and labor are presented as worthy, valuable, and beautiful as they are. They are not portrayed as rare exceptions but are worthwhile simply as they are, rough handed and work-stained. His representations of working-class women are

prolific, highlighting that their reality ought not to be erased in the way the servant class was so often made invisible in middle and upper class lives—both in reality and in literature.

At the heart of Munby's work is his assertion that working women are worthwhile subjects for art and literature, not to be sanitized linguistically or aesthetically. A remark in his February 24, 1863, journal entry is characteristic of dozens of similar comments that permeate Munby's journals. After a discussion with a friend about female labor, Munby comments, "Strange, that one never, from men or from books, hears a word about these homely everyday matters. No painter paints these female folk at work: no tourist ever describes them."² This was a call to action. Munby became the writer who described them in poem after poem, volume after volume, urging the world to see and value what was so often erased or stigmatized—creating for himself the poems he wanted to read. Such poetic depictions of women speakers combat the symbolic level of oppression that working women faced in Munby's lifetime first and foremost by giving them a voice that more accurately represented their living reality. Munby's body of work moreover re-presents working-class women in ways that combat their stereotypes as either white-skinned, pastoral, Tess-like figures or ugly, dirty, immoral villains. His poetry further signifies the desire to preserve working-class women's dialects as valuable and worthy of representation.

² Munby went to numerous art shows and exhibits throughout his life and worked for years with John Ruskin at the Working Men's College. He discussed art with Ruskin and had a cordial relationship—going to dinner and to Ruskin's home. It is possible that Munby's comment references the Pre-Raphaelite painters who were influenced by Ruskin. Munby was perhaps unaware that the kind of art he favored existed elsewhere. In *Adam Bede*, for example, George Eliot references Dutch painters whose pictures depict "a monotonous homely existence" (246). I will discuss this point further below.

To begin a discussion of Munby's aesthetic sensibility, I want to turn to William Pidduck's brief introduction to the microfilm collection of Munby's journals where he suggests that Munby initially "began to compile the record as raw data for his poems." It is interesting to think of the correlation here between journal keeping and poetic inspiration, especially in the context of a historical example from a poet of whom Munby was incredibly fond. Wordsworth (and Coleridge) clearly availed themselves of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals when composing at least some of their poems. Dorothy would read to them from her journals and would willingly allow them to be read by both men.

Critics have seen this circumstance as, in the best instance, happily collaborative, and in the worst, plagiaristic. Initially, Dorothy Wordsworth's journals and poems were thought to be of value simply as a means of further elucidating her brother's work, just as Hudson, Munby's biographer, downplayed the significance of Hannah Cullwick's journals. Margaret Homans and Susan Levin helped to reclaim Dorothy Wordsworth's importance as a significant Romantic writer. Using biographical, historical, and feminist approaches, they focused on her sense of relative unimportance in comparison with her brother who not only had gender privilege but was also a famous author. They argued that this created in Dorothy Wordsworth a kind of absent poetic identity-formation. In *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson*, Margaret Homans' estimation of Dorothy is of a woman enmeshed and subsumed by anxiety of influence to the point of self effacement: "Writing out of love for nature, she merges with nature and forgets her self; writing out of love for William

she takes on the persona he designs for her and adopts a 'hidden life' that is his, not hers, and therefore one that is as mystifying to her as it is to us" (78).

Critics like Homans and Levin suggest further that not only was Dorothy's self forgotten, it was unfairly used by her brother. In *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* (1987), Levin claims that Wordsworth plagiarized his sister's work. In an extended discussion of Dorothy's "Thoughts on My Sick Bed," Levin performs a close reading of the poem, arguing that

The word "pilfered" calls attention to itself, especially as placed in Dorothy's poem with "prelusive" and "piercing," words connected by sound, but also by their possible relationship to the language of William's and Dorothy's poetry. Her observations were taken little by little (pilfered) by other writers years ago. Her sounds, first prelusive to her brother's, now "pierce" his in the variegated sense of that word: "see thoroughly into," "puncture," "penetrate with pain," "discern," "pass a sharp instrument into" [. . .] Her being has indeed been "pilfered." (136-37).

Such claims of plagiarism are a point of debate. Subsequent Wordsworth critics like Anne Mellor, Susan Wolfson, and James Soderholm have pointed out the close parallels in the Wordsworth's poetry and how both Wordsworths influenced each other. There is more of a collaborative spirit rather than one of ill usage. Mellor, for instance, in *Romanticism and Gender* (1992) discusses Dorothy as a relational self—a self in process

with others. In such a reading, there is mutual benefit from shared journals, rather than William and Coleridge simply taking her words for their poems.

In “Dorothy Wordsworth's Return to Tintern Abbey,” Soderholm offers an interpretation of “Thoughts on My Sick Bed” that contrasts with Levin’s. He contends that Dorothy “echoes her brother's earlier works, borrowing from them as liberally as William once borrowed from her journals” (309). He argues against charges of plagiarism and insists on a loving, sharing personal and writing relationship between brother and sister. Soderholm’s interpretation of “Thoughts on My Sick Bed” conflicts greatly with Levin’s version, which he refutes: “The charge that Dorothy's observations were ‘pilfered’ by other writers completely misrepresents the actual relationship [. . .] between her journals and the use both her brother and Coleridge made of them as commonplace books. That Dorothy encouraged use of her journals is suggested most visibly at the beginning of the Grasmere journal, where she writes that she will keep a journal because she ‘shall give William pleasure by it’” (318). In Soderholm’s estimation, “Thoughts on My Sick Bed” and “Tintern Abbey” are companion poems in which brother and sister include one another in fond memory, each borrowing from the other.

Tilar J. Mazzeo’s 2007 text *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* examines the relationship between the Wordsworth’s in light of contemporary understandings of plagiarism. In it, she reminds readers that while the Romantics were often subject to accusations of plagiarism in their time and in ours, the definitions of what constituted plagiarism varied widely. In the Romantic era, one was accused of plagiarism

not for borrowing the words of other writers, but for borrowing them without improving upon them. Judgments of plagiarism thus were made on aesthetic grounds. Mazzeo acknowledges that William Wordsworth could not have written several of his poems without the inspiration and words of his sister, yet whether or not this constitutes plagiarism in Romantic terms depends upon one's assessment of whether or not he improved upon her work.

A similar occurrence of shared journals existed between Munby and his wife, Hannah Cullwick, whose journals were kept, at least in part, on Munby's instructions and for his own personal and professional use. Munby consistently requested that Cullwick keep a detailed account of her life and bring the journals to him for periodic perusal. It is obvious from reading his poems that her voice and labor, and that of thousands of other working-class women whom he interviews, finds a parallel in many of the characters he creates in his poetry. Yet while critics compare Dorothy Wordsworth's writing and poems with her more famous brother's in part because their language is so similar, no one could confuse Munby's voice with Cullwick's or that of working women generally, since they have come from completely different class and educational backgrounds. The question that is considered with the Wordsworth's, of who authored a given text, with Munby becomes a different one: why did he employ a language not his own in so much of his writing?

The challenge for a critic becomes to distinguish between language that has been appropriated for an unfair representation and language employed to honor and faithfully reflect those it purports to represent. In this sense, Munby was also a representative of a

relatively small trend in the Victorian era to retain regional dialects that would otherwise become extinct. To this end, local historians collected ballads, folk tales, and other evidence of regional dialects, while others, like Munby, published new literature that reproduced the old sounds. The most sustained example of such a writer is William Barnes, discussed in greater length below, who wrote both poetry in the Dorset dialect and published grammars and similar works designed to proliferate the regional speech he had grown up among. Munby had a similar impulse. Described by his biographer Derek Hudson as “a patriotic Yorkshireman and an expert on the local dialect” (9), Munby took painstaking effort in his journals to accurately record the language and syntax of his own regional dialect. Far from a desire to speak for the women represented in his poetry, Munby’s impulse is to retain and honor. His representations of working women’s voices are in keeping with a literary movement of regional preservation most notable in Barnes, Hardy, and Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*. After reading through his journals and poetry, the answer to why he used a working-class dialect becomes abundantly clear: out of a reverence for the language of working-class people and a deep desire to preserve it.

Munby’s Critics

Munby’s interest in Cullwick and other working women has been a point of speculation among his critics. Leonore Davidoff, Griselda Pollack, and Anne McClintock have each provided rich feminist criticisms of Munby in which he is censured for his erotic investment in working-class women. In “Class and Gender in Victorian England” (1983), Davidoff argued that middle-class men, Munby included,

“appear to be engaging in a kind of voyeurism which comes out of their privileged position as actors and doers” (22). While there are several brief references to his poetry, Davidoff uses a combination of feminist, psychological, and biographical criticism to interpret her primary focal point: the relationship between Munby and Cullwick, which she perceives as exploitative.

Similarly, Griselda Pollock argues in “The Dangers of Proximity: The Spaces of Sexuality and Surveillance in Word and Image” (1994) that Munby’s investment in working women was motivated by intense eroticism: “The Munby archive is not about social observation or analyses of collective economic conditions. The pleasure is, I suggest, pornographic, because it uses those social and economic conditions we name as class to stage a play structured by a fixed set of oppositions—licit/illicit, clean/dirty, pure/indecent” (11). Pollock reads Munby’s motivations for interacting with working women not as means for better understanding, aiding, and honoring such women, but as a means of self-gratification. Her work focuses on “just one aspect of this archive”: the photographs, which she argues are a means of surveilling, mapping, and mastering a “threatening hybrid, the laboring woman” (19).

Anne McClintock’s scholarship on Munby, two critical chapters of *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), echo these earlier critics in their negative assessment of Munby as a man who used working-class women to serve his own purpose. Building on the work of prior Munby critics, McClintock argues that Munby received immense erotic and psychological pleasure from feminizing himself in comparison to the working women whom he perceived as physically strong and

masculine in both appearance and labor. McClintock's focus was also largely on the relationship between Munby and Cullwick, but she argued (as did Liz Stanley before her) that Cullwick had a great deal more agency than she was given credit for by either Munby or his critics.

Most recently (2002), Barry Reay has published *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily Deformation in Victorian England*. This text, like its predecessors, focuses primarily on Munby's relationship with Cullwick, and as with previous scholars, Reay depicts Munby as self-serving and voyeuristic. Reay uses Munby as a lens through which to understand Victorian notions of sexuality and femininity, arguing that Munby's interactions with working-class and disfigured women were appealing to him by highlighting their contrast with the feminine, lady-like figures that represented the cultural ideal. To Reay, disfigured women provided Munby with his own personal gothic horror stories. Reay presents Munby as detached, cynical, and at times cruelly amused by such encounters with working-class and disfigured women, whom Reay argues Munby treated as servile dependents.

All of Munby's critics read his relationship to the working-class through the lens of abjection. They each argue that Munby is fascinated and repelled by categories of women deemed impure and the literal dirt in which they work. These "dirty" women include coal miners, scullery maids, boot-blackers, prostitutes, and pre-eminent among all working-class women, his maid-of-all-work wife Hannah Cullwick whom Munby delighted in seeing "in her dirt," to use his and Cullwick's phrase. The theories of abjection scholars use to interpret Munby's relationship with Cullwick stem primarily

from Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), Douglas argued that items ordinarily conceived of as taboo or polluted (dirt, blood, semen, feces, etc) were, in fact, responsible for maintaining social structures. By defining what is polluted and what is pure, societies set up binary systems that provide social order and divided what they conceived of as permissible and what, by contrast, was taboo.

In Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), she explains that "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Munby's critics argue that the working-class women on whom he focuses represent precisely that kind of ambiguity. He photographs Cullwick, for example, dressed as a slave, an upper-class lady, and a man. She represents for him that "in-between," "ambiguous" space that Kristeva speaks of. He also appreciates the times when Cullwick is particularly dirty—when she has blackened her naked body with chimney soot or when her hands and arms are stained with boot polish or kitchen dirt. Kristeva defines the abject as "something rejected from which one does not part" (4), and Munby scholars argue that working-class women are abject for Munby—dirty women whom Munby "rejects but cannot do without" (McClintock 72). What is abject are the dirty parts of ourselves that we expel but can never be rid of. According to his critics, Munby is fascinated by the abject.

While some of Munby's critics (particularly McClintock) provide compelling arguments, they are quick to cast his motivations for involvement with working-class

women in an entirely self-serving light. All are part of a generation of scholars who are highly critical of the Victorian philanthropy of reformers and social scientists, perceiving it not as charitable or benevolent, but as operating solely out of self-interest.³ While I do not deny that Munby likely received immense erotic gratification from many of his interactions with working-class women, to read his life in so circumscribed a way does not do justice to the immense work he did on behalf of working-class people. Munby's representations of them attempted to capture their appearance, voices, and labor more accurately.

Between Romanticism and Realism

Munby's favorite theme of working-class women is a constant subject in both his journals and his poetry, and Cullwick's journals could only have provided him with, among other things, a sustained account of such a living life. No doubt her journals served to supplement his numerous interviews with working women, and while there can be no doubt that Munby was erotically attracted to some of these women, Cullwick preeminent among them, to see this attraction as his sole motivation for reading her journals (or keeping his own) would be a vast oversimplification. The journals—both his own and Cullwick's—provided a vast body of knowledge from which to draw for character sketches and facts about the circumstances of working-class female labor—

³ In addition to all the critics who are skeptical of Munby's philanthropy, there are also scholars who insist on negative motivation for other Victorian philanthropists and reformers. See, for example, "Remaking 'Lawless Lads and Licentious Girls': The Salvation Army and the Regeneration of Empire," where Troy Boone critiques William Booth's project as one in which the poor are othered; Priti Joshi's "Edwin Chadwick's Self-Fashioning: Professionalism, Masculinity, and the Victorian Poor," which critiques Chadwick's sanitation reform, and Amy E Martin's "Blood Transfusions: Constructions of Irish Racial Difference, the English Working Class, and Revolutionary Possibility in the Work of Carlyle and Engels" where Engels is taken to task for racial bias.

sketches he published in his literary texts. The journals also allowed him a space to sketch out his theories on the subjects of art and poetry.

Munby's poetics and aesthetic sensibility are clearly a product of both his historical proximity to the Romantic poets and his embeddedness within Victorian culture. While many Victorian writers rejected the perceived solipsism of the Romantic poets in favor of a more clear-eyed representation of reality, Munby was not so quick to leave behind the lessons of his predecessors. Munby's record of a conversation with one of his dearest friends, Vernon Lushington, is telling of his poetic sensibility:

we talked of Burns, of poetry generally—he holding that nowadays it is time for a poet to leave behind introspection, & analysis of feeling & mere love of Nature, & to become Homeric and Shakespearean, & deal with & celebrate the facts & events of his time. A noble plan certainly: but I held & feel that the very tumult of events nowadays, & the splendid supremacy of physical science, is enough to drive the imaginative & contemplative soul into the society of himself and of nature: for here he finds the quiet & the permanence & the spiritual meanings which are the food of his poetic life. (March 17, 1859)

Lushington's commentary encapsulates the tendency to embrace realism that became increasingly prevalent in mid 19th century literature, while Munby's comment is a fair representation of romanticism. It is obvious from these remarks why Munby was so fond of Wordsworth's work with its appreciation of the natural world as a conduit for self-reflection. In the same entry, Munby goes on to say "But when the first whirl & flash of

engines and telegraphs & revolutions is over, & the poetic soul—which is slow to change & clings to familiar loves—has learnt to keep pace with them, and to see the poetic side of all such things, then we may have a Homer of the railway and a Shakespeare of the Ballot.”

These comments are early on in Munby’s poetic career, and yet they situate him firmly between the Romantic sensibility of self-exploration through nature and the Victorian desire to hold a mirror to the social and political realities of the world around them. Munby’s poetry would quickly reveal itself to be comprised of both an internal exploration and a critical exploration of the world in which he lived. His subject matter, working-class women, allowed him to pursue both passions. At the time these remarks were written, in the very first opening journal of 1859, Munby had already been enmeshed for four years in his lifelong relationship with Hannah Cullwick, maid-of-all-work, and was already chronicling the lives of working-class women through frequent interviews. His poetry enabled him to write the reality of his life’s personal investment in such women—through thinly veiled autobiographical pieces about cross-class relationships—while also providing the kind of social reportage that Victorians had come to prize. For Munby, these reports were on the realities of the speech, bodies, and labor of working-class women.

How is “Rustic Speech” Defined?

Munby was well-read and studied poetry at Cambridge and on his own; the collection of books that he bequeathed to Cambridge upon his death included volumes of

Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Clough, and Beddoes, among others (Hudson 11).

For Munby, the subjects of art/poetry are working women and country life. Like Wordsworth, Munby is committed to depictions of common life and to employing a language “really used by men”—or in Munby’s case, more often by women. Munby, though, far surpasses Wordsworth in the accuracy with which he adheres to such “real” language.

My intention in looking at Wordsworth’s discussion of and use of language is not simply to criticize Wordsworth for what he did not do—employ dialects—or condemn him for any lack of artistic merit, but rather to investigate his linguistic theory as operating along a continuum, as being part of a changing understanding of the nature of language in poetic expression. In 1852, by the time Munby published his earliest work, *Benoni*, during his undergraduate years at Cambridge, Wordsworth had been dead for two years. While there are numerous similarities in the writings of the two men, their differences, especially in their understanding of what demarcated appropriate poetic language, are far more pronounced. What Wordsworth perceived as the “common language really used by men” would be for Munby far closer to the neoclassical poets than to his own, though Munby had a deep appreciation of the poet, whom he described in his poem “Wordsworth” as the preeminent teacher of solace through nature: “One man alone, in this at least supreme/ O’er all the generations of his kind,/ Beheld deliverance: not as in a dream,/ But with the clear-eyed certainty of noon/ Beheld and heard it. Long with reverent ear/ He heard the secrets of the sun and moon,/ Stars, earth, and sea, the mountain and the mere,/ And told of them to others; and to me” (26). For Munby, as for

so many, Wordsworth's poems were a guide to understanding the self through the natural world, and they provided enormous comfort and counsel. In the same poem, Munby goes on to describe Wordsworth as the "pure prophet of our law,/ Priest and exemplar of the creed we own" who teaches that despite loss and ageing,

Far better things,
Even on this earth, are with us if we choose.
Age cannot spoil, nor Sorrow's self destroy
Our blessing, have we courage but to use
The sympathy, the comfort, and the joy
That Nature, only Nature, can confer;
Whose heart, whose voice, whose features, all employ
In us, the good that God employs in her. (28)

This poem, published in a volume called *Vestigia Retrorsum* in 1891, makes clear Munby's affiliation with Wordsworth. Yet while Munby's receptivity to the natural world found a kinship with Wordsworth, his use of dialect distinguishes him from the poet laureate. Munby simply had a different understanding of what poetic expression could be. While his language use and subject matter in *Vestigia Retrorsum* is elegiac and generally conforms to much of the popular poetry of its time, Munby far more frequently published poems in dialect about working-class women that were uncharacteristic of his time. He had an overwhelming passion for the speech of Hannah Cullwick and the other working women with whom he had contact. This love of rustic speech and commitment to an attempt at accurate representation is everywhere in his poetry. There is no apparent

attempt to sanitize, and indeed, no concession that the language of working-class women had any defects that required altering.

I argue that this is in marked contrast to Wordsworth, whose professed rustic speakers still need translation. In the February 16, 1862, entry of his journal, Munby notes one such necessity of translation in a story he read to Cullwick to cheer her after a crying spell. She listened “to a story of Miss Mulock’s, which I read to her out of ‘Good Words’. ‘Mistress and Maid’, it was called: but though it professed to be a servants’ story, I had to translate it, as I went on, out of a most involved and magniloquent style into homely English.” While Wordsworth translates rustic language into what he deems more appropriate poetic diction, Munby’s impulse is antithetical: to render “magniloquent” words back into familiar rustic speech. It was common for Munby and Cullwick to read to each other when together, and this incident provides insight into yet another possible motivation for Munby’s poetic word choice: a desire to please a working-class audience—one that was unlikely to be able to publish its own literature that represented a working-class perspective.

There is one journal entry, however, where Munby did find just such a work, and he delighted in it. Passing by a store window, he saw a book marked “‘written by a Domestic Servant’. Straightaway I went in.” Munby asked the shopkeeper about the author and discovered that she had paid for the printing herself, bringing the book out after some days’ consideration and “at her own risk.” He also discovered that 130 copies had already been sold, and the shopkeeper said that “‘the reviews speak highly of the book [. . .]. So said Mr. Bush: and for my part, I left his shop in a glow of satisfaction,

which for a time overpowered the dull day and my own sadness [. . .] so far as I know, this is the first servant maid who has written a novel ” (October 18, 1872). Munby is right to assume that the expense would prevent many working-class people from pursuing publication, assuming also that they had learned to read and write, and had the time and inclination to do so⁴. His delight in her success underscores his appreciation for working-class women and is in keeping with his insistence that they and their lives are worthwhile subjects for literature. This incident also underscores that Munby was not invested in replacing working-women’s voices with his own version, but welcomed literature in which they could speak for themselves.

Wordsworth’s Aesthetic

In “The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” William Wordsworth establishes his poetic aesthetic by distinguishing his work from the poetry of those who came before him, as well as from contemporary poetry that was being published. In this work, one of Wordsworth’s most fundamental tenets, which he views as a marker of difference between his own aesthetic and that of other poets, is his insistence upon using the realistic language of common men: “The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men” (59). Wordsworth justifies his decision by explaining that

⁴ While Munby encouraged Hannah Cullwick to keep a journal, she made it clear that it was a chore she had little time or desire to pursue. She repeatedly expressed a disinclination toward journal keeping, undertaking it solely at Munby’s request.

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in the condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and (from the necessary character of rural occupations) are more easily comprehended and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. (60)

Wordsworth's argument rests upon the assumption that rustics have a closer relationship with nature that enables them to feel more deeply by virtue of the relative simplicity of their lives. He infers that a relationship with nature will lead to a deeper understanding of the self, and therefore uses rustics as a kind of guide back to one's own spirit and knowledge of the self. Critics have since accused Wordsworth particularly, and the Romantic male poets more generally, of idealizing the natural world and country life as a response to the increasing industrialization and urban expansion springing up around them in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There is a tendency in most Romantic poets, particularly in Blake and Wordsworth, to contrast the health-inducing country with the evils of city life, represented most frequently by poverty, pollution, and crime. The

Wye River Valley, for example, was polluted with coal processing centers on its banks that made both the water and the air less than ideal when the Wordsworth's toured it.

True to his word, Wordsworth does use figures from common life frequently in his poetry; his work is filled with huntsmen, vagrants, reapers and other rustic characters who tell stories of their daily existence. And while his poetry is largely free of the allusions and elevated language of the neoclassical writers who came before him, the language he does use is hardly representative of the dialects and speech of actual rustic people. Wordsworth used country life and the representations of bucolic people as an occasion to come to a greater understanding of himself. His desire was not to accurately represent but to study as a means of self-exploration. Wedded as he may have been to the idea of common language, it was, in fact, little more to him than a poetic device. He offers a significant parenthetical aside in "The Preface" that more honestly depicts his assessment of rustic speech:

The language, too, of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects—from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived, and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. (60-61)

Embedded within the pseudo compliments he pays to country people—their simplicity, their relative lack of vanity—is a blatant dismissal of their actual voices. Wordsworth

clearly states that rustic language, in its actual usage, is defective, that one is right to dislike or be disgusted by aspects of it, and that to sanitize it is both rational and just, especially for poetic representation. His deepest investment lies not with representing the language as it was actually used, but with offering a mediated position between the dialects of rustic people and the falsely elevated language of the neoclassical poets.

There is no question that Wordsworth's language is more characteristic of an everyday speaking voice than what is typically found in the highly allusive language of poets like Gray, whose language Wordsworth critiques in "The Preface" as being unnecessarily artificial, insincere, and ostentatious. Yet it is equally unquestionable that Wordsworth has no intention of accurately representing rustic speech as it existed in the world around him. In "The Preface," Wordsworth proclaims that "the language of such poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men" (69). There is, once again, a qualification in the discourse that Wordsworth is willing to advocate; he will reproduce it only "*as far as is possible*" (my emphasis), and that possibility precludes the kind of realistic representation that dialects would enable. Wordsworth has no interest in capturing the language as it actually sounded. He further qualifies his intent by speaking of a "selection," a selection presumably sanitized from the "defects" he mentioned earlier: "this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life" (69-70). The presumption here is that Wordsworth, as poet, has the capacity to distinguish between language that represents "taste and feeling,"

and language that embodies the “vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life.” There is a presupposition not only that such a distinction exists, but that he is capable of making it.

Readership

Wordsworth’s distinctions between what is and is not permissible in the name of “true taste” in part anticipates his audience’s reaction. In many places in “The Preface,” most notably in its opening paragraphs, Wordsworth appears defensive about the reception *Lyrical Ballads* has received in earlier editions. Though urged by Coleridge to undertake the preface in the first place, and though reluctant to do so in any case, Wordsworth nevertheless does write and publish it, specifically addressing his readership on “poems so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed” (58). Wordsworth announces his intention to publish a kind of poetry that he feels is entirely without precedent and therefore in need of defense, or at least explanation. Conscious of potentially frustrating the expectations of his readers, Wordsworth warns that “They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will no doubt frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness. They will look round for poetry and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume the title” (59). Wordsworth is clearly aware of disappointing an audience so unused to what he considers the language “really used by men.” It may have been an effort to avoid further dissatisfying his readership that prevented him from using a more accurate representation of rustic language. It may

also have been his own aesthetic that prevented him from loving a “vulgar” dialect or feeling that it was at all worthy of unaltered representation.

Wordsworth was not the only poet who anticipated and was anxious about his potential audience. For Munby, there is also a definite apprehension about not being read, but it never induces him to make his poems more popular in their subject matter or choice of diction. While Wordsworth presumably stays true to his own poetic vision of representing rustic speech, Munby goes far further, despite his worries about reception and his awareness of a public that would likely not appreciate his subject matter or his style. In his journal entry of February 9, 1864, Munby laments that he gets work writing reviews, but not writing on the subject that is truly meaningful to him: “I do not seek the work [reviews]; it is offered me, and I take & do it, for money’s sake: but the interest of this work is small; is as nothing, compared with that of writing one poor verse, or one bit of narrative, about female labour, for instance.” And yet despite the apparent lack of public interest in his chosen subject, Munby persevered and published more than a dozen volumes, most of which featured working-class people.

Like most authors, Munby did contemplate having an audience that would appreciate his work, yet recognizing its difference from the norm and the consequent unlikelihood of success, Munby defied his readers to challenge their assumptions. In 1891 Munby published a collection he called *Vulgar Verses*—a title in which he appears to self-consciously reclaim the “vulgar,” whereas in Wordsworth’s writing, he distances himself from it. For Munby, the vulgar is cause for celebration. Similarly, Munby titled a book-length poem *Ann Morgan’s Love: A Pedestrian Poem* (1896). Writing about

pedestrian subjects was at the core of his work. Munby called attention to the everyday, ordinary world of working-class women with such titles.⁵

In *Vulgar Verses*, Munby quoted Renaissance poet John Skelton on the title page: “This barbarous language rude/ Perhaps ye may mislike:/ But blame not them that rudely play,/ If they the ball do strike.” Beneath this quote is also one from Vita Nuova: “He who skilleth not to understand it . . . is welcome to leave it alone.” These quotations demonstrate Munby’s clear awareness that his poems may not be well received, especially because of their “barbarous language,” yet he remained unapologetic, expressly welcoming his readers to “leave it alone” if they had not the ear for it. Sadly, this is often precisely what they did, and despite his bravado, this lack of reception did sting.⁶

For the most part, his work remained largely unread, much to his chagrin. His journals record dozens of entries over the years that chronicle his lack of success in gaining a significant audience. His first book, *Benoni*, sold poorly, and he was eventually required by the publisher to pick up the unsold copies:

Called at Harrison’s the publisher, and received from him one pound two, for the unbound copies of *Benoni* which were sold as waste paper, to line trunks or be reduced into pulp again. Amusing and instructive incident! It disposes satisfactorily of the amiable delusion that one has ‘a work to do’

⁵ These titles call to mind more well-known Victorian texts, as in the subtitle of George Eliot’s 1871-72 book *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*.

⁶ The sole exception to Munby’s lack of popularity was his 1880 book length poem, *Dorothy: A Country Story in Elegiac Verse*, which was extremely popular in the US and reprinted in several editions there. In England, it garnered less attention, but was very warmly received by Robert Browning, who wrote a letter to Munby expressing his enjoyment of the volume.

in the world. God having put his veto on *that* kind of work, & I being fit for no other. . . (February 11, 1859)

In his 1865 Retrospective in his rough journals, Munby likewise remarks on “the anxiety and bother of bringing out my poor and unregarded book.” He had published *Verses New and Old* at Bell and Daldy, but the book was not well received. Despite his continued disappointment and periodic depressions about his inability to gain a readership, Munby was never disillusioned enough to quit writing or to change his subject matter.

In one journal entry, for example, dated February 5th, 1870, he describes the reaction to one of his poems at the literary club The Pen and Pencil Society, to which he belonged: “My poem of a servant maid who waited twenty years for love, was not unaccepted of the audience, ignorant of its ‘motif.’” In another entry, dated January 16, 1862, Munby expresses his appreciation for Clough’s volume, *Bothie*, though he was not above feeling glad that Clough, too, was underappreciated as a writer: “It is a selfish satisfaction to think that such a book as this, too, never reached a second edition—‘fell dead on the market.’” Clearly, Munby gained some solace in the knowledge that other works that he valued and thought good were also largely ignored. A review of *Ann Morgan’s Love* in the March 7, 1896, issue of *The Spectacle* underscores that Munby’s subject matter was both perplexing and distasteful to many readers:

A man who has to go beneath his own natural level of taste and culture to find the true homeliness of a woman’s nature must be either a singularly unfortunate or a singularly unobservant man; nor can we see what

advantages the labour of scrubbing and cooking and gathering up manure for the garden, which [the poet's] hero so much admires in his wife, has over the tending of children, the plain needlework of the fireside, and the care of the garden, which come so naturally to the most delicate and refined women in all spheres of life. (qtd. in Reay 61)

This reviewer had missed the point that Munby was not interested in depicting the “most delicate and refined,” but the ordinary and homely. Clearly, Munby’s appreciation for working-class manual labor, as opposed to domestic feminine pursuits like needlework, was not shared by many in the reading public. Munby’s chosen literary subject matter was deemed unfit and strange.

Munby’s Aesthetic Regarding Novels:

Munby’s poetic sensibility is in keeping with Wordsworth’s in so much as both profess to appreciate “common” language. Yet whereas Wordsworth’s “Preface” is filled with qualifications and provisos, Munby offers no such reservation in *his* preface that stipulates his aesthetic. In addition to numerous conversations with literary acquaintances about the nature and subject matter of art and literature, Munby published his views (at first anonymously) in a preface to the original edition of the book-length poem *Dorothy: A Country Story in Elegiac Verse* (1880). In this preface, Munby articulates his dedication to the realistic representation of working women as fit subjects for art and literature. Not only did Munby insist on linguistic accuracy, but on realistic body images as well.

His preface contains an indictment of past and present authors and artists for, first of all, largely omitting working women entirely, and secondly, (when including them at all), representing them as simply ugly and evil contrasts to ladylike figures:

For it is wonderful, how Nature and Fact are ignored by Literature and by Art, in this matter of black faces and hard hands. It is assumed, in the Fool's Paradise of novels and pictures, that such things do not exist at all, at least among women: or that, if they do, we must expect them only among women who are ugly and old. Did you ever hear of a heroine with a sooty face or horny hands? (*Dorothy* 216-17)

Munby disdains fellow authors for their inability to see working-women as worthwhile heroines. The assumption that such women could not be the focus of literature incenses him. This assumption was being widely challenged by many Victorian writers. Munby acknowledges the occasional text that includes working people, often in minor roles, but is quick to point out that such scant representations are sanitized and unrealistic. With characteristic humor, Munby continues his indictment with the remark that

There can be no doubt that Molly Seagrim's handsome face was dirty, and that her hands were hard: but Fielding never says so; he dared not. Smollett—does *he* ever say so, of any fair maiden? As for Richardson, we know what a very superior young person *Pamela* was: humble as she thought herself, I do not recollect that she ever even scrubbed a floor. Miss Austen has little to do with the working classes; and even Sir Walter, in all his Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions, does not, I think, once

present us with a peasant girl who is both beautiful and hard-handed.

(*Dorothy* 217)

Munby's derision of fellow authors, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Austen, and Scott among them, for this lack of realistic representation is very much characteristic of the move from Romanticism to Realism in the 19th century. Munby himself is situated between these movements, his poetry representative of both. In the preface he mentions Wordsworth as a poet who is among the more appreciative of country life, which both men equate with realistic representations, yet even Wordsworth falls short of Munby's ideal: "Wordsworth, whose rustic women and girls are so many, was concerned rather with their moral character and atmosphere than with their physical frame; and those who have not a special object in writing, may well respect the limits of description imposed by his example—which is the highest of all examples" (*Dorothy* 221). Munby's aim in poetry is not to comment on the moral or immoral lives of the women he represents, but to include in his work an accurate portrayal of their physical, bodily lives as well as their language.

Naturally, his motivations for focusing on working women are not restricted to creating an unbiased record or chronicle of the women, but include an erotic and social scientific investment in them as well. Yet there is more to Munby's criticism than a disdain for the lack of realism when representing the working-class. The problem is the fundamental denial that working women can even *be* the central subject matter *as they are*: "Nay more: it is taken for granted by all writers that a heroine of the lower ranks *must* be different from her mates, if she is to win the love of the fated Fairy Prince. Even

Scott countenances this assumption” (*Dorothy* 217). The lower class heroine is the exception to her class—a contrast unlike the rest of her community. She is someone who resembles the upper class instead and is thereby worthy of being raised to their level. She is never acceptable as she is and is therefore never presented that way—or if so, only as a contrast to her inevitable transition. She is instead at odds with her class, among them, but not *of* them. Munby levels this criticism not only at his predecessors but at his contemporaries as well:

‘Tis the same, I need not say, among the mighty crowd of recent novelists. Their rustic heroines, when they have any, are all of the Dresden China kind: they dance along from village to village, like the sham peasants before Catherine Slayczar; they wear indeed a country dress, but it is beautifully made, and worn with highbred grace; indoors, they never do anything harder than dusting, and with a featherbrush; and a little haymaking is their heaviest work out of doors. (*Dorothy* 218)

While Munby initially names authors who predominantly wrote in the periods before his own, he does not name contemporaries, though he appears to find them equally blameworthy. Munby was clearly part of a movement toward realism that characterized the writing of several of his contemporaries, Hardy, Gissing, and Dickens among them, but he does not appear to claim kinship with any specific writer. I found no evidence that Munby recognized himself as part of a movement that we would identify as realism. In his preface he does not distinguish his contemporaries from his predecessors; all are alike guilty in their misrepresentations or erasures of realistic rustic women.

Accounting for this assessment is difficult when Munby does not name any contemporary authors that he finds lacking. What most characterizes Munby's poetry is an extensive use of dialect and a chronicle of working-women's labor. It is possible, then, that his assessment is based on what he felt to be a lack of dialect use in fellow authors and for the treatment of working-class heroines as sanitized. His specific objection above is that they are never shown doing realistic labor; his own writing, by contrast, is filled with depictions of physical work—whether in the field or in the home. For example, Dorothy, the central character of his book-length poem of the same name, is routinely shown at physically demanding work like plowing the fields. She (and all his heroines) are described with calloused hands, reddened skin, and similar markings of physical labor. Similarly, when doing housework, his poetry chronicles such labor by including descriptions of women scrubbing floors, doing dishes, and polishing silverware⁷. It is likely that this was what Munby would identify as realistic and worthy of representation.

Munby's remarks about "the mighty crowd of recent novelists" demonstrate frustration with his contemporaries for what he felt were idealized portraits of working-class women who emulate an empress in their desire to erase their own class markers. While he does not name any of the contemporaries he finds lacking, there are many possibilities by the time he published the remark in the 1880 preface of *Dorothy*.

⁷ This chronicle of women's labor finds a parallel in Dorothy Wordsworth's journals in which she so often describes the bodily labor of kitchen work. Since Munby was reading Cullwick's journals in which she often listed her many tasks, her journal no doubt served as a partial source as Dorothy's did for William and Coleridge.

Even many aspects of *Tess*, written just over a decade after *Dorothy* and considered an exemplar of realism, would likely not have met with Munby's approval. For while Tess is allowed to be a rustic heroine, undergoing unquestionably difficult circumstances, she, too, fits Munby's description above as less than realistic in body, dress, and voice. She is described as beautiful countless times throughout the text. Alec routinely calls her "my pretty" and "my beauty." While *Tess* demonstrates the situational realism Hardy was known for, his title character also distinguishes herself from the other rustics and captures both Angel's and Alec's attention for this physical and linguistic difference from her peers. Hardy writes that "The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school: the characteristic intonation of that dialect for this district being the voicing approximately rendered by the syllable UR, probably as rich an utterance as any to be found in human speech" (12). Hardy was committed to representing the Dorset dialect in his novels, yet compared to the speech of the other characters in the text, Tess has virtually no dialect whatsoever. She becomes a heroine like other working-class heroines who is notable for her difference from her rustic peers. She is an attractive girl who has virtually lost her dialect and has soft hands despite her labor.

While both of Tess's parents speak in the Dorset dialect in Hardy's text, her school lessons have all but erased her own dialect—a loss Munby would have mourned. Hardy writes that "Mrs. Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons

of quality” (17). Her education had trained the dialect out of Tess—even at home, her dialect is qualified if present at all. Hardy sets Tess and her mother up as contrasting figures, describing the mother as simple and backward in the estimation of many of the characters, while Tess is more modern:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (19)

It is likely that Munby would have preferred Mrs. Durbeyfield’s native tongue to Tess’ standardized version. As a heroine, Tess would possibly have been afforded the label of one of the “sham peasants” that Munby felt were prolific both in his own period and those before it. In “Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in the Victorian Novel,” Susan Ferguson comments on the inconsistency in dialect use in many Victorian novels:

Tess’s standard English speech [. . .] bears no resemblance to her mother’s dialect, though nothing has happened in the novel to account for this clear deviation from the narrator’s insistence that Tess speaks the dialect when at home. Inconsistency in use of dialect appears in many other novels as well. To cite just a few examples, the adult Pip in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* represents his own speech as a child in almost entirely

standard English, but he quotes that of his closest childhood companions in dialect, and George Eliot's Adam Bede, Walter Scott's Jeanie Deans, and Hardy's Elizabeth Henchard, though identified as dialect speakers, all speak nearly standard English in their major scenes. (1)

Interestingly, Munby's female speakers stay in dialect regardless of with whom they are conversing. Ferguson's commentary above echoes Munby's complaint about how often his contemporaries sanitized their heroines' voices. His works, by contrast, are rife with dialect, however imperfect. Ferguson also notes two major features of dialect use in Victorian novels, though I argue that neither is precisely suited to Munby's case:

Over a century of critical and scholarly discussions of inconsistency [. . .] of the levels of the representation of dialect has led to the widespread acceptance of two important "rules" governing the use of dialect in fiction: the first is that literary dialect, because it is based on the altering of a nonphonetic writing system (standard English) will be, even in its most elaborate state, an approximate and imprecise representation of speech sounds. The second is that some writers in the Victorian era "elevate" particularly virtuous characters from the lower classes by having them speak a relatively (or entirely) standard form of English. (2)

While Ferguson's comments appear abundantly true for the characters whose dialect use I critique in this chapter, and for the many others that she names above, they do not apply to Munby's speakers who consistently use dialect throughout his book-length poems. They are not the exceptions to their class; they are typical of it. Munby's point, again, is

that such homely women deserve literary inclusion—he makes no attempt to “elevate” his speakers. As to the other of Ferguson’s rules, I concede that proving the authenticity and accuracy of dialect use some one hundred and fifty years later is a daunting prospect, particularly due to the imprecision of the language. Nevertheless, I will argue below that Munby’s attempts at faithful representation were made with careful and consistent effort on his part to learn and reproduce the Yorkshire dialect that he spoke and heard spoken around him.

Mary Barton’s Beauty and Ambition

Elizabeth Gaskell’s first novel *Mary Barton* chronicles the title character’s involvement with Harry Carson, a man above her class, and Jem Wilson, a working-class man with whom she grew up. As a working-class heroine, Mary is representative of many women of her era. She works in a dress-maker’s shop and witnesses a great deal of poverty and want in the families struggling around her through the “hungry forties.” Her own small family, too, becomes increasingly poor and in need. Yet while Mary experiences poverty, she is also idealized in ways unlike Munby’s heroines. Like Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*, discussed at length below, Mary represents what for Munby would be a troubling uniqueness: her beauty sets her apart from all the other women in her community. She is repeatedly described as exceptionally pretty and a stand-out from the other girls in the community. For Munby, this exception demonstrates that only the beautiful working-class girls are worthy of literary inclusion as heroines—a sentiment deeply at odds with his own ideology.

Not only does her exceptional beauty set her apart from Munby's heroines, but Mary also initially desires to escape her working-class status—another sentiment antithetical to Munby's heroines. In the novel's opening chapter, Mary's aunt Esther asks the girl if she would like to be a lady and raise her class status: "'Mary,' says she, 'what would you think if I sent for you some day and made a lady of you?'" (Barton 10). While Mary's working-class father disdains such an elevated position for his daughter, Esther's question has a profound influence on Mary early on in the novel, despite Esther's mysterious absence. Like the working-class girl Bella in *Our Mutual Friend*, Mary is conscious of her beauty and of what it might make possible for her:

[. . .] the sayings of her absent, the mysterious aunt Esther, had an unacknowledged influence over Mary. She knew she was very pretty; the factory people [. . .] had early let Mary into the secret of her beauty. If their remarks had fallen on an unheeding ear, there were always young men enough, in a different rank from her own, who were willing to compliment the pretty weaver's daughter as they met her in the streets. Besides, trust a girl of sixteen for knowing it well if she is pretty [. . . .] So with this consciousness she had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady; the rank she coveted the more for her father's abuse; the rank to which she firmly believed her lost aunt Esther had arrived.

(Gaskell 26)

While Mary ultimately changes her ambition—a change that is part of Gaskell's moral—in the novel's opening third, she writes Mary as abundantly conscious of what material

gain her beauty can bring her. To that end, she develops a flirtation with Harry Carson—the only son of a wealthy capitalist who makes his appreciation of her beauty obvious. As the novel progresses, Mary is well-aware of the advantages her wealthy suitor can bring her:

Yes! Mary was ambitious, and did not favour Mr Carson the less because he was rich and a gentleman. The old leaven, infused years ago by her aunt Esther, fermented in her little bosom, and perhaps all the more, for her father's aversion to the rich and the gentle. [. . .] So Mary dwelt upon and enjoyed the idea of some day becoming a lady, and doing all the elegant nothings appertaining to ladyhood. It was a comfort to her, when scolded by Mrs. Simmonds, to think of the day when she would drive up to the door in her own carriage, to order her gowns from the hasty-tempered yet kind dressmaker. (Gaskell 81)

Mary's attitude about work is also very different than that of the heroines in Munby's book-length poems. While Munby routinely lists the work details of Dorothy and Ann and their pride in their work and for their class position, Gaskell's description of Mary in the first third of the book demonstrates that she is far from desirous of being identified as working-class. In fact, she chooses to become apprenticed to a dressmaker rather than be sent out to work as a domestic because of the perceived status of the former and the lowliness of the latter: "Now, while a servant must often drudge and be dirty, must be known as his servant by all who visited at her master's house, a dressmaker's apprentice must (or so Mary thought) be always dressed with a certain

regard to appearances; must never soil her hands, and need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour” (26). Mary’s ambition is to *not* be known as a house maid, and the details of servitude that she most hopes to avoid—red skin and soiled hands—are the very details Munby’s heroines take pride in.

Ultimately, Mary does embrace her working-class status. She rejects Harry Carson, despite his fortune, both because she realizes her love for Jem Wilson and because she learns that Carson was not seriously interested in marrying her, only in “ruining” her—like Bellingham does to Ruth in Gaskell’s second novel. Mary also cares deeply for her impoverished family and the people in her community. Indeed, a central theme throughout the text is the sympathy and compassion English citizens should have when dealing with impoverished working people, and the patience the working-class should have with those employers who are sympathetic and who also struggle.

Towards the novel’s close, Mr. Carson, whose son Harry was murdered by Mary’s father John, reflects on class strife and comes to the following conclusion: “[. . .] the wish that lay nearest to his heart was that none might suffer from the cause from which he had suffered; that a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men; that the truth might be recognized that the interests of one were the interests of all, and, as such, required the consideration and deliberation of all” (388). The novel expresses a clear sympathy toward the working-class and is an attempt to ameliorate the strife and mistrust between classes. Yet while Munby’s heroines are consistently proud of their class status throughout his works, Mary needs

time to embrace her class identity and reject the tantalizing image of wealth that her Aunt Esther conjured in her mind.

In the preface to *Dorothy*, Munby goes on to assert of recent novelists, that “the Honourable Tom Noddy, descending with his eyeglass upon such an heroine, observes at once how greatly she differs from the common peasant girls around: with rapture, he beholds her delicate form, her hands, ungloved, alas! but dainty as his own; and carries her off (in Volume Two) to assume her proper place and be a lady” (*Dorothy* 218). His own heroines, by contrast, are represented with voices and bodies that would have more readily paralleled the lives of rustic women: strong, capable, and rough handed. Furthermore, when these traits and their hard labor happen to garner the attention of an upper class man, the women do not change and renounce their positions to become ladies. They insist on the value of their own voices and lives, refusing to become ladies even when offered marriage.

Indeed, in Munby’s world, both personal and literary, wedded bliss across class boundaries occurs with the men being taught lessons by the women who retain their original identity. The working-class women in Munby’s poems do not change; their partners—and especially society—are required to accept them as they are. The women in Munby’s poems who marry above their class retain autonomy. For example, in an autobiographical poem titled “Dichter und Bauerin” (Poet and Peasant), published in *Relicta*, Munby relates the story of a woman “bred to labour with her hands” and a man schooled “in fields of larger growth/ And wider culture” (*Relicta* 36) who fall in love and

wait years before marrying. After the marriage, Munby recounts how she retained her position and how the speaker admired her for it:

At last, at last, the wedding came,
 And her few friends were there:
 But, though she bore to take my name,
 My place she would not share.
 Still she preferred her own degree[. . .]
 Shall I love her less, for this?
 Or shall I feel ashamed
 To stand beside her as she is—
 Obscure, and never named [. . .]?
 No! For beside that cottage fire,
 Where we together live,
 A nobler spirit dwells and higher,
 Than rank or wealth can give.

(Relicta 36-7)

As the speaker in the poem makes clear, the cross-class marriage does not lessen him, nor does he rankle at cottage life. Her worth is not measured in money or position, but in spirit and character, both of which are unassailable. Their marriage is a love match in which the betrothed is proud to retain her status, and the groom affirms its worth.

Our Mutual Friend

This transformation is echoed, though less completely, in the Lizzie Hexam plot of Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, in which Eugene Wrayburn, a barrister like Munby, who even resides, like Munby, in London's Inner Temple, becomes attracted to Lizzie Hexam, a working-class girl who accompanies her father on corpse retrievals from the Thames. Although taken with Lizzie at first sight, Eugene recognizes the impossibility of the match, even assuming that her father was not suspected of murder. He understands that marrying her would be a social disaster, yet he cannot stay away from her. Learning that Lizzie desires the education her dead father had forbidden, he offers to pay for her to be tutored, and, in an attempt to convince Lizzie, who feels that it is inappropriate, claims it is merely a kind act: "I hate to claim to mean well," Eugene remarks, with Wildean wit, "but I really did mean honestly and simply well, and I want you to know it. [. . .] Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate" (*Our Mutual Friend* 236).

This speech is disingenuous, though. Eugene cannot help but be aware of how this favor must appear. After all, he is neither a relation nor family friend, and his interest in Lizzie marks him as a potential suitor at the same time that their differing class positions make a courtship between them improbable, if not impossible. This leaves open only the possibility of an affair, which Lizzie disdains. Indeed, Lizzie longs to be educated and to escape her life along the Thames. It is possible that Eugene might find a more properly educated Lizzie to be better suited for him. Her education would thus facilitate their match by elevating her to something closer to his status. In the presence of

his best friend and law partner Mortimer Lightwood, Eugene claims not to know what his intentions are towards Lizzie, and Lightwood acts as the voice of social propriety. Their conversation records the cross-class bind regarding romantic interest:

‘Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?’ ‘My dear fellow, no.’ ‘Do you design to marry her?’ ‘My dear fellow, no.’ ‘Do you design to pursue her?’ ‘My dear fellow, I don’t design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation.’ (*OMF* 292)

All evasive wit aside, Eugene’s problem is a very real one. It is not that he has impure motives, but that his society has such a restricted way of viewing class relations that, as evidenced above, he is left without any viable option when it comes to Lizzie Hexam. And yet she is appealing to Eugene.

Her appeal, though, is as Munby argued about the representations of so many working-class heroines, not because of her difference from her social betters but because of her difference from her peers. When Eugene is questioned and warned off by Lizzie’s brother Charley and her would-be suitor Bradley Headstone, Eugene reveals his interest in Lizzie with the remark that she “is so different from all the associations to which she has been used, and from all the low obscure people about her” (*Our Mutual Friend* 291). She is unlike her social peers in looks, in attitude, in voice, and in refinement. Even her ambition demarcates her from other working-class girls; Lizzie wants an education but fears being disloyal to her father who has forbidden it. Her ambition, like her brother’s, is to rise above her position, though she is not at all grasping. She has no dialect and

speaks with a refined intelligence that differentiates her from her equals. When she finally agrees to accept Eugene's offer to pay for her education, along with Jenny Wren's, Lizzie is as eloquent as ever and her voice is without local accent: "I will not hesitate any longer, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope you will not think the worse of me for having hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny—you let me answer for you, Jenny dear? [. . .] For myself and for Jenny, I thankfully accept your kind offer" (*Our Mutual Friend* 237). There is nothing in the style, grammar, or phrasing of Lizzie's words throughout the text to differentiate her from Eugene, but her voice is completely unlike the heavily accented speech of her father or that of Riderhood—another of the characters who makes his living on the Thames.

