Bodies of Stories: Disability and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

Dissertation

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I trace the ways in which folk narratives, when embedded in fiction, facilitate discourses of disability. I argue that folk narratives are called upon in nineteenth-century British literature not only to express anxieties concerning the unruly body and mind but also to create space in which stories and experiences that are otherwise untellable might be told. This fundamentally interdisciplinary project draws upon folkloric and literary scholarship and reframes them through the lens of disability studies. The chapters that follow address influential texts penned during the long nineteenth century. In Chapter One, I examine Wordsworth's use of the ballad, contextualizing *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) within the emergent concept of folklore and illuminating how the language and belief patterns of British folklore can underpin complex depictions of disabled experiences. Chapter Two addresses Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and the folk narrative genre of the legend, arguing that the novel's notorious ambiguity and fragmentation are narrative strategies that accommodate unstable, disruptive concepts such as disability and the supernatural. Chapter Three explores the fairy tale through George MacDonald's "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen" (1882), analyzing it as a retelling of Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" and considering the tale's villain as a collision between the fairy tale witch and the "mad" scientist. Chapter Four addresses the folk

narrative genre of myth and its redeployment in Arthur Machen's novella *The Great God Pan* (1890), which vocalizes fears concerning disabled bodies that resist containment, treatment, or explanation despite advances in science and medicine.

Dedication

For my grandmother, Faye Beth Baer O'Byrne, and my parents, Cheryl Honeycutt and BJ

Honeycutt.

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Introduction

I grew up on fairy tales. As a child, I read with delight of witches who roamed the woods in huts perched atop chicken legs, of little girls who outsmarted or were devoured by wolves, of mermaids who pined for legs. I still reread these tales and seek out the ever abundant adaptations that saturate contemporary media, from Disney's musical adaptation of "The Snow Queen," *Frozen* (2013), to the most recent Academy Award winner for Best Picture, *The Shape of Water* (2017), to a current New York Times bestseller, *The Hazel Wood* (2018). When I teach composition, my fairy-tale theme elicits extreme reactions, ranging from glee to disgust, from my students, and yet I have received thoughtful reflections on the biographical resonance of Cinderella from female English majors and freshman football players. Fairy tales, and folk narratives more broadly, have the distinction of prompting passionate responses while remaining cloaked in frivolity; they are pervasive and wield surprising cultural power even as they are dismissed as childish or feminine. Their influence extends beyond the bounds of their own genre and strict retellings to shape other kinds of narrative, operating covertly within contemporary media and, as I discuss in this dissertation, within the romances *and* realism of nineteenth-century British literature.

This dissertation is a fundamentally interdisciplinary project, drawing upon folkloric and literary scholarship and reframing them through the lens of disability

studies. My archive includes influential texts that were penned during the long nineteenth

century. While the unruly bodies of early folktales and the supercrip superheroes of

contemporary popular media beckoned, and will certainly be the subject of future

projects, I chose to locate this dissertation in nineteenth-century British literature because

of this period's relationship to disability and to folklore; nineteenth-century Britain saw

the rise of folklore as a distinct discipline as well as the study and solidification[1] of a

"normal" body/ mind as an ideal. These two concepts crystalized concurrently, in lived

culture and in literature, and examining the literature of the period can demonstrate not

only how these discourses developed but how they interacted and even influenced one

another.