Lizzie presents a decided contrast to Munby's heroines, and would likely be counted by him as among the working-class representations that little resemble the reality. It is her difference from her peers that attracts Eugene's notice and recalls Munby's comment quoted above of the cultured gentleman who "observes at once how greatly she differs from the common peasant girls around: with rapture, he beholds her delicate form, her hands, ungloved, alas! but dainty as his own; and carries her off (in Volume Two) to assume her proper place and be a lady" (*Dorothy* 218). In *Our Mutual Friend*, Eugene and Lizzie do finally get their happy ending of wedded bliss, after many trials, though in Volume Four, not Two.

Lizzie Hexam is a very likable character—principled, honest, good-natured; yet she is unlike Munby's heroines whose voices and hands mark them as working-class and whose spirits are proud and independent. Lizzie has a feminine humility supposed to be

attractive in a Victorian heroine. She demurs about accepting Eugene's offer of education, and later, when discussing him with her friend Jenny Wren, Lizzie reveals not a pride in her station as is evident in Munby's heroines, but a consciousness that she is less worthy. When Jenny asks her what she would think of Eugene if she were a lady and therefore his social equal, Lizzie initially refrains from even imagining it, stating that she is just a "poor girl who used to row poor father on the river" (*OMF* 343). Her reiterated "poorness" is foremost in her mind as it places her beneath the station of someone like Eugene. When Jenny presses her to try to imagine it, Lizzie exclaims "I a lady!" four separate times before professing, "Too much, Jenny, dear, too much! My fancy is not able to get that far" (*OMF* 343). This inability to imagine herself as a lady is not altogether unlike Munby's heroines when similarly pressed, as I argue below, yet the motivation for the denial is entirely different. Munby's working-class women reject the position out of pride in their own station and a disdain for ladies—whom they have no desire to imitate. By contrast, Lizzie rejects it out of a sense of her own lack of worth to assume such a high position. She does not emit pride to be working-class as Munby's heroines do. When Jenny finally spurs Lizzie to picture herself as a lady, she imagines telling Eugene, "I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you" (*OMF* 344). This sentiment is antithetical to one of Munby's proud heroines. Such words would not be uttered by Ann Morgan or Dorothy in Munby's book-length poems. And much later, when Eugene pursues Lizzie to the out-of-the-way town she went to in order to avoid him, she tells him of the impossibility of their being together legitimately:

Think of me, as belonging to another station, and quite cut off from you in honor. Remember that I have no protector near me, unless I have one in your noble heart. Respect my good name. If you feel towards me, in one particular, as you might if I was a lady, give me the full claims of a lady upon your generous behaviour. I am removed from you and your family by being a working girl. How true a gentleman to be as considerate of me as if I was removed by being a Queen! (*OMF* 676)

To Lizzie's credit, she recognizes her name as respectable, but owes this not to her class position but to her chasteness and modesty. Her reputation has not yet been sullied, and like the title character in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) who attempts to safeguard herself from an upper class pursuer, Lizzie flees London to avoid becoming ensnared by Eugene. Yet her tone throughout the novel regarding him is wistful—she wishes she were his equal so that they might be together. She even acknowledges that she studies hard at her lessons so that she may more nearly approach his level, even though she believes marriage is completely out of the question. She confesses to her friend Bella that she loves him immensely, but that their class difference separates them. Munby's heroines, as I will argue more fully below, do not perceive cross-class marriage as an impossibility. What is impossible for them is to have to assume a lady's status in order to secure such a match. Their would-be suitors must take them as is or not at all.

The conclusion of Lizzie's and Eugene's story offers further intriguing contrasts with the cross-class matches in Munby's works. First, a physical punishment and subsequent rebirth is needed to ready Eugene for marriage. Like Mr. Rochester who had

to be blinded and hobbled in the fire to be worthy of Jane Eyre, Eugene, nearly murdered by a romantic rival, becomes more worthy of Lizzie in his subsequent lame and disfigured form. It is his near-death experience that precipitates his proposal to Lizzie. Prior to that, in the very moments before he was attacked, he was musing aloud about whether or not she was worthy of him as a wife. He placed too much emphasis on the opinion of society and his father, referred to humorously as M. R. F for “My Respected Father,” and what his father would think of such a match. His last words before Headstone attacked were “Out of the question to marry her [. . .] and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!” (*OMF* 682).

This kind of crisis finds a parallel in Munby’s life, if not in his work. When Munby at long last broached the idea to his father of marrying Cullwick, his father was so horrified that Munby dropped the subject, and when he did finally marry her, his family was not told. It is perhaps for this reason that the male suitors in Munby’s poems are so ardent in their defense of their working-class sweethearts. If they have fleeting assumptions that these women will assume a higher class position upon marriage, the women themselves are quick to disabuse them of such a notion—as Ann does in Munby’s *Ann Morgan’s Love* discussed below.

The more compelling obstacle to wedded bliss across class lines in Munby’s poems comes in the form of the social intermediary who represents class propriety. In *Ann Morgan’s Love*, it is the doctor who informs Ann of the inappropriateness of such a match. It is this representative of respectable social opinion that requires persuasion. The match between Lizzie and Eugene in *Our Mutual Friend* has similar detractors

whose opinions influence the couple, particularly Eugene, since by social standards, he would have the most to lose by marrying Lizzie. Eugene's father is one such representative, and Eugene imagines what his father would say about the match:

Now if I married her. If, outfacing the absurdity of the situation in correspondence with M. R. F., I astonished M. R. F. to the utmost extent of his respected powers, by informing him that I had married her, how would M. R. F. reason with the legal mind? 'You wouldn't marry for some money and some station, because you were frightfully likely to become bored. Are you less frightfully likely to become bored, marrying for no money and no station? Are you sure of yourself?' Legal mind, in spite of forensic protestations, must secretly admit, 'Good reasoning on the part of M. R. F. Not sure of myself.' *OMF* 679

Yet as happens in Munby's poems, the social objector is eventually won over by the charm and character of the girl in question. After their marriage, Eugene relates to Mortimer that his father came to accept Lizzie: "M. R. F., who is a much younger cavalier than I, and a professed admirer of beauty, was so affable as to remark the other day [. . .] that Lizzie ought to have her portrait painted. Which, coming from M. R. F., may be considered equivalent to a melodramatic blessing" (*OMF* 790).

Another obstacle to be overcome in *OMF* is the opinion of the upper class, represented in the social gatherings by Lady Tippins, Mr. Podsnap, and the aptly named Veneerings. Throughout *OMF*, there are occasional chapters devoted to these society folk who gossip about other people's business and pronounce judgments upon any whom

they deem to fall short. Though disdainful of such people, Eugene is present at many of these gatherings and is influenced by them and by his own consciousness of his social position. In the final chapter, titled “The Voice of Society,” there is another social gathering at which Eugene is not present. The latest item of gossip is his marriage to Lizzie, which is denounced thoroughly and vehemently by those present (with Mortimer’s exception). Lady Tippins mocks Lizzie by assuming she dressed “in rowing costume,” and when Mortimer attempts to come to Lizzie’s defense, Tippins cries out, “He means to tell us, that a horrid female waterman is graceful!” (OMF 793). In the eyes of the social elite, Lizzie’s class position precludes her from possessing what they feel only a lady must possess: beauty, grace, and *worth*. Eugene is met with similar bad will when Tippins exclaims that he has made an “exhibition of himself. The knowledge shall be brought home to you that such a ridiculous affair is condemned by the voice of Society” (OMF 794).

Lady Tippins’ sentiments about this “mesalliance” are echoed by other party goers, including Podsnap, who insists that “my gorge rises against such a marriage—that it offends and disgusts me—that it makes me sick—and that I desire to know no more about it” (OMF 794-5). There would seem to be no response to such a hyperbolic outburst with the couple so roundly criticized. However, Eugene has anticipated this kind of response and come to terms with it. His conversation with Lightwood about his fall from society’s grace occurs just prior to this final social gathering. In it, we see Eugene’s full transformation to someone who rejects class snobbery and society’s mandate that he marry a girl of his station. Such a transformation, though, took

consideration. It is not only his physical injury that precipitates the change, for even after it, he confesses to Lightwood that although he married Lizzie, he had considered leaving the country with her to avoid the scandal: “I have had an idea, Mortimer, of taking myself and my wife to one of the colonies, and working at my vocation there” (OMF 791). When Lightwood begins to acknowledge the rightness of such a decision, Eugene emphatically denies it: “Not right. Wrong! [. . .] Shall I turn coward to Lizzie, and sneak away with her, as if I were ashamed of her!” (791). The colonies, with their taint of criminals, impurity and exile, are no place for Eugene to begin a life with his wife, even though in society’s eyes, Lizzie is equated with the colonized. Lightwood gently reminds Eugene that Lizzie might suffer “some slight coldness [. . .] on the part of—Society,” but Eugene is insistent that Lizzie is worth fighting for—certainly more important to him than Lady Tippins and the social heights she represents:

Now, my wife is something nearer to my heart, Mortimer, than Tippins is, and I owe her a little more than I owe to Tippins, and I am rather prouder of her than I ever was of Tippins. Therefore, I will fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her, here, in the open field. When I hide her, or strike for her, faint-heartedly, in a hole or a corner, do you whom I love next best upon earth, tell me what I shall most righteously deserve to be told:—that she would have done well to turn me over with her foot that night when I lay bleeding to death, and spat in my dastard face! (OMF 791)

The wavering Eugene of previous chapters who could not make up his mind about what to do with Lizzie is completely eradicated. In his place stands the newly reformed Eugene who insists in patriotic fashion that Lizzie is of England, not of the colonies, and that the two of them shall make their life together without shame or regret, regardless of society's social mandates. Even though Lizzie is more refined than Munby's working-class heroines, it is a story Munby would have adored, being so close to his own life's choice. A barrister marries a working-class girl, and the two live happily in the face of social edicts.

Our Mutual Friend offers one final social transformation to complete the lesson that character supersedes class. Throughout the novel, one of the would-be social elite who is present at all the best parties and at-homes is Twemlow, a sycophantic character who seeks social inclusion at the cost of personal opinion. Twemlow tries desperately to align himself with the Veneerings, comically spending much of the novel in an attempt to determine whether or not he is Mr. Veneering's oldest and best friend. Yet having undergone some financial difficulties of his own and having been dealt with charitably, Twemlow ultimately demonstrates a radical shift by the closing chapter. When Tippins, Podsnap, and the others are castigating Lizzie and Eugene, they eventually turn to Twemlow for confirmation of the enormous gaffe they feel has been made in the match. Previously, Twemlow was at pains to conform to every opinion and whim of society, but by the novel's end, he is uncharacteristically independent. Instead of echoing their judgments, Twemlow publicly confers his blessing on the couple:

If such feelings on the part of this gentleman, induced this gentleman to

marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say, that when I use the word, gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion.

(OMF 796)

Podsnap challenges Twemlow's assertion by questioning whether Twemlow's "noble relation" would agree. Previously, any mention of this claim to social inclusion would have caused Twemlow to retreat, but on this, the last page in the novel, and hence the final word on the subject, Twemlow holds his ground: "I could not allow even him to dictate to me on a point of great delicacy, on which I feel very strongly" (OMF 797).

With his transformation, the social conversion is complete. A working-class girl has been championed and a middle-class man who married her has been approved. Again, this could only have met with Munby's deepest approval—if only Lizzie were depicted more realistically in voice and labor.

Munby's Poetic Aesthetic

Returning to Munby's criticism of fellow authors in his preface to *Dorothy: A Country Story*, Munby moves from a critique of the novelists and turns his attention to poets, but finds these similarly flawed:

So much for prose. Of poetry, there is little to say herein: because poetry

is concerned with beauty as well as with truth; and the charm of blacken'd faces and of horny hands fails to draw her; seeing that these things are perhaps not beautiful. Peasant poets, as might be expected, are specially apt to give small and delicate hands to their sweethearts: and reason good, even if the delicacy and the smallness be only relative; for his sweetheart represents to a peasant poet those finer external aspects of women which poets of a higher class see in all their equals. (220)

Munby thus asserts that poets are often trained by their peers and thereby offer a unilateral depiction of what counts as beautiful. If poetry is meant to concern truthfulness, Munby argues that this is shadowed by the precedent of describing beauty in the conventional ways. There is also a kind of reverse class criticism implied in his remarks, for when the peasant poet apes what "higher class" poets depict as beautiful, they neglect both the truthful presentation of the hard-handed rustics and the beauty Munby feels that they embody.

Munby's criticism lays the groundwork for his own poetry, which he conceives of as strikingly different. His work centers on the assumption that working women *as they are* are worthy of literature and art, and his poetry is more representative of their physical and working realities. Munby takes issue to the artistic and literary representation of only the classically or culturally defined instances of the beautiful: "Upon the whole, it appears to be an accepted rule of fiction, that if a woman has red arms or coarse hands, she is old, ugly, and probably wicked: she merely exists as a foil to the exquisite niece or daughter or mistress, whose happiness she with fiendish malevolence persists in

thwarting” (*Dorothy* 219).⁸ This criticism is remarkably close to contemporary feminist arguments against a standardized representation of beauty defined by the hegemonic culture that denies the inclusion of many women, lower-class and “unattractive” among them.

Against the dominant culture’s single definition of beauty for women and its insistence that only the beautiful deserve representation, Munby’s aesthetic is entirely more democratic, even feminist to a certain extent. He denies that only upper-class ladies are worthy of illustration and insists instead that lower-class women are every bit as beautiful—more so, for Munby. He rejects both their systematic omission and, when included, what he sees as their vilified depictions in art and literature, arguing instead that working women are and should be presented as beautiful in their own right: “Perhaps it may be said that coarseness, especially in Woman, is beneath the notice of true Art, and that brawny strength can never be a feminine charm. Well—I deny that any woman (or man either) is beneath the notice of true Art: and if he or she is to be noticed at all, why then, an accurate notice is desirable. And as to the other point: I have known many a strong lass whose strength was a part of her charms” (*Dorothy* 222).

Munby’s commentary here is highly reminiscent of George Eliot’s expression of realism in *Adam Bede*. In Chapter 17 “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” Eliot argues

⁸ Such characteristics are reminiscent of Brontë’s portrayal of Grace Poole in *Jane Eyre* who is described as ugly and inscrutable and who is, for a time, believed by Jane to serve as a romantic rival for Rochester’s attention. Jane presumes that the ugly and stoic Grace could never capture Rochester’s love, yet his mysterious relationship with her gives Jane momentary pause: “‘What if a former caprice [. . .] has delivered him into her power, and she now exercises over his actions a secret influence, the result of his own indiscretion, which he cannot shake off and dare not disregard?’ But having reached this point of conjecture, Mrs. Poole’s square, flat figure, and uncomely, dry, even course face, recurred so distinctly to my mind’s eye, that I thought, ‘No; impossible! My supposition cannot be correct. Yet, [. . .] *you* are not beautiful either, and perhaps Mr. Rochester approves of you” (Brontë 158-9).

passionately for the beauty that exists in homely, imperfect people and scenes. She points out that many people are loved and befriended who do not look like the ideal portraits in museum galleries. She acknowledges the appeal of the typical artistic representations of beauty, but insists also that there is a needed and desired place for the ordinary beauty of the average human being: “do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world” (247-248). Here is precisely Munby’s aesthetic as well: the homely, everyday scenes of life and labor have value and require inclusion in the literary and artistic canons.

Munby’s preface seeks to correct what for him was a glaring oversight. If, like Wordsworth, his aesthetic sensibility allowed him an appreciation of rustic women, he was, nevertheless, not interested in idealized portraits of country girls with delicate hands and white skin. Unlike many Victorians who cultivated an image of female beauty as delicate, meek, and passive, Munby argues for the beauty of strong, aggressive, and active women. He not only objects to their unrealistic representation, but denies that only upper-class women are attractive. He wished to portray working women as he found them: red-skinned *and* beautiful, rough-handed *and* picturesque.

It is to this end that Munby published a collection of poetry called *Vulgar Verses* under the pseudonym Jones Brown in 1891. As with the earlier volume *Dorothy*, *A Country Story* and the later works *Susan: A Poem of Degrees* (1893) and *Ann Morgan’s*

Love: A Pedestrian Poem (1896), *Vulgar Verses* was filled with poems describing the working lives of the laboring class. In the preface to the work, like the earlier preface to *Dorothy*, Munby reveals his poetic sensibility, this time by assuming a working-class voice under the pseudonym Jones Brown. This preface is less critical—there are no scathing remarks to fellow authors—yet it is no less forceful in its insistence upon the value of the working-class as fit subjects for literature and the avowal that most authors cannot present working people accurately. While the focus is the same in this preface, Munby employs a different approach, this time addressing readers as a working-class man, informing them that many authors purport to capture a working-class experience, but fail utterly:

Honoured Sir,—There's a many quality folks reckons to know a deal about working men and women. Writes books about 'em, they do; tells you what sort o' housen they got, an' their ways, an' that; aye, an' even makes up a mak o' talk, an' says it's theirn. I don't say but what some on 'em does it welly right; [. . .] but for the most on 'em, bless you, they dunno not so much as my dog Towser.

Munby's remark about the falsity of the representations that most authors make regarding working-class voices is intended as a contrast to his own, more authentic verses that follow. It is clearly ironic that Munby presents his university trained voice as a genuine working-class person. Such an assumption is not entirely unproblematic, especially when considering language appropriation and the fact that while Munby's poems are filled with the dialect of rustic women speaking in a close proximity to their real voices, they are

still mediated through his. Yet this assumption provides a marked contrast to the kind of language appropriation that occurs in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, as I will argue below. While Shaw presents Eliza as needing to put on the language of the dominant culture in order to be worthy of representation, Munby does not acquire power in his guise of a working-class man, except perhaps to lend his volume a perceived authenticity and perhaps marketability, though as I stated earlier, there does not appear to have been much of a market for such texts. He uses the persona as an attempt to persuade readers of the *value* of the dialect, not its insignificance. Further, Munby's poetic representations are of working-class women who do use their "own" language and are depicted as healthy, strong, and able-bodied. In a very real sense, he brought their dialect to a market that was perceived as more respectable—the literary one—than the one in which they traded as servants, colliery girls, and farm hands. He sought to value their labor and voices through his representations.

Furthermore, without at all equating Munby's class position with the working-class male voice he assumes, Munby did feel himself economically disadvantaged when compared to fellow Trinity graduates. In this sense, it is possible that he felt he shared identity with someone like Jones Brown. Indeed, it was not until Munby was in his early thirties that he began working as a clerk in the Ecclesiastical Office—work that was not well paid. Munby's economic circumstances were strained at best at this time, and more so beforehand. On April 4, 1859, within the first year that he began volunteering at the Working Men's College, he notes in his journal the vast discrepancy between his own income and that of an acquaintance: "Certain solicitors there have guaranteed him 2000

pounds a year, to be shortly doubled. Visits and talk such as this make me horribly despondent: they bring me to a sense of my own position—recall to my father!”

Munby’s father was paying his rent at this time (and for years after)—a circumstance of which Munby was ashamed.

His journal entry of the same date suggests that he had to work at what he had a passion for, and law was clearly not it. He desired to do work that mattered, that had a purpose, and even though his voluntary teaching position did not offer any remuneration, like his poetry, he felt its purpose deeply:

I am sure it is something more than mere indolence that keeps me from working earnestly at indifferent matters—at anything that does not help forward my convictions, whether literary, artistic, or religious. With all other work there comes over me a shuddering sadness that I can neither explain nor get rid of: my spiritual self becomes a third person & says ‘What folly, what selfishness this is! Done or undone, it will be the same in a hundred years!’ There is truth in this, & falsehood: but true or false, it is always there.

While Munby hated his financial position that made him poor relative to many of his fellow Trinity graduates and members of his social class, he refused to work in the profession that would be more lucrative and for which he had been trained: law. As this journal entry indicates, he wished for work that mattered. For all of his life, this work was poetry.

As his preface to *Vulgar Verses* continues, Munby acknowledges (as Jones) that it was his wife who suggested that he could better capture the language and reality of the working-class than those authors who falsely represent them, which could suggest that Cullwick said the same to Munby during their joint readings:

Well, my missis was a-readin' me a tale about working folks, an' her stops an' says, "Joe," her says, "whatever do they write such rubbish about us for? Is there e'er a one i' this tale as is like what I are? Look at our Susan," her says, "as works at Slottery Pit; an' young Polly, as goes a-leasin' wi' me, an' works afield, same as I did afore I went to service; why if any on us was to look an' talk like this here tale makes out, us 'ud be fair an' shamed—any way, I should." Then her says again, "Joe, *you* can do better till this here!" (vii-viii)

Of first note here is the wife's pride in her own voice and how she would feel "shamed" to assume a more upper class one. This passage is also reminiscent of Munby's journal entry discussed above where he needed to translate the servant's story "Mistress and Maid" to his wife as he read. The details in the preface are largely autobiographical: that he had a stronger education than she had had and had taught her some "book-learnin'", that they did not have children "to bother us," that she went into service, that he was familiar with pit girls, etc. These details, in conjunction with the translations that Munby had to make when reading supposed working-class literature to his wife, suggest that Cullwick is the wifely figure in the preface and that she encouraged and approved of Munby's representations of the working-class. It also suggests that she, and other

working-class people, were partially Munby's intended audience. There is ample evidence in the journals that each read to the other, that she copied his poetry, that Cullwick attended occasional events where he read his work, and that she enjoyed the poetry he wrote especially to her, like the sonnets upon their illicit marriage. Munby kept many letters and notes from his wife in the journal collection, and in one such note, dated April 11, 1898, Cullwick wrote "Darling M. I have had pleasure in copying your good verses—they are fine, and I will write to you when I get back to Hadley."

Wordsworth's Female Speakers: Lacking Subjectivity

By contrast, Wordsworth's representation of a country lass is nearly artificial in comparison. Among the many poems where Wordsworth depicts rustic characters, and presumably their "real" language, is "The Ruined Cottage." In the poem the speaker recounts a meeting with an old friend, Armytage, who relates a story of a woman's decline and death after the desertion of her husband and the death of her child. Armytage is described as "that venerable pride of nature and of lowly life" (37) who uses "his pack of rustic merchandize" to pillow his head when he lies down to rest (44). Both he and Margaret, the deserted woman, are aligned with nature and the natural world. Margaret and her husband earn their living from working the land, and there are references made to the husband's loom and "busy spade" (127) which become ominously still after "two blighting seasons" and his subsequent absence (134).

Wordsworth depicts all of these characters as simple, honest people who live close to the land and whose fates are inextricably bound to it. Yet though intended as

primary examples of a typical life of common people, the language Wordsworth uses sounds uncharacteristically elevated for such simple rural natives. Towards the opening of the poem, for example, when the speaker first begins to hear Armytage's story, the old man speaks prophetically about life and death, love and loss, and expounds on his theory of the mutability of all things:

The Poets in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks, nor idly; for they speak
In these their invocations with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion. Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind
And grow with thought. (73-82)

Change, impermanence, and the consequent sense of loss that they bring are typical concerns of the Romantic poets, and such feelings are certainly not restricted to poets and sages; no doubt Armytage could feel this sense of loss and experience a related mourning. Nevertheless, would his feelings have been couched in such language as Wordsworth has him use—language that is to be representative of the common speech of a peddler? Armytage's dialect seems wholly incompatible with rustic speech as Wordsworth defines it in "The Preface." Wordsworth not does attempt to accurately represent a country dialect, except perhaps after it has been cleansed of its "real defects."

Armytage serves as a poetic invention to disseminate Romantic ideology. His aesthetic serves to allow the poet, and presumably the reader, to better understand him/herself. In “The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” Wordsworth expresses the importance of becoming one with the subjects one writes of:

it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs, modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him, by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. (72)

The implication here is that only “poetic” language is pleasurable (however one defines that language), and that modification of that language is the requisite to giving pleasure by it. Despite the claim to use a common language, the precept is theoretical rather than practical. The quote is also significant for its explanation of the deliberate confusion that arises between poet and character in order to achieve success during the writing process. Yet if he intended to become one with Armytage linguistically, there is rather more of Wordsworth in him and rather less of the old man.

Thomas DeQuincey’s criticism of “The Ruined Cottage” brings to light a different concern about the work. In his review of the poem, DeQuincey faults Wordsworth’s depiction of Armytage as being unrealistic, not because of his language use, but because of the lack of help Armytage offers—assistance that DeQuincey insists would be common sense to any person in such a situation. With acerbic humor

DeQuincey takes Wordsworth to task for Armytage's utter inability to assist: "It might be allowable to ask the philosophic wanderer who washes the case of Margaret with so many coats of metaphysical varnish, but ends with finding all unavailing, 'Pray, amongst your other experiments, did you ever try the effect of a guinea?'" (407-9). DeQuincey's comment strikes a chord with any reader who is frustrated at the lack of practical help the old man offers Margaret. DeQuincey's critique continues by acknowledging that as a wandering hermit, Armytage may not have been able to offer financial assistance, but that he might have extended "a little rational advice, which costs no more than civility"(407-9). DeQuincey remarks that Armytage might have simply looked up the husband's name in the local enlistment corps, written to the war office, and "in a very few days, an official answer . . . would have placed Margaret in communication with her truant. To have overlooked a point of policy so broadly apparent as this, vitiates and nullifies the very basis of the story. Even for a romance it will not do, far less for a philosophic poem, dealing with intense realities" (407-9). Wordsworth's intention of depicting the common man is as unrealistic in its plot line as it is in its language choice.

The accusation that the poem lacked realism was not the only criticism that DeQuincey leveled at it. He remarks briefly that Armytage "found so luxurious a pleasure in contemplating a pathetic phtsis of heart in the abandoned wife" that he could not offer her sound advice. Though DeQuincey does not develop his argument further, Armytage's distraction over Margaret's pain bears closer inspection. Armytage is a voyeur. While the poem can be read as demonstrating sympathy at human grief, the story begs another interpretation. Armytage and the speaker of the poem bond over their

contemplation of Margaret's grief; her pain solidifies their friendship. Instead of ever offering Margaret aid in the form of remuneration or simple advice, Armytage does nothing to help her, and then uses her story to entertain his captive audience who begs for the tale to continue when Armytage breaks off at one point without finishing. Bonding over her troubles makes the men grow closer, and they literally walk off into the sunset together at the poem's closing. Their attention seems focused far more on their own enjoyment of the story, as narrator and as listener, than on the suffering that Margaret endured.

What makes Margaret's story so secondary to the men who bond over it is that in this poem, as in so many of Wordsworth's poems, the woman does not speak for herself; her voice is mediated through the men in the poem, subsumed within that of the peddler and within that of the speaker. Margaret does not get to tell her own story; she is long dead when the poem opens, and her words are a memory recalled by Armytage to entertain the speaker. Margaret has neither her own language nor the subjectivity her own words would represent if she had them.

"The Ruined Cottage" is only one of many Wordsworth poems in which women (and the feminine) are appropriated for a male poetic enterprise wherein female voices are diminished or erased altogether. In the instances where a woman is given a voice, it is most commonly a voice of lamentation. A frequent trope in Wordsworth's poems is the weeping, mourning woman who has been abandoned either through the death or the desertion of her male lover, or forsaken in some other way. Often, this wailing woman or girl is observed by a male counterpart who uses the opportunity to write about her

suffering. In this way, the poet's inspiration and the poem's inception come at the moment of female suffering.⁹

Margaret is in plentiful company. Women or girls in "The Mad Mother," "The Thorn," "Ruth," "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," and a series of poems, including "Lucy Gray," which feature a female character, Lucy, demonstrate this trope of the suffering female whose voice is frequently brief if present at all. When the woman is allowed to speak, it is to express her woe—like Mariana in Tennyson's poem of the same title, with her constant refrain of "He cometh not; I would that I were dead." In "The Thorn," the speaker tells the story of Martha Ray whose only and oft reiterated lines are "Oh misery! oh misery! Oh woe is me! oh misery!" (76-7). Otherwise, her tale is told by another—a tale like so many others in *Lyrical Ballads*. She has been abandoned by her betrothed. Worse still, she is suspected of having killed the child she bore him. The image is one of dependence and dejection—of a life not worth living. In other poems, like "Ruth," the woman doesn't speak at all. Her tale is told by the lover who woos then abandons her and by the speaker of the poem. Ruth is silent and ends up deserted and homeless, awaiting death.

The women in these Wordsworth poems are done to—they are objects of pity who have been victimized by another person or by life's circumstances. In "Lucy Gray," the title character has exactly four lines in a sixty-five line poem. The girl has been instructed by her father to take a lantern to the city on a stormy night to help light the way

⁹ See Lawrence Lipking's *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* in which Wordsworth's fascination with grieving, abandoned women is explained as a part of his formation as a poet: "Again and again men have turned to abandoned women during a stage of poetic self-definition" (128).

for her mother's return. To this request, Lucy replies, "That, father! Will I gladly do;/ 'Tis scarcely afternoon—/ The minster-clock has just struck two,/ And yonder is the moon" (17-20). Unfortunately for Lucy, the storm comes early and she gets lost in it and dies alone while her parents search for her. Her ghost, however, is said to haunt the "lonesome wild" (60) where she was lost, singing "a solitary song," (63) and presumably waiting for parents who never find her in time. In this poem, readers are invited not only to participate in the parents' lamentation for their lost child, but to feel Lucy's abandonment and cold and lonely demise. She is reduced solely to an object of pity.

In "The Mad Mother," Wordsworth envisions a mother with the power to destroy the life she has created. While the Mad Mother is clearly conversant with the natural world, knowing "The leaves that make the softest bed" (56), "the poisons of the shade" (95), "the earth-nuts fit for food" (96), she is also presented as monstrous and threatening in her ability to take the life of her child. Being imbued with this kind power also paradoxically undermines her subjectivity because while being akin to nature on the one hand, she is simultaneously divested of such power. In the opening lines, she is presented as creature-like: "Her eyes are wild, her head is bare,/ The sun has burnt her coal-black hair,/ Her eye-brows have a rusty stain" (1-3). This image of her as animal-like makes her an element of nature at the same time that it denies such a message by evoking the image of a mother who could harm her child—the epitome of an unnatural act. This paradox is continued in the third stanza when she describes the process of motherhood, so central to Victorian womanhood, in macabre, non-maternal detail: "And fiendish faces one, two, three,/ Hung at my breasts, and pulled at me" (23-4). Her children become

synecdochically reduced to faces, and malevolent ones that burden her. Ultimately, she posits a suicidal ideation, telling her child not to “dread the waves below,/ When o’er the sea-rock’s edge we go” (43-4).

It isn’t until line 61 that an explanation for her madness is offered: yet another case of abandonment. She tells her baby that “Thy Father cares not for my breast,” likely because she has grown older and presumably less attractive—her breasts no longer “so fair to view” (64), her beauty “flown” (66), and her cheek “brown” (69). While she reassures her baby of his legitimacy—“I am thy Father’s wedded Wife” (72), she also admits that he’s “gone and far away” (80) and that she has not been able to find him: “I’ve sought thy Father far and wide” (94). Ultimately, while she does not hurl them both over a cliff into the ocean, her alternative plan is not much more promising: “be not afraid;/ We’ll find thy Father in the wood” (98). The unlikelihood of this happening casts a pall of gloom over the poem. The fates of both mother and child are grim. She has been given neither a name nor the subjectivity it would afford her. Just as with Margaret in “The Ruined Cottage,” Wordsworth’s presentation of the Mad Mother posits his poetic inspiration on her creative degeneration. What’s more, he presents her as an unfit mother, her procreative power denied by her reversal of a maternal instinct. His poetic creation comes by undermining her ability to create.

Not only is she presented as grotesque and monstrous, but she is also depicted as dependent upon her husband, and in his absence, on her child. She pleads with her baby boy to “Draw from my heart the pain away./ [. . .] Oh! love me, love me, little boy!/
Thou art thy mother’s only joy” (34; 41-2). The mother is depicted as jointly dependent

on her husband and then child, yet even the bond of mother and child does not prevent her from later threatening to hurl them both from the cliff.

In “Women in the *Lyrical Ballads*,” Anne K. Mellor comments on the litany of negative portrayals of women in the collection: “These poems depict women as rejecting lovers, bad mothers or—worse—mad mothers, rebellious little girls, or most negatively, as witches or vampires. At best women appear as silent, respectful listeners” (63). In “Tintern Abbey” readers eventually discover that Wordsworth’s sister stands beside him, but her presence is one of silent companionship. Like Margaret, she does not get a voice.

When women do speak in Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, their tales are ones of misery and sorrow. They lament abandonment, cruelty, and harsh conditions. In Mellor’s words, “When we focus on the women in these poems, we are stranded in a brutal universe where women are abandoned, go mad, grow old, freeze, and die, or where women condemn others [. . .] to an unending life-in-death, forever confronting the cruelty and meaninglessness of the universe” (71). It is a poetic space entirely different from the ones posited in Munby’s works where working-class women celebrate their identities and labor through difficult though satisfying work and happy romantic matches. In Munby’s poetry, the women command their romantic partners to take them as they are—they are never abandoned.

Not only do the women inhabit very different worlds in Munby’s poems than in Wordsworth’s, but they also speak remarkably different languages. In “The Female Vagrant,” one of the few poems in which the woman tells her own tale, her speech is not remotely comparable to the speakers of Munby’s poems. Despite Wordsworth’s claim to

using the “real language” of ordinary men (and presumably women), the female vagrant sounds distinctly ladylike. Indeed, before her family’s collapse into hard times, she read constantly and does not appear to use a working-class woman’s voice: “The ground I for my bed have often used:/ But, what afflicts my peace with keenest ruth/ Is, that I have my inner self abused,/ Foregone the home delight of constant truth,/ And clear and open soul, so prized in fearless youth” (221-25). As with Margaret in “The Ruined Cottage,” this tale of woe is being told to the poem’s speaker who has become witness to her desolate suffering.

She concludes her story with the following lines: “Three years, thus wandering, often have I viewed,/ In tears, the sun towards that country tend/ Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude:/ And now across this moor my steps I bend—/ Oh! tell me whither—for no earthly friend/ Have I” (226-231). Wordsworth created varying versions of this poem—one complaint of his being the language, but he attempted not to make it sound more working-class but less “vicious.” In Michael Mason’s editorial commentary on the poem, he writes that “By 1801 Wordsworth was regretting the first LB version on the grounds that ‘the diction . . . is often vicious, and the descriptions are often false’” (137). Once again, this points to Wordsworth’s more sanitized language that seeks to erase vulgar speech—diction that Munby prized for his heroines.

Munby’s *Ann Morgen’s Love*: Autonomy and Pride

In his biography of Munby, primarily a collection of the journals themselves, Derek Hudson refers to him as “a patriotic Yorkshireman and an expert on the local

dialect” (9). This expertise is clearly visible in many of Munby’s poems, not the least of which is *Ann Morgan’s Love* (1896). This proficiency stemmed as much from his life with Cullwick as from his copious interviews with working-class women of all types. While Munby did not need to use Cullwick’s journals for an understanding of the dialect, surely they provided him with poetic inspiration and a love of her language, as well as with a detailed chronicle of her chores. Instances of both her language usage and examples of her labor were frequent themes in Munby’s poems.

Ann Morgan’s Love is a book-length narrative of the relationship between a working class maid-of-all-service and her unnamed “master” whom she marries. Throughout the poem, Munby takes great pains to represent as accurately as possible the dialect of the serving girl, as is evident in Ann’s list of the work she does in preparation for her Master’s return:

. . . Afoor he cooms,
 Ah shall gaw doon upon my hands and knees,
 An’ scrub this floor, an’ oil the furniture,
 An’ black the graate, an’ sweep the chimley doon,
 An’ doost, an’ clean the winder oot an’ in,
 An’ set them pots o’ flooers all a-row,
 An’ stick a posy on the taable theer,
 An’ silver, an’ a napkin: all for him!
 His parlour an’ mah kitchen is as near
 To one anoother, an’ as mooch unlike,

As him an' me is. (*Ann Morgan* 5)

Munby's use of dialect here is characteristic of much of his poetry in which he strives to accurately portray the language use of the women he writes about, representing in misspellings and unusual syntax the sound of the spoken dialect. Ann, like all the other women in Munby's poems, has her own voice that is distinctive and direct, offering her subjectivity and a representation far closer to rustic speech than is found in Wordsworth. She is the center of the poem, the one who is named, her words telling much of the story and calling forth for readers a voice that is vivid, sharp, and alive. For Wordsworth, the rustic is a mouthpiece for the poet, whereas for Munby the reverse is true.

Men's representations of women's voices in a historical moment when gender privilege far favored them requires a careful consideration of Munby's motives, as well as the affects he achieved in his poems. When is a male author speaking for a woman in an attempt to represent an underrepresented voice, and when does this representation become language appropriation or a desire to control the image of the woman presented? Many critics have questioned Munby's personal motivations regarding his interest in working-class women by focusing on his erotic attraction to Hannah Cullwick that is highlighted in their copious journals. McClintock, in particular, positions Munby as erotically invested in working-class women, Cullwick especially, because his perception of them as masculine allowed him to be feminized by contrast. His face-to-face interactions with Cullwick and with the countless working-class women that he interviewed emphasized their strength, which allowed him to feel comparatively feminine and somewhat alleviated the constraint of middleclass masculinity: "For Munby, the

irresistible lure of working women was that in watching them he could voyeuristically enjoy the masculine traits he coveted, without endangering his own socially prescribed sense of maleness” (McClintock 103). This critical focus on his personal, erotic interest in Cullwick does not extend to his published work. Neither McClintock nor the other critics do more than briefly acknowledge Munby’s poems, which offer a decidedly different perspective on his motivation for interacting with working-class women. The poems disclose Munby’s desire to represent working women as accurately and positively as possible.

Perhaps even more significant than Munby’s consistent use of the dialect itself in his poems is the discussion that the characters have about it. “Proper” language use allows for social respectability and an access to power that accompanies it. When *Ann Morgan* opens, the unnamed Master is out of the country and Ann is making preparations for his return when she is visited by the doctor, a friend of her Master’s whom he has asked to speak with Ann on his behalf. The doctor explains to Ann that her Master is in love with her and divines from Ann that she feels the same way about her Master. Although the doctor likes Ann, he acts as the voice of middle class propriety in the poem and disapproves of a union that crosses class boundaries. In an attempt to dishearten her and educate her on what marrying the Master would entail, the doctor explains that she will have to change:

For he will change you, and you will be changed.

You will give up your common work and ways;

You’ll make your hands and arms as smooth and white

As any lady's; and you'll go to school—
 Yes, Ann, you'll go to school, and there be taught
 To love the things I spoke of. Most of all,
 You must forget your homely country tongue,
 And be grammatical, and learn to speak
 In pretty phrases and in fine long words,
 Like folk who live in parlours. (*Ann Morgan* 14)

As a representative of the dominant class and its discourse, the doctor threatens Ann with the dissolution of her physical and intellectual identity through a change in her appearance and an alteration in her means of knowledge production. As the daughter of a laborer and as a servant herself, Ann has received no formal education¹⁰. Instead, her knowledge is entirely experiential—a type that the doctor disdains. In its place he contends that she must become properly educated via schooling and above all, must forget her own language, which he disparages. The doctor's conversation with Ann is couched in terms of helpful advice, but is both paternalistic and threatening in its attempt to police class boundaries and ultimately prevent Ann's acceptance into his world. He tries to persuade Ann that she could not possibly make a proper wife for her master unless she changes core aspects of herself. The implication is that clearly, Ann is not acceptable as she is. The doctor uses the threat of change to intimidate Ann and keep her

¹⁰ For Munby, Ann's lack of formal education does not read as romanticized. Given his many years of teaching at the Working Men's and Working Women's Colleges, I would argue that Munby cared very much that the working-class have access to education. As a plot device, Ann's lack of schooling serves to contrast her with the doctor. It also provides the backdrop against which her class pride is quickly asserted. The doctor intends to elicit shame in Ann about her lack of education; she, however, is proud of her working-class identity.

in her “proper” class position, just as Tippins and Podsnap attempt to shame Eugene and Lizzie by castigating their marriage.

In addition to his insistence that she sanitize her language, the doctor points out in the passage above that Ann must also alter her current appearance. Ann’s rough, red hands must be made “smooth and white” to imitate and so become the hands of a lady. The doctor insists that Ann clean her language and her body in order to elevate her status. She must learn to look and speak like a member of the hegemonic culture into which a marriage to her master would project her.

What is remarkable in Munby’s poetry is the strength of character and the pride in class that he displays in his female speakers. Ann responds to the doctor by reasserting her class identity with pride and by refusing to be dominated or changed in any way, either by schooling or by the Master. She insists upon the authenticity of her voice and her own way of living and rejects the idea of becoming a lady either through language or appearance:

Ah canna chaange mah natur an’ mah ways;
 Ah’ve lived like this for five an’ twenty year,
 An’ likes it; an’ Ah’s fit for nothink else,
 Nor dunna want to be. [. . .]
 An’ as for schule—
 To learn fine talk an’ little fidfad things,
 Why its ridic’lous! Me, at twenty-five,
 To gan a-schulin amoong laadies—nay,

It shanna be. [. . .]

be yo sure o' this—

Ah winna be a laady! (*Ann Morgan* 16-17)

Although she does love the Master, she refuses to change for him, and makes it clear to the doctor that she has no desire or intention of becoming Pygmalion's living statue. Munby presents Ann as someone content with herself and her life—someone who rebukes the doctor's counsel that she change. By doing so, he provides readers with a strong woman who values her own language and rejects the class criticism leveled against it by the doctor. Ann parallels “fine talk” with “little fidsad things,” refusing to credit the dominant discourse with the authority the doctor places in it. It is, in Ann's estimation, *another* way of speaking, but certainly not a better one. This rejection of the authority of his language demonstrates a remarkable sense of self. When all of a class-bound society insists that Ann's language is lesser, lower, Ann's avowal of her fondness for it is all the more remarkable. Munby clearly intends to offer working-class women the recognition they deserve, not only by reproducing their voices, but by making them a point of pride.

Beyond her refusal to reject her own discourse, readers also see Ann in a definitively feminist light for valuing her independence and way of life so much that she will not give it up simply for an economic match unless she is accepted on her own terms. Given the position of women in the 19th century, this adherence to her own code of behavior in which she asserts her own merits is remarkable. Certainly, it was the expectation that middle- and upper-class women would marry to secure their economic

futures, since work was not considered a respectable alternative for either class, and although Ann is among the working-class, for whom work was always a necessity, it is Ann's *attitude* about her work, her language, and her appearance that position her as feminist. She refuses to pass as a lady in order to secure the economic safety of marrying her master, like Jane Eyre who rejects Rochester's attempts to clothe her in a lady's attire that would mark her as a possession. Further, Ann insists on the value of her own way of speaking. She will marry him, but not if the price is changing her core identity, represented by her voice.

Rather than recognizing Ann as an equal who is as much invested in her own voice and way of life as he is, the doctor leaves after her speech, feeling satisfied that the union will not take place. He hears her speech not as one indicative of pride, but as revealing a lack of insight to be expected of her class. He goes, assured that there will be no marriage since he cannot believe that the Master will marry Ann as she is. True to his own life, however, Munby has a happier ending in store for Ann and Master.

Jane Eyre's Refinement

Cross-class matches are by no means unusual in Victorian novels, such as they relationship between Eugene and Lizzie in *Our Mutual Friend* discussed above. Another famous cross-class attachment is that between Charlotte Brontë's Rochester and Jane Eyre. While by birth Jane Eyre is of the same class as Mrs. Reed, the wealthy, unkind aunt who reluctantly takes her in, Jane is raised to be a virtual servant in that house hold and ultimately pursues the liminal class of governess in her escape first from Gateshead

and then from Lowood. Physically, Jane is repeatedly described as small and plain and thinks of herself in such terms, too. She is not the kind of working-class heroine who is exceptional in beauty, and yet she does differ from her peers in terms of refinement. When Jane is first introduced in the novel, she is reading a book, and from that time forward, her studiousness separates her from her wealthy cousins and the servants alike. She is very reserved and so intelligent that she is able to stay on at Lowood as a teacher of the younger girls. She learns many of the accomplishments of upper class women: to draw, play music, and speak French, and in fact, a great deal more, which enables her to become a governess at Thornfield.

Jane does not represent a working-class heroine in the sense of Munby's female leads, first because she assumes the liminal class of a governess. She calls one of Thornfield's servants, Grace Poole, by her first name, but Grace always addresses Jane by the more formal title "Miss," demonstrating a clear demarcation in status between the women. While Jane is certainly far nearer to working-class than upper-class status, as a governess, she becomes financially independent and capable of earning a substantially greater salary than the scullery maids and farm girls in Munby's works. Her pursuits as a governess are closer to those of an upper-class woman in mastering the refined accomplishments well enough to be able to teach them. She is further differentiated in the kind of work she pursues, which is not physical, not manual. Dorothy, Ann, and Susan—Munby's major heroines—are all manual laborers with reddened skin and rough hands who speak in heavy dialect. Jane has no discernable dialect and her work is

predominantly intellectual. Finally, Jane is upwardly mobile in both her inheritance from her uncle and her eventual marriage to Rochester.

Having said that, there are similarities between Jane Eyre and Ann Morgan. Jane is very independent, as is Munby's heroine. Jane is also class conscious and is made exceedingly uncomfortable by Rochester's attempts to purchase gifts for her once she agrees to become his wife. She does not want to feel dependent and is irritated by his largesse: "Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jeweller's shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (Bronte 270). Unlike Blanche Ingram, Jane's one time rival for Rochester's affections, Jane is not interested in elevating her financial situation through marriage; she is determined to provide for herself: "'It would, indeed, be a relief,' I thought, 'if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me'" (271). This independence is echoed by Ann Morgan when she refuses to be dressed as a lady or pursue a lady's education or hobbies. Both women want marriage on their own terms and view themselves as significant people, whatever their class status may be.

When Rochester pursues his desire to have Jane dressed in expensive silks and jewels, she likens him to a sultan and herself to his slave, finding the image aberrant: "'I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,' I said; 'so don't consider me an equivalent for one: if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay; and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here'" (Bronte 271-2).

Rochester is figured as a sultan who attempts to purchase Jane with material goods—an idea she promptly rejects, casting herself in the role of liberator when she tells him,

‘I’ll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved—your Harem inmates amongst the rest. I’ll get admitted there, and I’ll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.’ (272)

Despite how east and west are posited as antithetical with the former devalued in favor of the latter, it is clear that Jane does not want to be controlled by Rochester, and this independence remains consistent through the novel’s close.¹¹ It is not until Rochester’s injury that he and Jane are presumed to be on more equal ground, clearing the way for their final union. Ann Morgan’s master, too, needs a transformation. Initially, he assumed Ann would be a lady, raising to his status once she became his wife, but Ann promptly and consistently rejects such a plan, and it is the master who alters his conception of what their union will bring. Ultimately, he concedes to *her* wishes to retain her class status.

Voice Preservation or Denigration: Munby and Shaw

In George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle has a great deal in common with Ann Morgan. Both are working women who support themselves by their own labor,

¹¹ For a compelling discussion of orientalism in *Jane Eyre*, see Joyce Zonana’s essay “The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structures of *Jane Eyre*.”

both are judged as low and dirty by middle-class social standards, and both speak with a pronounced dialect that identifies them as members of the working-class. Yet the attitude of each central character regarding class status and upward mobility is vastly different, as is the assessment of language in each text. Examining Shaw's play, published in 1916—six years after Munby's death—demonstrates the far side of a linguistic continuum. If Wordsworth romanticized his pastoral figures and cleansed their language to position them as worthy of poetic representation, Shaw sanitized Eliza's voice because of the perception that she was otherwise utterly unworthy of any attention—literary or social. While Munby wrote so eloquently in his preface to *Dorothy* in favor of the value of working-class lives and voices, Shaw's attitude toward the same subjects in his preface to *Pygmalion* is entirely antithetical. Shaw describes his play as “intensely and deliberately didactic,” claiming that “great art can never be anything else” (xi). This claim is followed immediately by one explanation of what specific lesson he means his readers to learn: “Finally, and for the encouragement of people troubled with accents that cut them off from all high employment, I may add that the change wrought by Professor Higgins in the flower girl is neither impossible nor uncommon” (xi). Shaw asserts that “many thousands of men and women [have] sloughed off their native dialects and acquired a new tongue” (xi). Clearly, the play is partly meant as inspirational material designed to provide hope to the unfortunate lower classes that their unbecoming accents can be decimated—a plan completely at odds with Munby's veneration of the working-class voice. Shaw warns, though, that in order to achieve such a desirable

linguistic transformation, one must rely on the expertise of someone conversant in the dominant discourse:

But the thing has to be done scientifically, or the last state of the aspirant may be worse than the first. An honest slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempts of phonetically untaught persons to imitate the plutocracy. Ambitious flower girls who read this play must not imagine that they can pass themselves off as fine ladies by untutored imitation. They must learn their alphabet over again, and differently, from a phonetic expert.

Imitation will only make them ridiculous. (xi-xii)

He might as well have said, *more* ridiculous than he already thought them. Shaw utterly devalues working-class voices and makes their production of knowledge entirely dependent on the upper class that possess the only voice worthy of representation and are the only ones intelligent enough to disseminate it. Clearly such assumptions are at odds with Arthur Munby's poetic sensibility.

When we are first introduced to Eliza in the opening act of Shaw's play, she is working hard to sell flowers on a London street to the passersby who are momentarily waiting out a rainstorm. Eliza's class position is quickly outlined when Shaw provides her with three opening lines in which he attempts to approximate her voice. The first is when, upon running into Freddy and dropping her basket of flowers, Eliza exclaims, "Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah," which is quickly followed with "Theres menners f' yer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad" (Shaw 4). After Freddy hurriedly rushes out in search of a cab, Freddy's mother demands to know why Eliza

knows her son's name, to which Eliza responds, "'Ow, eez ye-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them?" (Shaw 5). After these few opening lines, Shaw gives up his attempt to represent Eliza's speech with the following aside: "[Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London]" (Shaw 5). His "desperate attempt" is a parodic one, though, and Eliza's dialect is never presented as acceptable. From here on, Shaw sanitizes Eliza's language under the guise of intelligibility, but clearly, for himself as well as for the characters who encounter her, this cleansing also serves to demarcate her speech from those of her "betters."

George Bernard Shaw was the second chairman of the BBC's Advisory Committee on Spoken English, a group with two primary purposes: 1) to answer letters of inquiry/complaint about the way the BBC broadcasters used language, and more importantly 2) to consult multiple dictionaries about how to pronounce words in order to come to a consensus and direct BBC broadcasters on the preferred way of speaking. Although Shaw did not originate as director of the committee, he sat as chair the longest—from 1930 until 1937. In "Bernard Shaw and the King's English," Vivian Ducat reproduces one of many of Shaw's handwritten postcards to phonetician A. Lloyd James on which Shaw lists words that he has heard mispronounced on the airwaves since last they met. Language, its use and misuse, was a subject that Shaw was deeply invested in. There is dispute about the degree to which Shaw professed to employ an elitist and exclusionary language, possibly because so much of what Shaw has written on the

subject has been conflicted. In a 1934 letter to *The Times*, for example, Shaw attempts to demonstrate to the public the rationale behind the decisions made by the committee he chaired:

The worst obstacle to our popularity as a committee is the general English conviction that to correct a man's pronunciation is to imply that he is no gentleman. Let me explain therefore that we do not correct anyone's pronunciation unless it is positively criminal. When we recommend an announcer to pronounce disputable with the stress on the second syllable we are neither inciting him to an ungentlemanly action nor insinuating that those who put the stress on the first ought to be ashamed of themselves. We are simply expressing our decision that for the purposes and under the circumstances of the new art of broadcasting the second syllable is the more effective. (Ducat 192)

He never explains, however, *why* the chosen pronunciation is “more effective.” Shaw was aware of the public perception of his committee as elitist and insulting; in his letter he becomes something of an apologist for the committee. Yet his attempt here to enlighten the public as to the committee's rationale fails in part because no clear explanation as to why one pronunciation over another was preferable is ever given. By his own admission in the same *Times* letter, Shaw conceded that his fellow committee members all “speak presentably [. . . though] no two of them pronounce the same word in the English language alike [. . . and that] They are quite frequently obliged to decide unanimously in favour of a pronunciation which they would rather die than use

themselves in their private lives” (Ducat 191). Such a random and arbitrary system could only have perplexed a public where so many dialects competed for recognition. The comment, while certainly intended as comical, nevertheless suggests that mispronunciation is a capital offense.

Secondly, his explanation fails because it *is* insulting, intentionally or not. Elsewhere in his letter, he writes that “Superior persons stress the first syllable in disputable, labratory, ecksmplary, desspicable, &c.; and we, being superior persons, talk like that; but as many ordinary and quite respectable people say disputable, laborratory, exemmplary, and despickable, we are by no means bound to come down on the side of the pretentious pronunciation if the popular alternative is less likely to be confused with other words by the human species called listeners-in” (Ducat 191-2). Despite Shaw’s concession to speaking pretentiously, it is with pride, and there is a clear demarcation between “superior persons” and “listeners-in” that respondents to *The Times* article found pompous and overbearing, prompting a second, equally unsuccessful letter from Shaw. After all, his comment implies that the “ordinary” listeners are apt to be “confused” by “superior persons” whose pronunciations differ from their own. If he could find, as he did, the King’s English to be the best because of its rhetorical ability to appeal to the English public, he still argued for a standardization that not only was not representative of the majority of the population, it was also recommended as spoken by a superior class of people.

While Shaw spends many years of his life in the pursuit of eradicating “errant” voices, Munby is conversely spending *his* time trying to learn them in order to better

emulate such dialect. Shaw makes the condescending comment in the preface to *Pygmalion* that “The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it” (vii). Yet as is clear from his work for the BBC, to him, language is singular and ought to be uniform. It is obvious who he thinks should be teaching whom the proper speech. For Munby, lessons on speech were mutually inclusive and language was co produced. There is certainly evidence in the journals that Munby taught his wife to become more literate—her education ended very early on when she went into service as a maid-of-all-work—yet she would eventually take French lessons at the Working Women’s College where Munby taught. As their relationship progressed, there are passages in the journals where they read to each other for pleasure and entertainment, yet Munby was decidedly not forever in the role of teacher. He was also an avid and enthusiastic student, frequently commenting on the “charming” dialects he heard as he traveled England, and taking down notes from working-class speech as he encountered them.

Since Higgins is invested in having Eliza unlearn her disreputable language, he copies down her speech to better demarcate it as degenerate and worthy of change. She is a lowly specimen whose language he reproduces in front of her solely to mock and humiliate her. His attempt is to get Eliza to internalize his position on the irrelevance of her voice, and to the extent that she does imitate his language, Higgins succeeds. Munby also wrote down the language of the speakers he encountered in his travels, but with an entirely different purpose—to preserve not eradicate such voices. In his January 18, 1862, journal entry, Munby records a conversation he had with Cullwick. As he so often

did with the strangers he interviewed, he provides here a brief translation of her word for the conventional word and then comments on his purpose: “Come = cowme, in her homely Saxon; which homely Saxon it is my business to conserve; for her quick ear would soon adapt itself to a loftier language.” Munby’s purpose is entirely opposite to Shaw’s. What Shaw seeks to eradicate, Munby wishes to preserve. Their attitudes toward the speakers of such dialect also conflict, as Munby makes clear in the above comment that Cullwick, and presumably many working-class people like her, has a “quick ear” and the intelligence and capacity to learn proper English. And while Munby appreciates his wife’s ability to read such lofty speech, he also values her own speech as it is and desires to safeguard it.

The Voices in *Mary Barton*

There were other Victorian writers who employed dialect in their works, including Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton*. Throughout her text she used Lancashire dialect to bring the working-class characters to life and to underscore their connection to English literary tradition through their quotes of Chaucer, for instance. Like in Munby’s works, the use of words like “wench” abound. In a note at the end of *Mary Barton*, editor Macdonald Daly writes that

Gaskell told her publisher that ‘my husband has put notes to those [dialect expressions] we believe to require them’ (Letters, p. 56). She further appended William Gaskell’s Two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect to the fifth edition of the novel (1854). Many of the literary references

appended to glosses of these dialect terms were added in editions subsequent to the first (the Chaucer and de Brunne references on pp. 8-9, for instance, did not appear in 1848.) Uglow (p. 202) contends that the effect of these glosses is to ‘point up [. . .] readers’ prejudices, insisting that the poor share the national inheritance; even their dialect is shown by William’s notes to derive from the English of Chaucer, of Langland, of Shakespeare, of the Book of Common Prayer.’” (397)

This sentiment echoes Munby’s speaker (discussed in greater length below) in *Ann Morgan’s Love* when he addresses Ann with the remark that “your dialect, my wench, / Is part of England’s history” (*Ann Morgan* 32-3). The impulse of both Gaskell and Munby is to value and preserve regional dialect and demonstrate its intimate connection with English literary history. *Mary Barton* includes hundreds of words and phrases in dialect that require transcription (then and now) to non native users of Lancashire dialect. Importantly, the title character herself uses words and phrases in dialect, demonstrating that like with Munby’s heroines, their voices are intended to represent an accurate rendering of working-class regional speech. If Gaskell’s heroine is sanitized in physical appearance, her voice appears more authentic and closer to Munby’s aesthetic.

Dialect Poetry/Barnes

Perhaps unknown to Munby was a relatively obscure contemporary poet and teacher named William Barnes (1801-1886) who had a great deal in common with Munby’s linguistic interests. Barnes, who would come to be known as the Dorset Poet,

published a collection in 1844 titled *Poems in the Dorset Dialect* that attempted to preserve the West Country Dorset regional dialect, just as several of Munby's collections sought to preserve and value the northern English Yorkshire dialect. Neither poet was alone in his desire to employ and preserve regional language: Other 19th century authors included occasional regional dialects in their works. The West Country dialect, for example, can be found in parts of Hardy's *Tess*, Trollope's *Chronicles of Barsetshire*, and Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas *The Sorcerer* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. The Yorkshire dialect was captured in parts of Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, and John Hartley's *Yorkshire Ditties*.

A native of Dorset for most of his life, Barnes had a deep love for the sound of the region, but his attempt at preservation also had a more studied and scientific bent. In addition to publishing poems in dialect and in what he called national English, Barnes was also a philologist and linguist who taught himself Welsh, Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Russian, and Persian. Additionally, many of his publications demonstrate a marked linguistic knowledge: *Etymological Glossary* (1829), *An Investigation of the Laws of Case in Language* (1840), *The Elements of Grammar* (1842), *A Philological Grammar* (1854), *A Grammar and Glossary of the Dorset Dialect* (1863), and *An Outline of English Speechcraft* (1878). Like Shaw, Barnes, too, wished to purify the English language, but he had a markedly different conception of what a "pure" English language would look like, and not only did it include dialect, it was often predicated upon it since he felt that those who spoke regional dialects were closer to the original, "pure" Anglo-Saxon. According to biographer and literary critic James Parins, much of Barnes'

“attention was given to efforts to ‘purify’ English; that is, he tried to convince people to drop words of ‘foreign’ derivation and to use only those which developed from the Anglo-Saxon language” (7). His book *Speechcraft* was one such attempt against the influence of Latin and Greek on English:

His ‘fore-say,’ or preface, announces that the book is an attempt to purge ‘derived’ words from the language and substitute ‘pure’ ones from the Saxon. Examples of this attempt to purify or ‘back-word’ the language are given in a glossary including the change from ‘accelerate’ to ‘on-quicken,’ ‘alienate’ to ‘unfrienden,’ ‘equivalent’ to ‘worth-evenness.’ He sought, clearly, to remove the Latin and Greek influence from English, revitalizing it with Teutonic words. (Parins 13)

Munby, as a teacher of Latin, would perhaps not have favored Barnes’ method of purification, and yet, as quoted above, Munby does record in his journal that the Yorkshire girl’s “homely Saxon [was his] business to conserve” —a sentiment clearly in keeping with Barnes’ appreciation for its antiquity and worth. Munby’s association of the originality, antiquity, and hence value of Anglo-Saxon are in keeping with Barnes’ linguistic sensibility.

Munby spends his time trying to learn Cullwick’s language and the dialect of other working-class people, not to prompt them to change it, but out of a belief in its intrinsic value. He becomes the student. It is certain that in the years he spent teaching Latin to working-class men in the Working Men’s College, he also was being taught a worthwhile language from them in return—a language he valued and reproduced in his

poetry. There are many places in his journals where Munby becomes the student. After recounting one conversation where he spoke to a servant girl gathering sticks in a lane so that he could “hear her Yorkshire,” he reproduces lines of her speech in dialect in the journal and then includes a reminder to himself: “Note the occasional absence of genitive = ‘Is you Beuson’ (= Beuson’s) dog?” (October 4, 1862). Munby is the pupil intent on learning how working-class language functions. In another example from May 15, 1864, Munby records that fellow travelers “used the word housen, and also placen, for ‘places’, and nor for ‘than’.” These recordings, with Munby’s emphasis on the minute differences from standard English, demonstrate his conscientious observation of language and his desire to reproduce the dialect faithfully.

These attempts to accurately learn the language are nowhere more obvious than in an undated entry in 1865 which Munby heads “Words & Phrases” (Book 1, Reel 17). On this page he lists forty-two underlined words/phrases in dialect and their corresponding translations into proper English. Many of them are colloquialisms such as “Don’t light of asking = dont wait to be asked” and “laate of him = wait for him.” Many others Munby translates for himself by providing a context that will make sense to him later as a reference: “skrike = scream: ‘Ah started to skrike’” and “skill, v. = understand: ‘he’s so uncertain we dont know how to skill him.’” In another example, Munby notes “maft v. = to blind or confuse: the snow so mafts’s us.” Many other words are listed simply with their one word translations: “felted = hidden, [. . .] band = string,” [. . .] “lahtle = little” and “yance = once.” Munby is not in the teaching position here but in a learning one. The house servants, farm hands, milkmaids, and countless other rustic people become his

teachers. Such careful note taking as is evidenced above also demonstrates an aspiration to preserve such words and ways of speaking. His approach to dialect is to faithfully conserve it.

In order to help substantiate the accuracy of Munby's dialect use, I turned to several volumes of an eighty volume collection of dialect grammars that were published for the English Dialect Society between 1873 and 1896. I looked particularly at collections within Yorkshire, where he was born and raised, and around Sheffield, where his wife was from. In 1873, Walter W. Skeat, a professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, founded The English Dialect Society, whose mission it was to collect and preserve dialects throughout England with the help of local experts.¹² The volumes were intended to retain local speech out of a love and appreciation for it. In one volume—*A Glossary of Words Used in Holderness in the East-Riding of Yorkshire*—authors Frederick Ross, Richard Stead, and Thomas Holderness write in the preface that “Hitherto, there has been no published Glossary of the Holderness Dialect, which is much to be regretted, as it possesses peculiarities and relics of old English speech not to be found elsewhere, many of which are disappearing, or have already become obsolete” (iii). The Dialect Society intended to retain and cherish the many dialects that had flourished throughout England as part of its rich and valuable history.

The volumes are mostly glossaries and grammars, but they also contain some folk songs, nursery rhymes, games, customs and folklore of the covered areas. For example, in the volume titled *A Glossary of Words used in the Neighbourhood of Sheffield* (1888),

¹² For more information on the English Dialect Society, see Tom McArthur's *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* published by Oxford University Press in 1998.

author Sidney Addy records that “At Norton, if a pig’s hock is hung up in the house, and whitewashed every time the house is whitewashed, the cattle of the farmer will be protected, it is said, against disease” (xxi). Collectively, these eighty volumes contain a wealth of linguistic information that would eventually culminate in the English Dialect Dictionary—the publication of which was piecemeal and began in 1898, twelve years after Skeat launched a fund for it.

When consulting the Sheffield and Yorkshire Glossaries, I found many of the words Munby so carefully records and translates in his journal discussed above. In *A Glossary of Words used in the Neighborhood of Sheffield*, I found “BAND, sb. string, twine” (10), just as Munby lists it above. In *A Glossary of Words Used in Holderness in the East-Riding of Yorkshire*, I found “Maffle, G. to blunder; to mislead” (60), which correlates with Munby’s note of “maft v. = to blind or confuse: the snow so mafts’s us” in his 1865 journal entry. In this same volume, I found “Skrike, c., N. to screech or scream” (87), and “Yance, c., s.w., Yence, N. once” (116). Both words are translated exactly as Munby had translated them years previously in his own journal. While I cannot make the claim that Munby’s attempts at dialect were wholly accurate, these source materials help substantiate my claim that Munby did his best to record working-class language exactly as he found it, and that he then used this language with honest attempts at accuracy in his poetic representations. Munby’s careful attention to dialect was part of a larger movement of preservation. The English Dialect Society was formed eight years after Munby’s entry above and dissolved in 1896, having achieved its goal of collecting the various dialects in writing to preserve them for future generations. In the

following year, the Yorkshire Dialect Society was established, and while I could not find evidence that Munby was aware of it, I am certain he would have been greatly pleased, as it was so much in keeping with the preservation work he had already begun.

One way to retain dialect that may otherwise be lost is to include it extensively in one's published work, which Munby does, rather than to denigrate it as valueless, which is Higgins' task. The contrasting attitudes toward language between Shaw, on the one hand, and Munby on the other, is pronounced, as is evident in their working-class heroines. Unlike Eliza with Higgins, Ann does not accept the doctor's premise that she must change her voice to gain entry into middle-class propriety. While Ann immediately rejects both the doctor's insistence that she change her language and the corresponding implication that it is worth changing, Eliza's reactions are more ambivalent, reflecting those of Shaw. Upon discovering that Higgins has been writing down everything that she said in the opening scene, Eliza is instantly on the defensive, ostensibly to protect her honor from the possible charge of prostitution: "They'll take away my character [. . .]" (Shaw 5), but there are underlying themes of ownership and representation at work as well. Eliza fears being misinterpreted, and while this fear is in part about not wanting to be incarcerated, it also signifies self-possession. Eliza fears misrepresentation. "Then what did you take down my words for? How do I know whether you took me down right? You just shew me what youve wrote about me" (Shaw 5). The suggestion here is that language matters. Certainly she does not want to be misquoted to the police or falsely accused—but beyond that, her words are also symbolic of identity. Eliza comes to realize that losing her language is akin to losing her identity.

Unlike Ann Morgan who immediately rejects changing her language and self to secure a match to her upper class employer, despite the economic security that would accompany it, Eliza is open to change, though only on her own terms. Eliza quickly recognizes the value of the dominant discourse—that using it will likely secure her an economic position currently unavailable to her. She could go from selling flowers on the street to owning her own flower shop, and this chance at upward mobility is one that she jumps at. It is difficult to fault her for a desire to “improve” her language when everyone around her, especially Higgins (representative of Shaw as chair of the BBC’s Advisory Committee on Spoken English), reminds her that it is too low almost to exist, as he makes clear: “A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible; and dont sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon” (Shaw 11). Her language use makes him question her very humanity. Compared to the language use of the dominant discourse, Eliza appears to Higgins to be atavistic and degenerate. Her willingness to learn his way of speaking is not a concession on her part that she *is* less worthy, but a consideration that in her society, speaking more like Shakespeare and less like a flower seller will secure her financial freedom. She needs to lose her voice to gain access to the world of privilege.

Given that Munby’s Ann Morgan lived within the same incredibly restrictive class constraints, it makes her rejection of the dominant discourse that much more profound. Ann refuses outright to concede that only a fundamental change in her will

make her a worthwhile wife for her master and secure her financial future. She also refuses to believe that her language makes her less of a person. Yet it takes the master some time to learn the lesson that Ann teaches. While the doctor is positioned as the elitist figure who asserts that Ann must change to be with Master, Master himself is not initially as accepting of Ann as he later becomes.

Once the doctor leaves Ann Morgan, certain that no wedding will take place, the Master returns and does ask Ann to marry him. Although he is nowhere near as concerned about maintaining class distinctions as the doctor is, he does initially expect Ann to make some compromises when she becomes his wife. They discuss their differences and he suggests that, “Surely, you would like/ To leave off cleaning boots and blacking grates,/ And scrubbing floors, and to sit down with me/ Here, or in that old parlour at the Grange,/ And be at leisure? You will read nice books,/ And I shall teach you all you wish to know” (*Ann Morgan* 24). Like Higgins, the Master is positioned as an authoritative figure fit to teach Ann. There is more of a concession with the Master than with Higgins—he’ll teach Ann what *she* wants to know—but there is still, nevertheless, a hierarchical relationship. Yet unlike Eliza who agrees to be lessoned, Ann replies that she certainly would not prefer such a life; she loves him and wants to be with him, but she has no desire to lead a life of leisure and assume the role of a lady. She will be the teacher, not the student. The Master is unconvinced by what she says, overrides her objections, and because she loves him, she agrees to marry him.

Immediately after their marriage, he has her dress up “in clothes that distress’d and baffled her” and like Eliza attending the ball with Higgins, Ann “forced herself to go

at his command/ With him, to places where they were not known,/ And seem to be his equal” (37). In this early stage of their marriage, the Master seems very much akin to Henry Higgins. He intends to prove to his own class that Ann is capable of rising to his level and thereby to justify his marriage to her—much the same reaction of Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend* when he considers whether or not to marry Lizzie Hexam. The Master refers to this attempt as an “untried experiment” to show “how she can be raised, . . . From lower levels (and the maid he chose/ Came from the lowest, which is best of all/ for his high purpose) to a dignity,/ A grace, a glow of quick intelligence” (36-7). This could easily be Higgins speaking of Eliza whom he has pulled from the gutter to pass as a duchess. Both men appear, at least initially, to view the working-class woman as an experiment upon which they can prove their expertise.

The similarities, however, end there. Master quickly accepts Ann’s autonomy and refrains from asking her to imitate a lady’s habits. Even more significantly, unlike Higgins who demands the annihilation of Eliza’s voice and is enraged when she deliberately slips back into it in Act V to taunt him, Master is consistently and genuinely fond of Ann’s language throughout the poem. He has no desire to alter Ann’s dialect, and, in fact, shows a tremendous liking for it. It is clear that Munby positions him alongside Wordsworth in his appreciation for rustic language, though Master hears and enjoys a more authentic representation of the rustic than Wordsworth was willing to produce:

Her speech too—could she alter it at will?

‘No,’ said her husband, ‘and you shall not try!’

For he derided grammar; and he loved
 That folkspeech of the Marches, full of words
 Vivid, expressive, picturesque; unknown
 To southern ears, but old and accurate
 As Chaucer's English; aye, and older far. [. . .]
 Therefore said he, 'You shall not change your note;
 It is your own: these many hundred years
 Your peasant fathers spoke as you speak now:
 Why should you change? Your dialect, my wench,
 Is part of England's history.' (*Ann Morgan* 32-3)

There is a lesson in this speech for the English public: such language is worth preserving. It is the language of antiquity and hence a marker of pride. He unmistakably appreciates dialects and is invested in the aural pleasure he receives from listening to them. This is language that, as he stated in the January 18, 1862, journal entry, "it is my business to conserve." He asserts that her language is as vital and worthy as any, not in need of lessons but "accurate" already. Munby records women's voices not as curiosities and samples of debased accents to add to the collection on which he bases his expertise, but out of a love for the rhythm of their various speeches and a desire to represent them to the world. Munby writes Master as deeply appreciative of Ann's dialect and equates it with a canonical figure to underscore its merit. She finds a place alongside and within language that matters.

It is also noteworthy that Master equates Ann's language as old and thereby authentic. His specific choice of a canonical figure—Chaucer—is equally significant. That her dialect is “part of England's history” echoes Barnes' sentiment of Anglo-Saxon as a more authentic language and therefore worthy of preservation, particularly in a moment when England was undergoing such a startlingly rapid transformation. The increasing urbanization and industrialization of England in the 19th century created in many a sense of nostalgia for a rapidly diminishing rural way of life that was in part represented through language:

In the face of these changes, folk language and literature took on a new importance. In some ways they were seen as all that remained of a valued heritage, the last vestiges of a fondly remembered past. To some they were important because they were the repositories of the old values and morals, reflections of a better, more stable world. Those who sought to preserve the folk language and literature were trying to save what was left from the older age; those who used the dialects and tales in writing their own literary works were undoubtedly attempting to re-create that better time, to bring back the golden age. (Parins 18)

Honoring Dialect in *The Secret Garden*

This same theme is found in another Victorian writer who employed Yorkshire dialect: Frances Hodgson Burnett, whose work spanned from the 1860's through the early 20th century. Many of Burnett's works were peppered with dialect, including her

first novel *That Lass O' Lowrie's* (1877), subtitled *A Lancashire Story*, that concerned the lives of pit brow girls in the Yorkshire north and contained a great deal of the regional dialect. In a far more famous text, *The Secret Garden* (1911), Mary Lennox leaves the desert climate of India for her family's native England and settles in northern Britain in the moors of Yorkshire where she meets the Sowerby family, whose broad Yorkshire dialect she sometimes has difficulty understanding. The Sowerby's are linked to nature and renewal, predominantly through Dickon's mastery of the animals and knowledge of gardening, but also through their speech. "In Braid Yorkshire; the Language of Myth? An Appreciation of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett," Mary Stolzenbach comments that "The language itself that is spoken by Martha and Dickon and their mother is given magical effect. With the speaking of Yorkshire, one leaves the realm of artificiality, of the highly conventional Victorian society, and comes closer to earth, to honesty, to reality. Dialect [. . .] often has the power to evoke far more emotion than 'standard English'" (28). Before long, Mary learns to speak Yorkshire, and it helps engender her transformation from a spoiled, lonely, orphaned girl into one who is generous, appreciative, and surrounded by the community of kindred spirits in both the human and the natural worlds. Stolzenbach points out that "Everyone in the novel who is regarded favorably—except Archibald Craven—comes to speak Yorkshire, at one time or another: Mary begins to pick it up, she coaches Colin, and Dickon takes great pleasure in hearing Colin use it. Even Mrs. Medlock [. . .] in the end falls into it" (28). The regional speech becomes the transformative agent that effects a positive change on the novel's heroine. Nostalgic or not, in the world of this novel, dialect is linked to rural purity and

the healing power of nature. Dickon, Martha, and Susan represent a healthful way of life that Mary needs to learn in order to be regenerated. Their goodness is linked to simplicity and antiquity, and Yorkshire comes to represent both.

Burnett demonstrates that such language is wrongly devalued in her discussions of how Martha's dialect is ridiculed by servants who have attained somewhat higher positions: "[Martha] found it dull in the great servants' hall downstairs where the footman and upper housemaids made fun of her Yorkshire speech and looked upon her as a common little thing, and sat and whispered among themselves" (Burnett 48). Mrs. Medlock also criticizes Martha for speaking in dialect, and it is clearly devalued as a negative marker of the lower classes. In a linguistic hierarchy, Martha is relegated to the bottom, among the servants and upper class alike. She obtained her situation, in fact, only because Mrs. Medlock was friends with her family. She would otherwise be considered too low to be a serving maid, as Martha tells Mary: "If there was a grand missus at Misselthwaite I should never have been even one of th' under house-maids. I might have been let to be scullery-maid but I'd never have been let upstairs. I'm too common an' I talk too much Yorkshire" (28-9). It was this attitude of linguistic exclusion that Burnett and Munby both sought to change.

Dialect Loss = Romantic Gain in *Wuthering Heights*

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte also demonstrates how Yorkshire dialect marks characters as lower class. The two central households of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights differ not only in terms of class and relative wealth, but also in the

language commonly used within each house. Joseph, the lifelong caretaker and servant at Wuthering Heights speaks in dialect more than any other character in the text and his speech marks him as a member of the servant class, equated with roughness, eccentricity, and a lack of education.

Bronte uses dialect to underscore class differences not just through the servants but also through the character of Hareton—Hindley’s ill-treated son who desires a relationship with Cathy but is initially considered by her too rude and common to ever be a romantic choice. The triangle between Cathy, Hareton, and Linton mirrors the novel’s previous one between Catherine, Heathcliff, and Edgar, and in both, language is used to demarcate one man from the other as a better or worse romantic choice for each of the heroines. Heathcliff, for example, the gypsy orphan who has been brought home to Wuthering Heights speaks rudely and is prevented from obtaining an education. It is not until he leaves home for three years and returns with a gentleman’s language and education that he can be considered a match for the already-married Catherine.

Similarly, with the second generation of inhabitants at the Grange and Wuthering Heights, Cathy is repelled by Hareton’s lack of education and Yorkshire dialect that she feels mark him as inferior. When she encounters him in the garden after riding her horse to Wuthering Heights, she tells Nelly that “He patted Minny’s neck, and said she was a bonny beast, and appeared as if he wanted me to speak to him. I only told him to leave my horse alone, or else it would kick him. He answered in his vulgar accent, ‘It wouldn’t do mitch hurt if it did,’” and she goes on to mock him for his inability to read his own name engraved over the entrance of the Heights: “He spelt, and drawled over by

syllables, the name” and is mocked further by Cathy when he can read no more (Bronte 228). In a similar scene when Hareton attempts to be kind to her by telling her in dialect that he asked Heathcliff to allow him to “wake for her” (wait up for her), Cathy responds “Be silent! I’ll go out of doors, or anywhere, rather than have your disagreeable voice in my ear!” (Bronte 272).

Bronte’s position toward dialect is not as clear cut as is Burnett’s in *The Secret Garden*. While readers are clearly meant to sympathize with Hareton when Cathy treats him so imperiously, he must lose his accent and gain a proper speech before the two finally receive the happy ending denied to Heathcliff and Catherine. Eventually, Cathy repents of her behavior regarding Hareton. Bronte writes that “her conscience reproved her for frightening him off improving himself” (285). Gaining an education is synonymous in the text with losing one’s dialect, and it is only upon this loss that Hareton becomes worthy of marrying Cathy: he must “improve himself,” to use the language of the text. Hareton’s self-love prevents him from immediately making up with Cathy after she apologizes, and Bronte gives him a few speeches in dialect where he refuses to comply with Cathy and appears to assert his own value and self respect: “I shall have naught to do wi’ you, and your mucky pride, and your damned mocking tricks! [. . .] I’ll go to hell, body and soul, before I look sideways after you again! Side out of t’ gait, now; this minute! (286). Yet Hareton quickly concedes to being Cathy’s pupil. She offers to teach him to read more, and their romance blooms. Unlike in Munby’s or Burnett’s works where the upper class are taught to love and value the working-class voice as it is, in *Wuthering Heights*, both Heathcliff and Hareton learn to emulate the

education and hence the language of the upper class. Shared education is found in each of these texts, but in Brontë's, it is apparent that Hareton will lose his language, and this is presented as a triumph of romance. We are given a scene of "two such radiant countenances bent over the page of the accepted book, that [Nelly, the narrator] did not doubt the treaty had been ratified, on both sides, and the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies" (Brontë 288). Reading and speaking standard English is what brings this couple together. In *Ann Morgan's Love*, by contrast, it is a mutual appreciation for Ann's dialect that is a large part of the charm.

Preserving Antiquity

Burnett, Barnes, Hardy, and Munby were writers with a vast appreciation for the language of the common people. The instinct to preserve it can be linked to a broader ideological shift that viewed the past with nostalgia but repositioned that valuable past away from the classical and toward the gothic. Victorians moved away from the neo-classical values that the previous century had prized, with its emphasis on the culture and languages of ancient Greece and Rome that had seemed to epitomize civilization in everything from art to architecture to government. The same impulse away from the classics can be seen in Wordsworth's preface discussed above. For the neo-classicists under the Greco-Roman model, local English customs, habits, language, and arts were perceived as primitive and barbaric, and little scholarly attention was given to them. To use John Ruskin's phrase in "The Savageness of Gothic Architecture," "the word Gothic became a term of unmitigated contempt, not unmixed with aversion" (Vol 2, chap 6).

The 19th century, by contrast, saw a rich Gothic revival in which scholars studied and came to revere the medieval as more closely connected to English history and literature. At the forefront of this movement was John Ruskin, whose *Stones of Venice* influenced a generation. In “The Savageness of Gothic Architecture,” Ruskin argued for the value of Gothic structures as emblematic of the entire medieval culture, which he maintained was more appreciative of the individual artist than his contemporary Victorians were of theirs, particularly because the mass production of goods created a prosaic uniformity. If gothic architecture was not uniform, this was not a testament to its lack of worth, but to its absolute value as a symbol of the individual artist: “It is true, greatly and deeply true, that the architecture of the North is rude and wild; but it is not true that, for this reason, we are to condemn it, or despise. Far otherwise: I believe it is in this very character that it deserves our profoundest reverence” (Vol 2, chap 6). For Ruskin, an appreciation of the Gothic became simultaneously an indictment of the Industrial Age.

For Munby, too, imagination and individuality became entwined not with the modern world but with its absence. On October 1, 1860, Munby records in his journal coming upon an Elizabethan chapel by a lake on one of his many country walks. The sight inspires in him a sense of wonder and awe at its antiquity and seeming magic:

When I came upon the scene from the bare grassy slope of the park, the morning sun shone full upon these woods and ivied walls, and filled the lawn with light, and threw still bright shadows on the still bright lake.

Fancy this, after the turmoil of Lancashire! It was an enchanted island on

a fairy water—it was the castle of the Lady of Shalott—it was the house of Elaine la Blanche: Knights; Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain and Sir Bors, should ride over that antique bridge by the wood, and dismount at that great door and do their orisons in that unearthly chapel. There was no one in sight—no modern man to break the spell.

Munby's description is filled with references to a medieval past that was popular among both Victorian writers and the pre-Raphaelite artists like Dante Gabriel Rossetti with whom Munby worked at the Working Men's College. Also notable is Munby's contrast of this scene with Lancashire, which was a major industrial and commercial county during the Industrial Revolution and had hundreds of coal mines and cotton mills that produced an abundant supply of coal and cotton. The juxtaposition of the fairy-like bower with noisy, overcrowded scenes in Lancashire make clear Munby's desire for a simpler, more appealing natural life that was evaporating at a rate both bewildering and distressing. Such a desire arose not simply out of romanticism or nostalgia, but out of a very real sense of the world changing at a dizzying, nearly incomprehensible rate. In his July 10, 1860, journal entry, Munby contemplates his location amidst such change:

I begin to feel sadly this year without a summer, this life without air or exercise, and more, without room for thought & reverie—no green quiet place to muse in & be free, but a round of petty habits circling in upon the soul and shutting out imagination from its food. I am like the mad man in *Maud*—dead and buried under the street: and the specters of my earlier lives walk over me continually.

For Munby, as for so many with a poetic sensibility, imaginative life is nourished through connection to the natural world. Its absence impends spiritual death.

This tendency to revert to the medieval occurred in a moment when the landscape of England was being altered nearly beyond recognition through the industrial revolution. The desire to retain the vestiges of the past became a way of both critiquing the present and trying to impose order and understanding upon it by looking backward in history for a more appealing model. If Ruskin did this primarily through the figures of the artist and architect, others did it through attempts to retain a language that was also evaporating. As rural farms became less tenable and vast populations shifted into urban environments, the language of the countryside became, to the minds of writers like Munby, Barnes, Hardy, and Burnett, greatly depleted and thus in need of preservation. Suddenly, medieval literature, folk legends, and ballads came into currency again, and scholars noted significant links between old and middle English and contemporary dialects, thus fueling a renewed interest in regional voices. In this context, Munby's claim that Ann's voice "Is part of England's history," (33) can be seen as a clear indication of an effort at preservation within a broader movement that attempted to retain what was defined as the heart of Englishness: the voice of its rural people.

William Morris

William Morris, a student of Ruskin's who was deeply influenced by him, is another Victorian who was committed to the preservation of English life as represented through its art and landscape. He, too, idealized the countryside and like Ruskin,

condemned an increasingly commercialized England that mass produced goods, alienated laborers from their work, and obliterated the landscape of England with modern inventions that were thought by many to be signs of national progress. In “How I Became a Socialist,” Morris stated emphatically that “Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization [. . . and] my hope of its destruction” (1620). Like Ruskin and Carlyle, Morris was astonished and dismayed at the rapidity of industrial change that transformed a rural, agrarian economy to one dominated by railways, factories, machinery, and mines. Morris was concerned not only for the laborers who suffered from appalling working and living conditions, but also over the sheer ugliness of capitalism—its smoke, sewage, and slums. He was pessimistic about the long term impact of a society that he felt prized profit over humanity: “The hope of the past times was gone, the struggles of mankind for many ages had produced nothing but this sordid, aimless, ugly confusion; the immediate future seemed to me likely to intensify all the present evils by sweeping away the last survivals of the days before the dull squalor of civilization had settled down on the world” (1620).

Munby shared Morris’s sentiment that the end of life as he knew it was fast upon him and that such changes wrought sorrow, not progress. After a new railway was built near the Inner Temple where Munby lived, he bemoaned the change and all that it signified:

Last night and tonight I have observed for the first time the noise of the new Charing Cross Railway. Even as I write the dull wearing hum of

trains upon the Surrey side is going on: it goes on far into the night, with every now & then the bitter shriek of some accursed engine. I almost welcome the loss, which I had been groaning over, of my view of the Thames; hoping that the new building when it rises may keep out these sounds. No one who has not tasted the pure & exquisite silence of the Temple at night can conceive the horror of the thought that it is gone for ever. Here at least was a respite from the roar of the streets by day: but now, silence and peace are fast going out of the world. It is not merely the torture of this new noise in a quiet place: but one knows that these are only the beginnings of such sorrows. (January 22, 1864)

As industry encroached further and further in on the Temple, Munby was forced to tolerate the increased noise, crowds, and pollution that were so much a part of Victorian London. It is a wonder that the Temple remained peaceful for as long as it did. Munby witnessed these changes with fatalistic melancholy. His love of the country, by contrast, stemmed from an instinct of self-preservation, feeling as he did that his imagination flourished in the greenery and that his very soul was more at peace there. Certainly, his purchase of Wheeler's Farm in Pyrford, which was to become his later home for thirty years, was secured with a desire to retire to a more restful, quiet region away from the din of London life. Indeed, in speaking of Pyrford in his retrospect of 1865 in the rough journal many years before he bought property there, he said he "enjoyed nearly every Sunday the inestimable blessing of country quiet, at Pyrford, and came to love that charming valley [. . .] with a strength of affection which I never felt before for anything

near London. Long evening walks in the lanes and sunsets over the river, & musings in the sweet churchyard: intense, intense relief from all the petty things of town.”

The effort to preserve also encompassed architecture. In 1877, Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). He also “became involved in the Kyrle Society, founded in 1875 to improve working-class housing and the wider environment, and the Commons Preservation Society, founded ten years earlier” to safeguard public access to common land (Haggerty par. 8). In *William Morris: Building Conservation and the Arts and Crafts Cult of Authenticity*, editor Chris Miele demonstrates Morris’s commitment to the preservation of ancient architecture and quotes SPAB’s mission:

Architecture, long decaying, died out, as a popular art at least, just as the knowledge of mediaeval art was born. So that the civilised world of the nineteenth century has no style of its own amidst its wide knowledge of the styles of other centuries. From this lack and this gain arose in men's minds the strange ideal of the Restoration of ancient buildings . . . which by its very name implies that it is possible to strip from a building this, that, and the other part of its history—of its life that is—and then to stay the hand at some arbitrary point, and leave it still historical, living, and even as it once was. (Miele 30)

Such an instinct for preservation of architecture is one that Munby certainly shared. For Munby, buildings were imbued with a life and history of their own that bordered on a kind of haunting presence akin to the above description of buildings as alive and almost

sentient. Upon hearing of the sale of one old property, Munby muses in his journal entry of October 12, 1860, “They will sell it: how often do those who buy old houses and old lands, think of the noble army of memories and perished interests that surround them? In such places, nay, in every place—the unseen crowds stand thicker than the seen.”

Buildings are embedded with the memories of those who frequented them and should not be indifferently treated.

Peppered throughout Munby’s journals, from 1859 through the turn of the 20th century, is a consistent observation of the negative impact of modern progress on the landscape and hence the people of England. Not only did he bewail the sound of the railways encroaching on the Temple, but the look of them as well:

No words are strong enough to condemn the scandalous & irretrievable ugliness which has spoilt the old Station & the entrance to the Borough. Lease hold houses are ugly, but they are built to fall down at the end of the lease, so their baseness will at least have a speedy end: but these railways are meant to last; and who are we, that we should decimate the population and defile our children’s minds with the sight of these monstrous and horrible forms, for the sake of gaining half an hour on the way to our work or our dinner? Few things of the kind are more distressing than the absolute divorce of strength and skill from beauty, which such buildings speak of. (January 11, 1864)

Munby has a clear sense of the impropriety of burdening the future generations with buildings too hideous to erect. As with Morris and Ruskin, Munby believes in buildings

with artistic worth, ones marked with individuality. His sense of aesthetics runs to antiquity.

On March 22, 1859, Munby laments the architectural changes being made near his home in the Inner Temple: “Today, after an auction yesterday, they began to pull down the old buildings on the south side of Figtree Court, opposite this house. After standing more than two hundred years, these old houses are coming down at last, to be replaced no doubt by some wretched modern improvement.” With relentless inevitability, the buildings and landscape continued to transform. By 1864, Munby had lost his view from the Inner Temple as construction and “improvements” continued year after year:

Today I finally lost my view of the Temple Gardens and the Thames. Week by week and day by day the hideous new building has been slowly rising, shutting one in, like the man in the Venetian prison, from all that I have looked on so long. For nearly five years, if I remember right, I have had from these windows an open view of the green gardens and trees, & often Surrey shore and the hills of Penge in the distance, & of the broad river. The little steamers have darted to and fro, brisk & noiseless; the stately hay-barges have swept upwards with the tide, and the sun on their brown sails and grey-gold freight and green hulls: & at night the line of wharfs and warehouses on the further bank have seemed like a long façade of Italian palaces, lit up by man, points of red and saffron tint, with vertical beams shooting down into the dark water, & traversing the

moonlight with deeper & more brilliant colours. All this I have seen and dwelt on for so long: and now it is gone for ever, not from me only but from all the Temple. For the Embankment is coming. (May 31, 1864)

The Thames embankment construction began in 1859 and the embankment itself in 1863 under the supervision of the engineering department of the Metropolitan Board of Works. It was a project that would take decades to complete and one that encompassed a massive undertaking that was considered by many Victorians to be a marvelous feat of modern engineering. An immense retaining wall was to be built, its purpose to contain the banks more cleanly, safely, and with less danger of having boats run aground. Not only was it thought to improve navigation along the river, but it was also meant to provide new spaces for docks and to house the final section of the new London Main Drainage system, put in place by the Metropolitan Sanitary Commission, formerly run by Edwin Chadwick.

In Dale H. Porter's *The Thames Embankment. Environment, Technology and Society in Victorian London*, Porter demonstrates how the embankment also disrupted many of the impoverished people who made their living on the river, such as the mudlarks, sweepers, and even those like Riderhood and Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend* who fished corpses from it. Porter points out that many of the technical improvements created in the Victorian era had a correlating moral component. Chadwick, for example, was sanitizing not only the sewage system and its concomitant toxic pollution of the river and surrounding neighborhoods, but also the dirty poor themselves, like the mudlarks who lived and worked in the slums along the river and who were conflated with the

sewage itself. Thus the fear of disease and contagion existed not only via the dirty waters of the Thames, but also the polluted bodies of those who made their living from it.

Porter goes on to note that there was a great deal of debate about the value of the embankment and whether and how to go about achieving it: "The public discourse which framed the Embankment in the period from about 1800 to 1862 reveals that the definition of a cultural artifact, even one so massive and concrete as the Embankment, is not inherent in its technology, but derives from a sort of negotiation among relevant social groups, which may or may not be resolved" (Porter 108). For Munby, at least, there was not a happy resolution. Despite many of the sanitary benefits, one of its obvious drawbacks, at least for Munby, was the destruction of his perception of the beauty of the Thames and his desire to continue its observation. While we can certainly dispute Munby's description above of the river in such pastoral terms, it is reminiscent of Wordsworth's depiction of the Wye River valley, described by him in "Tintern Abbey" in such idyllic terms when it was, in fact, greatly altered and polluted at the time he penned his famous poem. Both men appear to have so loved the idea of their respective rivers that they refused to let the reality intercede.

The Thames was undeniably in a state of utter degradation: "The Great Stink" in the summer of 1858 became a national scandal, the stench of the Thames so overwhelming that it prevented the MPs from holding session and prompted them to subsequently rush a bill through Parliament for greater funding that eventually resulted in the embankment project. Nevertheless, Munby's description above is one of very real loss for him, emblematic of a massive change in a way of life he so valued. He writes of

the beauty of the colors on the water, of witnessing life moving to and fro, and of the sense of freedom embodied by the river. For him, the Thames embankment put an end to all of that.

Ultimately, there was no happy ending to Munby's desire to preserve the rural life he was so fond of, even in the country setting of Pyrford. In Munby's poem "London Town," published in his final volume *Relicta* (1909), he describes yet another modern invention, the motor car, as infernal, dangerous, and relentless:

Hark! to the hideous roar of the ugly implacable monsters
 Forging in frantic speed, each with the other at war;
 Howling and growling and hoarse, in the riot of insolent triumph,
 Deaf to authority's voice, reckless of order and law.
 Here then at last is a force that none have the courage to cope with,
 None have the wit to suppress, none even dare to control:
 Foul as a lava stream, shot straight from its hidden Inferno,
 Making the fair broad streets seem like a vision of hell.

His description of the ugliness of the invention, its mindless inevitability and destructiveness, its unfeeling triumph, are in stark contrast to the notions of appreciation and awe some Victorians had at the convenience and speed of travel by motor car.

Munby, however, closes "London Town" on a dark, near despairing note: "Aye, and we too are doom'd, though we live remote in the country, / If but a road be near, still to encounter the foe; / Still to endure its stench, its cruel and culpable presence, / Killing all beauty and grace, crushing the charm out of life; / Making us bitterly feel that our

impotent civilisation / Cannot contrive to be free, cannot be noble and calm.” Here modernity in the form of the automobile becomes a threatening, relentless pursuer, bent on crisscrossing all of England with clouds of smoke, and Munby by contrast stands “impotent” against such change. Munby was leaving a world that barely resembled the one he had been born into. In the face of such vast, bewildering change, it is understandable that he would cling to the familiar, comforting voices of Yorkshire and the tranquility they represented. Like the sights of the Thames, the antique architecture, and the Pyrford countryside, Yorkshire dialect represented a beloved way of life that Munby was determined to preserve in his poetry. If he could not prevent the Thames embankment, the coming of the railroad or motorcar, or the destruction of long-standing buildings, he *could* capture in print the sounds of his much-loved Yorkshire voices.

Language Preservation or Annihilation

While there were several writers who made conscientious attempts to safeguard and value English dialects in their literature, the majority did not, and at the far end of the spectrum was Bernard Shaw who sought actively to mainstream language and, to use Wordsworth’s phrase, purify it of its real defects. Not surprisingly, the “defects” belonged to the working rather than the upper classes. The disparate attitudes Munby and Shaw have of working-class language translate into contrasting attitudes about the people who employ them. Munby’s appreciation of dialect via *Ann Morgen* and countless other poetic speakers could not be further from Shaw’s positioning of Higgins who repeatedly contrasts his own authoritative speech with what he considers to be Eliza’s cacophony,

which is constantly devalued and mocked. When Higgins first meets Eliza on the street where he is copying down her dialogue, he addresses her as an “incarnate insult to the English language” and contrasts her speech with his own, which he likens to “the language of Shakespeare and Milton” (Shaw 11)—a sentiment entirely at odds with Munby’s positioning of Ann’s voice within the canonical circle of Chaucer. This is merely the first instance in which Higgins positions himself alongside authoritative discourse, which he translates into human worth. Eliza, who lacks this language, lacks the worth that he subsequently attaches to it. At the end of the second act, Shaw gives us a brief scene to illustrate the lessons Higgins gave to Eliza. When she, to his ear, mispronounces the alphabet, he ridicules her in front of Pickering: “This is what we pay for as elementary education. This unfortunate animal has been locked up for nine years in school at our expense to teach her to speak and read the language of Shakespeare and Milton” (42). Eliza is not unschooled, nor unintelligent, as becomes ever more clear as the play progresses. Higgins concedes as much both in this scene and when she later wins the bet for him. Her crime is not that she does not know how to read, speak, or write, but that the way that she does so is unacceptable. There is only one acceptable speech—that of Milton, Shakespeare, and Higgins, and any derivation from that is met with contempt. Throughout the play, Eliza is referenced as an “animal,” “baggage,” “guttersnipe,” “slut,” “thing,” “presumptuous insect,” “cat,” “creature,” and “squashed cabbage leaf.” Her voice marks her as valueless.

Linguistic meaning depends on a context, and the contexts shift and change, changing the meaning of the language, despite Higgins’ insistence on its stability and

authority. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Eliza's language use. When she is first introduced in the play, she tries to get Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill to pay for the flowers that Freddy knocked to the ground. Clara is immediately disgusted by Eliza, whom she considers beneath her notice. She advises her mother not to pay, and reveals her contempt for Eliza not only in what she says, but by physically distancing herself from a girl she considers utterly common, as if not doing so would expose her to a contaminant. Eliza's appearance and speech mark her as unworthy of even the simplest courtesy.

When they next meet, however, it is under very different circumstances, and the context entirely changes Clara's response to Eliza, and specifically to her language. Higgins has brought out his newly reinvented Eliza to practice her invented persona in front of his mother who is entertaining the Eynsford Hills. Because of her attire and overall appearance, Eliza maintains a credibility for them that she did not possess in her flower girl's clothes. Likewise, Higgins' lessons have "improved" her speech to the extent that she is capable of conversing grammatically on the restricted subjects of the weather and health. All of the Eynsford Hills accept Eliza as a lady, even when she slips precipitously back into her own language when discussing the purportedly "safe" topic of health. Eliza reveals to her captivated audience that her aunt supposedly died of influenza, but that she suspects that whoever stole her aunt's new hat actually killed her to get it: "... what I say is, them as pinched it done her in" (Shaw 54). Higgins is horrified by this lapse into her authentic speech, and provides her with a cover by telling everyone that Eliza is practicing "the new small talk" (54).

Eliza's language value depends on context—on how her class is read by those around her. On the street, it is dismissed as degenerate, but in the parlor (with her attired as a lady), her speech is considered quaint and worthy of mimicking, even when she swears. While Clara initially snubbed her in Covent Garden, she now finds her the epitome of fashion. It is not the language itself that has or does not have value, but the meaning that people socially construct around it that makes it in the first instance despicably low, and in the second, worthy of emulation. When Mrs. Eynsford Hill objects to the sanguine aspect of the new small talk, it is Clara who immediately leaps to its, and Eliza's, defense: "It's all a matter of habit. There's no right or wrong in it. Nobody means anything by it. And it's so quaint, and gives such a smart emphasis to things that are not in themselves very witty. I find the new small talk delightful and quite innocent" (Shaw 55). Eliza's talk is only acceptable as a parody of itself, to be tried on as a fashion. It is not considered, by Higgins or Clara, to have any authority or value of its own when spoken within its original context. When couched as a fashion, however, Clara is eager to appropriate it for herself, commenting on "Victorian prudery" in language use as "Such bloody nonsense!" and exiting the room "*radiant, conscious of being thoroughly up to date*" (Shaw 56). The language use in Shaw's work is vastly different than in Munby's, who uses it not to parrot it in fashion but to represent it as it is—in its common, everyday use that Munby values. While Clara tries on language to appear fashionable, Munby's heroines use it as a means of genuine communication.

Munby frequently converses with the working-class, but he was sometimes compelled to change *his* language to be better understood rather than having the working-

class attempt to affect his speech. What's more, when he does change his speech, it is not to affect a new fashion but to simply communicate more effectively. It is not to denigrate the use of "low" speech but to value and learn from it. He does not put on the language for amusement, as Clara does in *Pygmalion*. In one more extreme instance, Munby encountered a Yorkshire girl who appeared entirely unused to conversing with those who spoke what he called "ordinary" English. In this September 21, 1861, entry, Munby describes his attempt to communicate with the girl:

She spoke Yorkshire thoroughly well: insomuch that, although my knowledge of it helped me to adapt my speech to hers, she could hardly understand me. The simplest phrases, the very accent, of ordinary English, seemed to be strange to her; and when I had as I thought, reduced a sentence to its lowest terms, & had pronounced it slow and clear, she would stare and cry 'Wat did ye saa, Sir?' in perfect good faith; and I had to try again. Never was the chasm produced by differing habits and education more obvious."

It is significant that Munby expends great effort to be understood and attempts to use his knowledge of the Yorkshire dialect to that end. Clearly, his assumption is that he ought to adapt his speech to hers to carry on the conversation, and he does so willingly, if without perfect success. Having interviewed thousands of working class women in various regions, Munby became increasingly adept through practice and through deliberate learning, at conversing with people whose language and syntax differed from his own. While this example is at the more extreme end in terms of the difficulty he had,

it is a perfect example to demonstrate the importance he felt such conversations had.