     Although William John Thoms, an Englishman, did not coin the word "folklore"

until 1846, the drive to "collect folklore, to preserve it in writing, and to share it with

others through print" was on the rise throughout the long nineteenth century (Georges

and Jones 35). Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones credit a movement from a

mechanistic model[2] of nature to an emerging organic model[3] with providing a

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[1] I am not suggesting that impairment or bodily/ mental difference was not recognized
prior to the nineteenth century but rather that the growing discourse around bodily and
mental medicalization gave rise to new language and heightened awareness and scrutiny
of bodily/ mental difference during this time. A useful analogy can be found in
Foucault's "specification of individuals," in which he explains how, during the nineteenth
century, the limited, action-focused concept of "sodomy" was superseded by the identity-
driven permanence of "homosexual" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 43). Likewise,
impairment has always been a fact, but during the nineteenth century, the idea of a proper
or normal body (and therefore also an improper, incorrect body) began to coalesce.
[2] A mechanistic model assumes that "the physical universe operates as a machine does—
constantly, repetitiously, and predictably, according to a set of mathematical principles
and physical laws that are determinable and hence knowable and describable" (Georges
and Jones 33).

"justification and goal for preserving and disseminating expressive behaviors that seemed to be antiquities" (Georges and Jones 34). "The roots of folklore study" are linked to "the quest for national identity and cultural purity that began in the late eighteenth century," which was frequently enacted by cultural elites collecting and elevating the stories and cultural materials of lower classes (Schacker 2).[4] Figures such as Bishop Thomas Percy, Sir Walter Scott, Sir Francis Child, and Henry Ellis collected and published archaic or traditional[5] English poems, songs, and customary practices in order to preserve a British cultural legacy. As interest in "popular antiquities" escalated, so did "an awareness that surviving remnants of the past were rapidly disappearing with the growth of urbanization, industrialization, and compulsory education," a fear now popularly known as eleventh-hour folklore (Georges and Jones 35). While collectors and writers like Percy, Scott, and

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[3] An organic model, which began to emerge in the latter half of the eighteenth century, rejects a mathematically certain version of reality and instead asserts that "human beings' views of reality are dependent on their conceptions of…perceived phenomena and way they conceptualize those phenomena relative to each other and to themselves. Everything in the universe—including human beings—is what it is by virtue of its relationship to other parts of the whole" (Georges and Jones 33).

[4] The history of the discipline of folklore, and its relationship to the past and the present, has been discussed extensively, but particularly notable contributions include Richard Bauman and Charles Brigg's *Voices of Modernity* (2003), Richard M. Dorson's *A History of British Folklore* (1999), and Dorothy Noyes's *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (2016).

[5] The word "tradition" is ubiquitous in folklore. It is key to many definitions of folklore as well as to descriptions of the work that folklorists do, and yet the term itself "defies crisp definition" (Bronner 10). Simon Bronner writes that "most evident in folklorist scholarship from the nineteenth century through the twentieth are ideas of tradition as (1) an everyday past, often ancient, represented as stable and immutable, (2) learning as a kind of custom or process usually described as being outside formal institutions and involving older generations passing on "lore" to younger ones, (3) tradition as a shared body of knowledge and belief, a conventional wisdom, existing outside of formal records, (4) a repeated, variable expression or performance emerging from social interaction, and (5) a symbol or mode of thought characteristic of a group's identity" (Bronner 48).

Thomas Crofton Croker worked to preserve the antiquities and folklore of Britain, similar scholarly and nationalistic impulses across the channel prompted Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm to collect German fairy tales in their *Children and Household Tales* (1812/57), a book that would have a profound influence on British audiences when Edgar Taylor translated the first edition into English in 1823 (Zipes 85).

"By conceptualizing and characterizing folklore as historical artifact," early collectors and fieldworkers "assumed and implied not only that folklore was a survival from the past, but also that it was transmitted through time intergenerationally and primarily through an oral tradition" (Georges and Jones 40). This new perception "suggested that the ongoing existence of folklore constituted conclusive evidence of continuity in culture through time, and that examples of folklore could provide insights into the national character and cultural heritage of peoples" (Georges and Jones 40). Bauman and Briggs note that, during this time, "oral tradition became the foundation of a poetics of Otherness, a means of identifying the premodern Others both within modern society (uneducated, rural, poor, female) and outside it (savage, primitive, 'preliterate')," a rubric that lends itself to the inclusion of disability as a marker of Otherness in the production of oral tradition (Bauman and Briggs 14). As folklore came to be understood as culturally valuable, the drive to record oral traditions increased; "[t]he development of Folklore as a written discourse was shaped by the need for, and the sustained by the existence of, a sufficiently large audience. In the early nineteenth century, England emerged as the center of folklore publishing" (Schacker 4). As fairy tales, ballads, and legends appeared with increasingly frequency on British shelves, so did they infiltrate the

poetry, short stories, and novels of the period, from Sir Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816) to Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) to Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821).