Otherwise, he would never have spent the time trying to make himself understood.

It is also noteworthy that although their conversation is extensive, at no point does Munby make any negative judgment about her dialect. In fact, he compliments it in the opening line above. He cannot but notice the disparity between himself and the milkmaid, but he makes every effort to use language he hoped would be familiar to her and to keep restating things until he made himself understood. He managed this fairly successfully, for their conversation persisted throughout her work of milking cows and during their joint walk together afterwards until their paths went separate ways. During this time they discussed the rainy weather, her employment, her pay, her opinion of her work, and many other work-related topics. Despite noting the clear disparity in their comparative educations, Munby's impulse is to further the conversation, not denigrate her voice.

Munby's attitude about language is entirely positive. The voices of working-class women have a credibility and level of acceptance that is unparalleled, regardless of the context. Not only does Ann Morgan insist on the value of her own voice from the very beginning when confronted by the doctor, but she gains praise for her speech from those around her who are of a higher class position—not for parading it as a new fashion, but for itself. Munby contrasts Ann's "vivid and expressive" dialect with "proper" English: "I love your country talk,/ And when I hear it, something eggs me on/ To grace it with a contrast and a foil,/ By using words as long as asses' ears,/ Which pedants have invented" (*Ann Morgan* 45). For Munby, as for Wordsworth, the language of common people

contained an honesty and simplicity that contrasted with the “invented” language of scholars. It was also a way of preserving a way of life that was rapidly becoming extinct via the immense changes of industrializing England. For Munby, instructor of Latin—the classical language that differentiated him from others and thereby partially marked him as upper class—to have dismissively referenced words that “pedants have invented” again echoes the sentiment found in Barnes that there was something alien and artificial about the Latinization of English—something that could be combated by preserving the Anglo-Saxon regional dialects.

While Higgins insults Eliza as “an idiot” and claims to be “wast[ing] the treasures of my Miltonic mind by spreading them before you” (Shaw 96), Munby’s Master, when making a similar comparison of class-based language, claims an equality between them. He argues that they “grace” each other in their difference, not that one is the correct, authoritative, only way of speaking. If anything, he posits Ann’s dialect as the more valuable for its vividness and ability to capture an “accurate” sound. Her connection to “her peasant fathers” is a benefit, not the link to the gutter that Higgins would have considered it (*Ann Morgan* 32-3). Munby applied the same poetic sensibility to his personal life with his wife. In an undated manuscript poem in the collection, Munby wrote of Cullwick’s speech reverently: “Such is her talk, her kitchen dialect;/ And such the homely subjects of her choice:/ To you, distasteful; but to me, the voice/ Of all that I most love, and most respect./ Her simple phrase, her rustic words, reflect/ A freedom, wherein I at least rejoice” (Reel 25). If it was rather romantic and nostalgic to view

Cullwick's life as "free" given her workload, it is nevertheless utterly clear that Munby's adoration of her voice was genuine and guileless.

A final point to consider is that while Munby invested so much effort in changing the way working-class women were presented in his poetry, and hence their symbolic meaning, his efforts extended to conversations he had with literary friends and acquaintances. One such attempt to bring his private concern into a more public arena can be seen in a discussion he and John Ruskin have about art during a luncheon. Munby and Ruskin both taught at the Working Men's College and attended regular meetings and college functions. They also had a cordial relationship outside of the College, and Munby frequently attended social gatherings at Ruskin's home and elsewhere. In one such meeting, Munby records their conversation in his journal entry on the 13th of April, 1859:

After luncheon [Ruskin] showed us the pictures round the room—two large Turners in oil, a Sir Joshua (Angelica Kauffman), several charming W. Hunts, & others. Apropos of a capital head of a village girl by Hunt, which Ruskin took me aside to look at, I spoke to him of my favourite project—namely that someone ought to paint peasant girls & servant maids as they are—coarse & hearty & homely—and so shame the false whitehanded wenches of modern art. *These* have been painted as they are, but *women*, never: spurious refinement & false delicacy prevent it—as if, being painted, she ought to be idealised & varnished with the halfgentility of a lady's maid! (Hudson 31)

Munby goes on to describe Comte's painting of a scene from *Faust* in which the artist's depiction erases the reality of Margaret's hand by painting it as delicate and ladylike: "I reminded [Ruskin] of that picture of the garden scene in *Faust*, where Margaret says 'How can you kiss my hand—sie ist so *garstig*, ist so *rauh*' [it is so *nasty*, is so *rough*]—and yet the hand is white and soft as a lady's! I was much pleased to find that Ruskin cordially agreed with me—and after talking some minutes & saying that Hunt was the man to do it, he thanked me for mentioning the subject: so I hope it may bear fruit" (Hudson 31).

The conversation not only underscores Munby's willingness to discuss his predilections with others, but also demonstrates his hope that such a conversation might influence his listener who, as an immensely influential figure in the art world, could potentially spread the word to Hunt and others through his teaching at the WMC, through public lectures, and in his publications. The implication is that Munby does perceive the potential ramifications of his discussions and intends to share his ideas about working women as worthy subjects, with the hope that such conversation will help perpetuate and foster action. In the event that Ruskin never took up the call, Munby himself publishes his artistic opinion in his preface to *Dorothy*. After critiquing the lack of realistic women in prose and poetry discussed above, Munby goes on to criticize artists for the same omissions and references the painting he discussed with Ruskin: "Of untruthfulness, the examples are innumerable. I will mention just one. Some years ago, I saw at the Royal Academy in London a picture of the interview between Faust and Margaret in the garden. The monument represented was that in which he kisses her hand [. . .]" Munby then

quotes the passage about the roughness of Margaret's hand in *Faust* and remarks, "Now, making every allowance for undue depreciation of herself, we cannot suppose that an artless straightforward girl like Margaret would say that her hands were *garstig* and *rauh* if they were not so. Yet the painter had given her hands as dainty and white as a lady's: and his picture was hung on the line—the place of honour" (*Dorothy* 222). Munby then berates the artist, and the multitude like him, for taking such unwarranted liberties. If these are the paintings that garner honor, it is no wonder that the erasure of working women's reality proliferated. Munby's publication of his frustration with this continued trend, like his conversation with Ruskin on the subject, was an attempt to influence the public to seek change.

Munby's accounts of working women are important in their attempt to change the symbolic level of working-class oppression in Victorian England. Instead of the pastoral images of country folk that only half approximate the lives and voices of rustic people, or the denigrated images of the working-class as ugly foils to the true heroines, Munby valued working-class women's voices and labor as they existed—without apology and without alteration. He did not want sanitized versions of working-class figures or voices. According to many of his journal entries and poems, much of what made the lives of these working-class women difficult was not so much the labor itself but the stigma attached to such labor, a point Leonore Davidoff echoes in "Class and Gender in Victorian England": "It should be remembered, however, that it is not the tasks themselves that degrade; it is the power of the dominant groups which defines what tasks are to be considered degrading and then forces the incumbents of socially constructed

categories to perform these tasks” (18). Women who performed the kind of physical labor that Munby chronicles were often considered beneath recognition and were denied both subjectivity in life and representation in art and literature. Their voices were silenced, misrepresented, or altered. By contrast, Munby was determined to erase that stigma, and to represent rustic voices and labor in his poems. In this effort, his works of faithful representation were often more real than some realist contemporaries who presented the working-class as beautiful and refined exceptions to their peers. Certainly, Munby’s motives were not entirely altruistic; he had a personal stake and an erotic investment, but he was committed to the inclusion of working women as fit subjects for art and literature and as worthy subjects in their own right.

CHAPTER 2: MAKING THE DISABLED: HARRIET LANGDON, VICTORIAN INCURABLE

Just then a tall ladylike young woman, well but simply drest, past by on the skirts of the crowd, not looking like the rest, but seeming anxious to escape notice. Her figure was erect and elegant; but her head was bent down, and she wore a veil of preternatural thickness, which hid her face indeed thoroughly, but showed also, by its falling vertically from the forehead, what ruin there must be beneath. Scrofula or cancer! She turned up the first quiet entry she could find; and I had just time to ask her, as gently as one might, if it were so? ‘Yes Sir’ she said—for she was not a lady, poor thing, though she looked so like one—and no, she wouldn’t mind my seeing it.

So begins Arthur Munby’s journal entry from August 22, 1861, recording his first sighting of a woman, Harriet Langdon, with whom he would have a decades-long connection. As he would soon realize, she suffered from neither of the illnesses that he initially guessed, but from lupus. The result on her face, though, as he saw when she lifted the veil, was much the same:

She lifted her veil, no one else being near, and disclosed one of the most hideous faces I ever saw. Scarce to be called a face; for it was covered with sores and redness, and was ghastly as a skull. The eyes were drawn downward and shrunken in their sockets; the nose was long since gone; the rotting lips were drawn back and showed all the teeth & gums. It was

Lupus. Good heavens, what a face to look out of a dainty bonnet, and have soft brown hair falling round it, as this had! She, with her tall and noble figure, had carried this curse about from childhood, and lived alone, a loathesome [sic] thing and unloved.

Embedded in this first entry on Langdon is everything significant to understanding Munby's relationship with her. His interest and repulsion are both evident, as is his perception of her as a remnant of death—much the way Victor Frankenstein described his creation in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. There is both sympathy and revulsion in Munby's response, and as will be seen below, a promise to return. While there is much to condemn in Munby's interaction with Langdon, not the least of which are his assumptions that she is cursed for life and that her condition precluded the possibility of love, there is nevertheless a sincere compassion that spurred consistent and years-long effort to help alleviate the social conditions that cast Langdon in an isolated, outsider position.

Much scholarly attention has been given to understanding the motivations of philanthropic work in the 19th century. Gertrude Himmelfarb's classic texts *The Idea of Poverty* (1984) and *Poverty and Compassion* (1991) argue through a series of biographical examples of Victorian philanthropists that it was not fear of revolution that motivated charity—a speculation that Engels had made—but a moral sense of compassion toward the poor by individuals who perceived the basic humanity of the struggling classes and felt an ethical obligation and an individual responsibility to intercede on their behalf. In these texts, Himmelfarb credits individual philanthropists

like Charles Booth who, like Mayhew, undertook a massive study of the lives of the London poor, codifying them into various classes of poverty and bringing to the attention of the Victorian public the plight of the impoverished masses. Himmelfarb argues that the social policies of the period were infused with the “moral imagination” of Victorian humanitarians who felt a sense of duty to help the poor.

Much of the subsequent scholarship has provided an alternate reading of Victorian philanthropists as self-serving and egoistic, with members of the privileged class depicted as largely erotically motivated.¹ Far from conceiving of philanthropists as moralistic and charitably intentioned, critics have focused on the personal dimension of what such charity workers gained through their varying philanthropic work: particularly sexual titillation. Certainly Munby’s critics have perceived his interactions with working-class women exclusively in this self-interested vein. Leonore Davidoff, Griselda Pollock, Anne McClintock, and Barry Reay exemplify this trend in Munby scholarship as I discussed in Chapter 1.

Yet without returning to an uncritical reclaiming of Himmelfarb’s work, I would argue that benevolence was indeed a large part of Munby’s motivation when working with Langdon, and further that charitable and self-interested motivations are not mutually exclusive. The most recent scholarship on Victorian philanthropy is Seth Koven’s text *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* in which he argues precisely for such an over determined set of philanthropic motivations. He describes his work as

¹ William Booth, Henry Mayhew, Friedrich Engels, Charles Booth, and William Acton have each been reassessed for self-serving motivations for their reform and charity endeavors on the part of the poor. The common argument is that these men dwelt in the abject spaces out of prurient interest or a desire to sensationalize the squalor and suffering they encountered as much as to change it.

an “attempt to save [such philanthropists] from the misguided good-will of those who would make them into saints and the smugness of those who would dismiss them as marginal cranks, or worse yet, as hypocrites” (3). Koven’s attempt to uncover a mediated position between equally problematic extremes is enormously persuasive in its perception of “the altogether messier mingling of good intentions and blinkered prejudices that informed” a Victorian philanthropic viewpoint (3). It is precisely this rendering that most accurately describes the work of Arthur Munby in the context of his charitable pursuits via Harriet Langdon: a commingling of benevolence and prejudgment. Recent critics have focused exclusively on the latter. My work is in part a corrective, acknowledging Munby’s baser impulses but finally crediting the years-long intensive labor he did on Langdon’s behalf. And while the scope of my project focuses on Munby’s relationship with Langdon, doing so opens new possible readings of Munby’s relationships with other working women, his wife Hannah Cullwick among them. While scholars have condemned him for an intense erotic attraction to working-class women that crosses into voyeurism, there is much evidence in the journals to underscore less self-serving motivations.

Not only does reading Munby’s journals about his relationship with Langdon reveal a new and significant aspect of his philanthropic life to scholars, it also opens a window to the way that disability and disfigurement were perceived and treated in the Victorian period. In Munby’s time, the prevalent attitude toward disfigurement necessitated the isolation of the disfigured person. The perceived non-normative body was met with discomfort and a desire to distance oneself from the “disabled.” In Lennard

J. Davis's essay "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," he argues that the idea of the normal, and the word itself, in fact, as we understand it to mean "'not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual' only enters the English language around 1840" (3). Davis points out that "the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (3). The normative body is constructed through and against the "abnormal" body; there would be no normal without the "aberrant." In this way, the disfigured are often points of both curiosity and revulsion—interest and repulsion.

It is the reaction of "normal" people that in large part creates a disabled or disfigured experience. In Martha Stoddard Holmes' "Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction: Autobiographical Narratives of Victorians with Physical Disabilities," she acknowledges the extent of discrimination and stereotypical assumptions in the Victorian era: "Most nondisabled people resisted the idea that disabled people could work, learn, or have families" (27). Such stereotypes circumscribed the lives of disabled individuals by attaching a negative symbolic value to their identities. That able-bodied people had the economic and social privilege in large part allowed them to mandate the conditions in which the disabled lived.

In this chapter, I place Munby's journals alongside literary works that help elucidate Victorian attitudes about disfigurement. I use Gissing's *The Nether World* to support my argument that disfigured women were frequently isolated and treated as valueless in both the labor and marriage markets, though they did have a degree of

agency. I also use Esther Summerson in Dickens' *Bleak House* to establish the erasure of disfigured experience and the foregrounding of abled people as normative to the degree that they blot out disfigured narratives. I place these literary texts alongside sections of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* in which Mayhew interviews disabled working-class persons about their lives and conditions since, like Munby, Mayhew is purportedly recording the language and experience of actual people. While hardly objective, such interviews help establish the life circumstances of people with disabilities. In order to further contextualize how Victorians with lupus were perceived and treated and to establish some of the material circumstances of their lives, I also use contemporary British medical journals that not only discuss treatments but further demonstrate the extent to which the medical establishment participated in the symbolic as well as institutional aspects of oppression.

Munby's journals powerfully reveal that disability and disfigurement, while having unmistakable biological components, are nevertheless created as much by society as by nature. Insistence that the disabled and disfigured remain in the private, as opposed to the public realm, not only actively contributes to disability; it *creates* disability. Stereotypes of the disabled as helpless or unfit for work create a symbolic level of oppression by attaching labels to which the disabled are expected to adhere. Such symbolic oppression directly impacts the material conditions in which the disabled/disfigured live, particularly as work is denied not because of inability but because of aesthetics and the hierarchy of perceived normalcy. Munby's journals

underscore the constructed nature of disability and the damaging impact such a construction has on those who receive the label.

Similarly, the assumption that the disfigured are asexual, pitiful, and lead miserable, unhappy lives contributes to the symbolic level of oppression. So does erasing their experience. Examining the relationship between Munby and Langdon reveals the stereotypes of disfigured people and the social response to them as constructed others relegated to the margins and forced to occupy the fringes of society. They are presumed incapable of integration and remain unwelcome. Harriet Langdon was refused work because of her disfigurement and was denied social inclusion whether veiled or unveiled.

Yet perhaps the greatest contribution that Munby's relationship with Langdon reveals is not what he or society thought about Langdon but what she felt about herself. The journals provide a fascinating glimpse into disfigured subjectivity. While it is perhaps inevitable that Langdon would internalize, at least momentarily, the negative valuation society attached to her identity, what emerges from the journals are portraits not of Langdon's "hideousness" but of her as an active, happy participant in her own life. She did not hide away out of sight as she was mandated to do. She took walks, went to the park, the circus, and to other social gathering places regardless of her reception. She claimed a space for herself in a society that tried repeatedly to erase her. Langdon also demonstrates agency through her ability to keep Munby's interest long enough for him to assist her in getting a lifelong pensioner's position at the Royal Hospital for Incurables, as I will argue in the next chapter. In short, Munby's journals are valuable for the rare revelations they provide of disfigured subjectivity in the Victorian era.

Returning to the opening entry from Munby's journal quoted above, Munby presumes that no one could ever love so disfigured and diseased a woman—an assumption commonly made of the disabled/disfigured. Martha Stoddard Holmes argues in *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* that disabled women in the marriage plots of early Victorian melodramas often serve as contrasts for the able bodied women who do marry—that there is a “twin structure” whereby the abled woman marries and the disabled does not: “These fictions over determine the disabled woman’s unfitness for marriage by characterizing her as hopelessly alienated from normal life and her desire invisible to the nondisabled” (39). She argues that in the melodramas in the first half of the Victorian period, disabled women are not allowed to marry, whereas in later ones, they sometimes do but are not given children out of a fear that disability was hereditary (Stoddard-Holmes 68).² The ability to experience pleasure is often presumed not to exist in disabled and disfigured people’s lives. Romantic or sexual desire is not only assumed to be an inappropriate response for a disabled person, but also a potentially dangerous one for society if more “defectives” are produced.³ For his part, Munby’s earliest comments about Langdon coincide with this assumption that marriage and family are out of reach for someone with such a disfigurement and that pleasure is outside her

² Such childless unions can be seen, for example, with Sloppy and Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*.

³ By the late Victorian period, the Eugenic movement had spread from England to the United States, where laws were more easily instituted on a state by state basis rather than having to pass through parliament. By the early 1900’s, laws were implemented in over half the US states legalizing sterilization without knowledge or consent. One central target population of such laws were people with disabilities. With the belief in heritable traits, it was presumed that such “defectives” would pass their defects on to the next generation. Sterilization was performed for the greater good—to prevent such undesirables who would likely become an economic drain on “normal” citizens. See Elaine Tyler May’s *Barren in the Promised Land* for a more detailed account.

capacity. Throughout their relationship, he continues in this assumption, despite ample evidence from Langdon to the contrary.

Yet in spite of his stereotypical assumptions about Langdon, Munby was nevertheless struck with pity, especially at what his obvious class position might make possible for her: “It was pathetic to see how she clung to any crumb of hope I could give her,” he remarks in the same entry that records their initial meeting. They are interrupted by a woman passing by who reacts with “horror and surprise” at the sight of Langdon’s uncovered face, and the brief meeting comes to a close, which Munby duly notes in his journal: “As for me, I shook hands as cheerfully as I could, and promising to see her if I returned that way, I went back to the coach with that hideous revelation upon me.”

Munby and Frankenstein

Munby’s initial entry about meeting Langdon does read like the opening of a popular gothic or Victorian sensation novel. Many of Munby’s physical descriptions of Langdon are reminiscent of Frankenstein’s description of the creature, who he found “more hideous than belongs to humanity” (Shelley 60). Munby frequently refers to Langdon’s face as skull-like, ghastly, and even simian, though these comments are solely in his private journals and never to Langdon herself. Over and over, though, she appears not fully human to him. What especially troubles Munby is her approximation to other people, just as Frankenstein is particularly repulsed by the apparent glimpses of humanity he sees in the creature, which render it as more rather than less horrible in Frankenstein’s gaze. The nearness of the creature, its likeness to human beings, its being literally a part

of them, repels Frankenstein, for he assumes the creature is other and cannot possibly share the same kind of life. Munby makes a similar assumption of Langdon. He is certainly cognizant of Langdon's humanity, yet for him, she is not fully the same as himself or other people.

Frankenstein rejects the idea of a match for his creature just as Munby assumes that no one could or should be romantically paired with Langdon. Langdon and the creature are deemed separate entities from the rest of humanity. The similarities end here, though. For while Frankenstein insists that the creature live in isolation from society—a thing apart—Munby does recognize the humanity in Langdon and is willing to befriend, visit, and go on social outings with her. If marriage is not a conceivable option for Langdon in his eyes, companionship, at least, is, and this is more than Frankenstein allows the creature. On September 31, 1865, Munby tells Langdon, “You have my pity, my brotherly love”—a sense of relationship that the creature does not get from Frankenstein.

Munby's initial meeting with Langdon could have been like so many other chance encounters he had with literally thousands of working-class women that he meets, interviews, and never sees again. Instead, it is the beginning of a years-long connection, though it is virtually unknown to 19th century scholars and critics. The only published work that is devoted to Munby's relationship with Harriet Langdon is one chapter of Barry Reay's 2002 book *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily Deformation in Victorian England*. In it, Reay argues that “there was a darker side to Munby that has barely been touched on by his biographer and historians. He collected noseless women.

This story has never been told before” (40). This “collection” references interviews Munby had with a number of disfigured women that he encountered through his years of diary-keeping who suffered facial injuries from lupus, scrofula, cancer, or in a few instances, from being beaten. The “collection” Reay references above is also to a series of photographs that Munby commissioned to be taken of Langdon at various times over their years-long friendship.⁴ In a footnote Reay acknowledges that Liz Stanley briefly mentions the implications of this aspect of Munby’s photographic compilation, but his chapter is the only one to offer any sustained criticism of Munby’s relationship with Langdon.

Between 1859 when the diary opens and 1864 at the height of his interaction with Harriet Langdon, Munby records contact with seven other disfigured women: Mary Ann Bell, Charlotte Douglas, Ellen Green, Emily Harris, Elizabeth Hawkins, Julia Slingsby, and Mary Ann Redkison, as well as occasional brief mentions of unnamed women he sees from a distance in church or on the street. As he did with thousands of working women whom he encountered, Munby briefly interviews them as to the condition of their lives. He routinely asks their names and about their work—questions put to virtually every woman he encounters, regardless of her appearance or evident level of health. With some of the disfigured women, the initial meeting was their only encounter, but it was also not uncommon for Munby to follow up a first encounter with an arranged meeting to talk further and sometimes to photograph the women—a practice he

⁴ These particular photographs are missing from the extensive literary and photographic collection left by Munby to his alma mater, Trinity College, Cambridge, upon his death in 1910, but pen and ink drawings that Munby drew of Langdon in his journals are included in this collection and reproduced in Reay’s chapter.

commonly employed with hundreds of women, especially to document various professions, particularly milkmaids, farm girls, and women who worked in the pit mines. He also directed some of the women to potential employers or hospitals he thought might be of help.

While Reay brings needed critical attention to a virtually unknown facet of Munby's journals, like most scholars who responded to Munby's biographer Derek Hudson, Reay provides a distinctly one-sided and entirely negative view of Munby's relationship with Langdon. Like Anne McClintock's interpretation of Munby's interviews with working women as largely motivated by voyeurism, Reay reads Munby's intentions regarding Langdon as equally voyeuristic. He argues that Munby's relationship with Langdon "involved the woman's self-abasement [via her . . .] ritualized admissions to her ugliness and noselessness," (41) which Munby enjoyed seeing. There is, however, a far less self-serving conclusion to be drawn from the evidence Munby records in his journals. If he was morbidly interested in the "ghastliness" of Langdon's face, he was equally interested in trying to help her via medical assistance and financial aid. His interactions with Langdon were as much philanthropic as voyeuristic.

Disfigurement on Display

In order to more fully assess Reay's contribution to the study of Arthur Munby, it is important to discuss his central argument. Reay comments that "The interest—for this writer at least—lies in trying to unravel the meanings represented by an absent nose" (42). His primary purpose is to explain why Munby was fascinated and repelled by

Langdon's physical malady, and in so doing, he depicts Munby as entirely selfish and cruel not only for the way that he writes of Langdon, but for compelling her to unveil her face for him and for having her photographed. Reay interprets this behavior as power seeking and uses Munby's admittedly disturbing descriptions of Langdon as proof of his cruelty. My task is not only to respond to Reay's central claims regarding *why* Munby was so interested in a noseless woman, but also to refute his one-sided view of Munby as lacking compassion and operating solely from "voyeurism and malice" (Reay 45). And as I argued above, Munby's relationship with Langdon is worthy of study not simply for what it says of how the disfigured were perceived, but how they saw themselves.

It is true that Munby had an extensive collection of photographs of working-class women, and in this way Langdon is no different than the hundreds of others Munby commissioned to have photographed—she has equal footing in this sense. Yet there was also a system in place at the Royal Hospital for Incurables—the hospital Langdon longed to enter—that suggested that photographs be taken of potential patients to help solicit funds on their behalf. Providing photographs of disabled individuals during fundraising for the Royal Hospital for Incurables was common practice. These photographs sought ostensibly to elicit sympathy and pity on the part of the viewers who would, ideally, then put their money and votes at the disposal of the individuals who elicited the strongest reactions. While there is no direct evidence in the journals that this was a partial motivation for having Langdon's photograph taken, it is certainly possible that Munby was following the guidelines and conventions of the RHI.

Obviously, this does not obviate a voyeuristic reading of the photographs; it may, in fact, enhance one, since her image would then be on public display to a number of charitably minded individuals who might financially support Langdon's case. I am reminded of a compelling quote from disability scholar David Hevey in *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery*: "In many ways, charity advertising as oppressive imagery appears to be the bete noire of disabled people" (367). While it is undoubtedly true that charities helped particular individuals in the 19th century, as in our own, "it is precisely in this way that charities function as an agency of control. Charities, at best, create dependency; at worst, they further degrade and isolate. The raison d'être of charity is to help the helpless. Charities would wither away [. . .] if people were not deemed helpless by those who make such a determination" (Charlton 93). If Langdon had not been denied work, she would not have needed a pensioner's position or the photographs that may have helped secure her position in the RHI. Charities in this way serve as a replacement for social responsibility. Nevertheless, if the photos were used to strengthen her chances of entry, they may, however, provide mitigating circumstances in viewing Munby as operating solely out of self-interest. I will discuss these possibilities at greater length in Chapter 3, which focuses on Munby's aid to Langdon in her attempts to gain a pensioner's position at the RHI.

Reay's explanation of Munby's interest in Langdon's injury centers on his claim that Munby takes voyeuristic pleasure in the horror of her face that contrasts with her ladylike body: "My claim is that for Munby, these de-formations served, powerfully, to confirm their opposite: the feminine ideal. The very appeal of such subversions was the

strengthening of their ‘other’” (59). Reay points out Munby’s frequent references to the ghastliness of Langdon’s image and how it appears to unsex her and erase her femininity. Reay’s assertion is that next to Langdon, healthy women appeared more womanly and feminine in Munby’s eyes, and that he enjoyed the perceived contrast between Langdon’s “ladylike” body and her deformed face—that there was a fascinated revulsion in the abject. I do not dispute Munby’s fascination, but think it stems more from the way disfigured/disabled bodies were read than that she simply provided Munby an occasion “to ponder the subversion of femininity” (Reay 39).

What seems remarkable is that she was nevertheless worthy of Munby’s notice and attention—and not simply as a hideous curiosity. His position regarding Langdon can be read in the context of other women dismissed by society that Munby finds worthy of representation—the working-class women whose voices and labor he represents in his poetry. In P. J. Keating’s *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, he argues that much of the Victorian literary depictions of the working-class frequently offer a reductive image:

For there are few English novels which deal with working-class characters in a working-class environment in the same sense as there are novels about the middle or upper classes in their own recognizably real settings: in other words, novels which treat of the working class as being composed of ordinary human beings who experience the range of feelings and emotions, social aspirations and physical relationships, that it is the special province of the novelist to explore. (2)

Keating supports this claim by stating that many of the depictions of the working-class exist in social problem texts arising either out of the 1840's and 50's during "the outcry over the condition of industrial workers, together with the middle-class panic engendered by Chartist politics" (2), or the novels of the 1880's and 90's that focused on depictions of urban slums, illustrating unrelentingly downcast and brutalized working-class characters. I would argue that Munby's literary depictions are not reductive. They are not concentrated on any period of social unrest, but span his entire writing career from the mid 1850's through the turn of the century, and focus not only on the labor and working conditions of the working-class but also on their romantic relationships and "range of feelings and emotions" to use Keating's phrase. Keating goes on to acknowledge one type of literary production that better captures working-class life: "In so far as it is possible to talk at all of a genuine working-class literary tradition in the Victorian age, it is to be found in certain regional poets (both dialect and non-dialect)" (3). It is precisely this kind of writing that Munby produced.

Compassion and Crawlers

In terms of Munby's relationship with Langdon, I do not mean to suggest that his discussions of her are entirely unproblematic, only that Reay's one-sided reading does not acknowledge Munby's work on behalf of Langdon and several other disfigured women. To my reading, there is more than abjection or perversion in Munby's attention, but a benevolent interest in all members of the working-class who struggled to make a living. Munby's journals demonstrate that, motivations aside, there were those in

Victorian England who sought to actively aid “incurable” members of their society rather than ignoring them and the discrimination they faced.

One telling incident that provides insight into Munby’s compassionate sensibility occurs on July 15, 1864, when he comes into contact with Victorian “crawlers”: a homeless population of Londoners so dejected and starved that they lay motionless in some of the public spaces around the city, and when compelled to move, many crawled pitifully for lack of energy and strength. Crawlers were those inhabitants of London immortalized in the images of Gustav Dore’s and Blanchard Jerrold’s *London: A Pilgrimage* who preferred death by starvation in the streets to the indignity and horror of Victorian poorhouses—reminiscent of Betty Higdon in *Our Mutual Friend* who takes to the streets until she literally dies of exhaustion. These were the forgotten masses who, as Munby learns, sometimes died where they lay from starvation or other maladies. Munby records in his journal that he was walking through St. James Park when he

found the open spaces of ground on either side [of] the path thickly dotted over with strange objects. They were human beings; lying prone and motionless, not as those who lie down for rest & enjoyment, but as creatures worn out and listless. A park keeper came up: Who are these? I asked. They are men out of work, said he, and unfortunate girls; servant girls, many of them, what has been out of place and took to the streets, till they’ve sunk so low that they can’t get a living even by prostitution. It’s like this every day, till winter comes; and then what they do *I* don’t know. They comes as soon as the gates opens; always the same faces: they bring

broken victuals with 'em, or else goes to the soup kitchen in Vinegar (?)

Yard; and except for that, they lie about here all day. The girls herd with the men, whether they know 'em or not"

The park keeper goes on to explain how the men and women lie indiscriminately around the park, leaving only to sleep elsewhere when the gates are locked at night and returning again the next day. The park keeper appears disturbed by the impropriety of the crawlers, questioning their sexual morality. He is also concerned about the impression they might make on a world audience: "It's a disgrace Sir (said he), to go on in a City like this; and foreigners to see it, too! Why Sir, these unfortunates are all over the place: the ground (he added with a gesture of disgust) is lousy with them.'" The park keeper is completely without compassion for the crawlers. His attention is on them only as a marker of national shame and disgust. Clearly he had a sense of London as a renown city of progress and prominence. He appears concerned over England's national reputation as *the* world power—the empire with holdings upon which the sun never sets. He is keeper not only of the park but also, reluctantly, of its wretched inhabitants whom he views as a disease and contagion. The park keeper, like many people then as now, appears to blame the poor for their poverty and is disgusted by them.

Munby, however, is less concerned with national reputation and more filled with compassionate pity. His reaction is demonstrably different. After noting the park keeper's comments, Munby's journal records his own reaction: "I looked and looked; it was Dante and Virgil gazing on the damned; and still they did not move." He goes on to describe their ruined clothing as "drazzled," "rent," "crushed," and "faded," but discredits

the park keeper's aspersions about where the women lay, though he does liken them to animals:

Their hands and faces were dirty & weather stained; and they lay, not (as far as I saw) herding with the men, but singly or in little groups; sprawling about the grass in attitudes ungainly, and unfeminine, and bestial: one flat on her face, another curled up like a dog with her head between her knees bent under her, and her cheek on the ground, and her arms spread out stiff and awkward, on either side of her. Every pose expressed an absolute degradation and despair: and the silence & deadness of the prostrate crowd was appalling.

Munby's reaction stemmed from the shock of seeing human beings cast down into such an animalistic condition, forgotten and dejected in attitudes no human being should ever be forced into. He is also shocked at the sheer quantity of them: the surplus population that industrial capitalism bore no social responsibility for. His journal continues,

I counted these miserable lazzaroui (sic), as I went along; and on one side only of one path (leading from the lake to the Mall), there were one hundred and five of them. 105 forlorn and fetid outcasts—women, many of them—grovelling on the ground, in the bright sunshine of a July afternoon, with Carlton House Terrace and Westminster Abbey looking down at them, and infinite well drest citizens passing by on the other side. The keeper said he had no doubt there were more than 200 of these folk in the Park at that moment.”

Munby's allusion to Lazarus is telling. He clearly sees the crawlers as half-dead, to be pitied for their appalling condition and if resurrected, only to a hellish existence. He also demonstrates a keen awareness of their proximity to wealth and status, surrounded on one side by Westminster Abbey, historical burial place of kings, statesmen, poets, scientists, and warriors, and on the other by Carlton House Terrace, one of the most fashionable residential addresses in London and home to several Prime Ministers: Lord Palmerston, Earl Grey, and at the time of Munby's comment, William Gladstone, who lived there from 1857-75. Carlton House Terrace was built with views of the park and represented a superbly elite and fashionable residence. The irony of the crawlers being overshadowed by such architecture is not lost on Munby.

Later that month, on July 27, 1864, Munby again passes through St. James's Park and describes its occupants "lying prone and abject in the sunshine, and looking like nothing human; and every heap was a woman: and now and then the young miserable face would look up, close to my feet, and then hide itself again; like a white sea-monster under the waves. A sight fully of distress and perplexity to any human gazer. The deadness and silence and isolation of these wretched figures, contrasts horribly with the life and gaiety of Nature around them." Once again, the sight fills Munby with compassion and pity that human beings have been reduced to so abject and miserable an existence. His impulse is not to be read as passive voyeur, but as a man filled with empathy and a desire to intercede despite the seemingly insurmountable task of one man offering aid. His journal continues,

I had promised a sixpence to the shaven girl I saw here the other day; and looking for her now, I came upon another young woman whose head in like manner was shaven. Standing over her a moment, as she lay on the ground with her face between her arms, Are you the girl that I promised to give something to? She raised herself—and in spite of her shorn head she was still comely—and honestly said “No Sir.”

Disappointingly, Munby never records whether he was able to find the girl he sought or whether he rewarded the girl he complements here as both comely, despite her conditions, as well as honest. It matters, though, that he intended to—that he made a promise and tried to fulfill it when he was under no obligation. He could have been one of the countless “well drest citizens” who simply passed by without acting. Munby closes the entry by describing how, upon leaving the park, he noticed many dirty, overheated people “paralyzed with drowsiness” in the summer heat. Once again Munby juxtaposes Carlton House Terrace with the impoverished women who surround it, taking note of the vast and unfair contrast in circumstances: “[. . .] the broad steps at Carlton House Terrace were dotted over with costergirls, beggar girls, female harpists, and such like, who lay there careless of themselves, soiled and ragged, panting & indolent” on the very stairs of symbolic affluence. Critics who condemn Munby do so with the accusation that he used his privilege to compel working women to do as he wished—talk to him, carry him, let him photograph them, etc—without recognition for their lack of privilege. This is not an accurate rendering of Munby who did not pass by suffering with apathy but with consistent compassion and a willingness to act.

This willingness to act permeates Munby's relationship with Harriet Langdon.

One core aspect that Reay neglects to mention is how close a connection Munby had with Langdon and how strenuous an effort he made on her behalf. Only two days after their initial street meeting, his journal of August 24, 1861, records that Munby returned "and enquired for Harriet Langdon" whom he finds at home and views through a door that stood ajar. She is cleaning, "Her face uncovered, & seeing someone at the door, she instinctively put up her apron to hide it, but she recognized me and came forward." Munby is invited in, where he learns the history of her illness—that "it began twenty years ago, she but eight years old, and has been getting worse ever since."

Reay only briefly summarizes and quotes this first extended meeting, noting that Munby "promised to inquire about medical help in London, gave her a shilling (which she accepted reluctantly) and then departed" (Reay 40-1). His excerpt from the diary leaves readers with the impression that the visit was rather perfunctory and that the exchange of money for the visit appears a kind of illicit payment for a voyeur's pleasure. What Reay does not quote, however, is the line preceding this one that Langdon "had been to hospital in London once, and the doctors wanted her to stay; but she could not afford it when father died, and her friends are too poor to send her again. I promised to enquire about this." In this fuller context, it is clear that financial inability prevents Langdon from pursuing treatment that might benefit her. Leaving money for her in this light can as easily be read as benefactor aiding a single woman in difficult economic circumstances. I argued in Chapter 1 that Wordsworth's Armytage observes Margaret's suffering without offering any aid; this moment in Munby's journal is the first of many

instances that demonstrate his willingness to move beyond the silent, voyeuristic observer to that of active helpmate. This reading becomes all the more valid not only because of Munby's stated promise to help her pursue treatment, but because this promise is fulfilled. One can certainly argue that Munby's class position allowed him to compel Langdon to expose her face to him whenever he wished, as Reay points out⁵; with money comes power and possibly her inability to refuse his gaze. Yet equally true is that without Munby's financial assistance, Langdon would have lost out on even more in her woefully narrow life. Certainly it could not have been easy to find herself the object of anyone's gaze under the circumstances, since she was viewed as Other, yet many who looked did not offer help.

Still more analysis of this first visit is needed, though, because it sets the tone for their future relationship, for which Reay consistently faults Munby as being negative and cruel. The diary entry indeed records commentary that is extremely difficult to read, particularly when it comes to the possibility that Langdon might marry: "How should she have a sweetheart, whom no man can look at without horror and disgust? Contact with such disease would be a sin." Munby believes that no one could or should be paired with Langdon. Victor Frankenstein expresses a similar sentiment at the thought that his creation might reproduce. Although he initially agrees to create a mate for the creature, ultimately, Frankenstein refuses to do it out of fear that the couple would reproduce: "One of the first results of those sympathies for which the demon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the

⁵ Davidoff makes a similar claim regarding Munby's ability to persuade working-class women to be photographed in "Class and Gender in Victorian England."

very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (Shelley 150). Anxiety over the reproduction of disabled or “deformed” people was not uncommon and in fact grew as the century progressed.

Fear that the “wrong” types of human beings would reproduce ultimately generated the British eugenics movement led by Francis Galton’s 1869 publication *Hereditary Genius* in which he claimed that abilities and characteristics were hereditary. The Eugenics movement promoted sterilization for those deemed “socially unfit.” While there was no legislative success for the movement in England, it remained a popular theory for solving social problems. The popularity of eugenic theory spread to the US where there were laws in over half of the states that legalized sterilization without the knowledge or consent of the recipient. In fact, when the constitutionality of such laws was tested in the Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ rendering of the majority decision sounded eerily like Frankenstein’s rationale for preventing his creature from reproducing: “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind” (May 95).⁶

When discussing the parallels between Munby and Frankenstein, there are obvious limits. Yes, Munby rejected out of hand the idea that Langdon would find a

⁶ The target population for sterilization in the US and later in Nazi Germany included those with physical and mental disabilities: “the Feeble Minded: using the term generally . . . The Pauper Class: pauper feeble-minded through successive generations . . . The Criminaloids: persons born with marked criminal tendencies . . . Epileptics . . . The Insane . . . The Constitutionally Weak . . . Those predisposed to specific diseases . . . The Congenitally Deformed . . . Those having defective sense organs, such as the deaf-mutes, the deaf and the blind” (May 106-7). Some current disability scholars see prenatal testing for selective abortion as a chilling consequence of the eugenic thinking begun in the 19th century. See Ruth Hubbard’s “Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Who Should Not Inhabit the World?” and Marsha Saxton’s “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion” for two compelling responses.

mate, but he is in no way her creator as Frankenstein is to his creature. Furthermore, Munby's thoughts remain private, not ones expressed to Langdon, and there is nothing malicious intended in his words. To be clear: had Munby expressed to Langdon in words or in deed the commentary in his journal regarding her appearance, this would indeed be indefensible. Reay points out one instance where Munby reveals to Langdon how he perceives her. After purchasing a mask for her, Munby records a conversation they have in an August 1, 1865, entry where Munby tells her that "'The truth is, you have no face in this world,' say I: 'No, only in the next,' the poor creature replies." This is a rare instance in the journals, though, where Munby verbalizes any negative opinion to Langdon. His choice of the word "creature" finds a parallel with Frankenstein's.

The Extent of Langdon's Condition

Yet Munby's commentary also signals a medical awareness of the severity of Langdon's condition. In the 1860's, doctors differentiated among several different types of lupus: exedens, superficial, hypertrophic, syphilitic, etc. Langdon's condition garnered the label of lupus exedens—a more severe type characterized by its eroding tendency. Patients with this type of lupus often had noses or ears that disintegrated from the disease, ulcers on the skin, thickened skin at the lips, and eyelids that turned up or down: all symptoms which Langdon had.

While such conditions did spark Munby to comment on her lack of a face in this entry, more often, he verbally downplayed Langdon's physical appearance when speaking of it with her—a practice he also assumed when interacting with several other

women who had facial disfigurements. His aim was to comfort and cheer, not cruelly cut. On August 8, 1863, for example, Munby visits Langdon and finds “her face better, i.e. less virulently ulcerous than usual: so that after looking at it I assured her it was ‘very nice’ and ‘almost like other people’s!’ It was meant for comfort, and received as such.” Whether Langdon really believed this assurance is doubtful; certainly, Munby was telling what he considered a lie, as is clear when his journal continues: “yet what mockery, to tell a poor girl whose face is blurred crimson colour, whose lips are swollen & distorted, and who has no nose, that she is like other people!” Munby did not believe his own assurances, and Langdon may not have either. Nevertheless, it underscores a conscious attempt on Munby’s part to safeguard Langdon’s feelings and separate what he thought about her privately from what he actually verbalized to her. At any rate, when the visit ends, Langdon says, “God bless you, Sir!” so there is at least room to believe that she accepted his kind words, whether she honestly believed them or not.

What this passage demonstrates is that there were those in Victorian London who were willing to interact with the disfigured on the level of friendship. Langdon was not ostracized by Munby—far from it. While kindly intentioned, Munby’s reassurances to Langdon also indicate that for Victorians, as for so many now, acceptance for the disfigured comes by how well they can pass as “normal”—how convincingly their identities parallel those with normative faces and bodies. “It was meant for comfort” because it was intended to favorably compare Langdon to the real people of value: the non disfigured. That Munby later buys Langdon false noses, discussed at length in the

next chapter—serves this same function—they are props to approximate normalcy. They help the abnormal appear less so.

When further interpreting his first extended visit to Langdon, disgust is far from the only emotion that Munby displays, even though it is the one Reay exclusively comments on. To my reading, mixed with his admitted revulsion for her physical appearance, Munby demonstrates an enormous ability to sympathize as he imagines what her life must have been like:

No childish amusements for her; no girlish gaiety & pride of person or dress; no womanly companionship and love. How should she care for dress or display, for pleasant walks or Sunday evening parades, for company of parlour friends; she who has always been shut out from all society, & whose only hope when she steals out of doors is, that no one will notice her or catch even a glimpse of her loathsome face?

Such is not the commentary of a man who finds Langdon utterly without value as a human being, but of someone willing to imagine himself in her place and empathize over what she must have been left out of in life, especially in a period that defined a woman's worth and identity in connection to the love of a husband and children—a life Munby asserts is out of reach for Langdon. In this context, his remarks can be faulted for the sexism and ableism of the period, but not for want of human feeling. He clearly identifies her sense of alienation and estrangement from everyday social interactions. Munby's fault is not cruelty, but that he accepts her isolation and social estrangement as inevitable, and so in this sense helps construct disfigurement as an alienating experience

when it need not be. Part of the symbolic level of oppression is the stereotype attached to the disfigured person. In this instance, the stereotyped assumption is that the disfigured must hide away and live outside of society, which then becomes part of how disability is produced and maintained as a social condition.

Definition of Terms

It is important to spend some time distinguishing between disfigurement and disability. Clearly, they are indicative of somewhat different physical experiences, divided generally between body and face; yet they also signify varying social responses that are closely intertwined. Both are terms that have social, aesthetic, and economic meanings. Disability was not a word that was used in the 19th century. Instead, the word that signified what we would call physical disability was “crippled”—a term pervasive in the literature and social writing of the period. The word most commonly applied to Harriet Langdon was “incurable”—a term that signified a physical condition for which there was no medical remedy. In her case, this condition was lupus.

While “crippled” appears at its face to indicate an inability to work that might signify a more economic term, this inability is certainly relative. There were many crippled Victorians who could and did work. Certainly part of the public perception about crippled people (and disabled people now) was that they were not capable of work and were thus less economically useful in a capitalist economy. In this ideology, they are constructed as dependants. Such an assumption, however, is part of the way disability is constructed; it makes the disabled less able than they would otherwise be if, say, a

broader range of productivity were acceptable and thought of as useful and valid. The word “crippled” also connoted an aesthetic response: most Victorians recoiled from the visual difference of a bent spine, missing limb, or twisted torso.

Disfigurement indicated a facial “abnormality” and was hence a term more overtly connected with aesthetics. Since women particularly were judged based on appearance and their beauty used to secure marriage, disfigurement was a largely gendered phenomenon. A disfigured person was not necessarily disabled, but similar stigma attached to both identities, as I argue below. The social response to disfigurement was frequently to require a veil or mask and mandate isolation. Additionally, disfigurement had an economic resonance because it often impacted one’s ability to find work and hence be and be seen as economically productive. It also could prevent one from being seen as marriageable—another economic as well as personal disadvantage.

There is frequently intentional slippage in my use of disability and disfigurement to describe Harriet Langdon because for her, there was no appreciable difference between the terms. That is, as I will argue more extensively later in the chapter, being disfigured made Harriet Langdon disabled. First, she did have a physical condition that ulcerated her skin, caused pain, and eroded skin tissue. Her face was also severely disfigured: she had a missing nose, infected mucous tissue, facial lesions, and eyelids that were inverted. Her condition as a Victorian incurable was social, economic, and aesthetic. While Langdon was physically capable of working despite having lupus, the response to her disfigurement prevented her from being hired and hence created a more disabling experience.

Disfigurement and Stigma

In Erving Goffman's seminal text *Stigma*, he argues that "we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances" (132). A large part of this discrimination, Goffman argues, is achieved when the "normals" isolate and separate the stigmatized individual—described by Goffman as "the person he is normal against" (133). His phrasing underscores that perceived normalcy is used as a weapon against those defined in opposition to it as different. "[. . .] an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated" (132). Munby's attitude about Langdon is complex. Members of a society who are identifiable as normal can have conflicting internal responses to stigmatized individuals. While he accepts that she should be isolated in the sense that she is presumably precluded from a romantic/marital relationship in his eyes, he does not accept her complete social isolation. He interacts both publicly and privately with her and insists that she be accepted into the working world. Munby's reaction indicates the more nuanced aspects of stigma response.

Munby's privileged gender and class position are irrefutable, especially in his next comment during the same August 8, 1863 entry: "It is true, that having grown up a

kind of leper and outcast, long habit and the blunter sensibilities of a lower class make life tolerable; so that, finding her own relatives can bear with her unveiled, she may think less (or, after the manner of women, not at all) of her isolation. But still, what a life for a woman!” In *Stigma* Goffman argues that “We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his [the stigmatized person’s] inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class” (132). Such a rationalization is present in Munby’s description above, and again, clearly present in his remark is the assumption that isolation is inevitable. We can condemn him for the unapologetic sexism and classism pervasive in the comment, as in the period, but in this entry and in all of his subsequent dealings with Langdon, there is an underlying sympathy and desire to help a woman whom virtually everyone in society—women and men, wealthy and poor, young and old, cast off as too repulsive to help.

Munby’s fault is that he uncritically accepts Langdon’s life as isolated by definition—that is, he never questions that his own (and society’s) assumptions about the necessity of isolating her are what partly construct her disability. The faulty logic of the period argues that because she is disfigured, she must be cut off from society, when in fact it is this imposed isolation that contributes to the social aspect of her disability. Even her sister is critical and less sympathetic at times than one should expect from one’s family. Munby cannot be faulted, at least, for a willingness to step in and offer sustained assistance where few others would. This assistance came not only in much needed financial aid, as we shall see later, but also in repeated visits to her residence (and she to

his), dozens of letters exchanged every year, and occasional social outings together to popular destinations like Kew Gardens, the Academy, Covent Gardens, and the circus. While rightly condemned for voyeurism in Reay's text, Munby is not given proper credit for any of his benevolent acts. For although his journal suggests his understanding of society's rejection of Langdon as inevitable, which implies a tacit endorsement of such a position, he does not reject or isolate her himself, but attempts time and again to create—to *mandate*—a place for her, both in social and employment settings.

Clara Hewett in Isolation

In George Gissing's 1889 novel *The Nether World*, readers are presented with a similarly isolated disfigured woman, Clara Hewett, who is stigmatized and relegated to an isolated position upon her disfigurement. Gissing's novel turns on the attempt of characters to escape the poverty and degradation they experience in the Clerkenwell slum where they live. Clara even turns down a marital suitor, Sidney Kirkwood, in favor of her plan to leave their neighborhood and all that it represents for her. Clara's plan of escape is to become an actress, which she manages to do until acid is thrown in her face by a rival actress who covets her part. Prior to acting, Clara made a living as a waitress in a tawdry public house, hired because her beauty was thought to increase business. After her disfigurement, there is no question of her returning to such public life. She becomes a virtual recluse who refuses to leave the relative safety and obscurity of her impoverished father's rented room and remains covered, like Langdon, to prevent being seen. Clara was "so wrapped and veiled that nothing but the womanly outline could be

discerned” (Gissing 243). Clara is repeatedly described as existing in isolation: “She would not leave her room “and spent her time “hiding her face as far as she was able” even from her own family members (Gissing 245). While described as still having a graceful figure and form, much the way Munby describes Langdon, her “countenance was no longer that of Clara Hewett; none must now look at her, unless to pity. Feeling herself thus utterly changed, she could not speak in her former natural voice; her utterance was oppressed, unmusical, monotonous” (Gissing 245). Clara’s voice, symbolic of her sense of autonomy, becomes another dull element in a world fatalistically controlled and pre-determined in her case by the intersection of classism, ableism, and looksism.