Concurrent with the solidification of folklore as a cultural concept, the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century saw the emergence of disability[6] as a "new category" that encompassed "physical impairments to deformity to monstrosity to madness" (Davis, "Dr. Johnson" 61). "Normalcy" and its corresponding inverse "abnormalcy" solidify as concepts during the nineteenth century. The *OED* identifies the first recorded usage of the word "abnormal" in an anatomical encyclopedia from 1835 and defines it as "deviating from the originary rule or type; contrary to rule or system; irregular, unusual, aberrant" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). "Normal" is an older coinage, first appearing in 1598, but its current meaning ("Constituting or conforming to a type or standard; regular, usual, typical; ordinary, conventional") was not in effect until the nineteenth century, nor was it applied to humans until the Victorian period (*Oxford English Dictionary)*. This standardization of language is significant because "at the moment when attempts are made to define difference as natural fact—no longer as a sign for divine or preternatural agency—it is revealed as the norm's inverse reflection" (Deutsch and Nussbaum 13). From a medical perspective, "the period of cultural history that corresponds with Romanticism in England saw the installation of a norm of

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[6] I address definitions of "disability" more extensively in the Key Terms portion of this introduction, but for the purposes of this document, "disability" can be understood as a broad term that encompasses physical impairment, social perception of mental/ physical difference, and conditions that impact ability to conduct every day life. I use disability as the umbrella term through which related and sometimes overlapping concepts such as ab/normality, chronic illness, and disease can be considered.

embodiment—call it "the proper body"—that served (and in some ways still serves) to regulate the agencies of bodies in liberal society" (Youngquist xiv). A gradual but pronounced shift in perceptions of health, wellness, and acceptable bodies can be tracked over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prompted by impetus to scientifically organize and taxonomize that echoes how early folklorists were beginning to regard their own cultural artifacts:

> Rational medicine in the eighteenth century had a language for constituting a person in terms of his life history and experiences. It could describe a person's own *natural* state and (sometimes) restore him to it if he fell sick. Nineteenth-century medical men were developing a language (which we still use) for situating all people in relation to each other, for measuring their deviation from the *normal*, and, increasingly, for managing their deviations from that norm. (Lawrence 45)

During this time, the proportion of the population designated as disabled oscillated "with the growth of greater social sympathy and benevolence," but "the absence or presence of physical or mental defect helped to define the very nature of the human species" (Deutsch and Nussbaum 6). According to Deutsch and Nussbaum, "the history of disability is intricately bound up with the formulation of other aspects of European modernity including the development of class, race, gender, and sexual norms both at home and in the emergent empire," illustrating the significance of disability alongside other, more

frequently studied social factors (Deutsch and Nussbaum 6). They emphasize the stakes

of representation, noting that the ways in which disability and normalcy are constructed

help determine how meaning is produced and "have real effects on people's lives"

(Deutsch and Nussbaum 6). Examining how disability began to solidify as a concept in

the nineteenth-century and how it was represented in the literature of the period

illuminates many of the tropes and patterns that still dominate contemporary narratives

and also demonstrates remarkable creativity that sidesteps stereotypes. Written in a time

in which the "proper body" was coalescing but still ambiguous, these texts represent

disability as an unfixed point in narratives of possibility.

As previously stated, there is very little scholarship that explicitly addresses both

folklore and disability, but the two fields have multiple points of intersection—they are

both concerned with personal narrative, the subaltern, formation of identity, the

development of groups, recording the words and experiences of the marginalized, and the

negotiation of insider/ outsider politics, to name a few. My methodology draws from

folkloristics and disability studies, highlighting these points of intersection, as I examine

an archive of that straddles folklore and literature, the nineteenth-century canon and the

margins that trouble genre. My archive is literary but my discussion of texts is informed

by folk narrative studies and well as disability studies.

Much of the wonder, and horror, of fairy tales is located in the mutability of the

bodies that traverse them. In Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's fairy tale "The Juniper Tree"

(1857), a little boy becomes, by turns, stew that is consumed by his father, bones

underneath the juniper tree, a beautiful song bird, and, once more, a human boy. Jeanne-

Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's Beast transforms from a hideous monster to a handsome prince when he earns Beauty's love and affection.[7] The brothers in Hans Christian Andersen's "The Wild Swans" (1838) are ensorcelled into birds, and only regain their humans forms after their sister produces nettle shirts after enduring years of muteness and pain from crushing, spinning, and weaving the stinging fibers; one brother never fully regains his human shape, living the rest of his days with a single wing in place of an arm. The impetus to read a fairy tale to its conclusion is largely to learn what becomes of the bodies that move through them, how they will be restored or punished, disenchanted or healed.

An emphasis on bodies, their abilities and disabilities, dovetails with the structure that underpins the genre. Indeed, "[f]rom a narratological standpoint, it is not surprising that a genre so often associated with magical or extraordinary abilities portrays disability with such great frequency" (Schmiesing 1). In the fairy tale, physical beauty is invoked to denote a character's positive traits, such as goodness, morality, or bravery. Inversely, ugliness, deformity, and physical impairment often function as a signifier of villainy, (re)enforcing alienation and stigma. In many of these narratives, and in the Grimms' collection in particular, "able-bodied protagonists are thus contrasted with antagonists who exhibit or are punished with impairment. And when a disabled hero is portrayed, his heroic qualities are often brought to the fore as he triumphs despite the social stigma of his disability—a triumph typically rewarded in fairy tales with the magical erasure of his

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[7] "Beauty and the Beast" (1756)

physical anomaly" (Schmiesing 1-2). Goodness and villainy are coded into characters'

bodies and expressed through their beauty, ability, and impairment.

The extraordinary prevalence of disabled characters in fairy tales and other folk

narrative genres exemplify the narrative reliance on disability articulated by David T.

Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in their theorization of "narrative prosthesis," in which

they argue that "all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to

reign in excess" (Mitchell and Snyder 53). They write that:

> The very need for a story is called into being when something has gone amiss
>
> with the known world, and, thus, the language of a tale seeks to comprehend that
>
> which has stepped out of line. In this sense, stories compensate for an unknown or
>
> unnatural deviance that begs for an explanation ... Since what we now call
>
> disability has been historically narrated as that which characterizes a body as
>
> deviant from shared norms of bodily appearance and ability, disability has
>
> functioned throughout history as one of the most marked and remarked on
>
> differences that propel the act of storytelling into existence. Narratives turn signs
>
> of cultural deviance into textually marked bodies. (Mitchell and Snyder 53-54)

Mitchell and Snyder's thesis is in some ways anticipated by the work of folklorist and

structuralist Vladimir Propp, who examined Russian folk tales to identify foundational

patterns in folk narrative. Propp concluded that the fairy tale relied on a pattern of lack-

lack liquidated, or that an initial disruption in the taleworld's status quo must be corrected

by the tale's end. Narrative prosthesis is a bodily expression of lack-lack liquidated, a pattern that occurs as fairy tales "move from disequilibrium to equilibrium, from enchantment to disenchantment, and from disability to ability and bodily perfection" (Schmiesing 2). This and related patterns occur, not only in fairy tales but in other narratives as well, including nineteenth-century literature.