Clara Hewett’s world after disfigurement was “so gloomy a monotony that it was impossible she should endure it much longer” (Gissing 273). She remained in “her cell”—a bedroom shared with siblings where she slept and lived, and came out only for meals so as not to prove more of an inconvenience: “To save trouble, she came into the middle room for her meals [. . .] always keeping as much of her face as possible hidden. The children could not overcome a repulsion, a fear, excited by her veil and the muteness she preserved in their presence” (Gissing 273). It is clear that Clara’s isolation is partly self-imposed but also brought on by the negative reactions she excites in all but her father. Her isolation is emphasized by her complete lack of communication and speech—as if she barely exists at all. Gissing goes on to describe how her younger sister found it difficult to sleep in the same room with her and how Clara only went out “perhaps every

third day, after dark, stealing silently down the long staircase, and walking rapidly until she had escaped the neighborhood” (273).

Ultimately, Clara faces the realization that while her life was brutal and suffocating to her before her injury, once she becomes disfigured, her existence will prove unbearable, especially once her father dies and she finds it imperative to try to make her own living:

In the desolation of her future she read a punishment equal to the daring wherewith she had aspired. Excepting her poor old father, not a living soul [. . .] held account of her. She might live for years and years. Her father would die, and then no smallest tribute of love or admiration would be hers for ever. More than that; perforce she must gain her own living, and in doing so she must expose herself to all manner of insulting wonder and pity. Was it a life that could be lived? (275)

It is clear from the text that Clara shares Munby’s assumption that she will live unloved and unmarried. Her expectations appear to conform to those of societal expectations; she sees herself the way society sees her: at best as pitiable and at worst as inciting fear and loathing. ““Can I go out into a world like that—alone?” was the thought which made Clara’s spirit fail as she stood gazing. ‘Can I face life as it is for women who grow old in earning bare daily bread among those terrible streets? Year after year to go in and out from some wretched garret that I call home, with my face hidden, my heart stabbed with misery till it is cold and bloodless!’” (Gissing 280). For Clara, as for Langdon, the

thought of struggling alone in an attempt to survive is horrifying in its oppressive injustice, in the sheer difficulty of the task before her.

When Clara asks herself whether such a life could be lived, she is tempted to say no. She raises up suddenly after pondering this question and moves quickly out to the top of the courtyard where she contemplates taking her own life: “She leaned forward over the bar and measured the distance that separated her from the ground; a ghastly height! Surely one would not feel much after such a fall? In any case, the crashing agony of but an instant” (Gissing 275). The brevity of the pain from such a suicide is contrasted with the long years ahead of her in which she must try to make a living all alone. It is unclear whether or not she might have been so despondent as to jump in that moment, for suddenly someone starts coming up the stairs where she stood, and upon fear of being seen, she retreats.

Still, it leaves a lasting imprint on her: “She had felt the horrible fascination of that sheer depth, and thought of it for days, thought of it until she dreaded to quit the tenement, lest a power distinct from will should seize and hurl her to destruction” (Gissing 275). Ultimately, Clara’s instinct for self-preservation enables her to persevere until she finds an alternative route to suicide. The sheer desperation of being poor and disfigured would likely have pushed her to act had it not been for her still-living father. Likewise, Langdon suffers immensely at her forced isolation from society, the increasing bitterness of her sister, and the inability to make a living. Ultimately, as I argue in the next chapter, both will discover a degree of autonomy through the means of another person.

Denied Disfigurement in *Bleak House*

Perhaps the best known disfigured woman in Victorian literature is Esther Summerson in Dickens' *Bleak House*. Summerson presents a challenge regarding interpretation because her presentation is often ambiguous and conflicting. At the face of it, her rendering appears entirely unlike that of Hewett's and Langdon's. When Esther becomes disfigured after a life and death struggle with an unnamed illness, presumably smallpox, her scarred face is presented as making no difference whatsoever to the people who surround her; Jarndyce, Woodcourt, Ada, Richard, Miss Flite, and Charley all treat her as if her disfigurement has made no change in her at all.

Esther is not presented as socially isolated in the way that Clara Hewett consistently is, but as the continued social center of the novel. Nor does Esther ever consider suicide as even a remote possibility. In terms of the less familial social response to Esther's disfigurement, it is presented as largely accepting. When Esther reenters village life after her illness, she is universally beloved: "Thus what with being so much in the air, playing with so many children, gossiping with so many people, sitting on invitation in so many cottages, going on with Charley's education, and writing long letters to Ada every day, I had scarcely any time to think about that little loss of mine, and was almost always cheerful" (*Bleak House* 575). This would seem to present a positive depiction that disfigurement need not mandate social exclusion. Indeed, after Esther's recovery, each of the characters noted above virtually ignores her physical change and enters into conversation with her about completely unrelated life occurrences

such as the Chancery suit and Richard's obsession with it, Lady Dedlock's acquirement of Esther's handkerchief, and other household and community matters.

Scholars have responded to Esther's role in the novel primarily in terms of whether she is or is not able to produce a stable self through her narrative. Helena Michie in "'Who is this in Pain?' Disfigurement and Female Identity" (1989) usefully encapsulates the critical response to Esther: "In one version, Esther journeys from a deprived childhood through a series of trials to emerge, fully integrated, into marriage and desire; in the other, Esther's self and narrative are framed by the endlessly replicating fantasies of Jarndyce or Jarndyce and Dickens, which trap her, at the end of the novel, in a house that she has neither named nor chosen" (201). In Michie's estimation, for Dickens "pain necessarily both temporarily reproduces female physicality and makes any notion of the stable and fully representable female self impossible" (199). She argues that *Bleak House* is about "the construction of the female self through pain and fragmentation" where "the reader is invited to gaze not only at the mirror and at the face that appears on its surface, but at the making and unmaking of that face and the self it represents—at its making and unmaking through pain" (200).

In "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated" (1973), Alex Zwerdling offers a more sympathetic estimation of both Dickens' narrative ability and of Esther Summerson's character in which he denies critics' claims that she is "a hopelessly inconsistent character" who "could hardly be expected to understand the complex institutions and devious characters she is asked to describe" (429). Zwerdling offers a psychological reading of Esther as an abused child whose only kind companion is her doll and who, in

her own words, wanted desperately to “win some love to myself if I could” (*Bleak House* 31). Esther’s childhood was alienating and lonely, something she acknowledges herself: “I knew I had brought no joy, at any time, to anybody’s heart, and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me” (*Bleak House* 31). In the face of such emotional barrenness, Zwerdling interprets Esther as having “great doubts about her right to love and marry” and as sublimating her own desires by putting herself second to the love between Ada and Richard (430). He argues “how efficiently she has been bullied into denying any sense of her own worth” and how “Dickens’ interest in Esther is fundamentally clinical: to observe and describe a certain kind of psychic debility. [. . . .] The function of Esther’s narrative, then, is to show us the deeper and more lasting effects of such neglect” (432-33).

Both Michie and Zwerdling offer largely ahistorical interpretations with respect to how disfigurement was treated in favor of foregrounding psychoanalytic arguments about the formation of female selfhood. Neither writes from a disability studies perspective, which is not surprising since one did not then exist in literary studies. In “Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century,” Lennard Davis provides a brief beginning to a useful interpretation of Esther from a disability studies perspective: “If disability appears in a novel, it is rarely centrally represented. It is unusual for a main character to be a person with disabilities, although minor characters, like Tiny Tim, can be deformed in ways that arouse pity. In the case of Esther Summerson, who is scarred by smallpox, her scars are made virtually to disappear through the agency of love” (11). Davis suggests that Esther

barely counts as a disfigured character; she is denied this material reality. While this is the only line about Esther in an essay otherwise focused on the construction of able-bodied normalcy, his comment suggests to me one explanation for why she is so universally accepted after her illness: those who love her do not see or do not want to see her scars. While this is perhaps a kindly testament to the power of familial love, it is not unproblematic. Like the (typically white) person who claims not to see color in terms of interacting with non-white others, the claim may be intended to establish equality, but what it often does is erase difference in favor of a mythical norm where experience is assumed to be the same. Seeing color is important. Seeing disfigurement is important. Both are aspects of identity that inform a person's experience in the world. Ignoring difference is not a valid method of avoiding discrimination because it erases the material circumstances in a person's world. In this way, I would argue that the seemingly "positive" reaction to Esther's disfigurement is a well-meaning but misguided attempt to safeguard her feelings by establishing that she is still "normal" in the eyes of those who surround her. And to them, "normal" *must* mean non-disfigured.

Significantly, critics have seen Esther as possessing a kind of coyness or false modesty, and have condemned her for a saccharine goodness: "Esther is also frequently accused of coyness, particularly in her insistence on disclaiming the compliments heaped upon her while faithfully recording them" (Zwerdling 429). But consider instead that Esther is being candid in rejecting the compliments—that it is *her* reality that is being rejected by her loved ones who insist that she remain static in character as well as in

appearance. Their refusal to see or acknowledge her scars is a denial of her lived experience. Esther's autobiography of her face is at odds with how others see her.

Fearing social rejection when experiencing disfigurement was altogether in keeping with Esther's historical moment in which the disfigured were frequently ostracized. Her anxiety on this point is understandable and well-founded given the historical context. In fact, before she was ever concerned for her own face, she was worried about Charley's, since the girl was ill before her: "I was very sorrowful to think that Charley's pretty looks would change and be disfigured, even if she recovered—she was such a child, with her dimpled face" (*Bleak House* 500). Esther is aware of the judgments that society makes about disfigurement, aware of the changes it entails, and she is rightfully concerned for Charley.

Once Esther falls ill herself, her narrative makes clear that her potential disfigurement is frequently on her mind: "I felt sure I was steady enough to say something to Charley that was not new to my thoughts. [. . .] 'I miss some familiar object. Ah, I know what it is, Charley! It's the looking-glass'" (557-58). Esther has long suspected that its removal indicated a significant change in her appearance. Her suspicion is confirmed when Charley promptly exits to the adjoining room after this query, where Esther "heard her sob there. I had thought of this very often. I was now certain of it. I could thank God that it was not a shock to me now" (558). This incident indicates that there is a marked change in Esther's appearance, but no admission of it is made by Charley or any other of Esther's family and friends. It is Esther herself who must name her own reality, grow used to it, and face its realness alone. When Charley

reenters, Esther remarks, “It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well” (558). Thus it is Esther who for the first time here, and for many, many times to come, must name her own experience that is denied and ignored by virtually everyone around her.

Yet while Esther appears to have a seamless non-transition before and after her illness in the eyes of others, she herself is singularly affected by the change, despite her protestations that it is a “little loss” and that it “matters very little.” In a society in which a woman’s value is so often linked to her appearance, it matters a great deal. It is Esther herself who acknowledges that any claim of affection and a possible future that Allan Woodcourt might have offered her is now entirely beyond her reach. In the very moment when Esther finally imparts the “little secret I have thus far tried to keep [. . .] that Mr. Woodcourt loved me,” (570) she must instead retract the wish, for as a disfigured woman, she is aware that such an offer could not be sustained. Esther expresses relief that there was not a bond between them so that she never has the necessity of breaking an engagement that her disfigurement would have caused: “What should I have suffered, if I had had to write to him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me, and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!” (570). Esther’s admission underscores that disfigurement would have been a reason for an honorable woman to break an engagement and thus prevent “entrapping” a man in a miserable marriage. Her comment also distinctly emphasizes that she perceives herself after her illness as a new person who will begin a history quite at odds with her former self. She continues,

O, it was so much better as it was! With a great pang mercifully spared me, I could take back to my heart my childish prayer to be all he had so brightly shown himself; and there was nothing to be undone: no chain for me to break, or for him to drag; and I could go, please God, my lowly way along the path of duty, and he could go his nobler way upon its broader road. (570)

These passages are not false modesty on Esther's behalf. She is being neither coy nor a martyr, but stating clearly that the social expectations would necessitate a break in such circumstances. The truth of her sensibility is underscored by Mr. Guppy's horrified reaction to Esther's face. He is the only character in the text whose response to Esther, while selfish, is in alignment with her sense of the reality of her position. Guppy insists that Esther acknowledge that she had unequivocally denied his former marriage proposal. He is terrified that she will try to trap him into marriage now that she has become disfigured. His response does not endear him to readers, certainly, and he presents a decidedly unlikable demeanor, but this is in large part because he underestimates Esther's character rather than that he rejects her appearance. Esther had no intention of trying to force a marriage. The incident, though, is instructive in that at least it is in keeping with a realistic though repugnant social response. In this sense, it serves to undergird Esther's truth that she has changed, at least in facial appearance. This truth does not mandate discrimination—Guppy could have seen the change in her face and responded differently. Yet he at least he does not ignore that there *is* a change. It is a truth that none of the other characters will admit to.

By the novel's close, Woodcourt has married Esther, but it is not by her own doing. Jarndyce's passed her, unasked, to Woodcourt as a fait accompli, complete with new home—importantly a home whose name does not change. Neither the estate nor the marriage was Esther's choice; her choice was to marry Jarndyce. The men assume they are doing what she secretly desires, yet this only underscores that both men act as if they know her better than she knows herself. While the marriage is presented as a happy ending for Esther, it is not one that she herself chose or set in motion.

Significantly, Woodcourt also still denies her facial reality. At the close of the novel, Esther tells him that she has been thinking of her “old looks—such as they were,” Woodcourt's response is to ask, “do you ever look in the glass?” to which Esther replies that he knows she does. Woodcourt's version of her, though, is utterly at odds with her own: “And don't you know that you are prettier than you ever were?” (989). This is not simply a fairy tale ending in which a husband cannot see his wife's flaws, but a consistent denial of Esther's reality as a disfigured person. She is the same maternal, domestic, ever unchanging “Dame Durden” to him. But Esther cannot accept these words. Her refusal is not self-deprecation or an inability to see beauty. The issue is that it is at odds with her reality. When he asks whether she doesn't know that she's prettier than ever, Esther responds, “I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now” (989). To know this would require her to disavow her own experience in favor of his—to deny what she knows to be true: she is scarred; she is disfigured. That's why she hid away before reuniting with Ada; she needed to prepare herself. Instead of responding again to her husband, Esther's final thoughts, the last in the novel, are to herself rather than voiced

aloud: “and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—” (989). It is a reiteration of her lack of beauty—her knowledge that she is scarred. What would be the point of saying this aloud? Throughout the novel, she has never been heard in her own terms on this point. She is written over by their insistence on her being just the same as she ever was even though plainly she is not. However kindly it is meant, they are bent on denying her the reality of her disfigured experience just as they deny her so many other things, like choosing her own husband.

Seeking Hospital Care

Although Langdon, like Clara Hewett, was intended to remain isolated, neither woman does. Roughly one week after his first extended visit to Langdon, Munby records in his journal of October 1st, 1861, the first of a series of inquiries he makes on Langdon’s behalf to secure medical assistance and treatment for lupus. He knew that she needed qualified aid to ameliorate her physical condition and he wasted no time trying to find it: “Went down to Blackfriars in the afternoon, to enquire about the admission of Harriet Langdon into the hospital there. Saw one of the surgeons, but could not get much information.” His attempt continued on October 10th when he notes that he “Went to Blackfriars Hospital about H. Langdon. [. . .] In the consultation room sat the doctor, a gross large man of blunt manners, seeing patients one by one, and with two plain but intelligent looking young men, his pupils, behind him. They advised me to apply at Bartholomew’s,” a suggestion Munby follows the very next day, as recorded in his October 11th entry: “I went to [. . .] Bartholomew’s in the afternoon. I was referred by

one of several gentlemanly students to the house surgeon on duty, also a gentlemanly and obliging young man. Certainly, to a stranger at least no public place is so noble, so suggestive of skillful benevolence and patient selfsacrifice, [sic] as an hospital: & Bartholomew's is the noblest of these in London." Despite his good impression, he did not gain entry for Langdon at Bartholomew's, for on November 16th, 1861, he records that he went "to the Royal Hospital in the Poultry, about Harriet Langdon," and on November 30th "to one or two societies about Harriet Langdon without success." Finally, on March 8th, 1862, Munby's efforts paid off and he was able to secure a hospital visit for his charge: "At the Hospital I called by appointment on the house surgeon, W. J. D. Hill, a pleasant and I believe a clever young man: and at once obtained from him a promise to admit Harriet Langdon, whenever I like to send for her to London."

I don't include these entries to be repetitive; no doubt this is not an exhaustive list of the enquiries Munby prepared, a fact made clear enough simply by noting Munby's remark that he had come by appointment and so necessarily would have had to have set this up prior to his diary notation. My point is twofold. First, the world of surgeons and even doctors' pupils, is a privileged space, as is the hospital itself. It is a world best negotiated by someone familiar and comfortable with those within its class ranking. It seems patently clear that, irrespective of finances, Munby would have a great deal more success negotiating this space than would someone of Langdon's status—which is to say that he did her an important service. It is not likely that she would have found the experience as ennobling as he did, nor as likely that she would have found someone

willing to hear her case when there were so many similar cases to compete for attention and resources.

What these entries suggest on a broader level is that treatment of lupus in the Victorian era was possible—alleviating the symptoms and lessening the discomfort could happen, but treatment was not immediately forthcoming for a working-class person. Even with Munby's intervention on Langdon's behalf, several attempts needed to be made before a willing doctor could be found. Further, Munby was privileged and was likely better able to garner attention from the medical staff. The average working-class person making such a plea on his or her own would have faced even more resistance. Not surprisingly, health care required money or influence or both. Many obstacles impeded the way for a poor person working on his or her own to gain entry: ignorance that treatment was possible, an inability to pay for it, lack of access to transportation, and time away from work if employed. Moreover, in a metropolis the size of London, the competition for such beds and medical care was immense. Making oneself heard over the desperate voices of thousands of other needy disabled and disfigured people was a monumental task. It was far more common to receive no treatment and to degenerate and ultimately die from one's malady.

Additionally, I think Reay's attention to this point is too succinct when he simply notes that "Munby arranged for Langdon to go to London in 1862, having gained her admission to the Free Hospital in Gray's Inn Road" before turning to the entry that records the hospital visit itself (Reay 41). While factually accurate, the brevity of such a move erases the very real labor Munby undertook on Langdon's behalf, following up lead

after lead and not quitting until he succeeded in finding a place for her. It is important to remember that Munby and Langdon are not related by blood or family connection. He bears no responsibility for her other than due to his own moral sense of duty to a human being who is suffering and whom it is in his power to help. If Munby's sole motivation was simply voyeuristic, it is entirely unlikely that he would have tracked down repeated leads of where to find Langdon the medical attention she could potentially benefit from. That Munby made repeated efforts demonstrates his very real concern for her situation. As a Londoner, a man, and of upper middle class rank, Munby used his privilege on Langdon's behalf. Had his only interest been to stare at her deformity, he need not have bothered with any of this. She had already welcomed him to her home and would very likely welcome him again, even if he did nothing else for her but pay a social visit.

Munby did do more, though—much more. On April 30th, 1862, Munby records in his journal that “After about six months of unsuccessful effort, I have at last obtained for Harriet Langdon of Ilfracombe a free admission to an Hospital here—the free Hospital in Gray's Inn Road.” While Munby had far more money than Langdon, he did have financial stress, as I have discussed, and was careful to be sure his money was being used for the purpose he intended. In the same April 30th entry, he notes that “In order to test her sincerity, I thought it prudent to stipulate that she or her friends, who are poor folk, should pay her passage to Bristol; I paying the rest.” This would ensure for Munby that Langdon would use the money for the purpose they had agreed upon: to seek a cure. Langdon agreed, and she made the journey with her sister and sister's husband—Munby

meeting them in Bristol as planned and accompanying Langdon from there to the hospital in London.

The Medical Response

During this trip, as on many other occasions, Munby requests to see her face and remarks in his journal, “Poor creature, it was more hideous than ever: the skin crimson, and spotted with foul scabs; the eyes and the swollen lips suppurated, and the lower eyelids drawn down and reversed; the hollow sore where once the nose had been, horrible to see.” Requests like these and the subsequent internal commentary they drew from Munby are no doubt why Reay labels Munby a voyeur as well as cruel. His desire to look and to consequently be repelled are undeniable. Munby also records the reaction of Dr. Selwood (who treated Langdon) when she first reveals her face: “I noticed a little spasm of horror even on his calm professional countenance. It was indeed much as if a skull had suddenly revealed itself in lieu of a woman’s face.” In Barry Reay’s chapter on the relationship between Munby and Langdon, he uses this passage to further condemn Munby: “After Langdon had been admitted, the doctor told Munby that it was the worst case of lupus that he had seen. The relevant diary entry finishes with Munby’s self-congratulation on gaining the trust of a ‘young and lonely woman’—it exudes the sense of power that he gained from such relationships” (Reay 41).

Reay’s conclusion is incomplete at best. He argues that for Munby this was an occasion to “record Langdon’s hideousness and gratitude,” but his version of the journal entry is first of all condensed, and second consistently reads Munby through the darkest

possible lens (41). It is certainly possible to read the journal and come to a vastly different conclusion in light of Munby's aid to Langdon. While Munby did maintain control of Langdon to the extent that she would reveal her face to him when asked, in this particular instance, Munby's gaze enables him to have the "before" image against which to compare her upcoming medical treatment. It serves to chart her progress, which he does throughout her time in hospital. I am not suggesting that Munby was not fascinated by Langdon's disfigurement, only that his motivation was absolutely not simply self-serving.

After his initial examination of Langdon, the doctor closes the door to speak to Munby privately. Munby records that Selwood "gave vent to his surprise and pity," sentiments that Munby shared. Munby doesn't bring Langdon to the hospital to feel powerful, but to get her assistance because her condition is so severe. On his first visit to Langdon's house, Munby was struck by the extent of it: "Her face was even worse than it seemed at first sight: the very eyes being full of sores, besides being distorted. And that hideous hollow in the centre of her face, where the nose had been, was foul with a fetid mucus which was absolutely offensive" (August 24, 1861). Munby recognized that Langdon's condition needed attention, and once at the hospital, that the doctor himself had "never seen so bad a case of Lupus in [his] life" confirms that Langdon's physical circumstances are remarkable—not that Munby was justified in staring, but that it was all but inevitable. If a surgeon who routinely treats cases of lupus, scrofula, and cancer that result in disfigurement cannot but be shocked at the advanced state of Langdon's

condition, Munby can hardly be faulted for the same. More shocking is that provisions for English citizens in such dire need were not immediately available.

Their joint reaction is reminiscent of a doctor's comment in the December 6, 1862, edition of *The British Medical Journal* regarding a patient with a similar case of lupus:

J. N., aged 36, labourer, was admitted June 9th, 1860. He has suffered with his disease fourteen years. It commenced in one hand, and a surgeon amputated part of a finger on account of it. His face and both hands are now affected, the face all over. The disease is well-marked lupus, without the eroding tendency. The face is much swollen, very red, with tubercular formations here and there; the nostrils and ocular apertures are contracted; and the lips thickened and stiffened; the disease encroaches a little on the mucous surface. His aspect is nothing less than hideous. The backs of the hands are covered in large patches by extremely thick scabs, which adhere to extraordinary papilloid prolongations of the cutis with remarkable firmness. (577-8)

While one might expect a level of objectivity from medical professionals, this published article on the etiology and treatment of lupus clearly demonstrates that doctors adhere to the same cultural assumptions and harbor the same visceral reactions to disfigurement as the public at large. In "Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction," Martha Stoddard Holmes offers a telling example that the medical community shared and helped produce the negative assessment of disabled life. She quotes from Physician William Lawrence's

decidedly non-clinical introduction to a series of lectures on eye disease and its treatments:

“Blindness is one of the greatest calamities that can befall human nature short of death; and many think that the termination of existence would be preferable to its continuance in the solitary, dependent, and imperfect state to which human life is reduced by the privation of this precious sense . . . their existence reduced to a dreary blank—dark, solitary and cheerless—burthensome to themselves and to those around them.” (qtd in Holmes 29)

Here is a catalogue of negative stereotypes about one disabled experience that makes it a catastrophe worse than death. Such histrionics abound both in literary as well as medical accounts of disabled life, contributing to the symbolic level of oppression for disabled people. Such stereotypes serve the abled majority by differentiating clearly between normal and “abnormal” bodies. Holmes argues that “like so many twentieth-century narratives of disability, the stories of feeling written on the bodies of nineteenth-century people with impairments seem written to express and manage the feelings of the nonimpaired” (31). They are not reflective of the totality of the disabled person’s own sense of self but the projection of horror and loss placed by the normative body on the “abnormal” one.

Similarly, alongside the medical catalogue of J. N.’s condition, there is an aesthetic commentary of him/her as “hideous”—a descriptor that goes beyond the clinical. Presumably, J. N.—whose disease was not the eroding kind that Langdon had—was never privy to the doctor’s description, nor was Langdon cognizant of hers. The

discussion of her condition happened in a separate room, not in front of her. Like his private commentary in the journal, any discussion he had with the doctor was never intended for Langdon to hear or be distressed by. Nevertheless, it demonstrates a singular assessment both within and outside of the medical profession: neither was beyond aesthetic considerations. Doctors live within not outside of culture. If those who routinely deal with such disfigurement react with aversion, it can hardly be surprising that Munby does as well.

These reactions reveal the thoroughness with which disfigured persons were reduced to their facial anomalies. Identity became linked to pathology. According to the medical model of disability that was omnipresent in Victorian culture, the disabled individual was reduced to his or her physical condition such that identity was conflated with pathology. One major problem with such a model is that it entirely ignores the constructed aspect of disability and the means by which disability is socially produced. Clearly, Langdon, J. N., and others diagnosed with lupus had a disease rooted in biological, physiological causes. Yet the reactions of Munby, the doctors, and society at large demonstrate the equally powerful social component of disability/disfigurement: stigma, repulsion, pity, and isolation. Treatment of disability/disfigurement requires a careful study of both the physical and social etiologies. Able-bodied Victorians saw disfigurement as a biological condition—one that they, as normals, bore no responsibility for. They did not recognize the role that their metaphors, judgments, stereotypes and exclusions played in creating a disabling experience.

As for Reay's conclusion regarding the April 30th, 1862, entry that Munby is self-congratulatory in a smug and power seeking sense, I think a very different conclusion can be drawn when looking at the whole entry from which Reay only briefly quotes. Munby comments that the doctor

gave one small hopes of a cure: but at any rate she is to have a month's trial. And so I left her in his hands; & I home by 9:45. There has been a good deal of mutual confidence shown in this case. The Hospital doctors give me, a perfect stranger, free admission to it for a patient they never saw: the patient, a young and lonely woman, who knows nothing of me, comes all the way from [illegible] on the faith of my report, with no place here to go to, & no money, when she set off, except five shillings; trusts herself alone with me in London, to go where I chose to take her; and finally comes at night to an Hospital, where she never was before, and is left there alone by me, among persons even less known to her than I am. My trust has been shown merely in promising her attendance at the Hospital, and sending her money beforehand. So far, the confidence of each party appears to have been deserved: and it is therefore a pleasant thing to know that it exists.

This is the close of the journal entry, and the section from which Reay briefly quotes. Interpreting this as self-congratulatory is a misreading. While Munby put a small degree of trust in Langdon to use the money he gave her for the medical purpose they had agreed to, it seems clear that he acknowledges that her trust was far greater because she had

more at risk. Munby appears not only grateful that she kept her word, but that after a month of trying, he was able to convince someone to take her case. His entry suggests a kind of equality between himself and Langdon: both are strangers to the hospital and its doctors in whom they place their trust. And superseding either of those points in importance, more than anything else, Munby appears to appreciate the trust that Langdon placed in him, a virtual stranger, and to feel glad that he has been able to help a fellow human being because doing so was by no means guaranteed.

Because Langdon's case is so severe, the doctor has given little hope for a cure, but while in hospital, Langdon does benefit immensely from the medical care she receives, and as I noted above, Munby chronicles her progress toward health. He did not leave her abandoned alone in this hospital setting, even though he might have safely assumed she would be well cared for. A few days after her admittance, he notes in his journal of May 3rd, 1862, that when he visits her, he passes by thirty or so young women and girls and finds

My patient [sewing] by her bed [. . .] A broad bandage was round her head, covering the whole ruinous center of her face, and leaving visible only her red distorted eyes and her swollen under lip. She was very cheerful, and was happy, she said; did not feel at all lonely, and was thankful to be there. Her face felt—and indeed looked—somewhat better already.

There is no indication that Munby visits to be the recipient of her gratitude.

Nevertheless, it seems entirely natural that she should feel grateful to him for making a

treatment possible, and more grateful by far to the doctors who are actually treating her. As this entry makes clear, Langdon is happy to finally have some hope for a better future, even though those hopes are relatively small. Throughout the journals, Munby repeatedly refers to them as “pathetic”—that is, as inspiring pathos because they are so modest. In the entry that records this May 3rd visit he says, “I sat with her awhile, talking: her aspirations for recovery were pathetic; for if once the sores could be got rid of and the skin of her face restored, she would be so glad: she would not mind the absence of her nose, she said.” It is remarkably sad to think that this is as much as someone in Langdon’s condition could hope—facial reconstruction and further cures for the disease from which she suffered were unavailable. Even with all the medical advancements between Langdon’s time and our own, there is still no cure for lupus and it is still degenerative and often eventually fatal.

Yet what is equally evident in both of these entries is Langdon’s capacity for happiness. Each time Munby visits, she is “cheerful,” says she is happy, and expresses the ability to feel glad. While her physical condition loomed large in her experience, it does not preclude the possibility of pleasure. Contrary to the societal assumption, she is not enmeshed in dread and has hope for her future. Langdon’s hope is to return as much to facial normalcy as possible so that she might get a job, though as I will discuss in greater detail below, finding a position as a disfigured woman was exceedingly difficult.

In England in the 1860’s, when Langdon went into hospital, the treatment of lupus varied somewhat depending on the type, and included both internal and external management. Many Victorian doctors were miasmists who recommended healthy air to

patients who suffered a variety of maladies, including lupus, under the premise of environmental causes for disease. Clean and “healthy” air was thought to produce a curative effect on the body and was often prescribed in conjunction with or following medical procedures. Martha Stoddard Holmes comments in *Fictions of Affliction* that a “miasmist would argue that contact with cold air, harsh light, ‘the evil influence’ of impure air, overcrowding, or some other environmental factor caused disease, particularly in individuals with a ‘scrofulous’ or otherwise weak constitution” (63). The specific treatment of lupus typically included cod liver oil taken internally as well as a variety of caustics applied to the skin. Potassa fusa (acid nitrate of mercury), chloride of zinc, arsenic, and calomel were all used as topicals.

Concurrently, in Europe, a cauterizing tool called the Galvano-Caustic Apparatus was also used by some physicians for the treatment of a variety of medical conditions, lupus included. It was a device shaped roughly like a wand with a metal wire heated by an electric current and used to burn the skin affected by disease. In an article published in the *British Medical Journal* on April 20, 1861, British physician Thomas James Walker described his observations of a Viennese doctor who used the device on patients with lupus: “To all the parts affected, the instrument was applied at a white heat; thus, in a case of lupus of the ear, the porcelain cauteriser was deliberately applied to the whole surface of that organ. During the operation, which was necessarily a slow one, the size of the instrument being about that of an ordinary lead-pencil, the patient, a nervous female, continued shrieking violently” (410). The treatment was unquestionably excruciating, and due to the small size of the apparatus, patients with advanced lupus over many areas

had long, gruesome treatments. Walker acknowledged that the instrument had the potential benefit of being somewhat less painful than a non electric type of cautery because the Galvano “is not cooled by the tissues of the body, consequently it quickly and completely destroys their sensibility and vitality [. . .] while the former [. . .] is, on its first application to the tissues, so cooled by them, that it requires a longer application in order completely to destroy the structures with which it is in contact, and may in many places only half burn them, causing therefore pain of some duration” (409). Despite this apparent benefit, Walker rejects the method of treatment: “In pointing out what I conceive to be comparative merits of the galvanic cautery, I do not wish it to be supposed that I am advocating what appears to me an unnecessarily harsh and cruel treatment of a disease which does not require the use of the cautery at all” (410). Walker preferred the use of caustics applied to the skin, which were certainly not pain-free (or harm free considering the prevalence of mercury and arsenic based topicals), but these were apparently less barbaric in his estimation than burning the affected flesh with a cauterizing iron.

In no case was a total cure possible; it was then, as now, about disease management. In a journal article from the *British Medical Journal* on December 6, 1862, Dr. C. Handfield Jones wrote that

We may strive with more or less success to stay the ravages of lupus exedens by cod-liver oil, iodide of iron, and alternative doses of calomel and opium, with the local application of biniodide of mercury, or arsenic and calomel pastes, or strong chloride of zinc solution [. . .] but the morbid

tendency is generally too strong to allow us to obtain more than very incomplete and temporary success. (577)

Clearly, though, Langdon is made much better by such incomplete treatments and is both “cheerful” and “happy” to finally receive aid. Her condition appears remarkably improved while in hospital and makes clear that relief of her condition was certainly possible, even if a cure was not.

In a July 9, 1864, *British Medical Journal* article, Dr. A. W. Barclay writes of the consensus among doctors about “how necessary it was to have recourse to local treatment in dealing with lupus exedens” (47). The article is about the benefits of caustics in the treatment of lupus exedens and includes a patient history of a ten year old girl whose lupus paralleled Langdon’s and so is instructive about the kind of treatment she would likely have been given. Langdon had told Munby that the onset of her lupus was at age eight—roughly the age of the patient from the article. Unlike with Langdon, however, the girl’s lupus had spread into her throat and larynx, causing her to become mute whereas she had previously been able to speak. Otherwise, her symptoms mirror Langdon’s:

When Mr. Holmes first saw her in July, the alae [sic] of the nostrils were quite gone, and the patient quite dumb. Constitutional remedies, chiefly iodide of potassium, had not affected the lupus, but done a little good for the cornea and the larynx; change of air was, therefore, proposed; but Mr. Holmes first treated the tuberculated edges with chloride of zinc, which caused a free discharge from the part, and a healthy surface. She was then

sent to Margate, when the disease began rapidly to spread; the air of the place, and the cod-liver oil she took whilst there, having no good effect. The disease had now destroyed the nose, and involved both lower eyelids. She, therefore, was brought back to town; and Mr. Holmes applied the potassa fusa well to the edges, not omitting the eyelids, and again produced a healthy surface. The disease now seems to have succumbed to the local treatment, as no further progress of the disease has occurred, and the parts are cicatrised over. (47)

Langdon's Progress

Langdon met with similar improvement in the weeks at the hospital on Gray's Inn Road, and in all likelihood received similar treatment with caustics, as was common practice in England at the time by anyone fortunate enough to gain treatment. Over the course of her time there, Munby visited her regularly. On May 11th, his journal records that in his visit that afternoon he saw that "Her face was strapped across as before, but she was cheerful & improving." The next few weeks saw consistent improvement in Langdon's condition that must have brought her immense relief. On May 31st, Munby records that "Her face was strapped across as usual, but she removed part of the dressing and showed me that the sores were fast healing. The site of her lost nose, which used to be horribly diseased, is now—a ghastly hollow indeed, but—clean & wholesome." Over the course of her stay at the Free Hospital, Langdon's condition continued to improve, demonstrating that if she could only afford treatment, she need not suffer to the extent

that she had been. Her condition could be managed, if not cured. Like so many millions of 19th century English citizens, Langdon suffered as much from poverty as from disease. It was lupus that caused her biological disability, but it was poverty, a social condition, which made her unable to afford treatment—a poverty caused not by an inability to work but by a society that refused to hire a disfigured woman.

While it is clear that Munby could have taken credit for Langdon's vast improvement, his tone, to my reading, is not self-congratulatory on any of the visits to the hospital. On June 13th, 1862, he mentions talking with "the excellent energetic W. Hill concerning Harriet Langdon." It seems perfectly clear whom Munby credits for Langdon's treatment. Indeed, on the day of her departure from the hospital, after not the promised four weeks, but ten full weeks instead, Munby visits Mr. Hill, "the kind and gentlemanly doctor whom I had to thank for his care of her" (July 12th, 1862). Returning to the June 13th visit, though, Munby comments that Langdon's

face looked strange enough, in the red fire light; for she had taken off the bandages, & left only a circle of grey plaster, like the rim of a well, round the site of her nose; and a strip of the same that was laid like a moustache across her upper lips. I told her the surgeons held it dangerous to make her a false nose; but that they thought she might wear a mask, which would hide the incurable hideousness of her face, and save her from being always veiled. She heard it with composure: she had no objection to remain without a nose, since it could not be helped; and thought she would rather like a mask. I shook hands with her, and as I went she said 'God

bless you Sir!’ to which I, with one’s instinctive deprecation of thanks,
replied ‘Not at all!’

Munby’s closing remark is not disingenuous; rather, it seems primarily about class breeding. Considering how life-altering a change he had made possible for Langdon, especially given that she is a mere acquaintance unconnected with him or his family, her gratitude is understandable, as is his reply. It is the gallant, offhand remark fitting with his class and with the period. More importantly, it enables her to accept what amounts to charity with her dignity intact. Munby says nothing about being happy to be able to do this for her or that she is in any way in his debt. To my reading, his offhand response is an acknowledgment of thanks that safeguards her feelings. Also notable in this entry is a further implied promise Munby makes to Langdon about acquiring possible future aids for her like a false nose or a mask (considered social necessities) that would make it more likely that she would be hired, this having been a consistent problem for her. If Langdon wishes to have any public outing whatsoever, she must keep her face covered. The necessity of a mask, as opposed to simply a veil, will be discussed below.

It is important to underscore that Munby’s assistance did not simply end with her admission to the hospital or with her release, as significant as this help was. Although this entry only briefly mentions future help, Munby follows through on all three points: the false nose, the mask, and help finding a position. On July 9th, 1862, Munby “Enquired at Nathan’s about a mask for Harriet Langdon: they told me they had several times made masks & half masks for ladies whose faces were disfigured.”

Capacity for Happiness

When it was at last time to arrange for Langdon to leave the hospital, Munby notes on July 7th, 1862, what has changed in her physical condition and what is yet the same: “Her face has now acquired a new & healthy skin; but of course she has no nose, and her lips are still distorted. This being so, her indifference to her own ugliness would be surprising if I did not know how callous women of her class are in such matters, even when young as she is.” Munby’s attribution of callousness to Langdon’s class station can be understood to an extent via his own class privilege. His remark assumes that because working-class women are used to difficult labor and to supporting themselves, their identities are less appearance-based and more work-based than the women of his class who could afford to spend a great deal of time and effort on how they looked, and indeed, needed to in order to secure a wealthy husband. In *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, Susan Wendell comments on the obsessive connection of beauty with worth for contemporary women: “Physical ‘imperfection’ is more likely to be thought to ‘spoil’ a woman than a man by rendering her unattractive in a culture where her physical appearance is a large component of a woman’s value” (43-44). This was perhaps even more true in the 19th century than our own, since women were legally classed with children and “idiots.” Middle and upper class women whose class station forbade them to work were economically dependent on their husbands and had to do everything possible to assure a good match. Munby assumes that a working-class woman like Harriet Langdon was more economically independent since there was no taboo against working for women of her class.

Regardless, it is utterly impossible that Langdon was “indifferen[t] to her own ugliness” in the sense of being unaware of the social impact her face had had and would continue to have; the constant stares and discrimination of potential employers provided daily reminders of her exclusion. Yet Munby attributes to class what he ought to have attributed in large part to self-acceptance and also to resignation. Langdon is more conscious of and used to her own appearance than anyone else is, and is also keenly aware that only so much can medically be done for her. This makes her not callous but realistic. There would be no point in idly wishing for something that medical science was incapable of providing. As noted earlier, her hope was simply to alleviate the worst symptoms of her condition. Beyond this, Munby’s classism attributes her indifference to her station when it arose instead, no doubt, because she saw herself, and rightly so, as more than just her disfigurement. It is important to read against Munby’s interpretation of her indifference. It is not simply a feature of her economic class but a marker of self-love. In this moment, we get a possible window into the psyche not only of Munby (and through him society at large) in principally defining Langdon as Disabled, but also into the psyche of a disfigured woman who did not see herself the same way. In other words, we get nearer to understanding how Langdon likely perceived herself when not forced to look through the social mirror. She was indifferent to her “ugliness” because it was not to her a core aspect of her identity—not the central identifying marker of her personhood in the same way it no doubt was for Munby and society. To put it simply, Langdon perceived herself as more than simply her disfigurement.

On April 14, 1863, Munby records in his journal a conversation he has about Langdon with a doctor, Mr. Allen. Munby says that Allen “thought hers ‘a most pathetic & horrible case’: he had been struck with horror at the sight of her face. ‘It must be a constant humiliation to her’ said he ‘to see herself in the glass.’ There is no such feminine delight for her: I do not suppose she ever ventures to cast her eyes upon a mirror.” This conversation provides key evidence to the way members in society interpreted facial disfigurement. While their supposition that Langdon’s reflection would distress her might seem a plausible one (and in the next chapter I will discuss just a scene of distress that Clara Hewett has before a mirror), it is also critical to read against such assessments via the totality of the evidence that Munby provides about Langdon’s self-perception. There is only one scene in all of his interactions with Langdon where he records her as distressed and crying—one I include below when her sister says no one will hire her “with a face like that” and Langdon sobs in response that her sister “has no feeling.” Otherwise, there are numerous comments about her cheer, good humor, and happiness, to the extent that Munby is bewildered. The crux is that he, Allen, her sister (and society by extension), read her through the one-dimensional prism of her disfigurement, whereas Langdon experiences herself as whole person. It is the difference between subject and object; she is their object, but her own subject.

Munby’s journals provide evidence, sometimes conflicting, that Langdon at times rejected the image of herself as stigmatized and did not internalize societal expectations such as remaining hidden. In “Stigma: An Enigma Demystified,” Lerita M. Coleman demonstrates that some stigmatized people do internalize societal judgments: “The most

pernicious consequence of bearing a stigma is that stigmatized people may develop the same perceptual problems that nonstigmatized people have. They begin to see themselves and their lives through the stigma” (147). Langdon’s “indifference to her own ugliness” can be read as a rejection of the negative symbolic label leveled at her by society, and through this rejection, a level of autonomy and self-direction.

There are many instances in Munby’s journals that chronicle Langdon’s refusal to remain hidden away—another of the social mandates required of disfigured people. Yet while she was expected to withdraw from society, there is ample evidence in the journals that Langdon did not. Even after her pension was secure, she still attempted to find work to supplement her income, and Munby continued to help her in this capacity. She also was fond of taking walks, and though convention necessitated her use of thick veils to cover her face when in public, she enjoyed the feel of the wind on her bare face, as Munby notes in his June 24, 1865, entry: “often in this hot weather she longs to uncover her face & breathe the fresh air; but she dares not do it: only sometimes in Battersea Park, when she looks round and sees no one near, she ventures to lift the black towel like curtain.” When at home, when Munby visits, and when alone in public, Langdon is able to forgo the veil. Otherwise, she must wear it or face public reactions like the photographer who on the same day refused to take her picture, saying that “‘Her face is like a death’s-head!’ [. . .] and to my grief, the poor girl heard him. [. . .] ‘If I had such a face’ said the photographer, ‘I should jump into the river.’” It is reactions like these that construct the experience of disfigurement as painful and isolating. People assume that life is not worth living for the disabled or disfigured. A different social response could

have generated inclusion and recognition of humanity. Nevertheless, such attempts at exclusion of Langdon, at the insistence of her unwanted difference, do not succeed in repelling her. She continues to go to the circus, to concerts, and on walks. While Munby's perception of Langdon's face is privately horrified, he does not express this to her. He acknowledges that her face "is not like other people's," but recognizes her right to participate in life in terms of work and social outings. On this date they had gone to the circus together, for instance. At other times, they go to concerts at Covent Gardens.

Yet there are also numerous incidents in the interactions between the two where it is clear that they do not perceive her disfigurement in the same way. For Munby, it is all-consuming—her sole defining characteristic. For Langdon, it was one aspect of her identity that she had come to terms with. On January 10, 1868, Munby comments to himself on "the abnormal inhuman look of that hole in the center of her face." For him, her face is made far worse by her missing nose, but he goes on to quote Langdon's entirely antithetical perception of it: "She herself thinks little of that, though. 'the loss of my nose is nothing,' says the poor creature: 'if that nose was all the disease, I should be very thankful!'" Its absence does not negate her presence.

Langdon is also not above womanly vanity about her nose. On September 17, 1867, when Munby buys her a "a new one from Paris; a false nose & lip, coloured to suit her scarlet face; but not coloured deep enough," Langdon complains about it: "She took her nose out of its box & glued it on to her face, so as to cover that loathsome chasm: then she drew back & contemplated herself, thus gifted with features: then she turned to me, and petted & complained, because the new nose was not pretty enough! 'I don't like

this nose half so well as my old one,' she says; 'it doesn't suit my face; it's not like me; it's a man's nose,' & so on." Munby seems surprised and annoyed by her comments, as if only other people have the right to an opinion of her face. For him, any features appear to do. Langdon refutes this, claiming ownership of her face here, and she is particular about its features. She knows what is and is not "like" her, what does and does not suit her, and she is not afraid to make her opinion heard, no matter that the nose is a gift from Munby. It is still *her* nose and she claims the right to define it.

In preparation for Langdon's departure from the hospital, Munby fulfilled his promise to help her find work, and he did more than make a few casual enquiries. Two days prior to this visit, Munby records on July 5th, that he went "To the Daily Telegraph Office, and inserted an advertisement seeking work for Harriet Langdon, who is about to leave the hospital." When he visited her on the 7th, he brought the ad along to show her and "she calmly read out loud the advertisement I had put in the Telegraph about her: 'Needlework, or housework where she would not be much seen, wanted by a tall healthy young woman aged 29, whose face is very much disfigured.'" That Munby underscores her disfigurement is not intended to be cruel but is an unfortunately necessary warning to prospective employers whom Langdon had found extremely reluctant to hire her in the past. This is certainly not a comment on Langdon. The sad truth is that disfigured women had an enormously difficult time supporting themselves economically—even women like Langdon who were otherwise capable and "healthy." Munby notes Langdon's response to the ad simply: "She thought it was 'all right,' she said." This is not evidence of what Munby sees as Langdon's callousness, but the resignation of

someone who had been judged based on appearance since the development of her disease at eight years old. Langdon knows first hand how she has been and likely will be received. It is important to note that Munby describes Langdon in this ad as “healthy”—underscoring her ability despite the social stereotype of the disabled as feeble and incapable. One social mandate to which he does adhere in the ad is that the position be one of isolation—one “where she would not be much seen.” In this statement there is recognition and adherence to the societal insistence to keep such disfigured people out of the public eye.

It is a very dismal commentary that such a reference to her disfigurement was even needed in a job ad from an otherwise healthy individual seeking work. Disability laws put in place in the 1990’s currently help safeguard individuals from such blatant job discrimination, legally if not culturally, but for Langdon, no such laws existed, and she—as well as Munby—knew that even forewarning a potential employer would not guarantee fair treatment, as is clear by some of the responses she gets from them. The conflation of disability with disfigurement in the ad is also troubling. Munby takes care to underscore her health and ability, and in doing so attempts to combat the perception of feebleness and incapacity attached to her identity. Considering a disfigured person disabled may appear to be a false conflation, but it is one that is unfortunately still too often made in contemporary societies, let alone in the 19th century. Langdon’s disfigurement was equated with disability. While she did suffer from a physically debilitating condition that primarily affected her skin and was likely very painful, she had full use of all limbs, was relatively strong, and completely capable of work if given the

chance. Despite this, however, her “ruined” face was interpreted as a marker of disability.

It is important not to diminish her physical discomfort or to minimize the seriousness of the condition from which she suffered. Yet it is equally important to stress that much of Langdon’s disability was due to social perception, not personal inability; her disability was largely socially constructed. Susan Wendell emphasizes this concept succinctly in *The Rejected Body*: “the biological and the social are interactive in creating disability” (35). Wendell argues that disability—and I would argue disfigurement by extension—have not just a biological component in, say, the etiology of a disease, but are actively constructed in the minds of those who perceive people whom she refers to not as disabled but as “non-paradigm.” The paradigm or non-disabled body, socially conceived of as “normal,” is the body against which disability is constructed and created. Wendell’s point is not to deny that some individuals have a wider range of physical or mental abilities than others, but that much of what is conceived of as disability is a matter of social perception, not biological imperative. People who receive the label of “disabled” would be far more able if society could extend its perception of what is “normal” rather than assume a mythical norm against which the “disabled” are defined and presumed to fall short: “Thus disability is socially constructed through the failure or unwillingness to create ability among people who do not fit the physical and mental profile of ‘paradigm’ citizens” (Wendell 41). Nowhere is this more evident than in Harriet Langdon’s case. She was far more disabled due to social reaction than to biological condition.

As referenced above, Lennard Davis reminds us that the word “normal,” as in meaning the average or commonplace, only came into existence around 1840. In previous eras, there were concepts of the ideal, associated with divinity, and the grotesque, associated with the common man (4). It was not until mid 19th century, Davis argues, that the concept of the “normal” body came into existence, and with it, the “other,” devalued bodies that it was defined through and against: “So, with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. This [. . .] is in contrast to societies with the concept of an ideal, in which all people have a non-ideal status” (Davis 6).

Munby, too, is guilty of judging Langdon’s appearance, and he clearly contrasts it with his conception of a “normal” ie non-disfigured face. Thankfully, though, his judgment remains internal, as recorded in his diary entry on July 12th, 1862, the day that she left the hospital:

I walked up by appointment to Gray’s Inn Road Hospital, to fetch away Harriet Langdon, who has now been there ten weeks, and has gained great benefit, though of course nothing can restore her features. [. . .] I took her and left her in charge of her sister at Crescent News; bidding her lift her veil at length before I went. The sores, and much of the redness, are removed: but the want of a nose and the drawing back from the teeth of the distorted lips, leave her face as ghastly and hideous as ever, and make the smile of this young woman look like the grinning of a skull. It proves

impossible to restore her to human society: yet she is cheerful, and sometimes even gay.”

These remarks deserve censure for a number of reasons, the first of which is because he presumes that a person with a disfigurement cannot or should not participate in society. Clearly, Munby also judged Langdon on what he saw as a death-like appearance, and I will comment more extensively on this connection below. Mounting a defense of him is not intended to erase what is problematic in his commentary, but to provide a fuller discussion of what the truth often is: more nuanced.

Notable in this entry is Munby’s inability to perceive Langdon as a whole person. That she can feel cheerful or gay despite her affliction appears to perplex him. This is evidence of the social perception of the disfigured as leading pitiful, alienated, unhappy lives. In one of her autobiographical collections of essays, *Carnal Acts*, Nancy Mairs explores how she is perceived as a person with multiple sclerosis in a way that illuminates Munby’s reaction to Langdon. Like lupus, multiple sclerosis is a degenerative autoimmune disease for which there is no cure. Yet with characteristic humor, Mairs comments on the frustrating perceptions of those who observe her. In the excerpt below she explores society’s habit of placing exclusive focus on her disability, in this instance, in the limited film depictions of disabled individuals: “It’s not about a woman who happens to be physically disabled; it’s about physical disability as the determining factor of a woman’s existence. Take it from me, physical disability looms pretty large in one’s life. But it doesn’t devour one wholly. I’m not, for instance, Ms. MS, a walking, talking embodiment of a chronic incurable degenerative disease” (Mairs

32). Mairs explains that despite her ordinariness as a mother, consumer, worker, etc. society still largely “den[ies] the existence of me and my kind absolutely” (33).

Mairs draws attention to the erasure and denial of the disabled in the media, as in society in general. In the few instances where they are depicted, the disease, disability, or disorder is the defining characteristic, thereby limiting a person’s identity to a single, narrow aspect and eradicating all else that defines or encompasses that person. To my reading, Munby is often guilty of this kind of narrow focus throughout his relationship with Langdon. His writing is preoccupied with her appearance and he assumes that her entire existence is circumscribed by it. He often perceives Langdon as Ms. Lupus, to use Mairs’ language. This perception is understandable to a degree, given that in their era, people with disabilities were completely unprotected from discrimination, and Munby was increasingly familiar with how Langdon was treated by society and prevented from employment. Yet this kind of reduction prevents Munby from recognizing the part that he and society at large play in actually creating her disability. It is this symbolic level of oppression that keeps Langdon locked in the label of non able and thereby without value.

I would argue that a greater share of the blame lies on society as a whole rather than on Munby. To his credit, Munby is not guilty of entirely reducing Langdon to her disease. It does not induce him to keep her at arm’s length, as it did so many others, nor does Munby fail to notice her capacity and desire to work. It’s important to note that in the same July 12th, 1862, entry where Munby appears surprised that Langdon is capable of joy, he does seek employment for her as promised. If he perceives her in harsh and stereotypical ways, that judgment does not prevent him from working on her behalf. He

does not agree that she should be discriminated against and kept from work, and makes repeated and extensive efforts on her behalf to enable her to support herself.

Denied Work

In addition to placing the job ad, Munby notes in this same July 12th entry that before taking her to meet her sister “I first took her, at W. Hill’s suggestion, to Eley’s works close by, to seek employment at cartridge making: but it was a wrong day. So we left the Hospital together; & I made her take my arm, as it was raining.” The comment is notable not only because it shows another effort Munby made to help employ Langdon, but also because it demonstrates that he was not too repulsed by her to offer a commonplace civility of the time: an arm to steady and assist a lady in bad weather. In this way, he treats her as he would any woman of his acquaintance. While such a gesture may appear paltry, it is significant for its very normalcy, and is a courtesy Langdon cannot expect from most strangers or potential employers. She is not the embodiment of monstrosity from which he must physically distance himself.

The ad Munby placed in the paper on Langdon’s behalf did bring responses, but he feared that they would only provide short-lived hope, and he was right. On July 9th, 1862, he records that he “received four letters in answer to my advertisement about Langdon; but none of them appears to realize the extent of her horrors.” A few days later on the 10th, Munby reports checking for “answers to my advertisement, but found no work for my outcast: received also a letter from a lady, who had proposed for her a servant’s place in utter retirement, stating that ‘her disfigurement was too great’; a

servant maid without a nose would be intolerable!” Even though being noseless does not render one incapable of work, she is turned away from job after job. For someone with such an acute disfigurement, finding work was immensely difficult. The prejudices of the general population become patently clear in this case as Langdon searches for any work that can be had. Although she is otherwise healthy and capable, she is treated as a pariah by much of society, as if those around her fear that being near her will somehow contaminate them. Like the elderly, the disabled and disfigured too often remind society of physical limitation and death, and are thus subject to stereotyping and prejudice. While Langdon clearly does not suffer from a contagious disease, she is treated by most with disgust and a desire to keep her at a distance.

The conflation of disfigurement with disability is also revealed in the December 6, 1862, *British Medical Journal* article referenced earlier. In the case of J. N., whose lupus was even less severe than Langdon’s, it is clear that his inability to work was as much due to his physical appearance as disfigured as it was to any physical limitation. The doctor’s description of J. N. as “hideous” is quickly followed by the remark that “He is unable to work by reason of his disease; in other respects, his health is fair” (578). While the scabs and growths on his hands likely contributed to this assessment, I would argue that the evaluation of his appearance co-created his disability. Since his health is otherwise described as “fair,” it is likely that there certainly was work that he could do. It is probable that, as in Langdon’s case, no one wanted to work around someone so “hideous,” and labor was denied him not simply out of an inability to perform, but out of a societal desire for separation from the disfigured. The article continues with a brief

chronicling of his treatment, and concludes with the following remark: “[. . .] his wife reported, on August 6th, that his face was getting quite clear, and that he had gone to work. Considerable improvement was certainly effected” (578). This statement underscores that his facial disfigurement was paramount to his lack of employment. No mention is made of his hands, suggesting that they were not the primary barrier to work. Rather, his face kept him from being employable, demonstrating once again that disability is as much socially constructed as biological and that disfigurement was conflated with disability. Having a disfigured face was sometimes all that was necessary to be rendered disabled.

On the 29th of July, 1862, Munby returns to the cartridge maker’s where he had gone with Langdon upon her release:

I have applied for work for her at Eley’s Cartridge works; and she went the other day to show herself to the forewoman there, who pitied her, & promised to see whether such an object could with due concealment be admitted among the girls of the factory. The answer is not yet come: but today I promised, if she goes there, to buy her a mask; and she was grateful for the boon!

In this entry, as in all other instances when Langdon interacts with the public, she is expected to remain as invisible as possible, hidden behind a cloth or veil or whatever other means of concealment is possible. She is an “object” denied subjectivity. Susan Wendell comments on the private/public split in *The Rejected Body*, noting that “Weakness, illness, rest and recovery, pain, death, and the negative (devalued) body are

private, generally hidden, and often neglected. Coming into the public world with illness, pain, or a devalued body, people encounter resistance to mixing the two worlds; the split is vividly revealed” (40). Langdon’s attempted entry into the public world—an entry necessitated by sheer survival—is repeatedly met with discomfort and rejection. She is expected to remain hidden. Even those within the medical community accept her erasure as a given. When Dr. Selwood initially examines Langdon, he takes Munby aside afterwards to consult. Munby records the discussion in his April 30, 1862, entry, quoting the doctor: “‘It is horrible—quite impossible for her to go anywhere or be seen by anyone!’ He fancied, as most people would, that the sense of her own hideousness would overwhelm her with distress.” Clearly, the doctor colludes in the societal assumption that Langdon must remain apart to safeguard the public’s sensibility. The doctor also appears to take for granted that Langdon would view herself in the same narrow, reductive way that he does: her disability is definitive and all encompassing.

By August 2nd, 1862, Munby reports in his journal after visiting Langdon that “She is still waiting anxiously to hear whether or not she may be permitted, on condition of hiding her face, to become one of the hundreds of female artizans [sic] at Eley the cartridge maker’s.” Once again it is clear that entrance to society is permissible only with a specific restriction: that she remain hidden. Finally, on August 16th, Munby brings Langdon the news that he has “at last got some work from Messrs. Eley: making shot bags, at three shillings the gross! She is to work at them at home, at her sister’s: they will not have her hideous face among the women at the factory.” While some work is clearly better than being unemployed, the remuneration is miserly at best and

depressingly short-lived. Langdon's society placed the full burden of responsibility for her disfigurement on her, not recognizing the vast extent to which it *actively created* her disability. The social insistence on privatizing and stigmatizing her disfigurement made Langdon far more disabled than she otherwise would have been. Susan Wendell underscores this point in *The Rejected Body*:

Much of the experience of disability and illness goes underground, because there is no socially acceptable way of expressing it and having the physical and psychological experience acknowledged. Yet acknowledgement of this experience is exactly what is required for creating accessibility in the public world. The more a society regards disability as a private matter, and people with disabilities as belonging in the private sphere, the more disability it creates by failing to make the public sphere accessible to a wide range of people. (40)

Clearly, Langdon is one of those expected to remain in the private sphere. This is made especially clear in the July 9th, 1862, entry quoted above in which a potential employer suggests to Munby that Langdon find a position "in utter retirement [because] 'her disfigurement was too great.'" It is also evidenced by the assumption that she was only fit to work for the cartridge maker from home—safely removed from societal interaction. The results of such a worldview are utterly chilling. One wonders how a person with such a disfigurement could possibly survive if no one was willing to hire her/him. Munby's conclusion from the woman's comment—that "a servant maid without a nose would be intolerable!"—underscores the inevitable misery of Langdon's predicament. It

is certainly possible that without Munby's intervention, Langdon could have ended up as one of the destitute crawlers in St. James Park. It is unlikely that she could find a situation. Her society is not responsible for causing lupus, but it unmistakably participates in the construction of her disability.

When Munby returns from a late summer/early fall trip, he discovers that she has lost even this small piecework he had found for her at the cartridge maker's. On October 14th, 1862, he writes, "I called to see Harriet Langdon in coming back; and found her sitting alone in her sister's homely house, with nothing to do. The little work I got for her before I left was not continued: nobody will employ her, on account of her disfigurement." While Munby clearly shared some of the prejudices of his society regarding Langdon's appearance, he thankfully did not believe that this appearance should prevent her from employment. He actively seeks to help demonstrate her ability. As the entry continues, the two emotions prevalent throughout his entire relationship with Langdon are equally evident here—horror and sympathy both:

And yet, as she sat there, & I looked on her ghastly noseless face—which even now the poor creature scarcely likes to show to me, and which, with the shadows of twilight on the sunken eyes and perished mouth, appeared only like a living skull—it seemed conceivable that a man might even love such an one, out of the very thought that she was cut off from love: a fine and otherwise comely young woman, condemned to be an outcast from humanity, and to hide from sight, because of her hideousness—because she may never know what it is to have a human face! In some such dream

of pity, as I shook hands with her at parting, I kissed her forehead: for reverence, and because it was the only part of her countenance that was not diseased and loathesome. [sic]

Munby's description of Langdon is exceedingly difficult to read, even while acknowledging that she did not view his remarks, only receive the kiss and kind treatment. Clearly, describing his actions as "kind" is mitigated by recognition that it comes not from love but from pity—a sentiment most human beings would rather avoid and one which disabled individuals find particularly galling because it so reduces their lives. Once again, it seems apparent that Munby reduces Langdon to a single aspect of her identity. It does not occur to him that a man might "love such a one" because of her spirit, her kindness, her love of family, her honesty, her humor, or any other of the varied characteristics that comprise a human being. He cannot move beyond her outward appearance and in failing to do so, denies her humanity.

Yet from Munby's perspective, his pity is for a woman considered too disfigured to work, let alone receive romantic love. That his perception helps to create her disability is an irony completely lost on him. Pity is still a common though misplaced reaction to the disabled, stemming from stereotypes of them as dependent, asexual, pitiable people who lack meaningful or full lives. In *The Rejected Body*, Wendell argues that "the stigma of physical 'imperfection' (and possibly the additional stigma of having been damaged by disease) and the cultural meanings attached to the disability contribute to the power of the stereotype" (43). Such narrow vision often prevents the viewer from identifying with the

disabled or disfigured person, and it is that very inability to identify that widens the gulf between the abled and disabled experience.

In *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily De-formation in Victorian England*, Barry Reay does not consider Munby's relationship with Langdon through the lens of disability. Beyond his initial discussion of Munby's voyeurism, his principle argument is to place Munby in the context of contemporary Victorians (both in the pseudo-scientific community and the public at large) who used physiognomy to interpret one's character, and he offers an extensive section in his single chapter on Munby and Langdon on how studies of the face, and especially of nasology, offered supposed insights to the Victorian viewers of those on whom they gazed. Unfortunately, he does not fully explain how Munby read Langdon's face in this light. His chapter lacks a compelling conclusion, especially in his discussion of Langdon's missing nose. While he provides evidence for how Victorians would have perceived the aquiline nose from, say, the snub nose, there is little said of how to read the case in point: the absent nose. He does suggest that "The false nose would become incorporated into Munby's fantasies of subverted femininity," (46) which provide his explanation for why Munby buys Langdon more than one false nose, but he disregards any other possible motivation, including that it was deemed socially necessary to pass, ironically, as a woman. In light of his discussion of physiognomy, Reay's primary point appears to be that Langdon's missing nose signified an ambiguous identity, potentially as "baboon," to use Munby's unfortunate word choice.

A final argument of Reay's is to connect Munby's occasional references to Langdon as "simian" with Victorian anxiety about Darwinian discoveries, which is an interesting connection. Like most Victorians who had cause to question their faith due to scientific discoveries and Darwinian theories, Munby's faith was tested in his lifetime, though Reay does not provide the specific evidence from the journals to underscore this. On Sunday, July 1, 1860, for example, Munby went with his friend and fellow teacher at the Working Men's College, R. B. Litchfield, to Oxford to attend Frederick Temple's University sermon that focused, as Munby recorded in his journal, "on the old theme—science v. revelation" (Hudson 64). Afterwards, Munby, Litchfield, James Clerk-Maxwell (former Fellow of Trinity College), and Godfrey Lushington (another friend and WMC teacher) walked back to Lushington's room to discuss the previous day's event: the debate between Thomas Henry Huxley and the Bishop of Oxford. Munby provides an account of the famous event:

Yesterday in a speech before the meeting, the Bishop ended by appealing to Professor Huxley whether he would not rather have for his father a man than an ape: Huxley replies fiercely, that, having to choose between a genuine ape, and a man of abilities who used his talents for purposes of evil, he would prefer the ape! To such straights have we come! 'It's no use, cry L. and Godfrey—defense is no longer possible—the controversy has been pushed to the last point; and that will soon be given up.' (Hudson 64)

Litchfield was agnostic and Lushington a Positivist, following “the doctrines of August Comte in rejecting all supernatural belief, and substituting ‘faith in our common humanity’” (Harrison 48). Munby, however, had remained devout throughout his life, though the tumultuous events surrounding Darwin’s discoveries could not but affect him. In the same July 1st 1860 journal entry on the Huxley debate, Munby explains his own position, which contrasted with the friends with whom he spoke:

meanwhile, I ask, is it worse than in the days of the Encyclopaedists? Facts indeed look far more alarming now: but spiritual consciousness is more widely awake, the need of a Father much more keenly felt. For me, as I said, let any number of insensate laws and necessary God-excluding developments be proved for nature: the moral world, then, shall for me be cut loose from the physical: even if Love be not Power, I will yet believe in Love: I must and will have a Father in heaven, and a Christ too, if I have even to create them out of old memories and tottering beliefs. In religion, at least, let us be allowed to live through the Imagination, if we can find no stronger aliment. How saddening this sermon was and all our talk about it [. . .] What would Archbishop Chicheley have said to see us, fellows and friends of his college, sitting, under the shadow of S. Mary’s and looking on that grey solemn court, and talking not heresy merely but absolute unbelief? Unbelief, not loud and defiant, but reluctant and very sad—yet alas! no better for that. (Hudson 64)

Like most devout Victorians, Munby had moments where his faith was tested, but he resolved for himself the doubts he had, and the crisis of faith passed. Considering that Munby was deeply religious, and in light of his proximity to this famous debate, it is possible that Munby read Langdon through a lens of Victorian doubt. She may have represented the link in the evolutionary chain between human and ape to Munby, at least on some subconscious level, but there is a more compelling conclusion to be drawn in light of these passages: a clear sense of moral duty that helps explain his philanthropic endeavor with Langdon. Compassion and a duty to aid one's fellow human sufferers is the bedrock of a Christian worldview, which Munby definitely possessed.

While Munby does describe Langdon as "simian" in several entries, his focus is far more often on the "death-like" countenance of her noseless face. Reay does acknowledge that "Her living body signified multiple crossings: into death, animality, and the annihilation of beauty" (59), but I want to place greater emphasis on the first item in his trilogy and provide an alternate explanation for its cause. As can already be seen in the numerous quotations from his journals above, including his very first meeting of Langdon, Munby's fixation with her appearance stems from a perception of her as skull-like, since to him, our noses make us human and separate us from skulls. I would argue that for Munby, as for the rest of society with whom she interacted, Langdon became an uncanny reminder of death, referenced repeatedly by Munby as a "death's head" and "a living skull." Her absent nose is not so much ape-like as death-like for Munby, and regarding his relationship with Langdon through the lens of disability/disfigurement provides a much more compelling interpretation of why Munby, and the rest of society,

reacted to Langdon as they did: disability/disfigurement was a palpable reminder of human frailty—one to be avoided at all costs. Certainly the exclusion of the disfigured and disabled was a small price to pay for peace of mind for the public at large.

Disfigurement Evokes Death

Munby's interaction with Langdon suggests a schism between pity and revulsion that he reconciled uneasily. As I have argued above, the pity stemmed from both the real circumstances of how she was treated as well as his perception of her life as wholly reductive: to him, she became her disease. The revulsion, however, came not just from her physical condition, but from a deeper association that Munby made between Langdon and death. Feminist scholars have made this connection in their studies of ageism. The age/death connection is something that Baba Copper discusses at length in "Voices: On Becoming Old Women." Her essay urges society to recognize the ageist assumption "that death is a preoccupation, or subject of expertise, of midlife or old women" (102). Copper argues that much of the deliberate forgetting as well as overt and covert hostility toward the elderly stems from a faulty societal perception of them as being at death's door. Because the elderly remind people of their own mortality, many attempt to distance themselves physically and emotionally from old people. In Langdon's case, as a woman in her late 20's when Munby initially meets her, she certainly would not qualify as "old," although by Victorian standards she would be far closer to middle age than by current standards. Regardless, Copper's essay is still instructive as a lens through which to interpret Munby's reaction to Langdon.

As Copper, a self-identified “old” woman in her sixties, examines her life, she realizes that death has been a virtually non-existent force in her experiences. At the time her essay is published, she relates that “other than the death of my mother when she was ninety-three, no one I loved has ever died” (102). Her statement reveals the false assumption that automatically connects old people with death. Since that assumption is routinely made of her, however, Copper comes to a conclusion relevant to Langdon’s situation: “Since my own demise is as distant from my conscious mind as it was when I was twenty, I have come to recognize that it is my looks that evoke the age/death connection in others” (103). The same is equally true of Langdon. Society at large, Munby included, perceive Langdon as close to death because of the way that she looks. Her noseless face, shrunken eyes, and receding gums are perceived as skull-like. This false assumption creates a desire to maintain distance. The tragedy for Langdon is that while living, she was treated by most in her society as half dead already. Human beings are unarguably social creatures, but Langdon became a pariah without a community, shunned by society at large and unable to find work because no one could stand to be near her, even veiled. For much of society, her appearance was evocative of death.

Copper’s essay is also instructive on another point. The association with death, whether because of age, or in Langdon’s case, solely because of her countenance, is intensified via sexism. Copper points out that as she has aged, her perceived value as a woman has diminished since she lives in a sexist society that equates womanhood with youth and beauty. Because beauty is narrowly defined to exclude images of old women, Copper’s perceived value as a woman is lessened and people attempt to keep her at a

distance to avoid the association that they, too, will grow old and be perceived as valueless. Sexism also operates in Langdon's case. While Copper criticizes the perceived necessity for women to pass as younger in our society, Langdon's society insists that she also pass, perversely, as living. Her props are not creams and cosmetics but masks and false noses. It is only through these props that she can approximate life in the eyes of those who perceive her face as a death's mask. And even then, as Munby makes clear, she cannot pass convincingly. In "Stigma," Lerita M. Coleman argues that passing indicates a collusion between the "normal" and the stigmatized: "Attempting to 'pass' and derogating others like themselves are two ways in which stigmatized people effectively accept the society's negative perceptions of their stigma," (146). Yet if donning a mask, veil, or false nose makes Langdon guilty of accepting her label, the fact that Langdon participates in the passing also demonstrates the power society has at defining the normal and forcing the non-paradigm to concede. Understandably, Langdon has at least in part internalized the standard of the culture in which she lives. While she has moments of gaiety that perplex Munby, she is also subject to viewing her face in society's mirror, like Caliban made monstrous by the glass. For any semblance of acceptance, she must don a mask.

Admittedly, Langdon's circumstances are mediated through Munby and therefore not entirely reliable. We get quotations from Langdon subsumed within his voice, though his allowances of surprise at some of her responses and attitudes rings true and we can read against his interpretation of their meanings. While Munby does quote her and relay information that she has told him, there are no letters that remain to hear Langdon's

voice first hand. Such letters did exist. More evidence that Munby's motivations for interacting with Langdon went beyond voyeurism can be found in the shorter, "rough" journals he left that begin with reel six of the extensive microfilm collection. Beginning in 1861, Munby used pre-dated journals similar to contemporary at-a-glance calendars that include a whole week on two facing pages. In these journals, Munby recorded, among other things, the number of letters he sent and received each day, including names, and Harriet Langdon figures prominently in these records for years. In just 1865, for example, he records eleven letters that Langdon sent to him and nine that he sent to her. Disappointingly, none of her letters to him were included in the materials he left to Trinity College.⁷ Nevertheless, in addition to their copious correspondence, Munby was also involved first hand as a liaison between Langdon and the doctors as well as potential employers. He and Langdon visited often, and the information he provides of Langdon's life, while partial, does testify to much of the difficulty she had in finding employment due to how she was perceived.

Not only did the disabled/disfigured evoke death for those who perceived them, but they also evoked a fear that necessitated distance. This was not simply a fear of death but a fear that the disabled are potentially ourselves. Stereotyping the disabled as two dimensional people who lead lonely, depressed, and painful lives prevents people from identifying easily with them. This refusal to identify, to see one's life as potentially connected to that of a disabled person's, is a kind of wayward self-protection mechanism. The more "other" the disabled person is, the less likely we are to perceive ourselves as

⁷ The microfilm collection contains several reels devoted exclusively to letters, but all of them are from Munby's wife, Hannah Cullwick. He does not appear to have kept, or at least bequeathed, the letters of any other correspondents.

becoming like them. Their difference not only underscores the comparative normalcy of the abled, but serves as a false security blanket that what happened to them could not happen to us. In *Carnal Acts*, Nancy Mairs comments on society's need to keep disability at a distance:

I once asked a local advertiser why he didn't include disabled people in his spots. His response seemed direct enough: 'We don't want to give people the idea that our product is just for the handicapped.' But tell me truly now: If you saw me pouring out puppy biscuits, would you think these kibbles were only for the puppies of cripples? If you saw my blind niece ordering a Coke, would you switch to Pepsi lest you be struck sightless? No, I think the advertiser's excuse masked a deeper and more anxious rationale: To depict disabled people in the ordinary activities of daily life is to admit that there is something ordinary about disability itself, that it may enter anybody's life. If it is effaced completely, or at least isolated as a separate 'problem,' so that it remains at a safe distance from other human issues, then the viewer won't feel threatened by her or his own physical vulnerability.

Mairs makes it clear that society creates and maintains distance from people with disabilities as a safeguard. If anything, this is truer in Langdon's time because the disabled were considered even more pitiable in the sense that fewer cures existed then and less could be done to alter their physical conditions. There were also no laws to protect the disabled or disfigured from discrimination. Coupled with the existent sexism

and classism of the period, Langdon found herself, as a poor woman, at risk for enormous inequity and a desire to keep her far away. She was too potent a reminder that people in society at large were, to use Mairs' language, "TAPS—Temporarily Abled Persons" who might "join involuntarily, without warning, at any time" the ranks of the disabled (34). This possibility provoked such a fear in the public that it required Langdon and those like her to drop out of society altogether. They had to remain safely in the realm of the private. The expectation was that they would be the exclusive responsibility of their families and/or, if absolutely necessary, should seek permanent asylum as recipients of care from a charitable hospital, which is ultimately what Langdon did.

Disfigured Theology

In the 19th century, this kind of exclusion was prompted in part by a belief that disability was a punishment for sin or at least that it was ordained by God. In *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, Nancy Eisland discusses the history of disability in the Christian faith: "The persistent thread within Christian tradition has been that disability denotes an unusual relationship with God and that the person with disabilities is either divinely blessed or damned: the defiled evildoer or the spiritual superhero" (70). Such an ideology contributed to polarized views of disability in the 19th century. Whether saintly or sinful, to be pitied or to be condemned, the disabled were not like the able-bodied, not *normal*. In the Old Testament, for example, Leviticus 21:18 prohibits anyone "blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a

man with a blemish in his eyes" from approaching the altar. The prohibition is against those with presumed defective bodies and the reason, offered repeatedly in this passage of Leviticus is "because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the LORD who sanctifies them." An imperfect body denotes a blemish that links physical disability with moral impurity—an impurity that would profane a sacred place.

The other side of the binary was to see the disabled as specially touched by God—placed on earth to test their faith or as tests of charity and altruism for others. In this construction, the disabled were props for pity who sometimes saw themselves in this light, since given the choice between being a sinner or being tested, the latter was more appealing. In Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, for example, Mayhew interviews many disabled people, including a street-seller of nutmeg-graters whose understanding of his disability is couched in part as divine providence, particularly when he sees swearing "blackguards" around him who are able-bodied while he is not:

I've thought, Why should I be deprived of the use of [my limbs]? and I've felt angry like, and perhaps at that moment I couldn't bring my mind to believe the Almighty was so good and merciful as I'd heard say; but then in a minute or two afterwards I've prayed to Him to make me better and happier in the next world. I've always been led to think He's afflicted me as He has for some wise purpose or another that I can't see. I think as mine is so hard a life in this world, I shall be better off in the next. (1:331)

Such a conception calls to mind Karl Marx's remark that "Religion is the opiate of the people." The nutmeg-grater seller sublimates his anger at God and society, represented

by the able-bodied ruffians who swear when passing him, and prefers instead to believe that his disability is a test of faith with a promise of a better life in the afterworld.

Disabled people were right to fear the conditions in which they lived. Mayhew interviews a disabled bird-seller who comments that “I feel that I shall be a poor starving cripple, till I end, perhaps in the workhouse” (2:67). It was toward this end that Langdon was heading, and were it not for Munby’s assistance, she would likely have ended up there.

Conclusion

Roughly one month after Munby deigned to kiss Harriet Langdon in sympathy, her situation had changed very little. After losing the piece work from the cartridge maker, it was as difficult to find new work for her as ever, perhaps more so, for both Munby and Langdon herself were running out of places to look and people to whom they could appeal. On the 15th of November, 1862, Munby writes that he visited her

only to give her my usual halfcrown⁸, for work I had none to tell her of.

And she also could hear of none. [. . .] she is fully and cruelly sensible of

her own ugliness and her outcast condition; which last seems more

hopeless than ever: my schemes for getting her employment having all

failed, because as one lady said ‘the disfigurement is too great.’

⁸ According to Dale H. Porter’s *The Thames Embankment: Environment, Technology, and Society in Victorian London*. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 1998. (176), in the mid-1860s, common laborers in London received a weekly wage of 3s. 9d for a 10-hour day and six-day week. The fact that Munby routinely gives Langdon half a crown—worth two shillings and sixpence (or one-eighth of a pound) is therefore very significant. Munby’s monetary gifts represent a significant income for Langdon.

Langdon's society refused to allow her among them, regardless of the gravity of her situation. Their presumption that she was "too disfigured" to work underscores the symbolic nature of her oppression. She was stigmatized and stereotyped as unfit because her face and body did not conform to the societal norm of able bodied and thereby worthy and capable of work. Despite playing the crucial role in the creation of her disability by denying her the right to work, the public insisted that she alone was responsible for her own care. That this became impossible when no one would hire her was an irony her society did not concern itself with.

As 1862 passed and 1863 began, Munby was conscious of the increasingly desperate state Harriet Langdon was sinking into, and while he never turned his back on her, his hope flagged with hers. Munby records on February 21, 1863, what he thought of her latest plan to make a living (a suggestion first made known to Munby by Langdon's sister on a previous visit): "She wants to take a little back room and try to get sewing: a doubtful enterprise. I have written on her behalf to some benevolent friend of Mr. Hill's [one of the surgeons who saw her]: but without much hope that any one will employ her, when once they have seen her face." It was by now more than obvious to Munby, as well as to Langdon, that she was in a hopeless situation that was unlikely to change. As long as her face remained disfigured, and given the scope of medical science at the time, this was a certainty, she would be a meal away from starvation at all times, cruelly prevented from finding gainful employment—her disfigurement rendering her disabled by societal practice.

The injustice of the situation was painfully obvious to Langdon, whom Munby finds increasingly depressed and “still without work, hoping against hope” as March drew to a close. He records in the March 21, 1863, entry that another small hope Langdon cherished had also, at least for the time being, come to nothing: “The plan of getting her a mask, to be worn always, fails by reason of the cost—ten pounds, they say!” Under the circumstances, there was little chance that Langdon could survive without a means of supporting herself. Even her sister, with whom Langdon lived, had evidently become tired of having to care for her, as Munby notes later in the entry:

Her sister, who was in the room and who is evidently tired of having that hideous object constantly about her and dependent, spoke out with the brutal frankness of her class, when I again suggested washing or some such employment. “Nobody will have her, Sir” she said: “nobody could bear to see her about, with a face like that!” It was true enough: but when she left off, Harriet was crying; wiping her poor bleared eyes, which were sore enough already. “My sister’s got no feeling,” sobbed the poor outcast.

Langdon’s suffering is heartbreaking. Not only did she have to endure the physical discomfort of her disease, she was prevented from getting employment, and could not find comfort even in the love of a sister. That her sister condemned her was very likely out of the frustration of having to care for her as a dependent, and as such, a financial drain that she could ill afford. Nevertheless, it is clear that Langdon’s sister shared in the symbolic level of Langdon’s oppression. She accepted that to be disfigured meant to live

outside of society, and she saw her sister in the stereotyped, stigmatized way as did the majority of her peers.

Langdon's situation exemplifies the pervasiveness of oppression, how the symbolic and the institutional are linked. While she is stereotyped by society as incapable and unworthy of work, she experiences simultaneously the systemic nature of oppression. Coupled with the stigma attached to her disfigurement, there is an assumption that her care is the sole responsibility of her family. Such an assumption obviates the need for social intervention in a flawed system. In this case, by making Langdon the responsibility of her sister, criticism of the hospital system is averted. Part of the way that dominance works is to make those who benefit from its privileges invisible so that they are never questioned, and indeed, often remain unseen. In this way, it is in the best interests of the "normal" bodied to both deny their own privilege and to deny that the disfigured or disabled are oppressed. This denial takes many forms, one of which is to insist that the family alone is responsible for the disfigured/disabled person.

Susan Wendell comments on the strain placed on a disabled person and his or her family in *The Rejected Body*, noting that the assumption that the family is solely responsible for supporting a disabled person perpetuates disability:

Attitudes that disability is a personal or family problem (of biological or accidental origin), rather than a matter of social responsibility, are cultural contributors to disability and powerful factors working against social measures to increase ability. The attitude that disability is a personal problem is manifested when people with disabilities are expected to

overcome obstacles to their participation in activities by their own extraordinary efforts. [. . .] The attitude that disability is a family matter is manifested when the families of people with disabilities are expected to provide whatever they need, even at great personal sacrifice by other family members. (52)

Certainly, Langdon makes just such extraordinary efforts, but there is such a stigma attached to her disfigurement that she is repeatedly unable to surmount her situation. The combined nature of the symbolic and institutional aspects of oppression create a cage that she is ill equipped to escape from. The consequent burden of care falls to her sister, whose own immediate family is made less financially stable by consequence. By placing the burden of care of Langdon and her family, the need for social change becomes a moot point. The privileges of the dominant group, the able bodied, remain largely hidden and unquestioned.

That Langdon failed to gain sympathy even from her sister underscores the misery of her situation. As is clear in the quote from Munby's journal above, her sister shared in their society's assumption that someone as disfigured as Harriet would not be welcome in any job, regardless of her willingness and ability to perform. That Langdon *could* work but was prevented from doing so due to social stigma does not seem to have registered with her frustrated family whose anger ought to have been leveled at a society that mandated exclusion. Instead, Langdon's sister internalizes the assumptions of her society and blames Langdon for the family's strained financial position. Lerita M. Coleman writes in "Stigma" that "Social exile conveys another message about expectations. Many

stigmatized people are not encouraged to develop or grow, to have aspirations or to be successful” (147). It is Langdon herself who is forced to carry the sole responsibility for her disfigurement, and her sister’s family who grudgingly support her, making their displeasure painfully obvious. Munby’s importance is clear in these circumstances. Given how strained her relationship had become with her family, Munby becomes increasingly necessary as her only other means of support. This assistance was not merely financial, as significant as monetary help was in her condition, but was also the aid of a friend who visited, distracted, and attempted to cheer her. While his reference to her as an “object” in this entry deserves censure, his reference to her as a “poor outcast” sobbing and “wiping her poor bleared eyes” because of her sister’s “brutal frankness” clearly demonstrates Munby’s sympathy and commiseration.

What is remarkable about Munby is not that he shared some of the prejudices of his society against a disfigured woman, nor that like the rest of that society, he helped to create Langdon’s disability through his perception of her. That he considered her “loathsome” to look at is unarguable, as is his desire, nonetheless, to keep requesting that she lift her veil. There is an element of voyeurism in Munby and had his impulse stopped here, I, too, could more readily condemn him as Reay does. Yet each of us has a voyeuristic streak to some extent, even Reay. Consider the opening lines of his chapter on Munby and Langdon: “This story has many possible beginnings. I would have liked to have started with a photograph, a shocking image. But the appropriate photographs have vanished from what is otherwise an extensive collection. So perhaps I should have begun with a blank, a simple rectangle where the photograph should have been, an absent

image all the more powerful for its non-appearance” (37). If Munby is guilty of wanting to look, so is Reay, and so would we all be. This is far from a human being’s noblest aspect, but it is a part of human consciousness. Many of us are drawn to images that simultaneously attract and repulse, whether at the roadside of a terrible accident or to televised surgeries open for public perusal.

Munby’s impulse did not stop at voyeurism, however, and if taken to task for his faults, he must also be credited for what was good and noble in him—a consistent and diligent effort to find a way for Langdon to care for herself. If friendship is too strong a word for their relationship, he nevertheless did fulfill this capacity to an extent through visits, letters, outings, and aid. More importantly, rather than simply treating her as a benefactor would a charity case by providing money and withdrawing, he made conscientious attempts to help her find work and acted as a representative in a public world that made repeated attempts to erase her. What is remarkable is that despite his inadvertent participation in the construction of her disability, she was more self-reliant than those around her considered her capable of being.

On a broader level, Munby’s journals are instructive of the way that disfigurement was treated in Victorian England—both medically and socially. They reveal that the medical model of disability that treats disability/disfigurement as a pathology in need of a medical fix is insufficient in scope to address such conditions. Munby’s journals reveal that for Victorians, disfigurement was collapsed within the frame of disability, the two conditions conflated to such an extent that there was little appreciable difference. To be disfigured was to be treated as disabled. To be disfigured was to be refused work,

refused society, and cast into the very periphery of the margins. The journals demonstrate that the response to disfigurement requires a recognition of the condition as largely socially constructed and as such, an understanding that medical response alone is insufficient. Even after Langdon's useful medical treatment to alleviate the symptoms of lupus, the social stigma attached to her identity was not diminished. The journals therefore are useful in underscoring that disfigurement requires not simply a medical but a social response: a recognition and dismantling of the negative stereotypes and an insistence on the social integration of disfigured people as whole, productive, and valuable human beings.

CHAPTER 3: OPENING INSTITUTIONS: MUNBY MAKES ROOM FOR THE UNDESIRABLES

I argued in the previous chapter that society had largely constructed Langdon's disability by refusing to employ her. The social stigma attached to her disfigurement exemplifies the symbolic level of her oppression. Yet Langdon and those like her faced discrimination at an institutional level as well. This began with the refusal to hire her, which she encountered at the hands of nearly every employer, but this level of oppression is damaging precisely because it permeates every major social institution. This chapter will explore a different, yet equally crippling aspect of institutionalized oppression faced by disfigured/disabled people: the lack of access to hospital care and Munby's fight to provide that access. I also provide a criticism of the Royal Hospital for Incurables, where Langdon became a pensioner, as fundamentally embedded in classist and ableist practices. The admitting system of the RHI maintained and perpetuated disability through discriminatory practices that required the disabled to raise funds for the hospital in order to gain entry. Such a study provides useful information about the life circumstances of disabled and disfigured people.

In this chapter I extend my analysis of Langdon's agency through a study of both literary and autobiographical sources of other disfigured Victorians. Specifically, I compare the varied responses to disfigurement that Langdon, Clara Hewett, and Esther Summerson have as each views herself in the mirror. These perceptions demonstrate a range from self-rejection to self-integration, though all demonstrate agency. I also evaluate Langdon alongside the most famous Victorian incurable: Joseph Merrick. I

argue that both Merrick and Langdon were able to use their positions as “freaks” to sustain a living, and that this reveals a complex blend of agency and dependence available to Victorians with non paradigm bodies.

At the time when Munby met Harriet Langdon, the only option for her permanent care once the pursuit of employment had been exhausted was admittance into the Royal Hospital for Incurables (RHI) founded in 1854. It was the only institution of its kind and was created precisely to care for patients who suffered from chronic, debilitating diseases that were beyond medical cure. Despite its philanthropic mission, however, the admitting system of the RHI maintained and perpetuated disability by its discriminatory practices. Studying the foundation and early history of this hospital¹ and Arthur Munby’s involvement with it allows us to understand some prevalent Victorian attitudes regarding disability and disfigurement. The amount and kind of help available to Victorians with chronic incurable diseases was vastly insufficient. The prevalent attitude toward disability was informed in part by the industrial revolution and an English ideology that prized work. In “‘The Time is Sick and Out of Joint’: Physical Disability in Victorian England,” Cindy Lacom argues that Victorians

privileged competition and a free-market economy. Their ideology punished individuals who could not support themselves, condemning many people with disabilities to the social role of parasite. Rhetorics of

¹ The Royal Hospital for Incurables underwent several name changes through the decades, and still exists today, over one hundred and fifty years later, under its current name: the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability. Interestingly, the word “Incurable” in the title was not deemed controversial until 1953 when a vote was taken about whether to change it. At that time, both the governors of the hospital and the patients themselves still strongly favored the word as the vote suggests: 674 for keeping it, 376 for changing it. It was not until 1987 that the word “incurable” became outdated and was dropped from the name.

self-help and tough love, found in religious tracts, novels, and political discourses, were behind an increasingly visceral social condemnation of those who could not work. (547)

Though this hospital was created to ameliorate the chronic suffering of this very non-working population, it exemplified class-based institutionalized oppression through policies that secured care on the basis of wealth. Some Victorians, Munby included, critiqued its system of election for entry and additionally, some sought change. While Munby recognized the pecuniary nature of the voting system through which patients were admitted, he had a very pragmatic and heartfelt task as his priority: to gain entry to the hospital for Harriet Langdon. Munby's participation within the existing system to achieve this goal demonstrates an ethic of care that far surpassed many contemporaries who ignored the issue of people with incurable diseases. Munby became instead one of a growing number of Victorians who pursued philanthropic work. In this chapter I argue that Munby combated institutionalized oppression as it existed in the hospital admittance system by working within the system to gain care for someone who would otherwise very likely have been denied. If the general public turned away from Langdon, Munby never did. And if the hospital's flawed admittance policy all but ensured failure for most who attempted, Munby ensured, by contrast, that he would make every effort to assist Langdon in her quest for admission to the only place left to her to go. And they succeeded.

As significant as Munby's sympathy for Langdon is psychologically, it is by no means his only investment in her care. As I argued in the previous chapter, Munby

combated symbolic oppression by refusing the societal assumption that Langdon's disfigurement made her ineligible for work. He did not share the belief that her face made her unworthy and incapable of employment. Nor did he accept that the sole responsibility for her care fell to herself and her family. Munby combated institutionalized oppression by refusing to deny that Langdon was oppressed by a system that granted privilege to those of a higher social class. He did not refuse to see her, as so many others did, and his gaze was neither casual nor solely prurient, as Reay tried to argue. Just as he had made the working class literarily visible by writing them into hundreds of his published poems, so too did he make Langdon visible in a hospital system that would otherwise have erased her out of existence if Munby had not provided the money and influence to bring her story to the attention of voters, as I will argue below.

Most importantly, Munby recognized the severity of Langdon's case—that without medical intervention, she could die. Her extreme poverty made further treatment of her condition impossible. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Langdon's skin condition was made markedly better by the treatment she received during her ten weeks in the hospital, and that similar medical treatment could have provided a continuing benefit, could she only afford it. Yet her lack of resources and the unwillingness of her sister to care for her much longer placed Langdon in the precarious and unenviable position of having to return to the destitute situation in which Munby first found her in Ilfracombe, as he notes in the March 21, 1863, entry: "Evidently, she dreads going back to be a pauper at Ilfracombe, with no money even to pay for medicine that might check

the disease, which else will get to the brain and kill her. At present, she has medicine for nothing: but that cannot go on for ever [. . .]”. The implications of this statement are chilling. Without money, there can be no medicine. Without employment, there can be no money. And without a whole face, there can be no employment. Munby clearly recognizes her situation as literally a matter of life and death. He understands that she cannot go on without medicine and aid, and sets himself up to remedy the situation. Langdon’s poverty, brought on by her social construction as disabled and by the subsequent withholding of work, puts her very life at risk. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not an isolated occurrence, then or now, as Susan Wendell notes in *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*:

Poverty is the single most disabling social circumstance for people with disabilities, since it means that they can barely afford the things that are necessities for non-disabled people, much less the personal care, medicines, and technological aids they may need to live decent lives outside institutions, or the training or education or transportation or clothing that might enable them to work or to participate more fully in public life. (41)

While Wendell is addressing the current 21st century state of disability practice, her words prove no less true for Langdon in the 19th century, when there was as much if not more stigma and discrimination against people perceived as disabled. As I noted in the

previous chapter, there were no laws in Victorian England to safeguard the rights of disabled or disfigured individuals, and no social assistance programs to offer aid².

While Munby's concern over Langdon's life is certainly well-placed, lupus did not need to be a fatal diagnosis; many treatments were available, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. *The British Medical Journal* has dozens of articles that reference the disease in the period corresponding to Munby's interaction with Langdon. Paramount amidst the medical articles are discussions and debates of the etiology of lupus and the efficacy of varying treatments, most of which insist on treatment to check the disease. So long as Langdon could receive proper medical care, there was no reason to suppose that her illness could not be managed.

Yet such treatment was not without cost, and as she had such difficulty finding work, Munby's intervention and aid became increasingly paramount. What Langdon had known all along became sadly apparent to Munby: no one would hire her, or at least not for long, and when they did, the remuneration was miserly. In the April 11, 1863, entry, Munby is clearly aware of the class restrictions Langdon faced: "And so, after a year's effort, I am able to gladden this poor creature with the hope of earning—five shillings a week!" He had found sewing work for Langdon on the condition that he would be responsible for the materials and that Langdon come privately to get the work and not with all the other sewing women who would be made uncomfortable at the sight of her. This was work that Langdon could only get because of Munby's willingness to act as financial security for her, and it was an amount that would go a long way to support her,

² In Chapter 2 of *The Rejected Body*, Wendell argues that current public assistance and aid for individuals with disabilities is woefully underdeveloped even today.

but the job was not to last. Langdon was an excellent seamstress. Munby often compliments the clothes she is able to make, even with the material from the old clothes he gives her. Yet her skill did not matter. Even with Munby actively soliciting work on her behalf, acting as a mediator between her and the public, her disfigurement was considered too vast. Faced once more with overwhelming public rejection, there was only one other possible solution for Langdon: get elected into the RHI as a charitable dependent—a possibility that surfaces in the March 21, 1863, entry when Munby writes that “at present her longing is for admission to the Incurable Hospital.”

When Munby became committed to helping Langdon reach her goal of entry into the RHI, neither had an understanding of how difficult an endeavor it would be. They were up against a system embedded in classism—one that required the working classes to pay for their entry. It was an illogical system, especially when considering that if they could afford to pay, they would likely have enough money to support themselves and not need the hospital in the first place. The hospital’s admittance policy that expected potential patients to pay their own way was in keeping with the prevalent Victorian assumption that people with incurable diseases or conditions were alone responsible for their own care. It was a system determined to wrest utility out of a populace often ill-equipped to provide it.

Prior to 1854, there was no system in place to safeguard disabled and disfigured people, who were perceived, from the point of view of hospital administration, and society at large, as drains on an already strained system, the sole purpose of which ought to be to save the ones that could be saved. Individuals like Harriet Langdon, well beyond

the possibility of cure, were cast aside as hopeless. The principle of utility was omnipresent in mid Victorian schools, and the Working Men's College was formed under a competing model of pedagogy in which Munby participated. A similar philosophy was present in patient care in mid century Victorian hospitals. Under the principles of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian code that was so much a part of the social consciousness of the period, the focus must be on providing the greatest possible good to the greatest number. For hospitals, this meant that scarce resources needed to be spent on those who could gain the most from them—on those who could be cured. It was considered an unavoidable, if unfortunate, fact of life that nothing could be done for the Harriet Langdon's of the world. They were sacrificed on the altar of the greater good.

Denied Royal Patronage

One illustrative example of this societal attitude toward incurables is especially relevant regarding the Royal Hospital for Incurables. In an effort to raise money for the charitable hospital, board members attempted to gain the patronage of Queen Victoria and the royal family. To that end, Charles Reed, son of the late founder of the RHI, Andrew Reed, wrote to Sir Charles Phipps, Esq. in 1864 (ten years after the hospital's founding) to seek royal support. Phipps responded by declining to assist, and enclosed a letter he had previously written in 1857 to Alfred Paget who had made the same request for royal patronage and received the same denial. In this letter, Phipps makes clear that support of such a hospital would serve no "useful" purpose:

[. . .] the principle of an Hospital for Incurables is not considered to be a sound or advisable one. The Establishment has none of the uses of an Hospital, it is neither curative, that is it does not take people in with a view of restoring them to Society in a sound and useful state, nor is it of any use to Medical Science by affording instruction to the Medical Men who attend in the train of the Officers of the Hospital.” (Cook 143)

Clearly, incurables have no use value: variations of the word “useful” appear three times in this paragraph alone. Incurables became a superfluous, expendable population. They were not conceived of as a social responsibility. Kept apart from mainstream society as much as possible, the average Victorian could not see him/herself as sharing identity with an incurable. These were a separate class of people with their own problems—not conceived of as potentially anyone or everyone.

Phipps’s description focuses on the inability of the incurables to contribute, to be productive members of society. In a society that mandated labor to fuel a capitalist market, the inability to work was anti-English. In Cindy Lacom’s essay “‘The Time is Sick and Out of Joint’: Physical Disability in Victorian England,” she echoes the work of Lennard Davis and Michael Oliver³, noting that the category of the “disabled” “evolved in the context of the industrial revolution and of the development of a work ethic that punished those who could not keep up [. . .]. Those unable to meet industrial workplace standards because of a disability or deformity were increasingly exiled from the capitalist norm, which demanded ‘useful bodies, able to perform predictable and repeated movements’” (548). Those with disabilities were denigrated in a society that equated

³ Lacom references Michael Oliver’s 1990 text *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*.

work with a valid identity. Setting aside for the moment that Harriet Langdon *could* work, the social interpretation of her as disabled invalidated her existence. Coupled with this was her assumed uselessness on the marriage market due to facial disfigurement. With such social signifiers in play, Langdon was doubly unproductive.

Not only does Phipps's letter denigrate the potential labor use of disfigured or disabled individuals, the incurables also failed to provide practical lessons to the medical establishment, presumably as attempting potential treatments on incurables was considered inappropriate and wasteful. Without any use value, Phipps feels justified in dismissing the RHI as unworthy of royal consideration. Indeed, the only potential "use" that some incurables found was in self exhibition, as I will argue below.

In his letter, Phipps goes on to outline Bentham's principle of utility by comparing the RHI to hospitals that can reach far more patients:

The good that such an Institution can possibly do must be very limited. In an Hospital thousands of persons pass through the hands of the Doctors in the course of the year, they are cured, their diseases are modified, and others take their place in the Wards, or as Out Patients. In Asylums for orphans they grow to a certain age & quit the Establishment, but in this Institution when you have once filled the building with Incurables, there [sic] would remain for the rest of their lives, and all the rest of the Incurables of England would know that there is such an Establishment into which some two or three hundred may gain admission but the doors of which must then be closed unless they die off. (Cook 143)

Under this logic, the inability to help all is somehow justification for helping none. There is no evidence in this sentiment that the incurables, as human beings and English citizens, have a right to expect decent care. Phipps neglected to acknowledge that the RHI also had out patients for whom no beds were required. Regardless, the chief objection that Phipps appears to raise is that these patients, by definition of being incurable, are somehow not worth expending resources on. In fact, his solution appears embedded in the comment regarding the hope that some of them die off. While his message suggests a brutal competition among potential inmates of the Hospital, the meta message is more ominous: “dying off” would alleviate not just the waiting patients, but all of England. Such an inference is not a reach in the context of his overall refusal to offer royal aid, or in the context of a burgeoning interest in eugenics as a valid social panacea for all the “undesirables,” the disabled among them⁴.