"Disability imagery abounds…in literature, linguistics, philosophy, art, aesthetics and literary criticism" but "because it is not analyzed, it remains as background, seemingly of little consequence" (Linton 110.) Beth Franks argues that "disability as background has provided a setting for the actions of others, an atmospheric backdrop, an unchanging horizon—one that can be overlooked or ignored. It has remained stable for so long that its background status is accepted as a universal truth rather than questioned as a cultural perspective" (Franks 244.) This "background status" is increasingly under scrutiny with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the creation and rise of new scholarly fields such as bodylore, queer theory, and disability studies. Disability as a category has begun to be destabilized, both in academic discourse as well as in popular discourse.

While most work within disability studies has focused on public policy and the lived experience of the disabled in the world, "fiction provides an opportunity for readers to explore how disability is constructed and discussed in cultural texts. Fictional explorations of disability make it clear that disability is a socially constructed idea, a text that is inscribed on the body" (Newman-Stille 43.) In the body of work that addresses representations of disability in fiction, realism tends to be the preferred mode. David

Church suggests that the subfield of disability film studies generally examines realistic films for analysis and interpretation of disability in cultural discourse because these realistic films show "the world in which persons with disabilities find themselves" (Church.) However, he goes on to observe that realist films, especially those which are written or directed by people without disabilities, often offer a negative or unrealistic portrayal of disability, leaning on the clichés of the "supercrip" or the "self-loathing cripple" (Church.)

While these problematic trends in depiction can be replicated in fiction, an unrealistic mode can be harnessed to unlock innovative ways of representing non-normative bodies and minds. As Derek Newman-Stille argues "disability studies theorists often situate realism as most appropriate for discussing social change because it portrays the real world, but science fiction and speculative fiction offer a similar opportunity because these genres depict *possible* worlds and opportunities for changes that a society could make" (Newman-Stille 44.) Church similarly suggests that disability scholars' emphasis on realism undercuts the potential of fantasy to create "positive critical readings and empowering depictions of disability" (Church.) While fairy tales, folk narrative, and related speculative fiction do not offer a literal, applicable model for change, they can provide possible worlds in which bodies that are hybrid, disabled, or otherwise non-normative can be valid, desirable, and even preferred. They can, however, also reinforce pre-existing assumptions of normalcy and difference.

Surprisingly, very little scholarship on folk narrative, the fairy tale and disability exists, although it is an area that is beginning to receive critical attention. Beth Franks'

chapter "Gutting the Golden Goose: Disability in Grimms' Fairy Tales," and Vivian

Yenika-Agbaw's article "Reading Disability in Children's Literature: Hans Christian

Andersen's Tales" are among the few texts that directly address fairy tales and disability

in any depth. Franks' chapter is most concerned with identifying the positive and

negative affect associated with depictions of disability in the first one hundred stories in

the Grimms' collection rather than close reading or analysis of the tales themselves.

Yenika-Agbaw's article addresses four of Andersen's fairy tales: "The Little Mermaid"

(1837), "The Brave Tin Soldier" (1838), "Little Tiny or Thumbelina" (1835), and "The

Ugly Duckling" (1843.) She examines that ways in which disability determines the title

characters' places in the social order and the extent to which disability alienates and

others them.

The first full-length study to address folklore, the fairy tale, and disability is Ann

Schmiesing's *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (2014).

Schmiesing is primarily concerned with the Grimms' own perceptions of disability and

the ways in which those ideas were reproduced in their *Children and Household Tales*.

By establishing an analogy between the fairy tale and the disabled body—Schmiesing

suggests that the Grimms viewed the fairy tale as a genre that had sickened and eroded,

requiring restoration to its once healthy state—she conceptualizes the collection as a

quest for the reinstatement of wholeness to the impaired or diseased genre/ body. While

Schmiesing's book marks an important and groundbreaking contribution to both fairy tale

studies and disability studies, her archive is limited to the Grimms' stories, and much of

her focus is on the editorial process, leaving less room for close readings of the stories themselves.

As Schmiesing's book suggests, the Grimms' fairy tales are saturated with depictions of disability—and so are fairy tales beyond *Children and Household Tales*. Prominent examples include Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1837) whose titular character experiences physical alienation in her aquatic form and suffers muteness and extreme pain in her feet to acquire a human body; Perrault's "Little Thumb" (1697), whose tiny size and refusal to speak are understood as "a sign of stupidity" (Perrault 231) despite his intelligence; and Cinderella's stepsisters, who in multiple versions of the text, mutilate their feet in an effort to fit the slipper[8]. More abstract physical or mental differences, such as bodily transformation or curses that generate impossible sleep or stupidity, might also be considered under the rubric of disability.

While fairy-tale scholarship on disability is still in its infancy, and even less work has been done on other folk narrative genres such as myth and legend[9], folklorists have long been concerned with the relationships between health, stigma, and culture. The essays in *Healing Logics: Culture and Medicine in Modern Health Belief Systems* (2001), edited by Erika Brady, explore folk medicine and the diverse sources from which individuals construct their systems of belief regarding their health, ranging from communal traditions to personal experiences to religious beliefs to popular culture. In

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[8] While the Grimms' version features foot mutilations, so do others, including "Cinderella" as told by James and Pinky Murray in *Folk-Lore of Sea Islands, South Carolina* (1923)

[9] One of the very few published works on disability and legend is Diane Goldstein's article "Deranged Psychopaths and Victims who go insane: Visibility and Invisibility in the Depiction of Mental Health and Illness in Contemporary Legend" (2015).

Carville: Remembering Leprosy in America (2004), Marcia Gaudet recounts the stories of former patients at the National Hansen's Disease Center and illustrates how those patients created their own cultural traditions in the face of extreme stigma and alientation. Diane Goldstein has written extensively about the ways in which information about health is received and transmitted, particularly on the internet. David Hufford has published multiple articles on folk medicine[10] as well as his fascinating exploration of sleep paralysis/ *mara*/ hag riding, *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (1989). *Healing Traditions: Alternative Medicine and the Health Professions* (1994) by Bonnie Blair O'Connor probes the culture and beliefs that drive patients' reliance on alternative treatments such as acupuncture and herbalism. Occupational folklore and trauma intersect in Timothy R. Tangherlini's *Talking Trauma: Paramedics and Their Stories* (1998), in which the storytelling tradition and culture of emergency paramedics are detailed through detailed ethnographic interviews.

More recently, *The Stigmatized Vernacular*, a 2012 special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* edited by Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman, explores the concept of the how stigma is constructed and mediated by culture, galvanizing discourse on normality, stigma, and the body in folkloristics more broadly.[11] The collected articles examine reflexivity, representation, and stigma in the context of tobacco farming narratives, the study of diabetes, chaotic trauma narratives, and political asylum. In their

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[10] See "Folk Medicine and Health Culture in Contemporary Society" (1997), "Folk Medicine in Contemporary America (1991), and "Customary Observances in Modern Medicine" (1989).

[11] In 2016, the collection was republished as a book of the same name by Indiana University Press.

introduction, Goldstein and Shuman not only articulate useful formulations of the stigmatized vernacular, but they also explore what it means for a narrative to be tellable or untellable, designations that determine which stories can be told or accepted. A narrative that is tellable "addresses audience expectations, newsworthiness, uniqueness, relevance, importance, and humor but also—and perhaps just as centrally—appropriateness, contextualization, negotiation, mediation, and entitlement" (Goldstein and Shuman, "Introduction" 119). By contrast, "[s]tories become untellable because the content defies articulation, the rules of appropriateness outweigh the import of content, the narrator is constrained by issues of entitlement and storytelling rights, or the space the narratives would normally inhabit is understood by the narrator as somehow unsafe" (Goldstein and Shuman, "Introduction" 120). These concepts apply not only to stigma but to disability, and to questions that have guided my dissertation research: What kinds of stories can be narrated, and by whom? What kinds of strategies might a narrator use to transform a narrative into one that is tellable?