Incurables need not fear, however, that their government had forgotten them entirely. In February 1868, the written minutes of the RHI record that “[. . .] the Queen [has] sent, through Dr [William] Jenner for the use of the patients, a copy of Her Majesty’s Book—*Leaves from the Journal of our life in the Highlands*, and the Secy. had been desired to send a suitable acknowledgement” (Cook 144). So if they could not

⁴ In 1869, Sir Frances Galton published *Hereditary Genius*, in which he coined the phrase “eugenics” and differentiated between so-called positive and negative types. In the former, society ought to encourage the socially prominent and gifted to reproduce, while in the latter, society should actively discourage the social “misfits” from reproducing. Disabled individuals fell into the category of unfit and were considered viable candidates for sterilization.

count on the financial support that royal patronage would entail, the incurables of the RHI could at least read a royal book, for all the good it would do them.⁵

Dickens and Disfigurement

Yet if there was immense public apathy for the conditions that incurable people suffered, there was also a significant clamoring for social change. Because oppression occurs not only at the individual level, but also at the symbolic and the institutional, affecting social change is most possible when all levels are addressed. Munby played a critical role in such change in the life of Harriet Langdon. He was a part of the movement to alter the way the disfigured were thought of and how they were treated. Although he worked extensively to help one individual woman, he did so at the human level of recognizing each life, her life, as valuable. An inability to help all incurables did not for him, as for Phipps, place a prohibition on helping one. Munby was on the frontline of those seeking social change for incurable Victorians. Yet he was not alone in this attempt.

A far more famous voice that sought to alter the treatment of those with incurable diseases was Charles Dickens, whose popularity as a writer enabled him to reach a much greater audience. His voice was as passionate in the cause, though more removed from the personal involvement Munby demonstrated.⁶ C. G. Cook's history of the Royal Incurables Hospital quotes from an article titled "No hospital for Incurables" in the

⁵ It was not until after Victoria's death, that King Edward VII gave permission for the hospital to keep its name of "Royal" in 1903. Previously, the hospital had had no official claim to such a name. With this royal permission granted, the RHI became the recipient of more financial support.

⁶ Dickens was invited by the RHI to serve as chairman of the first annual fundraising dinner in 1854, and he accepted.

inaugural edition of the weekly journal *Household Words*, edited by Charles Dickens.

The article was anonymous, but if it was not written by Dickens himself, it was clearly approved by him in the first 1850 volume of his journal. The article served to both reflect and bolster concern for incurables:

It is an extraordinary fact that among the innumerable medical charities with which this country abounds, there is not one for the help of those who of all others most require succour, and who must die, and do die in thousands, neglected, unaided. There are hospitals for the cure of every possible ailment or disease known to suffering humanity, but not one for the reception of persons past cure. There are, indeed, small charities for incurables scattered over the country—like the asylum for a few females afflicted with incurable diseases, at Leith, which was built and solely supported by Miss Gladstone; and a few hospital wards, like the Cancer ward of Middlesex, and the ward for seven incurable patients in the Westminster; but a large hospital for incurables, does not exist. (Cook 1)

The article opens with a strong rhetorical point intended to demonstrate the great need of a large segment of the population for whom there is no facility capable of aiding them. By outlining the occasional existent example, the author convincingly mounts the case of how few people are currently receiving aid—six here, seven there—among a population of millions in the country.

Dickens continues by attempting to gain public sympathy through the report of one specific example—a girl whose story is personalized in the hope of putting a face on

the suffering. Hers is the single instance that will draw attention to the countless others in similar positions:

The case of a poor servant girl which lately came to our knowledge, is the case of thousands. She was afflicted with a disease to which the domestics of the middle classes, especially, are very liable—white swelling [probably tuberculosis] of the knee. On presenting herself at the hospitals, it was found that an operation would be certain death; and that, in short, being incurable, she could not be admitted. She had no relations; and crawling back to a miserable lodging, she lay helpless till her small savings were exhausted. Privations of the severest kind followed; and despite the assistance of some benevolent persons who learnt of her condition when it was too late, she died a painful and wretched death.

(Cook 1-2)

Clearly, by outlining the suffering of such a girl, the intention is to raise public outcry that no such facility of care exists. This girl, and thousands of others like her, Langdon included, was shut out from the possibility of aid. The utter hopelessness of being left for dead in conditions of unameliorated suffering, in many cases for years on end, raised public awareness of such cases and helped to solidify a public demand for redress. The reference to the middle class also seems rhetorically significant for its suggestion that this is a problem that could and did affect the majority of the readership of the journal. If framed as a problem of those who served the middle class, the solution ought also come from this class who are directly affected and morally responsible. The article implies that

it is the responsibility of the middle class to care for those that directly support it. This plea for individual responsibility invokes a moral imperative to get involved, become active. If there was undoubtedly a voyeuristic aspect to a philanthropic interest in incurables, for example in the photographs of the disabled, there was also a commitment to benevolence by some Victorians, Munby included.

The article in *Household Words* finally moves from the specific case of the servant girl to a generalization of how many English citizens suffer a similar fate. Rhetorically, the argument focuses on simple humanity by reminding the public that even those citizens who are guilty of capital offenses and put to death are not made to suffer so terribly or for so long:

It is indeed a marvelous oversight of benevolence that sympathy should have been so long withheld from precisely the sufferers who most need it. Hopeless pain, allied to hopeless poverty, is a condition of existence not to be thought of without a shudder. It is a slow journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, from which we save even the greatest criminals. When the law deems it necessary to deprive a human being of life, the anguish, though sharp, is short. We do not doom him to the lingering agony with which innocent misfortune is allowed to make its slow descent into the grave. (Cook 3)

This article helped pave the way for public sympathy and support for what would come four years later: The Royal Hospital for Incurables—the first hospital created to help lessen the suffering of those with diseases and deformities that could not be aided in

general hospitals. While Dickens combated the discriminatory treatment of incurables in the realm of ideas, through the printed word, Munby did so through years-long pragmatic effort in the life of Harriet Langdon. Both kinds of commitment—in the realm of ideas and that of action—are valuable and necessary to create change. The written word, especially when composed by an author with the popularity of Charles Dickens, has immense power. Words can inspire action and create a climate in which change becomes possible⁷. This article raised the level of social consciousness about the conditions that incurables faced. Munby's actions on behalf of Langdon are equally powerful. He was there in the week to week existence of a woman who desperately needed medical and financial aid. Without his assistance she would never have received the support she needed to stay alive.

Philanthropic Perspective

Munby acted to help Langdon, understanding that each person should do whatever he or she could to lessen the burden faced by people with disabilities. His motivations were in part those described by Gertrude Himmelfarb in *Poverty and Compassion* in which she argues that Victorian philanthropists affected immense positive social change by linking morality with social policy. Setting aside for now the wave of criticism subsequent to Himmelfarb's work that called into question the benevolence and motivation of Victorian philanthropists, I want to look at her contribution to the understanding of Victorian philanthropy. Himmelfarb interprets Booth's seventeen-

⁷ Just as Munby had done by including working-class women as worthy figures of literary inclusion, Dickens's works are permeated with representations of disabled/disfigured characters in an attempt both to humanize them and demonstrate the reality of their existence in the Victorian landscape.

volume *Life and Labour of the People in London* as invested in moral sentiment.

Whereas Booth's text had been understood as primarily objective social science, Himmelfarb insists that Booth would not "have thought it scientific to ignore the objective, empirical, demonstrable facts about the poor—moral and religious facts as well as economic and social facts" (149). Himmelfarb insists that it was this conjuncture of social science with compassion that made Booth such a worthy philanthropist. She also credits him for creating varying categories of poor with different correlating programs to aid them, which she views as his refusal to essentialize.

While Himmelfarb focuses on individuals, like Charles Booth, with a vast reach to alter the course of working-class lives, Munby's aid was far more modest, focusing as it did on an individual woman. One point of correlation, however, is Munby's refusal to treat Langdon, a disfigured woman, as a disabled woman incapable of work. While much of society collapsed the boundary between disfigured and disabled, making them interchangeable, Munby acknowledged that Langdon had both the right and the capacity for labor. Acknowledging for a moment that there were obviously Victorians whose disabilities made them incapable of work (and not supposing that this equates them with superfluity), Munby did not assume that every person with a disease or disorder should be treated universally and painted with the same, condemning brush. In "Stigma" Lerita M. Coleman asserts that "Stigma appears to be a special and insidious kind of social categorization [. . .], a process of generalizing from a single experience. People are treated categorically rather than individually, and in the process are devalued" (145). By contrast, Munby sees Langdon as individuated. While Munby should not be read as

uncritically philanthropic any more than Charles Booth, Munby does understand Langdon's capacity to work.

Munby's critics have often condemned him for the erotic pleasure he took in interacting with working class women, yet this criticism is at best one-sided. While he was undeniably attracted to the milkmaids and colliery women he encountered over the years, there was an equally strong humanitarian impulse in Munby that was unselfish and compassionate. His sensibility was such that he could not walk past a person in Langdon's condition and do nothing. He also took notice of other acts of kindness on behalf of the disabled. On March 21st, 1863, after leaving Langdon's side with the resolve that her lack of care "cannot go on for ever," he walked home and

On the way, in Piccadilly, I saw an incident that pleased me much. A cripple, who had lost the use of his legs, was painfully dragging himself along the pavement after a day's begging. Just as I passed, a costergirl came up, going home after her day's work, and driving her emptied handcart before her. Whether the cripple were an acquaintance of hers, I do not know; but it did not seem as if he were. However, she stopped and offered him a ride, which he gladly accepted.

For roughly two and a half pages, Munby records the scene in his journal, clearly moved by the effort she has extended to a stranger. The incident is further evidence of a man who acknowledged the fellow responsibility that each individual has to his/her fellow human beings. It is a testament to Munby's belief in social responsibility, even at the

cost of personal inconvenience, as he describes in his journal after the disabled man accepted her help:

So she tilted her cart up against the flags, whilst he by help of his hands painfully worked himself into it. He was a tall well grown young man: and it was all she could do, by hanging with her whole weight upon the shafts, to bring the cart down to a level again, when he was fairly in. She did it, however; and then bravely set off with her new burden: pushing between the shafts, and driving the cart, with him lying helpless in it, over the stones among cabs and omnibuses and crowds, from S. James's Hall to S. Martin's Lane: how much further I know not. She was a slim delicate looking girl, and though she bent nearly double to her work, the load was as much as she could manage. Yet she did it; simply and kindly; not knowing that even one passer by was noticing the act.

Munby's remark that the incident "pleased me much" is telling; it is the pleasure of recognition. He sees himself in the costergirl and is gratified to witness acts of human kindness as well as to participate in them himself. Having just come from a visit with Langdon, it is clear that Munby identifies with the costergirl who helps a stranger out of common human decency. She does it not to be noticed, not to be thanked, not to be thought well of, but because it is the right thing to do—just as Munby helps Langdon, who had been a total stranger to him. He does it from an ethic of care, to use the words of psychologist Carol Gilligan. It differentiates him from a vast number of Victorians who, as they did in the scene he describes, pass by the disabled man as if he were

invisible. Munby is not one of the faceless members of the crowd who walk past without acting; he is someone with a willingness and capacity to offer help.

Hospital Flaws

One might assume that with the 1854 foundation of the Royal Hospital for Incurables a new, more humane day had come in patient care for those like Langdon. And it had. And yet it had not. The hospital at which Langdon would seek entry did offer what no other previous hospital had ever done—a caring place for those beyond cure to get the sustained medical care and attention they so desperately needed. Yet it was also a deeply flawed endeavor run by individuals who shared the same assumptions of many of the period that the burden of care was the responsibility of the individual patient. When it initially opened, the hospital housed fewer than twenty patients, and in the early 1860's when Munby attempted to gain a place for Harriet Langdon, there were roughly ninety spaces available, to be sought after by desperate patients throughout all of England. While the size of the hospital clearly limited its availability, there was a far more insidious problem. The system that was in place to enable entry to the hospital was discriminatory and unfair; it placed the sole burden of entry on patients by forcing them to raise money and votes from wealthy patrons in order to be accepted as in-patients or as pensioners (out patients who were given an annual stipend). Consequently, those who could not raise enough money or did not gain sufficient sympathy from voters were rejected as candidates for hospital entry, no matter how deserving they were.

It was a system that relied primarily on money for admittance, but also on the prominence of those with the power to cast votes. If applicants could not raise sufficient funds to buy votes through their own family and friends, they were forced to rely on the favor of those benefactors who supported the hospital. The end result was that the benefactors cast their votes for their favorite candidates. If an applicant could not make his or her case known to such voters, the chance of gaining entry was virtually impossible. Here again Munby came to Langdon's aid by writing scores of letters to potential benefactors on her behalf. He fought institutionalized oppression from within the flawed system of the hospital admittance policies.

The process to gain admittance for Langdon began in May 1863 when Munby wrote an appeal to plead her case as an applicant to the Royal Hospital for Incurables, as he notes in his May 27th entry: "I went afterwards to the Victoria Press with the M. S. of the appeal on behalf of Harriet Langdon." Though a brief entry, it marks the beginning of a concerted effort to gain Langdon a position. Munby was following the prescribed advice that the hospital gave to potential applicants. When a candidate sought admission to the hospital, he or she was given the following written advice: "Advice to Candidates. When an incurable invalid has been accepted by the Board of Management of the ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES, PUTNEY HEATH, as a candidate for the benefits of the Institution, he, or she, should, of course, do all that is possible to secure election" (Cook 194). The notice goes on to spell out specific advice that candidates should follow to help ensure a position. An emphasis is placed on the favor the hospital is doing for the candidate; the burden of effort is clearly placed on the potential patient,

offering another clear example of a society that felt that the burden of care for incurable patients was their own responsibility: “Election is only possible by the votes of subscribers. It should be borne in mind that whether a candidate is seeking admission to the Hospital, or the pension of 20 pounds a year for life, very great benefit is sought and some effort is necessary on the part of the candidates and their friends” (Cook 194). It would have been more accurate to say that *great* effort was needed, considering the amount of money necessary to garner the required votes, not to mention that any money raised would be kept by the hospital regardless of whether or not the patient was accepted. While tactfully written, the advice underscores to candidates that the responsibility to gather funds and votes is theirs alone. This exemplifies the denial of social responsibility and a refusal to recognize the necessity of changing a flawed system. The language of the notice implies that the hospital is doing potential patients a great and unearned favor for which they must compete to the best of their abilities. There is no apparent recognition that society created or worsened many of the cases of disability by refusing to allow individuals like Langdon to work, even though she was entirely capable of it. In this sense, candidates are solving a social problem that society created, rather than a biological one of disease or deformity. Yet the hospital insists that the problem of disability/disfigurement is the fault of the individual patient and hence she or he is solely responsible for competing for entry.

The notice continues by stating that “The Board have to secure year by year the [money] necessary to maintain this National Charity, and, since the successful candidates are those who alone benefit, it behoves [sic] them to leave no stone unturned to make

known the good work of the Hospital, profiting their own candidature in the process” (Cook 194). While the hospital absolutely needed to be funded in order to run, there is a decidedly cynical and crass aspect in advising disabled and disfigured potential patients that as they are charity cases, it is their responsibility to see that the funds are raised. And further they must put their disabilities on display as the means of generating funds. I argued earlier that dominance is maintained through the denial both that the privileged are privileged and that the oppressed suffer discrimination. One form of denial is to focus on the charitable, philanthropic aspect of the hospital instead of on its classism. The advice to candidates is predicated on a series of assumptions, not the least of which is that the candidates are capable of raising sufficient funds. The board members suffer from a circular logic, for surely if candidates could raise the funds, they would not need the help of the hospital’s care and could rely only on their own and that of their family’s to obtain private medical care. Yet these assumptions are never surfaced. Particularly galling is that for patients like Langdon, personally raising funds is impossible because she is denied work due to her very disfigurement. Again, this demonstrates that Langdon’s disability was largely socially constructed and that she was then further penalized by the hospital admittance policies by being made personally incapable of raising funds. None of this discrimination was acknowledged. Instead, the spirit of the notice is that the hospital is doing Langdon and those like her a great charitable service for which she must pay. Ironically, the Board did not appreciate that requiring patients to pay for their care hardly constituted actual charity.

The hospital did offer some help in assisting the candidates, as the notice advises:

A List of Subscribers to the Hospital is published and may be obtained, post free, for 1s. 3d. In this list will be found the names and postal addresses of those who possess votes. Candidates and their friends should send their cards to subscribers in the hope of receiving votes. Candidates should also let their friends know that votes for one Election only are obtainable at the rate of four per guinea⁸. (Cook 194)

Clearly the hospital was more than willing to point candidates in the direction of wealthy subscribers. Rather than turning to these subscribers themselves to raise funds, the hospital sent potential patients to them instead to ensure continued patronage. Begging is, presumably, more effective when coming from those perceived as beggars. This contributes to the symbolic oppression of the disabled by equating disability with utter helplessness and a complete lack of self-sufficiency. While there are certainly disabled individuals who must rely solely on outside care for survival, there are also many, like Langdon, who are capable of independence. The symbolic aspect of their oppression perpetuates the stereotype of helplessness, which in fact *creates* inability for Langdon.

The grasping nature of the system is also apparent in the notice above by observing what was underscored. While votes could be carried over to the new election, if subscribers failed to elect a chosen candidate after one election, that money would not be given to the needy candidates for whom it was raised. Instead, the money would be retained by the hospital and if the subscriber were willing to support the candidate again, fresh funds would be required to obtain new votes. The abusive nature of such a system

⁸ This notice, the only specific example of the written advice to candidates provided in Cook's history, is from 1910; consequently, the rates for votes (and for postage) were likely lower in 1864 when Langdon gained entry, though the electoral system itself was the same.

is clear. With the promise of potential entry into the hospital, or as pensioners, candidates become fundraisers for the hospital. The willingness of the disabled to participate in a system that they likely would never have the opportunity to enter is a testament to their desperation. It is comparable to a lottery system in which the likelihood of winning is so low as to be all but impossible. Yet when faced with a slow and painful death like the one outlined in Dickens's *Household Words* article, who would not rather turn to any possible hope, however unlikely?

It was into this system that Langdon and Munby were propelled. While it is true that a list of candidates was theoretically available to Langdon, she did not have the money needed to purchase it, nor did she have the money needed to send her appeal to those on the list. Receipt of this list may appear to be a boon from the hospital, yet reaching the vast number of subscribers would have proven an insurmountable mountain that many would never have been able to climb. In 1867, for example, three years after Langdon's eventual election, there were nearly 6000 subscribers (Cook 189). How is it possible that someone of Langdon's economic status could afford to send appeals to even a fraction of the names on the list? Besides the post, there was the expense of creating and copying the appeals. This is a further example of the institutionalized aspect of class-based oppression. The system assumes financial ability where none exists and places a heavy responsibility on the patients to raise funds, despite their already strained position.

While it may seem at first glance that the hospital is being helpful in providing a list at what was claimed to be a minimal fee, there is no acknowledgment on their part about how impossible it would be for a working-class person to contact even a dozen of

Throughout the rough diaries for the years when he was in contact with Langdon, there appear regular recordings of letters received from and sent to Harriet Langdon. The frequency of the letters varies from once a month, with some months completely empty, to half a dozen times a month or more when they were in most frequent contact.

Although the deed box containing the Munby materials did not include any of these letters, they spanned the time that Munby sought work on Langdon's behalf and later the attempted hospital admittance and afterwards. It can be assumed that these letters were in part to keep Langdon aware of any work he might have found for her, but by the sheer number of them it seems safe to assume that they were also to exchange pleasantries and simply keep in touch. There is also evidence that Munby routinely sent Langdon money (and brought it to her in person) to help support her through her struggles.

On May 25, 1863, Munby records sending a letter to the Royal Hospital for Incurables and receiving one back the next day. He wrote again to the hospital on the 27th of May 1863. This appears to be the initial exchange between himself and the Hospital on her behalf. It came two months after the March 21st journal entry in which Munby recorded that "at present her longing is for admission to the Incurable Hospital." In the absence of any other eventuality, Munby was following through on helping her to achieve this goal. On June 15th of the same year, Munby records in the rough diary that the "First 50 of Langdon's appeal ready." On July 2, 1863, he records that he had sent "12 letters re Langdon," followed on July 3 by "20 letters re Langdon." Finally, on July 6th, he records that he had sent out an additional "28 letters re Langdon," and a letter to Langdon herself, likely informing her of the progress of this campaign. Clearly these

letters are ones sent to the RHI's subscribers, as suggested in the notice to applicants. Munby was doing what Langdon was financially unable to do—send out numerous appeals and thereby improve her likelihood of election. There is no evidence of Langdon's level of literacy, but it is safe to assume that Munby's was significantly higher; thus he is also able to couch these appeals in the language of an upper middle class barrister.

There is no copy in his journal of the appeal that Munby sent out on Langdon's behalf to these sixty individuals, but Cook provides an example of one (from 1898) in his history of the hospital that typifies what was customarily included. Like Langdon, this candidate sought acceptance as a pensioner. Across the top is the date of the election—these took place twice a year: in May and in November. The appeal card is split between two columns. On the left beneath the date, there is a brief message addressed to those who voted at the RHI:

Your VOTES and INTEREST are earnestly solicited on behalf of
WILLIAM JAMES SHAVE married, aged 32. CANDIDATE FOR THE
PENSION, Who for fourteen years has suffered from Rheumatism, and
has been under treatment at St. George's Hospital, has been to Bath twice,
and to the Local Hospital without benefit, and for four years has been
quite disabled and is now entirely dependent upon his friends for support.
(Cook 196).

This note is followed by a list of names that “The case is personally known and strongly recommended by.” Finally, there is the following direct plea at the bottom: “The

Candidate is thankful to say that at this last May Election, his first attempt, he has secured 288 Votes, he again asks your kindly interest for November next, or for the following May, if November Votes are already promised” (Cook 196).

Munby’s appeal on Langdon’s behalf likely followed this pattern. There is a great deal to note in this appeal. The description of the candidate has the rhetorical objective of demonstrating that he has made every effort possible to assume responsibility for his own care, having sought help at varying hospitals and to the restorative baths as well. It also serves as proof of the incurable nature of his condition and hence the necessity of being cared for by the RHI, since he has been for four years unable to take care of himself. That he is currently cared for by friends is also significant, implying as it does that he is worthy of such care and that by this time they are no longer able to care for him. The list of names that is included serves to vouch for the reliability of the candidate’s character, particularly as it is composed of two Major Generals, a Reverend, and an Esquire. These individuals serve as mediators who, like Munby, increase the likelihood of a candidate’s acceptance by lending credibility and authority.

It is also an important rhetorical point that Shave’s appeal demonstrates the extent to which he has already benefited the RHI by securing 288 votes—each of which has been purchased by a financial contribution. Shave is made appealing to voters by demonstrating the confidence he has already raised by his case, but the pecuniary message is also clear: he has already brought funds to the hospital and is likely to be able to bring more. That he has friends in middle and upper-middle class stations suggests that more money will be forthcoming. In his history of the hospital, Cook notes that most

candidates to the RHI did not gain entry on their first attempt. Indeed, there was little chance that one could be elected because the number of candidates that the RHI accepted for each election by far outnumbered the number of vacancies they had available. What purpose did this discrepancy serve if not to gain funds? In the November 1867 election, for example, there were nearly 300 candidates for admission and only 30 available spaces (Cook 193). This translated into a significant source of income for the hospital and later became a source of public criticism. If a subscriber intended to get a candidate elected, he or she would need to donate enough money to acquire the necessary votes. When he or she failed to elect a chosen candidate, that money still went to the hospital, not to the chosen recipient. This meant that should the same donor wish to pursue election for the chosen candidate in the future, he or she would need to donate more money to secure further votes in the next election.

Picturing Others

The final note of importance in Shave's appeal is that while the left side was devoted to the description discussed above of the candidate and his circumstances, the right side contained a photograph of Shave, stooped forward and leaning on crutches. The photo is significant in its ability to add to the persuasive aspect of the appeal. Surely Shave would garner more sympathy and hence more votes with this visible demonstration of his disability and subsequent need of care. The photo takes up the entire right hand side of the appeal—it is a prominent part of the card that is also suggestive for Langdon's case. Although Munby does not include a copy of the appeal he sent out on her behalf in

his journal, it is certainly possible that one of the photographs he had taken of her was useful as part of her appeal card. Visual proof of her disfigurement would have strengthened the rhetorical power of her appeal since it is that very face that was used as proof of her inability to work for potential employers. In the case of her appeal, her disfigurement might have worked to her benefit in proving her supposed unfitness for both work and social interaction. In this light, Munby's photograph could be seen as a necessary step in ensuring Langdon's election, rather than solely as another example in his photographic collection of working-class women or for his personal voyeurism, as suggested by Davidoff, McClintock, and Reay. In the rough diary dated November 6, 1863, Munby lists the places he went, as he commonly did, but this entry specifies that he went to "H. Langdon—show portraits." The note is undeniably brief, yet its proximity to the appeal campaign is suggestive. It is certainly possible that her portrait was used to further her appeal claim.

Charitable institutions in the Victorian era, of which the RHI is certainly one, rely on stereotypical, one-dimensional portraits of the disabled in order to arouse the pity necessary to obtain funds from a skeptical public. When seeking public support, the charitable institution must present the disabled as suffering victims devoid of agency. In "Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction," Martha Stoddard Holmes quotes from one such institution that sought funds from the public for the School of the Indigent Blind in Liverpool:

Few there are, if any, who have entered the walls of this Institution without emotion, at the sight of so many of their fellow-creatures deprived

of that blessing, without which, *every other* appears empty and insignificant; and although the gloom of their once lonely and dependent condition is happily cheered . . . still present to the mind is the lamentable conviction of their dark and benighted state, for which no relief can be found on this side of the grave. . . . Your compassionate assistance is now implored.—Extend a helping Hand to raise their drooping Hearts,—to cheer their gloomy paths. (28)

The image of the blind presented here is one rife with suffering. The comment is rhetorically designed to solicit funds through pity. It does so by positing the blind person's position as a hopelessly deficient state entirely at odds with the charitable, sighted person who hears the appeal and comes to the rescue. The blind are depicted as entirely other: they are "creatures" leading "gloomy," "benighted" lives who await the "relief" of death. The appeal turns on positing the blind as victims of cruel circumstance who lead impossibly unhappy lives. This level of rhetoric is evidently necessary to induce any social response on the part of the "normal."⁹

Similarly, the RHI used photos as a large part of its rhetorical appeal. As I noted in the previous chapter, photographs of the disabled that are put on display are certainly problematic. While there may be some mitigating circumstances in Munby's case, namely that he could have been disseminating her likeness in order to help secure her a position in the RHI, it is important to question the necessity of such spectacle as well as its effect. One of the most telling aspects about the photography of "otherness" is that the

⁹ I would argue that much charity advertising today still functions by positing the disabled in such reductive, stereotypical terms in which their lives are presented as one-dimensional and misery-filled.

photos are always about how the “normal” perceive the “abnormal,” not about how the “others” perceive themselves. Certainly we can see this tendency in Munby’s case, even outside of the photographs, when he is surprised by her apparent happiness and lack of concern at times. He is definitely guilty of seeing Langdon in these moments through the lens of his own creation: she is abnormal other for whom there can be no light moments with *that* face.

In the case of the photographs of Langdon, they say more about how the abled perceive the disabled/disfigured than about how Langdon perceived herself. She is the photographic object, not subject, and her face underscores for viewers her otherness, and, consequently, their own normalcy. This tendency to read one’s own abled normalcy in contrast to the Other’s perceived abnormality is discussed at length in a compelling chapter from *The Creatures Time Forgot* by David Hevey called “The Enfreakment of Photography.” Hevey’s scope is to critique representations of the disabled from the 1950’s through the 1980’s, though his text is also instructive in interpreting Victorian photographs of so-called “freaks.” Hevey particularly critiques the work of Diane Arbus who photographed a variety of disabled individuals. One of the central criticisms Hevey levels at Arbus is that she manipulated isolated disabled people, among them Eddie Carmel, whom she depicts in a 1970 monograph entitled *A Jewish Giant at Home with his Parents in the Bronx, N.Y.* Hevey argues that

Carmel told Arbus about his ambitions, about his job selling insurance, about his acting hopes (and his despair at only being offered ‘monster’ roles), and so on. Arbus dismissed this in her representations. She clearly

found his actual day-to-day life irrelevant. Indeed, she appears to have disbelieved him, preferring her own projection of a metaphysical decline. His real tragedy is that he trusted Arbus, and she abused that trust outside of their relationship in an area within her total control, that is, photography. (371)

According to Hevey, Arbus made her career on such misusages of the disabled. While Munby's photographs of Langdon are not totally unproblematic, it doesn't seem possible to read Munby in light of Hevey's criticism of Arbus. Langdon's daily life was anything but irrelevant to Munby, nor was he dismissive when she told him of her problems, concerns, and hopes. Instead, he fought to help Langdon gain the best possible life she could. Her trust in him, I argue, was not misplaced, and yet many of his private thoughts about her face do seem to evoke *his* evaluation of Langdon's life rather than her own.

Disfigured Agency

Even more significant a question than whether or to what extent Langdon could trust Munby is a consideration of the extent to which Langdon had control of her own fate. While my above arguments have demonstrated the dire situation Langdon found herself in as a disfigured woman presumed incapable of work, such a reading does not preclude the possibility that Langdon, despite her constrained circumstances, was able to retain a degree of autonomy. Martha Stoddard Holmes argues this point eloquently in "Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction":

One of the dangers in uncovering the cultural history of discrimination against people with physical impairments is that the story we piece together is a narrative of villains and victims that effectively re-enshrines disabled people as incapable of speaking or acting for themselves. While it is crucial to make it clear just how that discrimination took place and how thorough it was, it is equally crucial to recover the subjectivity, voice, and agency of people with disabilities who survived discrimination. (42)

Munby's journals provide just such a place to discover disfigured subjectivity and non disfigured response.

How much power is available to disfigured Victorian women? It is possible to find evidence of their social conditions in the literature of the period. In the previous chapter, I argued that Esther Summerson had the power to accept herself as a disfigured woman even when no one else would. Gissing's *The Nether World* provides another important text to study the amount of power available to a disfigured woman. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Clara Hewett's disfigured face is a source of alienation, imposed by the expectations of society as well as Clara's own internalization of society's view of her as outcast. Her understanding of her lack of prospects and her view of the long, unutterably bleak life ahead of her causes her to contemplate suicide.

It is possible at first glance to see Clara's life as utterly pre-determined and entirely outside of her control. Gissing's incessant references to those in "the nether world" as trapped by their impoverished circumstances encourages readers to accept his worldview that those in the London slums are fated to a life of utter misery and toil—the

unblemished and disfigured alike. P. J. Keating comments on such undifferentiated depictions of Victorian working-class characters in *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*: “In each novel the workers share in common skills, occupations, wage levels, and most important of all, interests and attitudes. Each worker is part of the same instantly recognizable whole” (7).

Clara’s fate is depicted as a foregone conclusion, her life in the hands not only of the woman who throws vitriol in her face, but by a larger, unseen, darker fate that suffocates all possibility. Like Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago*, another Victorian depiction of life in a London slum, Gissing’s text blurs the boundaries between literary realism and naturalism. Nowhere is Gissing’s position of the inescapable brutality of the nether world more clear than in the description given of it by Mad Jack, one of the slum’s inhabitants: ““This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower shall you sink in want and misery; at the end there is waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell—Hell—Hell!”” (Gissing 345). Jack quotes an angel’s speech that came to him in a dream, demonstrating that even those aligned with heaven take no pity on the inhabitants in the Clerkenwell slum. Indeed, Gissing provides no relief for any of his characters. Not a single person escapes a hellish fate in the novel.

Gissing’s text is instructive of one disfigured woman’s struggle to survive. His work is important in its acknowledgement of the intersections among disability, class, and gender in Victorian England. Clara is trapped not simply because of her

disfigurement but because of her poverty, which is compounded by her assumed exclusion from both the labor and the marriage markets. Additionally, as a woman, her ability to earn a living is comparatively small, even assuming she would be hired with her disfigurement. Her predicament is indicative of what feminist theorist Marilyn Frye describes as the interlocking axes of oppression:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is this experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped. (81)

Clara Hewett, like Harriet Langdon, is fixed amidst the interlocking structures of oppression. Gissing's text supports my reading of the difficulty of being disfigured in Victorian England, prevented from love and from labor alike: "She dreaded a life of drudgery; she dreaded humiliation among her inferiors; but that which she feared most of all was the barrenness of a lot into which would enter none of the passionate joys of existence" (Gissing 293). There is evidence in the text to suggest that Clara might be able to find enough work to subsist, but that it would be woefully difficult and would not provide for her the future she had envisioned before her disfigurement.

Despite the bleak worldview evidenced in *The Nether World*, it is yet possible to argue for a degree of autonomy for Clara. Shortly after she contemplates taking her own life, she devises another plan for how to support herself, imagining that if she could

somehow reignite the interest of her former suitor Sidney Kirkwood and induce him to marry her, she would not be as destitute as if she tried to make her own way in the world. It seems an insurmountable task, given the cultural rendering of her face as ruined. Yet from the moment Clara develops this plan, she acts swiftly and decisively to achieve it, arranging a meeting with the estranged Sidney under the pretenses of looking for work. Ironically, her disfigurement and subsequent secluded position are powerful allies in inciting his pity, if not his love. She tells him that she seeks work but is afraid of what it entails: social interaction: “[. . .] if I could only avoid—if I could only be spared going among strangers—” she says (Gissing 284). A few moments later, she tells him she feels helpless and a burden to her father and that “I shall never—see either friends or strangers unless it is absolutely needful” (Gissing 285). Clara presents herself as pitiable by design; this is her cultural currency, and readers understand that she is controlling Sidney’s responses. She uses his reaction to her “pitiable” body to gain her position: a place at his side for life.

Clara’s calculations have the desired effect: Sidney becomes interested in her once more. Clara’s power is evident in numerous scenes in the text, including this first meeting with Sidney since Clara’s disfigurement and return home to Clerkenwell. While she has lost the power of facial beauty and is utterly veiled, she is still able to elicit Sidney’s interest: “Unable to show him by a smile, by a light in her eyes, what mood had come upon her, [she was able to show him] by her mere movement as she stepped lightly towards him, by the carriage of her head, by her hands half held out and half drawn away again” that she was remembering the time when he had first proposed, and her gestures

had the desired effect upon him (Gissing 287). While one might suppose that Sidney should have the upper hand in this relationship, it is Clara who uses her disfigured body to enthrall him.

Clara is depicted as manipulative, a consummate actress in pursuit of what she wanted: a proposal¹⁰: “No piece of acting was ever more delicately finished. He knew that she smiled, though nothing of her face was visible; he knew that her look was one of diffident, half-blushing pleasure” (287). Clara’s impact on Sidney is immediate, much to his surprise: “Sidney would not have believed that anyone could so completely rob him of self-possession, least of all Clara Hewett” (288). And yet she does. It is little wonder that Sidney is taken aback by Clara—as a disfigured woman she is thought to have little social value or influence. Nevertheless, from this moment on, Clara inexorably reels Sidney in until he eventually reinstates his proposal and they become man and wife. That Clara has the capacity to have such an overwhelming influence on Sidney is indicative of her power.

As readers, Gissing directs us not to feel glad for Clara’s victory, which he posits as at the expense of the genuine love that had developed between Sidney and Jane Snowdon during Clara’s years-long absence. Sidney and Jane are presented as like-minded, a natural match of mutual love and sympathy destined to be happy together had not a series of complex circumstances come between them. Yet it *is* possible to feel glad at Clara’s victory and to sympathize with her, despite Gissing’s comment that Clara “had

¹⁰ Another common stereotype of the disabled in both literary and cinematic productions is as the evil villain. This can be seen in everything from *The Phantom of the Opera* to Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*. See, for example, Martin F. Norden’s *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*.

never loved him; she had never loved anyone” (292). Clara is in some ways reminiscent of Stoddard-Holmes’s construction of the twin marriage plots in Victorian melodramas referenced above. The two characters are written as antithetical—their names symbolic of their differences. Jane is innocent, pure, and sweet—like snow—and cast as the heroine who deserves a happy ending. By contrast, Clara is proud and designing, hewing an existence for herself out of sheer determination. There is a turn in this marriage plot, though, as it is not the perfect-featured, but the disfigured woman who achieves a marriage.

Who is This in the Mirror?

Clara is a complex character—much more so than Jane—and she elicits sympathy because she fights for survival, despite circumstances that contrive to make a misery of her life. She is also sympathetic because “The purely selfish project which, in her desperation, had seemed the only resource remaining to her against a life of intolerable desolateness, was taking hold upon her in a way she could not understand” (Gissing 292). Clara’s instinct for self-preservation is stronger than that for self-destruction. Securing one’s existence is not “selfish.” Sidney represents survival; who in similar circumstances would not grasp at it? When she was still uncertain that he would propose, Clara “gazed at her scarred face until the image blurred with tears; then, as though there were luxury in weeping, sobbed for an hour, crouching down in a corner of her room” (Gissing 294-5). Not long after, she wails, “‘Father—Oh, if I had my face again! If I had my own face!’” (Gissing 302). Clara’s lamentation marks a fracture in her psyche: *that* face, the

disfigured face, is distinguished from the face she owns as “hers.” Such a fracture can be understood through Goffman’s *Stigma*: “The immediate presence of normals is likely to reinforce this split between self-demands and self, but in fact self-hate and self-derogation can also occur when only [s]he and a mirror are about” (133).

When Esther Summerson beholds her new face in the glass, her reaction is utterly different from Clara’s. Esther’s reaction is not the violent storm that encompasses Clara’s response. This helps underscore that response to disfigurement is individuated, and Esther and Clara have vastly different personalities. Esther had been prepared for a change through Charley’s long illness and then her own. She knew in advance that it was a possibility, and when the mirrors disappeared from her room, a reality. Clara, by contrast, had acid thrown suddenly upon her without any chance of preparation, which has given her far less time for preparation. Clara also has immense poverty to contend with and no way to take care of herself, whereas Esther has no concerns for her economic welfare as ward of the wealthy John Jarndyce.

Nevertheless, even accounting for these differences in circumstance, Esther’s reaction is remarkably more self-possessed. For several days after her recovery, the mirrors are all covered to protect her from this alteration, and it is not until Esther is alone and away from Bleak House, about a week after her recovery, that she works up the resolve to see herself once again. Importantly, she chooses to meet this new self on her own terms and in the time and manner of her choosing. She is in as much command of herself as she can manage.

Even so, Esther is understandably hesitant about looking; she says her prayers first and recounts her blessings, but then she faces the glass resolutely:

Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror:
 encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much
 changed—O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that
 I think I should have put my hands before it and started back, but for the
 encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and
 then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first.
 It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite,
 and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me. (*Bleak House*
 572)

Esther's response is noteworthy for her level of calm self-acceptance. She immediately acknowledges the difference from what she was before—something that no one around her will do—and in so doing, takes the first step toward self-acceptance. Her demeanor in the glass is "placid" and "encouraging" to her despite her alteration, and though she is apparently startled at its difference, it becomes increasingly familiar to her as she stares. As readers, we are witness to Esther's reintegration of self. What was strange is made familiar and reabsorbed into her self-identity as a (newly) disfigured woman. Esther's response underscores that ultimately, no one can expect such physical alteration—it may come at any time and its effects are always indefinite. Yet for her, reintegration is possible.

There is no outburst, no rejection, but a private and honest assessment: “I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully” (572). Esther cries briefly but quickly accepts what she cannot change. She is thankful to be alive and for the grace of calm acceptance that enables her to recognize that her identity is not solely tied to her appearance. Hers is a much healthier response that demonstrates a person more at peace with herself.

Clara’s avowal that she no longer has her face underscores that her lack of control over her life stems in large part from her disfigurement; yet paradoxically, it is this very disfigurement that persuades Sidney to become her husband. In this sense, Clara represents “a blend of agency and dependence,” to use a phrase from Graham and Oehlschlaeger discussed below. Clara’s position of power is disrupted through images of her own countenance—both ones she glimpses in the mirror and those reflected in the averted gazes of her family. At one point, before his proposal is secure, Clara has a moment of desperation that levels her pride entirely. She is petrified at the prospect of being left to earn her own way as a disfigured woman, as well as at the thought that her power over him may be contravened: “She asked nothing more eagerly than to humiliate herself before him, to confess that her pride was broken. [. . .] When he came again—and he must soon—she would throw aside every vestige of dignity, lest he should think that she was strong enough to bear her misery alone. No matter how poor-spirited she seemed, if only she could move his sympathies” (Gissing 295). Ultimately, such self-

abasement was not necessary—Sidney’s proposal came readily—yet Clara’s shifting position between powerful and powerless is predicated upon her disfigured face.

In one instance, her face is a marker of shame: “Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual’s perception of one of [her] own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one [she] can readily see [herself] as not possessing” (Goffman 133). Clara’s fervent desire for “her own” face back underscores how this sense of shame arises from her imaginative recollection of her “real” face that is no longer hers to display. With its loss, there is a corresponding loss of a way to earn a living through acting, however suspect such a career was for a woman.

While the above example underscores the powerlessness that results from her disfigured face, there are other instances in the text where her face achieves for her a marriage designed to alleviate her untenable position. The chapter in which we discover that Sidney has proposed again is called “A Haven”: Clara has found refuge—etymologically, “a place to flee to.” Clara’s ability to obtain a proposal from Sidney is indicative of her autonomy. While her life will be attached to his, in that sense making her a dependent, she has yet maintained a degree of control over her own destiny and achieved a somewhat easier path in life than the indignities and hardships of getting a living alone in the Clerkenwell slum would have afforded. Clara’s independence and dependence are forever intermingled. As a disfigured woman, she has achieved a marriage that shocks the neighborhood. Nevertheless, it is not the life she initially sought for herself—the life of an actress, alone and unmarried and making her own way in the world.

In a very real sense, though, being an actress and being a married woman present two sides of the same coin. Marriage typically would provide a respectable dependence for a Victorian woman, whereas acting a disreputable one. The difference exists largely in the social construction of femininity—on what is constructed as the proper and improper behavior for a woman. In “Her Appearance in Public: Sexual Danger, Urban Space and the Working Woman,” Emma Liggins underscores that for women working in a public space, their livelihood often came at the cost of reputation. In Clara Hewett’s case, she has been both a bar-maid and an actress, professions Liggins reminds us that would be connected in the minds of many Victorians with prostitution. Both jobs place women in a dependent position where they “have to accept their dependence on male appreciation of their charms” to make a living (Liggins 33). Yet in the marriage market, Clara trades on this same appreciation in order to secure Sidney’s proposal. Her “charms” become even more important once she becomes disfigured because her choices are then more circumscribed. In both the commercial marketplace and the marriage market, Clara is partially dependent on the men who surround her. Her agency is limited to successfully ensnaring the one man she feels would not be beneath her as a marriage partner: Sidney Kirkwood. That she is able to succeed in this choice despite, or in fact, *because of* her “ruined” face, is a victory readers should appreciate.

Ultimately, after her marriage Clara falls into a despondent state—one echoed by each of the characters in Gissing’s text—in which there is no escape from poverty and want. While Clara is no doubt more financially secure than she would have been without Sidney, her father’s illness requires Sidney to take on the added responsibility for him

and for Clara's three underage siblings, in addition to the child, May, that they conceive together. The necessity of caring for such an extended family keeps them all in an impoverished lot. In the end, Clara's power is transient—even the success of her own strategy cannot please or sustain her in the nether world, where the most people can hope for is success “in keeping themselves alive” (Gissing 357). Part of the despair she falls into by the close of the text stems from a recognition of how limited her choices are and how depressingly similar the outcome of either acting or marriage.

Blending Agency and Dependence

While Clara Hewett's case is certainly instructive in the way that disfigured individuals were treated and the amount of autonomy they possessed, a historical case analogous to Langdon's is equally informative. In “The Time is Sick and Out of Joint”: Physical Disability in Victorian England,” Cindy Lacom focuses on perhaps the most famous disabled Victorian, Joseph Merrick, who has subsequently been immortalized in film and stage productions as “the elephant man.” In her essay, Lacom provides the compelling argument that some disabled individuals were able to participate in the economic marketplace by putting themselves on display in so-called “freak shows.” Using Merrick as her primary example, she argues that “those who displayed themselves in freak shows at least participated in a capitalist economy, alongside a nation of ambitious shopkeepers; minimally, they were self-supporting, enacting the cultural imperative of self-help through capitalist gain” (549). In discussing Merrick's life, Lacom argues for a degree of self-governance, suggesting that although Merrick likely

suffered at the hands of his managers, he did have agency: “Merrick’s decision to display himself rather than remain in the workhouse suggests a degree of power over his destiny” (559). Her reading of Merrick echoes the interpretation of him offered in Peter Graham’s and Fritz Oehlschlaeger’s book *Articulating the Elephant Man*, in which they describe Merrick as “no mere passive sufferer but the first mover in the process of creating the Elephant Man, an individual who bravely endured—and, when he had to, successfully exploited—his outrageously intractable bodily disorder” (2).

In their discussion of Merrick’s autobiographical pamphlet that he may or may not have written, Graham and Oehlschlaeger argue that

it is clear that he, from the start, was no helpless victim of exhibitors. Exhibition was for him an alternative to confinement in charitable institutions. The *Autobiography* presents him as the first to recognize that this thing, so unsatisfactory as a body, had a degree of use as a commodity: ‘So thought I I’ll get my living by being exhibited about the country.’ This phrase perfectly captures the blend of agency and dependence that was to characterize Merrick’s subsequent existence. (14)

The construction of the disabled as dependent created a parallel reality. Yet at the same time, there were disabled “dependents” who could use this very status to earn a living, and hence, paradoxically, a measure of independence. Such an interpretation of Langdon as both dependent and self-directing is also possible. Without denying the difficulty of her life and seriousness of her ailment, it is certainly possible to envision Langdon as participating in the marketplace of her own body. Part of that marketability was through

photography. While I believe that the photographs that Munby commissioned of her were potentially used to garner sympathy to aid her cause, they were clearly also spectacle for Munby, the photographers, and everyone else who saw them—everyone, except for Langdon herself, as I will discuss below. An acknowledgement of Munby's privileged position to commission such photographs to be taken does not, however, negate Langdon's agency altogether.

As I have outlined, Langdon's prospects for employment were exceedingly circumscribed. The very face that no one would hire was one that kept Munby fascinated and returning, whatever his motivations. In fact, if Munby's interest in Langdon *were* motivated by his fascination with the abject, as Reay suggests, his very eroticization becomes, then, perversely, her saving grace. In a world in which she could barely gain a living on her own, Langdon's unveilings may have been designed to keep Munby interested and to ensure his continued aid. It is impossible that she was unaware of his interest, since he asks to see her face with some regularity. It is not beyond the scope of imagination for her to suppose that continued unveilings would keep him ever returning. Langdon's revelations were less widely publicized than were Merrick's, who went on display in freak shows both in England and abroad, but Langdon did lift her veil for Munby, several doctors, the photographers Munby commissioned to take her likeness, and possibly for the subscribers of the RHI through those photos. She did, then, have something of a public audience and a face that garnered interest—however reluctant. Ultimately, it was Langdon's decision to reveal her face. In this way, it is possible to

read Langdon as having a degree of control over her own circumstances—her self-display a participation in the only marketplace within her control.

Clearly Langdon's "choice" to reveal her face should be problematized, given Munby's relative gender and class privilege. Yet surely she deserves credit for her ability to maintain his interest. If we use the marketplace analogy relevant in Merrick's case for a moment, Langdon does more than get a copper, unveil her face, and send Munby happily on his way, voyeurism satiated. She must maintain his interest time and again, and I argue that doing so demonstrates agency. I argue further that it was not simply her face that interested Munby; the dozens of letters between them insist on a more nuanced reading of their relationship, as does the fact that they took social outings together and maintained a connection long after she gained a place at the RHI.

For Graham and Oehlschlaeger, as for Lacom, the relationships between Merrick and those they refer to as his managers—both at the freak show and later at the hospital—are fraught with complexity. At the close of her article, Lacom comments on the economic advantages gained by Merrick's managers: "Torr makes money from his human displays, and Treves's management of Merrick strengthens his professional reputation and secures his position in a medical elite. The benefits to those on display are less measurable, perhaps, but a degree of economic subsistence is one; another is the opportunity to exist on the fringes of Victorian culture" (551). She describes the managers' attitudes toward Merrick as paternalistic, arguing that

if Treves is overtly paternalistic in his treatment of Merrick, such paternalism is necessary in the management of deviant bodies in Victorian

England—it creates the space wherein deviant bodies can enact economic and cultural ‘normates.’ We see this in factories and workhouses, where managers often described their employees and inmates as children and themselves as father figures. (551)

This kind of “necessary paternalism” is only one possible way to read Munby’s connection to Langdon. If he is invested in the abjection her face provides him, his interest is the key to Langdon’s economic success. Similarly, in James Greenwood’s 1866 newspaper expose “A Night in the Workhouse,” for example, the young boys who spend the night there refer to the overseer as “daddy.” If Munby can likewise be seen as in some way the manager of Langdon’s deviant body, what kind of manager is he, and what is his reward? While Munby’s critics would be eager to accept “paternalistic” as an appropriate modifier, there are significant differences between his relationship with Langdon and that of Merrick’s with Treves. As I have argued extensively above, Munby collaborated with Langdon to gain her entry into the RHI. He certainly had no economic incentive to help Langdon, nor did she further his reputation in any way. While Merrick provided financial gain to his managers in the freak shows and increased reputation to the doctors who safeguarded him (so publicly) in the London Hospital, Munby receives no such tangible benefit from helping Langdon.¹¹

¹¹ There are numerous articles published in both British medical journals and the popular press throughout the 1880’s that highlight both the specifics of Merrick’s case and feature the doctors who provide him with shelter.

Housing Contagion

It is possible, though, to interpret the *hospital* through this paternal lens. It is the RHI that “creates the space wherein deviant bodies can enact economic and cultural ‘normates’” to use Lacom’s phrase. It is the hospital that gets an economic use value out of its candidates while depicting itself as a paternal entity. It is also the hospital which preserves/maintains/creates the distinction between the abled and non abled body, between the culturally acceptable and culturally marginalized body. In this sense, the RHI is a place of containment for dangerous bodies or in Langdon’s case, the medium through which they must move to ensure that they will not reenter society. As a potential pensioner, she sought not to be confined within the hospital, but to be granted a yearly sum that would obviate the necessity of reentry into a workforce and larger community that had rejected her. The work of the RHI was ostensibly to create a haven for incurables who had nowhere else to go and it undeniably *did* alleviate suffering for those it took in or pensioned, but it is also served as a liminal space where people were placed safely at a distance from the “normal” bodies outside its purview.