The Stigmatized Vernacular ultimately inspired the creation of Diagnosing Folklore: Perspectives on Disability, Health and Trauma (2015), one of the first publications to explicitly bridge the fields of folklore and disability studies. In their introduction to the collection, editors Trevor J. Blank and Andrea Kitta define stigma as "any attribute that is socially discreditable" whether they are "physical, mental, emotional, behavioral, and/or attitudinal" as long they "have been socially determined to be undesirable," casting a broad net (Blank and Kitta 5). The collection is strongly ethnographic in terms of methodology and contemporary in terms of content; the

contributors explore inclusion in the Special Olympics, the visibility and performance of bipolar disorder by YouTube vloggers, and the fragmented storytelling of veterans. Of particular importance to the editors and authors is their desire to "create equal power relationships" (Kitta and Blank 3) with their subjects and to avoid the pitfall of "strategic romanticism" (Shuman 168).

Ethnographic approaches to disability studies are beginning to flourish in the field of folklore, but comparatively little work has been done on folk narrative, particularly on the fairy tale, legend, and myth, despite the prevalence of disability in these genres. Derek Newman-Stille's work on science fiction and speculative fiction, particularly his assertion that these unrealistic genres present powerful, understudied representations of disability in "possible worlds" (Newman-Stille 44) that present alternate models of accommodation, prompted my own speculation into the affordances of folk narratives, particularly when they are deployed in literature. Though this dissertation began as a fairy-tale studies project, it has broadened to encompass other folk narrative genres. How do folk narratives, when embedded in fiction, facilitate discourses of disability? What do they articulate about ideas of normalcy and disability? Over the course of my dissertation research and writing, I have found that folk narratives are called upon in nineteenth-century British literature in order to express anxieties concerning the unruly body and mind but also to create space in which stories and experiences that are otherwise untellable might be told.

Key Terms

I now turn to several key terms and genres that inform the project. Many of these terms are contested or in a near constant state of evolution, necessitating both an overview of how these terms have been used historically and how I am using them in this dissertation.

Folklore

"Folklore" can refer to a body of traditional texts, practices, and cultural materials and to the discipline that studies them. Perhaps the most famous definition of folklore is still Dan Ben-Amos's "artistic communication in small groups" (Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition" 13). Lynne McNeill succinctly defines folklore as "informal, traditional culture" (McNeill 13). Of most relevance to my project is Elliott Oring's assessment of folklore as a perspective or orientation: Oring regards folklore as "a mode of expression which emphasizes the human and personal as opposed to the formal and institutional," arguing that it is best conceived of as "an orientation" because this approach is "productive rather than restrictive. It allows one to think of folklore less as a collection of things than as a perspective from which almost any number of forms, behaviors, and events may be examined" (Oring 16, 18). Oring adds that, in order to map their orientation, folklorists address concepts central to the field,

pursu[ing] reflections of the *communal* (a group or collective), the *common* (the everyday rather than the extraordinary), the *informal* (in relation to the formal and

institutional), the *marginal* (in relation to the centers of power and privilege), the *personal* (communication face-to-face), the *traditional* (stable over time), the *aesthetic* (artistic expressions), and the *ideological* (expressions of belief and systems of knowledge). (Oring 18)

The literary texts that make up my archive are not folklore themselves, but they are deeply informed by folklore. By approaching them with a folkloric lens or orientation, I am attuned to the ways in which folklore and literature can intersect and inform one another, particularly with regards to the *marginal* (disability and queerness), the *traditional* (the stability and changes in retellings), the *aesthetic* (the artistry of the authors in my archive), and the *ideological* (how beliefs concerning disability are expressed).