In some ways the RHI is reminiscent of another type of contemporary hospital meant to house an alternate kind of potential social contagion: the lock hospital. Through a series of three separate Contagious Diseases Acts passed in the 1860’s, Victorian prostitutes were subject to incarceration in lock hospitals, nominally for the prevention of sexually contagious diseases. Historian Judith Walkowitz argues in *Prostitution and Victorian Society* that such containment was as much to prevent perceived social and moral contagion as to check medical disease, particularly since only

the women were targeted, and no attempt was made to inspect their male clientele. Since women were thought of as the conduits of social contagion, they were subjected to medical examinations, required to register as prostitutes, and could legally be detained if infected or even if they refused examination. In practice, these hospitals were both coercive and punitive, detaining and punishing women for their supposed sexual and moral impropriety.

The acts were first introduced in 1864 in key garrison towns in Britain in an effort to safeguard soldiers, among whom STDs were rampant. These were followed by similar acts in nearly all of Britain's overseas possessions, making clear that containment extended to the bodies of colonized women as well, since they, too, were deviant by definition and represented a potential threat. Both the lock hospitals and the RHI contained socially suspect bodies. These institutions were representative of vast national and colonial power and authority, but they could be circumvented. In a fascinating article on the social history of medicine in the Victorian Madras government in India, Sarah Hodges chronicles how prostitutes in colonial Indian lock hospitals in the 1870's

regularly interrupted and reconfigured the hospitals' functioning in unexpected ways. While shrewd and successful prostitutes incorporated the Indian Contagious Diseases Acts' (1864 and 1868) compulsory registration and regular incarceration into their business practices, destitute women incorporated lock hospitals into their strategies for survival and transformed these institutions into (albeit grim) asylums of

relief. In short, women enrolled lock hospitals into their own distinct regimes of governance just as they were caught up within others. (379)

During the famine years of the 1870's, the inmates made use of the hospitals as a means of survival. While the RHI was established to offer disabled and disfigured individuals a permanent residence, its policies and practices were definitely questionable, but resistance was not impossible. In order to circumvent the institutionalized classism and ableism embedded in the hospital system, Munby provided Langdon with the social and economic power she needed to succeed in ensuring herself a pensioner's place when so many like her were turned away.

One of the many suffering individuals who was denied entry was Joseph Merrick. If the RHI can be read as a site of social containment for those with deviant bodies, as I argued above, Merrick's body was considered beyond the pale for even this place. According to hospital intake records provided by Cook in his history of the RHI, the hospital did admit many under the label of "congenitally deformed," but his deformity proved too great for admittance. It might be argued that when Merrick left his native country to display himself in Belgium freak shows, England had rid itself of one particularly troubling source of contagion. After all, it was the English police who had put an end to the show and with it, to Merrick's ability to support himself—just as Langdon had the capacity to work but was denied the opportunity. Like the return of the repressed, however, Merrick made his way back into England after having been robbed of his life's savings abroad. He once again tried to make a place for himself, this time via the RHI, but once again found England an inhospitable place.

Denied Entry

Even while waging the appeal campaign to gain admission for Langdon to the RHI, Munby was simultaneously still looking for work for her in case they were unsuccessful. He was also making more personal contact with the Hospital by attending one of their fundraising bazaars. On June 27, 1863, Munby records in his journal that he “went down to the Bazaar for the Incurable Hospital, which was being held in the Exhibition Building. I hoped to do something for Langdon’s case there; but did not succeed.” Munby was not satisfied with the more distant letter writing campaign, but attempted to gain aid for Langdon in person as well. While there, he met up with Langdon herself, noting that her face “was also worse and more full of sores. I told her of the sum I had collected for her so far, and had some talk with her sister as to how she can be kept from destitution till November [the next election to the RHI]. The shirt making I got for her from Miss Stanley does not bring in more than two shillings a week.” It was still five long months before the next election, and to Munby’s credit, he did not abandon her to the hope of admittance. His contingency plan of seeking more work for her demonstrates his recognition that her candidacy may not be successful despite their efforts.

Besides attending the RHI charity bazaar to advertise her case, Munby later visited the RHI in Poultry, as he notes about a month before the November election to plead her case: the “worse case Lupus [sic]” (September 23, 1863). Since she had already long since been accepted by the office as a candidate for admission, this visit was

not to achieve candidacy; instead, it appears clearly designed to keep her case fresh in the minds of the hospital board who were immensely influential in the election process. This was the same month that Munby had taken the portraits to show Langdon, and again, it is possible that he showed them to the hospital administration to substantiate his claim that she was “the wors[t] case [of] Lupus.” Regardless of whether he showed the photograph, this visit underscores Munby’s effort on Langdon’s behalf. He clearly had a multi-pronged strategy in which a direct appeal to the officials in the RHI office was part of his plan. In his history of the RHI, Cook explains that “Admission was largely dependent therefore on the influence/wealth of the members of the Board of Directors; in fact, ‘influence’ from a member of the Board carried a great deal of weight, and was of paramount importance in gaining acceptance, either as a ‘Home’ or an ‘Extra’ patient [an in patient or a pensioner]” (44). Going directly to the RHI was likely Munby’s way of drawing the Board’s attention to Langdon’s cause.

From June until the November election, Munby’s journals show evidence of his consistent work on her behalf and his close contact with her. For example, in addition to the sixty letters sent to subscribers, Munby notes receiving eight letters from Langdon and sending seven to her. It was clearly routine for both of them to send monthly letters to keep in touch. Beyond this personal contact and the appeals he sent to subscribers, Munby also had circulars made to further advertise her case. On June 30, 1863, Munby “went to Miss Rye’s in Portugal Street, the female lawstationers’s office, to have circulars copied in Langdon’s case.” These would help to ensure that Munby could publicize her appeal for aid to whomever he might encounter who could be of help.

Munby was a man with vast social connections who could appeal to a class of people that were beyond Langdon's reach. These circulars demonstrate Munby's level of commitment to Langdon. Not only did he work within the system by making and sending appeals to the hospital's subscribers, as they suggested, but he went further by extending his reach beyond those at the hospital, presumably to many people who would not be otherwise inundated with the appeals of other hospital applicants. While each RHI subscriber was all but guaranteed to be sent multiple appeals for each election, since their names were provided to candidates, Munby's reach extended to individuals for whom Langdon's case would appear unique. This was a sound method in raising more funds than would be possible if only appealing to subscribers.

In the July 18, 1863, entry there is also the first evidence that their campaign was working: "I walked across Hyde Park to Brompton, to see Harriet Langdon about the money I have collected for her: but she was out." The sixty letters that Munby sent out and the circulars he had disseminated on her behalf were beginning to generate the needed revenue to enable Langdon to enter the hospital. While no sum is named in this entry, on August 12, 1863, Munby writes "I went to the Bank in the afternoon, and put in the money I have collected for Harriet Langdon," and in the corresponding rough diary of the same date, Munby notes "L & W. Bank—Put in £56.7.4 for Langdon, & sent her £1." Munby acted as financial mediator between Langdon and her benefactors. While he was a civil servant by profession, he was a trained barrister living in the Inner Temple at Fig Tree Court—the prestigious residence of London barristers. His name, his address, his gender and class station all made him a more reliable recipient of funds than Langdon

would have been considered by potential donors. Keeping the money in the bank also had the added benefit of drawing interest, and every penny counted, as is clear by Munby's recording of the sum down to the last ducket.

On November 20, 1863, the election was near at hand and Munby withdrew "£56.14.2 for H. Langdon from L & W. Bank." The next day, Munby records in his rough diary that he went "To 10 Poultry, Royal Hospital Office, paid in £80 for H. Langdon." There is no explanation in the journal of the difference between what he withdrew from the bank on her behalf and what he paid in to the RHI. It is unlikely that Munby himself paid the approximately twenty-five pound difference, though he did routinely contribute to Langdon financially. It is more likely that while some of it was his contribution, he had donations on hand—either through his appeal campaign or through the circulars—that had come too recently to be deposited in the bank, and he added this sum to what he had withdrawn and brought the total to the RHI. It is equally possible that the difference was made up by a campaign they had made in Ilfracombe—Langdon's hometown—which is suggestive once again of Langdon's agency.¹²

On Friday, November 27, 1863, election day had finally come. It is important to imagine for a moment what this election must have meant to Langdon: a chance for economic independence at long last, a sense of personal safety and security, access to medical treatments—her very life spared. Yet despite all of their efforts to secure a space for Langdon at the RHI, her case was not accepted. Munby's rough diary entry for that

¹² There is a reference in a subsequent journal article discussed below that demonstrates that Munby and Langdon had been campaigning (jointly or separately) in Ilfracombe.

date provides only a brief outline of the event, including his attention, as always, to the servants at any location:

At 11, to London Tavern, Election for Inc. Hospital. Worthy businessmen & bustling women. Placards for candidates—out at 2 & dine—Back 3:30, waiting for [declaration] of poll till 4—Servants m & f—2 cleaning stone stairs—m. throws [illegible] mat over her “I wish you had stairs to clean instead of me—” Banter. Poll, H.L. 297 votes.

This succinct notation offers the only commentary on their joint failure—a failure that would propel Langdon back into the depressing circumstances she had long suffered. She had received virtually the same number of votes that William Shave, the man whose appeal is included above, had obtained on his first attempt at election. The brevity of Munby’s entry might imply that he did not yet expect to be successful. Realistically, such failure was built into the system, and would continue to be so for decades. Even as late as 1914, patients were routinely denied entry on their first attempt, as Cook notes in an anonymous protest letter published in the *Lancet*: ““it always takes months, and generally years, to reach this much coveted haven of refuge, either as an in-patient or as a pensioner”” (Cook 212). Langdon’s failure to be elected is also significant in underscoring how utterly unlikely a candidate’s chance would be without such active assistance. Had she been on her own, as many disabled and disfigured people were who sought candidacy, it is unlikely that she would have been able to achieve anywhere near the number of votes possible with Munby’s aid and wealth behind her.

Redoubled Efforts

For some people, this might have been the final chapter in the story. It could only have been disheartening to Munby, and far more so to Langdon, to have worked so diligently, put forth such effort, only to remain in the same predicament. Most significantly, this failure meant six long months through another bleak winter before a second attempt could be made in the spring. Langdon's day-by-day hardships and struggle to endure during this time are difficult to calculate. Work remained as impossible to obtain and survival as difficult as before. To his credit, Munby did not abandon Langdon after the failed election. His support was as critical to Langdon's survival as ever, and he provided it. While there are fewer entries containing lengthy accounts, the rough diary notes more letters exchanged between the two in the winter and spring following the election. In the March 5, 1864, entry of Munby's rough diary he notes a visit to several names in Brompton "re Langdon" that were most likely either to seek employment for her or to gather subscriptions for the May election.

In the May 7, 1864, rough diary entry, Munby notes that W. Stabb, surgeon, Ilfracombe, called re Langdon," and a few more details are provided in the regular journal on the corresponding date. Munby reports that the surgeon "called on me this morning with welcome news of subscriptions for Harriet Langdon." Obviously, this was a follow up on a visit or letter that Munby did not record, since the surgeon would otherwise not have known to give the subscriptions to Munby. Thus, while the journals do not provide as detailed an account leading up to this election as they did in the previous one, it has to be assumed from the details that are given, as well as based on the

results of the subsequent election, that Munby was still campaigning on Langdon's behalf. Significantly, too, they had discovered another financial market to cultivate: those in Langdon's home town. It is clear that Munby and Langdon went to every length to reach anyone who might take an interest in her case and offer funds to help enable her election. Campaigning in Ilfracombe also underscores that disability was considered a local concern. It was not the responsibility of the governing body to care for the disabled, but that of their families. Those in the local township were simply an extension of this family. It fell to them to be bountiful, disability being thus construed as a charitable endeavor rather than a social responsibility.

On May 25, 1864, Munby records in his journal that he "went into the City, to the office of the Royal Hospital for Incurables, and paid in about forty pounds in money and votes, towards Harriet Langdon's election." This was the final step in a years-long preparation that led to the election two days later: an election that, unlike the previous one, would finally deliver Langdon from the miserable, years-long suffering that she had endured. Munby begins his Friday, May 27, 1864, journal entry with the propitious announcement that it was a

Brilliant day. Went to the London Tavern by 12:30, to the election of Candidates to the Royal Hospital for Incurables. The scene was similar to that of last November. A couple of large rooms, handsomely built and decorated in the rich eighteenth century style, and hung with full length portraits of that time: and these rooms, and the staircase that leads to

them, hung with election-placards—such as mine, “Vote for Harriet Langdon—a case of great disfigurement.”

Munby’s journal describes this election with all the detail lacking in the previous one. The victory they had achieved inspired descriptions that the previous loss had failed to arouse. Unlike contemporary political polling sites, it was clearly encouraged to influence voters with final appeals before they cast their votes. While Munby was obviously participating in the rules of the system, and doing everything he could to garner votes for Langdon, there is a decidedly ironic aspect of requiring disabled and disfigured people to openly publicize what society would otherwise induce them to hide. In this way, the publicity and earlier public bazaars are reminiscent of the freak shows wherein deviant bodies are displayed in ritualized containment.

While the RHI’s fundraisers were intended for charity rather than entertainment, there is certainly room for slippage. The freak shows in which Merrick was displayed find a parallel of sorts in the bazaar that Langdon attended at least once, and the photos taken of Merrick for medical journals are not unlike the ones of Langdon. Each set of photographs has both a favorable and more objectionable purpose. The spectacle can be read as a kind of ritualized containment wherein the horror of Langdon’s face was displayed, but within the sanitizing frame of the hospital. In Langdon’s case, the announcement of her “great disfigurement” worked within the hospital system to help get her elected, while in the equally public arena of the working world, she had worn the same pronouncement beneath her veil and been forced out of society. There is something decidedly voyeuristic about a system that requires such public announcements to achieve

success. It is a small comfort to know that both Merrick and Langdon used their disfigured bodies to secure a permanent living in a society which used that very disfigurement to deny them such a position.

Munby's place in this world of voyeurism and philanthropy can be gauged by reading his commentary on the RHI system. While at the fundraising bazaar before the first election he first remarks that he had "hoped to do something for Langdon's case there; but did not succeed"; he went on to describe the frivolity of the bazaar and its apparent inconsistency with the somber nature of raising money for incurable patients:

The bazaar was crowded with well drest folks, who thronged the nave between the lines of pink stalls, and made the place look almost as it did last year. Many fair stall keepers glided about among the people, drest in indoor demi-toilette of white muslin, airily knit up round their lithe frames with ribbons of gay colour; and snoods of blue or yellow drawn tight round their massive hair, which was clubbed behind in the new (and very old Greek) fashion. And many amateur male comedians in grotesque dresses wandered about & made preparatory fun.

The scene seems oddly out of place, contrasting sharply with the serious physical maladies of the incurables who were also present, Langdon among them, whose "noseless face look[ed] more hideous by contrast." While the sight of Langdon's disfigurement clearly still negatively affects Munby, he is also aware of his purpose at the bazaar: to come to her aid. This appears to be at a cross purpose to the merrymakers. After commenting on the "preparatory fun" the comedians were making, Munby made the

following wry observation: “Thus people amused themselves with helping the Incurable sufferers” (June 27, 1863). While a current audience may implicate Munby as one of these revelers, Munby clearly distinguishes himself from them. He does not say “thus we amused ourselves,” but “thus people amused themselves.” This grammatical distinction is significant because it shows Munby as being at cross purposes with the gay crowd. He is not with Langdon for a day, but for years. His work on her behalf elevates him above casual spectator. He is unmistakably aware of the contrast in demeanor and objective between himself and the stall keepers, whose purpose was, presumably, to sell and entertain, though in an effort to raise funds for the hospital. Such a carnivalesque atmosphere is reminiscent of the freak shows Altick¹³ chronicles where deformity and “oddity” were on display.

The day of the election was equally crowded, though the demeanor of the crowd was more staid. Munby’s journal entry for May 27, 1864, continues by describing the event as “crowded with a few men and a great number of quietly dressed ladies and other women, intent each on the case of her choice. An admirable safety valve for feminine excitement.” Most significant, however, was his next comment for its recognition of an unfair system and his implied criticism of the RHI’s admittance policy: “The patients however are elected not upon their merits, but according to the amount of money & votes that A or B can beg or buy for them: the Hospital folks pocketing all receipts with admirable impartiality.” The Dickensian derision evident in this comment underscores Munby’s attitude about a system he clearly sees as self-serving, if not outright corrupt.

¹³ See Richard D. Altick’s *The Shows of London* for a chronicle and discussion of the popular exhibitions that Londoners flocked to throughout the Victorian era.

Munby's criticism of the electoral system preceded similar criticism that would be leveled at the RHI in the years after Langdon's election.

The RHI had had its share of media criticism dating from several years after its 1854 founding. In 1867, for example, an article published in the August *Athenaeum* criticized the building (Melrose Hall) as antiquated and unnecessarily expensive to use. Cook quotes from the article in his history of the RHI: “No building could be worse adapted for the purposes of an hospital” because the “necessary alterations and improvements [would cost] far in excess of the amount spent on the incurables themselves” (Cook 188). While varying aspects of the hospital were criticized over the years: the nursing staff, lack of sufficient attending physicians, and the hospital's locale among them, the primary complaint was in reference to the insufficient use of funds for the incurables themselves.

The same 1867 *Athenaeum* letter, for example, included a copy of the 1865 receipts and expenditures it had found in the RHI's annual report of that year. This was only a year after Langdon's election; she was one of the patients on whose behalf the journal writer was outraged. The printed list of total receipts for the year was £22,823, but in the list of expenditures, only £4,473 was spent on the Incurables—for their housekeeping, medical expenses, wines and spirits, and payments and medical expenses of pensioners (Cook 188). The remainder, over eighteen thousand pounds, had been spent on general expenses and on building and estate expenses. The *Athenaeum* writer went on to question whether the hospital's subscribers “would be happy with the knowledge that their gifts were being used predominantly on overheads” (Cook 189).

These figures demonstrate a pattern of abuse of power on the part of the hospital that was echoed in the elections process that Munby criticized above. One has to wonder at how little access the disabled had to the money that they had put themselves on display to solicit. In Langdon's case, such solicitation had eventually paid off. Munby's May 27, 1864, entry of election day continues, "The polls closed at two, & the elderly gentlemen who sat at the receipt of custom retired to get at the result," but he would have to wait for many hours to hear the result:

It was near 5 before the counting was over: and meanwhile those women, with their plain but kindly faces, sat in groups about the table, quietly sewing as their manner is. At last the awful procession appeared: every one stood up, produced a pencil to note down the successful numbers, and listened breathless while the chairman read them out. Harriet Langdon was among them, this time: she got in as a pensioner, by 575 votes, the smallest number of any that succeeded. And so my two years' effort on her behalf—most kindly seconded of late by the Ilfracombians—is ended: and this poor peniless object, this hideous unpreventable young woman, is made for the rest of her life happy. Happy? Yes, for she is to have twenty pounds a year.

While there is still judgment in Munby's comments of her "hideousness," there is also, finally, the knowledge of success. The amount seems incredibly small in his estimation, yet it is a fortune compared to what Langdon was able to raise on her own, and it has utterly changed her position in life. Gone is the incessant fear of dying on the street and

the perpetual struggle to try to force resistant employers to allow her to work at a subsistence level. With her election into the RHI, Langdon is assured a way of “keeping herself alive,” in Gissing’s phrase.

Langdon’s Joy

I want to close the chapter with a discussion of what ultimately happened to Langdon in the months and years after her election in order to gauge what kind of life was possible for at least this one Victorian incurable. While there are unfortunately no letters in her own hand to decipher Langdon’s own assessment of her position, there are numerous further journal entries of Munby’s in which Langdon figures. Reading Langdon through Munby’s gaze is certainly subject to difficulties, yet like when evaluating an unreliable narrator who unwittingly reveals his own prejudices, readers can wade through the rhetoric and get at least a partial glimpse of Langdon that is at odds with Munby’s evaluation. It is possible to read against his assessment of her via the very words that he chooses. Munby’s portrait of Langdon must be positioned against the vision it reveals of how Langdon saw herself—a vision ephemeral and partial but tantalizing nonetheless, especially in its more holistic approach. Munby’s journals do capture Langdon’s voice in quotes from time to time, and more than that, we get her impression in the contradictions and challenges she presents to Munby’s assessment of what disability and disfigurement *mean*. Not surprisingly, his view and hers provide remarkably different pictures.

Subsequent to her election, Munby duly notes in his rough journals many more letters that are exchanged between them. In the December following the May election, Munby records briefly in his rough journal of December 20, 1864, that “H. Langdon came—ribbon sewn in veil—gratitude—drinking wine.” Despite the shorthand nature of his remarks, they offer further proof of their joint success and friendship—sharing wine a few days before Christmas. Beyond this, Langdon’s decorative ribbon suggests that she did take care, and presumably some pleasure, in her appearance, despite Munby’s assumptions to the contrary. These ribbons represent one puncture in the perception Munby has of the disabled, but they would not be the last. They provide a decided contradiction to his assumption that Langdon was “indifferent to her own ugliness,” as he had formerly asserted of her.

Munby consistently misreads what disfigurement means in Langdon’s life. Despite all the good he did on her behalf, he still read her as incapable of joy because his lens equated disfigurement with misery and unhappiness. Even when Munby witnesses the frivolity Langdon was capable of, his focal point is still, always, fixated on her disfigured face and what it means to him: horror and desolation. On February 10, 1868, Munby records in his journal that “as I had promised, I took Harriet Langdon to see a circus at the Agricultural Hall, Islington. Such an amusement seemed likely to please the lonely disfigured being; and it did please her.” His comment conveys that he sees her as alienated and defined by disfigurement. While he states awareness that she was pleased, it is as if he cannot really hear himself; his focus returns to her physical appearance, what she is wearing, and the omnipresent veil that hid her “hideousness.”

Munby's journal reveals two versions of human experience: hers, subjective and his, objective. In her version, she is laughing, enjoying the circus and the music, and having a fun outing with amusing entertainment. In his, this reality, related by Munby himself, is subsumed beneath the narrative of affliction that he surrounds it with—her skull-like face, the people staring and wondering what lies beneath it, and her death's head waiting to accost his sight.

She abandoned herself to enjoyment: she beat time with her foot to the music, hummed the airs, and laughed heartily at the clown's jokes; so that as I sat by, and saw only her trim youthful figure and neat dress, & heard the girlish laugh and cheerful talk which came from behind that dense black veil, I involuntarily imagined the fair countenance that should have been there. But at length, excited by the pageant, she unpinned & lifted the veil [. . .] and revealed to me, grinning with delight, the Death's Head which is her face. She hid it again immediately, but the delusion was over.

This passage represents two markedly different realities. By his own account, Langdon is having a wonderful time, laughing happily and freely, engaged in a playful evening of entertainment. For Munby, however, the only way he can imagine this is to write out the existence of her disfigurement and imagine her as “normal.” This “involuntary” fancy occurs because he cannot imagine, despite the evidence before his eyes, that anyone with so serious a disfigurement as Langdon's could ever experience joy simply as she is. The reality of her face disrupts his fantasy version of her—the only one that fits the

circumstance in his estimation—and he becomes desultory. Immediately after “the delusion” ended, he records, “When the wearisome trumpery (which she thought ‘splendid’) came to an end, we left.” Munby cannot face Langdon’s reality—that she is joyful—because to do so would be to eradicate what he “knows” to be true: disfigurement and happiness are incompatible. He cannot even accept his own testimony as a witness to the contrary. But readers can.

In a discussion of Mayhew’s depictions of disabled people in *London Labour and the London Poor*, Martha Stoddard Holmes remarks on a similar incident in which Mayhew’s version of disabled reality as afflicted and melodramatic is countered by his subjects’ contrasting versions of their lives:

In their material facts, the lives of many of Mayhew’s interviewees are unrelentingly difficult. At the same time, however, these people’s accounts of their lives are often surprising for their *lack* of sentiment. This becomes especially noticeable when Mayhew establishes the narrative as a melodramatic story of affliction, and then the subject of the story counters with a story that is grounded in material facts rather than feelings, or a story that mingles unhappiness with joy and accomplishment. A fascinating interplay ensues between Mayhew’s diagnosis of a person’s degree of suffering, the interviewee’s own treatment of the facts of his/her life, and the reader’s response. (32)

Her remarks are a useful reminder that readers must determine how reliable, how objective the writer’s of such social histories are. It must always be kept in mind that

they are framing the stories of the disabled/disfigured through a cultural lens that stereotypes and grossly misrepresents some of the life circumstances of disabled individuals. It becomes, then, especially important to try to read against their frame and attempt to uncover, however imperfectly, the voices and subjectivities of the disfigured whose stories are contained within them.

Conclusion

Langdon and Munby kept in touch through the years, and there is further evidence of Langdon's attention to her appearance in many of his recordings of these visits. On April 20, 1865, he writes "Home at 5, and Harriet Langdon came. Being now better off, she was nicely drest; wore a tasteful gown, a pretty bonnet with bright blue trimmings; & with her tall elegant figure, she might seem a beauty." Such comments suggest that it was economic constraint rather than self-rejection that kept Langdon from participating in some of the commonplace feminine attention to dress.

After noting her clothing, Munby's commentary returns to his distaste for her "hideous noseless face," demonstrating his frequent inability to see beyond her disfigurement. Subsequent to detailing her sores and distorted mouth (she had removed her veil), he goes on to contrast his perception of her with her own: "But use has reconciled her to herself: she combs her hair (it is not disfigured) before the glass, she says; and when at her own request I produced the dreadful portrait of her, saying, 'It makes your face look much more hideous than it is', she looked on it calmly & said 'But it's very like me!'"

This exchange underscores the antithetical responses each has to her disfigurement. For Munby, Langdon's hair is alone worthy of attention because of its apparent normalcy, its likeness to the paradigm that he accepts as unquestionably better. Like everyone who rushes to deny any change in Esther Summerson, Munby attempts to deny Langdon's disfigured identity. With respect to everything but her hair, he rushes to assure her that she is not so ugly as her portrait suggests. He assumes her reactions coincided with his own and is unable to see any other actuality. While Munby intends to comfort her by the thought that her portrait is worse than the reality, Langdon rejects his attempt and acknowledges its likeness. That it is *she* who asks to see it and then "calmly" affirms its resemblance demonstrates Langdon's self acceptance, as does her acknowledgment that she uses the mirror when grooming like any other person—without hesitation. While Clara Hewett cries out piteously before the mirror to have her "own face" back again, Langdon does not appear to suffer from such a schism. Like Esther Summerson when she looks in the mirror, Langdon calmly affirms that the disfigured reflection *is* her face and moves on with her life. It is a powerful moment of someone *claiming* disability, to use Simi Linton's phrase.

While Langdon will wear the veil and eventually the mask and false noses Munby purchases for her over the years, they are social requirements, not requirements she seems to need for herself. In the passing years, Munby bought more than one nose for Langdon, supposing them useful in giving her a profile behind the veil; yet Langdon does not always appear to take them seriously. In one telling incident, recorded in Munby's March 28, 1868, journal entry, her false nose begins to come loose, and Munby is

horrified, remarking that “There is something that makes one’s blood run cold, in the grotesque horror of sitting [. . .] by the side of a creature like this.” She doesn’t appear fully human to him, and he finds the incident macabre and perverse. Langdon’s reaction, though, is one of gaiety at the same circumstance, which strikes her as funny: “[. . .] once she whispered ‘My nose is getting loose—I’m afraid it will blow off!’ And thrusting her hand up under her veils, she held it on, and absolutely laughed—a light girlish laugh—at the notion that her nose was coming off!” Munby’s horrified reaction is comical. He simply can never understand Langdon’s self-acceptance—how the supposed creature accepts its “creature-ness.” This scene marks a perfect disjuncture between the objectification of the disfigured by the paradigm and the non-paradigm’s subjective rendering of herself.

An incident Munby sees as grotesque and terrible, Langdon finds entertaining and amusing. In fact, it was her reaction of gaiety that immediately prompted his remark that his blood ran cold. How could a disfigured woman laugh about her situation? Lerita Coleman asks an equally compelling question in “Stigma”: “Would stigma persist if stigmatized people did not feel stigmatized or inferior?” (146). Langdon appears to provide an answer to the question, at least in this instance, not feeling remotely inferior despite Munby’s reaction. She sees herself through her own lens, not his. Mirrors do not frighten her. In *The Nether World*, Clara is written by a “normal”—she is Gissing’s perception of what disfigurement would be like for a woman. In the same way, Langdon is Munby’s projection of disfigurement in the journals—his literary creation that he would write as grotesque. Yet his frame collapses upon itself because even in Munby’s

journalistic creations, Langdon gets her own quotes, her own speech, and appears sometimes truly carefree—despite how Munby and the rest of society see her. She thwarts his rendering of her as a pitiable, unhappy exile.

Clearly, Langdon cannot write herself entirely out of her stigmatized position. It would be beyond naïve to assume that the judgments made about disfigured persons would have no effect if the disfigured simply rejected the judgment. Unfortunately, one cannot simply reject one's way out of oppression, particularly when the normals, to use Goffman's phrase, control every major societal institution. Langdon unquestionably faced immense and sustained oppression; yet she also was strong enough not to internalize, in times like the example above, the negative assessments that were leveled at her.

Langdon, thus, receives at least a partially happy ending. She appears to accept herself if society does not, and once her very life was no longer at stake due to her comfortable pension, her disposition seems especially light. Munby's journal recording her election on May 27, 1864, contains a penciled-in postscript that "H. L. enjoyed her pension 18 years. She died at Swansea, aged 50, in May 1882: and lies in Cocket Churchyard." Indeed, in the ensuing years after she was pensioned, Langdon appears in his journal still horribly disfigured to his eye, but remarkably self-possessed and *happy* when we read against his lens.

If Langdon was ousted from society by its construction of her as disabled, with Munby's help she was nevertheless able to borrow privilege and exercise it against a world that tried very hard to erase her out of existence. Despite his flaws, Munby did

unquestionable good on behalf of Harriet Langdon; yet she did herself remarkable good as well. Denied both economic productivity and that of the marriage bed, Langdon used the economy of her very disfigurement to sustain agency. Despite the symbolic and institutional levels of oppression that sought to constrict her, and that had unquestionably crushed countless other disfigured and disabled English citizens, Langdon fought eradication and prevailed—thrillingly alive and with her sense of humor in tact.

CONCLUSION

Arthur Joseph Munby was a man of his times. He was deeply invested in philanthropy and engaged in benevolent acts on a personal, individual level throughout his entire life. He was a voluntary, unpaid teacher at two unprecedented colleges that provided a liberal education to working-class men and women—populations that had traditionally been deemed unsuited for education. His numerous volumes of published poetry were steeped in the language of the Yorkshire people—an inclusion that demonstrated his positive valuation of such a dialect, as did his repeated published admiration for such voices in the prefaces of his works. His years-long efforts to find employment, hospital care, and finally a pensioner's place for Harriet Langdon in the Royal Hospital for Incurables also emphasize his deep level of commitment to philanthropic acts and civil engagement.

Such engagement has left Munby open to scholarly questions about his motivation and rationale for interacting with working-class people. Why would an upper middle-class man with gender and class privilege spend his life interacting with those deemed social inferiors in such a gender- and class-stratified culture? Munby's critics have spent the past fifteen years chronicling what they depict as his misuse of privilege, arguing that his incentives were erotic, self-serving, and egoistic in nature. Of primary focus in such critical interpretations has been Munby's relationship with his wife, Hannah Cullwick, a maid-of-all-work that he secretly married and with whom he maintained a relationship until she died one year before he did. Critics have dissected their relationship and emphasized Munby's interviews with other working-class women who,

like Cullwick, made a living through rough, physically demanding work. By focusing so heavily on his relationship with Cullwick, critics have developed theories of Munby that are one-sided at best, largely because his voluntary teaching, published poetry, and relationship with Langdon have briefly, if ever, been their focus. While I do not deny that Munby had an erotic investment in working-class women, his wife pre-eminent among them, there was far more to Munby's interactions with the working-class than such criticism reveals. This project is about the discovery of Munby's philanthropy regarding literary representation and access to work and hospital care for working-class people.

The journals are copious materials; they are comprised of thirty-two microfilm reels—a daunting number that no single critic has ever or could ever make sense of in a single critical text, let alone with a narrow critical theory. Munby defies a simple or single explanation. Scholars who have written about him have made important contributions to our understanding not only of Munby himself, but more significantly to our understanding of the Victorian era as a whole. McClintock, Pollack, Davidoff, and Reay have focused on his erotic and self-serving motivations for interacting with working-class people, but I argue that there is copious evidence in the journals to refute that single reading. When McClintock posits, for example, that Munby felt a sexual charge from being carried by physically strong, stout women that he perceived as comparatively masculine, she has a point. Yet there is another side to Munby—a side characterized by intense, years-long, *sustained* effort to provide working-class people with access to a college education, to create a literary space where working-class dialect

was valued, to ensure that disfigured/disabled people were allowed to work, and finally, to enable a Victorian “incurable” to enter a hospital system that she would otherwise likely never have had access to. In this project, I demonstrate the extent to which Munby combated oppression at the individual level of personal action, the symbolic level of representation, and the institutional levels of access and inclusion. These philanthropic acts were not singular or isolated in nature, and they made a life-altering difference to the working-class individuals with whom Munby came into contact.

While I am certainly invested here in coming to Munby’s defense and to broadening the critical understanding of his philanthropy, I am also fascinated by the Munby collection for what it reveals about Victorian attitudes toward disability and disfigurement. Munby’s journals reveal not only his own culturally informed attitude about disfigurement, but also the larger social response, and most gratifyingly, the response of a disfigured woman’s own experience. Disability theorist Susan Wendell argues that there are many social factors that construct disability: a lack of availability of basic resources such as clean water, fresh food, warm clothing, and adequate shelter; a lack of sanitation, an increase in high-risk working conditions, a proliferation of diseases, environmental degradation and pollution, rampant overwork, and the “daily grinding deprivations of poverty” (36-7). These kinds of social conditions were pervasive in Victorian England, especially in urban environments that were the sites of the industrial revolution. Disability and disfigurement were a routine part of life for scores of individuals and hence part of the social collective unconscious. Certainly, they figure

prominently in Munby's journals. And not surprisingly, images of disability abound in Victorian literature.

Perhaps the best known example of a disabled character in the 19th century is Charles Dickens' Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* who is presented as a pitiable and sympathetic figure sure to appeal to the emotions of readers and remind them of the importance of acting charitably. Tiny Tim is a pivotal figure in Scrooge's transformation from miserly and unfeeling to emotionally expressive and benevolent. In *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture*, Martha Stoddard Holmes reminds us that "Disability is melodramatic machinery" (3); wherever disability exists in a story, melodramatic emotion is bound to follow:

[. . .] we know that when we enter a story about disability, we enter a world of pitying or heart-warmed tears, inner triumph, mirror-smashing rages, suicide attempts, angst and abjection, saintly compassion, bitterness, troubled relationships, and courageous overcoming. The connection between emotion and impairment has become a kind of cultural shorthand: to indicate or produce emotional excess, add disability. (2-3)

As Stoddard Holmes makes clear, a range of emotional responses is possible, provided that they are excessive and lean towards the melodramatic. Obviously, individuals do respond emotionally to experiences of disfigurement and disability, whether that experience is first hand or about someone else's disability, but the emotional range should not simply register in such polar extremes as suicide or abjection. This polarized

reading of the disabled is inaccurate. Arthur Munby reads Harriet Langdon through precisely such a melodramatic lens. He responds emotionally to her disfigurement along both sides of the continuum: pity and abjection. He is moved to such sympathy that he works for years on her behalf; yet he also recoils from her image in an excess of emotional descriptors in the journals that are not unlike Victor Frankenstein's utterances about the creature he describes as demonic, corpse-like, and ugly beyond description: "No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (Shelley 43).

Such melodramatic depictions elide the possibility of viewing disabled experience through a non-emotional lens: "The stories that pervade our lives make disability resound so intensely in emotional terms that all other possible registers (scientific, environmental, artistic, sexual, economic, geographic, epistemological, statistical, sartorial, political, and so on) are often informed and overshadowed by affect" (Stoddard Holmes 3). The result is an incomplete rendering of a disabled experience that often breeds stereotyping and stock responses. And Langdon, as well as Frankenstein's creature, are certainly capable of "normal" experience, though you would not guess that if you relied solely on the overt assumptions of those who narrate their stories.

The problem with such melodramatic depictions—either of pity and sympathy or of horror and revulsion—is that they obscure the normalcy of living with disability or disfigurement and construct the disabled/disfigured person as different, as other, and

consequently, as *less*. Lennard Davis argues that disfigured main characters in novels are rare because “the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her” (11). The disabled and disfigured are our abnormal control population—those whom we are “normal against,” to use Irving Goffman’s phrase. Constructing them as different underscores and creates our normalcy. Davis argues that

a disability studies consciousness can alter the way we see not just novels that have main characters who are disabled but any novel. [. . .] almost any literary work will have some reference to the abnormal, to disability, and so on. I would explain this phenomenon as a result of the hegemony of normalcy. This normalcy must constantly be enforced in public venues (like the novel), must always be creating and bolstering its image by processing, comparing, constructing, deconstructing images of normalcy and the abnormal. (12)

Davis’ comments bring *Frankenstein* to mind. At one point in the novel, Victor perceives that he is fundamentally, inextricably bound to the creature. He sees the monster as a kind of double of himself: “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror [. . .] nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (Shelley 61). The creature, “the disfigured,” is an alternative version of the self—it is the other against whom, terrified, “the normal” attempts to

defend itself, and yet at the same time is defined by. Victor would not be Victor without the mirror of the creature.

One of the great benefits of Munby's journals is the glimpse it gives into the self-schema of a disfigured woman. Langdon provides an exemplar of someone Munby is normal against. The melodramatic depictions that exist in Victorian literature obscure the reality of disabled experience, so much so that it is important to reassess such depictions of disability and acknowledge that they may tell only a very circumscribed part of the story. Of particular concern is narrative point of view. Who is telling the story? Through whose frame has disability been constructed? How does Frankenstein's creature perceive himself? In the past twenty years there has been an explosion of disability narratives coming from a variety of women and men who claim a disability identity. In the Victorian era, such narratives were virtually non-existent. When they did exist, they were often mediated through another writer's frame, such as the depictions of the "crippled" and blind interviewees of Henry Mayhew in *London Labor and the London Poor*.

In one such instance, Mayhew interviews a "crippled" seller of nutmeg graters whose story is one of relative self-sufficiency that is largely free of melodrama. He describes very difficult circumstances of poverty and physical ailment, but he also describes his ability to provide for himself after the deaths of his mother and the woman who raised him. The seller describes that he could read and write more than many of his class, that he could build and mend furniture, sell kitchen goods and even have his own shop: "I had then got the means. Before [his mother's death] I had opened a kind of

shop for things in the general line; I sold tin-ward, and brass-work, and candlesticks, and fire-irons, and all old furniture, and gown-prints as well” (Mayhew 1:331).

While the seller chronicles both what he has been able to do to make a living as well as the difficulties he has faced, Mayhew’s commentary on him frames him entirely through the lens of victimization and pity.

I have made all due inquiries to satisfy myself as to his worthiness, and I feel convinced that when the reader looks at the portrait here given, and observes how utterly helpless the poor fellow is, and then reads the following plain unvarnished tale, he will marvel like me, not only at the fortitude which could sustain him under all his heavy afflictions, but with the resignation (not to say philosophy) with which he bears them every one. His struggles to earn his own living (notwithstanding his physical incapacity even to put the victuals to his mouth after he has earned them), are instances of a nobility of pride that are I believe without a parallel.

The poor creature’s legs and arms are completely withered: indeed he is scarcely more than head and trunk. (Mayhew 1:330)

What this description does is render obsolete the self-schema of the seller of nutmeg graters. Mayhew’s frame renders him pitiable and denies him subjectivity. He becomes superhuman, an object of both pity and admiration—near to the “supercrip” descriptor in the current disability vernacular—a term given to disabled people who are presented as having superhuman courage and strength, such as Christopher Reeve or the wheelchair rugby players in the film *Murderball*. Such depictions make false distinctions between

the disabled who matter and are deserving of our pity and admiration and those who are not trying hard enough and do not deserve our attention—the “average” disabled.

In such a construction, only the superhuman depictions of disabled or disfigured people are rendered significant, while those who are incapable of such feats are rendered invisible. Mayhew makes such problematic distinctions between the disabled people with whom he interacts. Those that matter, those who deserve our sympathy and praise, are those who work—who participate in the economy even against overwhelming odds and limitations that should prevent the possibility of doing so. The “undeserving” other half of this binary is constructed as those who beg rather than remain self-sufficient, no matter how high the personal cost. Begging is depicted not as a last resort for individuals physically incapable of working, but an easy short cut that “lazy” disabled people take. Before using the seller of nutmeg graters as one of the deserving disabled, Mayhew assures readers (in the quote above) that he has thoroughly checked into his background before giving his stamp of approval:

I now give an example of one of the classes *driven* to the streets by utter inability to labour. I have already spoken of the sterling independence of some of these men possessing the strongest claims to our sympathy and charity, and yet preferring to *sell* rather *beg*. As I said before, many ingrained beggars certainly use the street *trade* as a cloak for alms-seeking, but as certainly many more, with every title to our assistance, use it as a means of redemption from beggary. That the nutmeg-grater seller is

a noble example of the latter class, I have not the least doubt. (Mayhew 1:329-330)

As Mayhew makes clear, there is a class of disabled who deserve our pity and admiration, and another class who have far less, if any, claim to it. The deserving disabled make superhuman efforts to participate in the economy no matter how impossibly difficult, and thus earn the label of productive citizens. The less deserving are those who beg and therefore are an economic drain on the worthy citizens who are solicited to care for them as dependents. The only disabled who deserve our sympathy are those who repudiate begging, even if it is the only viable option for them.¹

Where did such a vision of undeserving begging come from and why did it arise? In an increasingly industrial society where scores of individuals left rural environments to enter metropolitan areas in search of employment, the urban poor were on display in unprecedented numbers. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Londoners like Munby became witnesses to a population that was literally crawling in the public parks and starving on the streets. The responses to those in such overwhelming need were varied. Some got involved in charitable works; others preferred to believe that the poor were shiftless and undeserving. The benefit of such latter belief was that it obviated the need for any kind of personal or social response. Blaming the poor and disabled for their inability to work—for what was constructed as their *refusal* to find gainful employment—meant that their miserable conditions were their own fault. Likewise, their salvation would be at

¹ For the disabled or disfigured who are seen with horror and revulsion, like Frankenstein's monster, there is no pity but a demand of isolation—an insistence upon separation from the rest of the population. Langdon, too, experienced this level of rejection.

their own hands, literally, via the presumption that when they put those hands to work, poverty and want would dissipate. Londoners who chose to do nothing about the disfigured and disabled could then be absolved from any niggling twinge of conscience.

There were certainly literary examples that depicted begging as an easy and ill-gotten way to earn a living—Eliza Doolittle’s father in *Pygmalion* comes to mind. Another account of an undeserving beggar is Neville St. Clair in Arthur Conan Doyle’s 1891 short story “The Man with the Twisted Lip.” In this Sherlock Holmes tale, St. Clair dons the false but aptly chosen name, Hugh Boone, and disguises himself as a disfigured, lame man so as to elicit the most pity and hence the most coins from charitably-minded Londoners. Begging is the boon his name suggests. When he reveals his story to Holmes and Watson, he makes the connection between disfigurement and pity abundantly clear: “I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh-coloured plaster” (Doyle 11). Donning disfigurement is a deliberate ruse to solicit sympathy and gain a living from unsuspecting Londoners who are duped by the disguise. St. Clair stops living as a gainfully employed reporter and becomes instead an undeserving social dependent: “I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets with coppers” (Doyle 12). This kind of literary construction posits disfigurement as an illicit attempt to steal money from charitable Victorians. It equates disfigurement and disability with a most serious offense to capitalism: the refusal to be gainfully employed.

Clearly, Harriet Langdon is no Neville St. Clair. In Doyle's literary construction, disability and disfigurement are ruses that enable an able-bodied man to avoid the capitalist imperative and become a social dependent rather than an independent, working contributor to society. Langdon's experience is also in large part a social construction, but it is her disability that is constructed by a society that finds her too repulsive to be among them. While both St. Clair and Langdon are capable of working, only St. Clair is worthy of it, for when his "repulsive" disfigurement is stripped away by Holmes' sponge, St. Clair's physical perfection makes him a worthwhile candidate for employment:

The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree.

Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. (Doyle 11)

With one simple swipe of a damp sponge, Holmes safeguards London from a man intent on passing as a casual and refusing to earn a living. St. Clair has the "refined" looks and "smooth skin" that will ensure an easy return to gainful employment. Yet the above display is noteworthy not simply because St. Clair is revealed but because Holmes' mastery is likewise on display. The message in this Doyle story is that England has to be on careful watch to prevent those who would shirk their capitalist duty. Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Bradstreet, to whom Holmes reveals St. Clair, represent British authority

and propriety. They agree not to prosecute St. Clair or publicly reveal his scandalous evasion only after exacting from him the solemn promise that Hugh Boone is forever banished and St. Clair will return to gainful employment in his place. St. Clair wholeheartedly agrees: "I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take" (Doyle 12). The world has once again become safe for capitalism.

With Langdon, however, there is no social unmasking possible. There is no sponge that will restore her noseless face to normalcy or smooth the lesions or reversed eyelids on her face. In fact, her situation is opposite to St. Clair's: when she reveals her face, she becomes unfitted to work. Time and again, she is turned away from employment because she is considered too hideous to be among "normal" people. In this sense, Munby becomes in this scenario Holmes' antithesis. He, too, may be considered someone who is safeguarding London, but he does so through *providing* the disguises, not revealing what lies beneath them. Langdon is *required* to wear a mask, false nose, and veil to hide her objectionable face, and Munby provides them. Yet even with such concessions in place, she is still deemed "too disfigured" to work.

Of course, like Holmes, Munby does perhaps serve as the revealer of reality in the sense that he commissions photographs to be taken of Langdon unveiled. So as Holmes' revelation of the reality of St. Clair's face prompts St. Clair to return to employment, Munby's revelations of Langdon's face perhaps serve as a method of containing her within the proper realm as well—if these photographs were used to ensure her admission to the RHI. There is evidence in the journals and in the RHI admission advice that suggests that photographs of candidates could be used to solicit sympathy—a method of

charity fundraising that is sadly still used today. In this sense, Langdon's face, a face that is actually severely disfigured as opposed to theatrically disfigured by the former actor, St. Clair, serves as a conduit to charitable donations. It could thus be read as a potential marker of agency for Langdon, not unlike Joseph Merrick's level of agency in displaying himself for money. If Langdon were conscious that her face could solicit not simply horror, but pity, she could have used it as St. Clair does in "The Man with the Twisted Lip": as a means of survival.

The only means of participating in capitalism for those who are severely disfigured or disabled is on the economic fringes of society: via freak shows and medical photographs for Joseph Merrick, and the fundraising bazaars and hospital placards for Harriet Langdon. Hence the Royal Hospital for Incurables becomes her only means of survival outside of begging—an endeavor, by the way, that there is no evidence in the journals to suggest that Langdon ever undertook. Nevertheless, there is no room in England proper for someone so deformed as Harriet Langdon. She is asked to remove herself from the working world, which provides evidence of the extreme prejudice against severe facial disfigurement, since working was a British imperative.

What kind of life was possible for those on the economic fringes? It is the answer to this question that makes Arthur Munby's journals most fascinating, for they provide not only his rendering of disfigurement but Langdon's that is embedded within it. Like Mayhew's discussion of the nutmeg grater seller whom he reads as pitiful and worthy of assistance, Munby likewise reads Harriet Langdon melodramatically. Yes, he is revolted by the hideousness of her countenance, but his overwhelming emotional response to her

is pity. Ultimately, neither abjection nor pity is an appropriate response to disfigurement; they represent equally problematic extremes along a continuum that severely limits subjectivity.

Yet remarkably, paradoxically, new reading practices of Munby's journals (as of Mayhew's interviews) reveal the subjectivity of the objects of such studies. Disability theory provides a lens through which to understand the self-constructions that are embedded within the larger text that Munby writes. Similar kinds of deconstructions were required to read the colonized through their depictions by the colonizers. Clearly, how Indians were written by Victorian Englishman, for example, as colonial subjects of British rule, is not the same as how Indians would have written and understood themselves. Likewise, disability studies provides a lens through which to read against the ways in which disabled Victorians were constructed through the rhetoric of pity and through their repeated recasting as victims without agency.

Whereas Munby depicts Langdon as an object of oppression worthy of assistance, I read Munby's journals for the evidence they provide of Langdon's voice—of their revelations of her subjectivity as an active participant in her own life and as someone with agency and desire. What comes through palpably in Munby's writing about Langdon and his quotations of her is not simply his perception of her through the typical melodramatic lens that was common for Victorians. What is equally and more uniquely present is Langdon's understanding of herself—a self-schema that does acknowledge the difficulty of being prevented from work, but one that also finds joy and laughter possible—one that enjoys going to the park and the theater and pursuing the

commonplace, everyday amusements available to normative Victorians. In short, Langdon posits herself as a typical Victorian, not an outcast who exists solely on the fringes, whatever society's construction of her.

Until now, Arthur Munby's journals have never been read with an eye to the conscientious care he took in representing working-class women's voices in his poetry or to the years-long effort he made on behalf of Harriet Langdon. His voluntary teaching has likewise been ignored. We can no longer undervalue the efforts Munby made on behalf of poor and disfigured/disabled working-class people. Munby's interactions with both have rightly been critiqued by scholars: his representations imperfect, his relationships erotically motivated. Yet such scholarly critiques are *themselves imperfect* in their monolithic representation of Munby's philanthropy as solely motivated by self-gain and erotic pleasure. A generation of Munby scholars have entirely ignored the incontrovertible evidence in his journals of three kinds of active labors he pursued on the part of working-class people: his lifelong valuing and accurate representations of Yorkshire dialects in his poetry, his years of voluntary teaching at the Working Men's and Working Women's colleges, and his years of aid to Harriet Langdon to find work and finally a pensioner's place in the Royal Hospital for Incurables. Each of these efforts alone begs for a reevaluation of Munby; collectively, they demonstrate a far more benevolent rendering of Arthur Munby than has ever been undertaken until now.

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