Folk narrative

The broader term of "folk narrative" is contested, largely because "the notion of folk narrative is based upon a conceptualization of what folklore is, and there is no unanimity among scholars about the basic defining characteristics of folklore" (Oring 122). Oring writes that "folk narratives are generally conceptualized to be those narratives which circulate primarily in oral tradition and are communicated face-to-face (Oring 122-3). He identifies three defining characteristics of folk narrative. First, folk narratives "tend to exist in multiple versions," and no single version can be considered as truly authoritative or correct (Oring 123). Instead, the different situations and contexts

call forth altered versions from different narrators, and a folk narrative is also being re-created with each subsequent retelling. Oring's second characteristic is that "as a result of this process of re-creation, the folk narrative reflects both the past as well as the present" (Oring 123). Narrators of a folk narrative must utilize "past language, symbols, events, and forms which they share with their audience for their narrations to be both comprehensive and meaningful." However, because each iteration of a folk narrative is the product of a new context, it "crystallizes around contemporary situations and concerns, reflecting current values and attitudes" (Oring 123). Folk narrative revives structures from the past to speak to the present. Finally, Oring notes that "a folk narrative reflects both the individual and the community" (Oring 123). A folk narrative is, in part, an individual act of creativity, but that creativity has certain limitations and constraints predicated on community acceptance. Recreating or retelling a narrative "relies upon a negotiation between the narrator and his audience. The narrator's individuality must find outlet in a narrative acceptable to the community if he is to be confirmed in his role as narrator" (Oring 123).

Folklorists have identified many subgenres of folk narrative, including but by no means limited to: "origin myth, Saint's legend, memorate, fabulat, novella, aetiological tale, magic tale, joke, jest, animal tale, catch tale, clock tale, formula tale, personal experience story, and life history" (Oring 123). However, the most frequently discussed categories are myth, legend, and (fairy) tale. These folk narrative types are defined less by their content or form than by the attitudes of the community that hear, read, or otherwise receive them.

Fairy Tale

"Fairy tales" is the popular, or lay, term for what folklorists often refer to as "International Wonder Tales" or "Märchen." They have been classified in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Index from 300-749. In *The Folktale* (1946) Stith Thompson describes them as tales "involving a succession of motifs or episodes. [They move] in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and [are] filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land, humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses" (Thompson 8). They generally involve some type of quest or search that the hero or heroine must undertake. While these tales are often popularly conceived of as children's stories, this belief is a nineteenth century construct; they were once considered primarily to be adult entertainment.

Fairy tales can be oral or literary, and tales often migrate between these seemingly separate incarnations. While both the fields of folklore and literature have tried to claim fairy tales for their own—Alan Dundes deplored the fact that most literary scholarship does not acknowledge the contributions of folkloristics (Dundes, "Study" 136), and Ruth Bottigheimer boldly and dismissively claimed that fairy tales are exclusively the province of the literary world (Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales* 3), sending the field of folklore into an uproar. As a scholar of both literature and folklore, I am able to speak to the contributions of both fields and to put their fairy tale discourses into conversation with one another, mediated through the perspective of disability studies.

Legend

According to Oring, legends recount an episode which is "presented as miraculous, uncanny, bizarre, or sometimes embarrassing"—there is always something unusual or noteworthy about the contents of a legend (Oring 125). Most significantly, "the narration of a legend is, in a sense, the negotiation of the truth of these episodes ... at the core of the legend is an evaluation of its truth status" (Oring 125). Different tellers and receivers of a legend might assess it as true, false, or indeterminate, but "this diversity of opinion does not negate the status of the narrative as legend because, whatever the opinion, the truth status of the legend is what is being negotiated. In a legend, the question of truth must be *entertained* even if that truth is ultimately rejected. Thus, the legend often depicts the improbable within the world of the possible" (Oring 125). Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi inaugurated this emphasis on belief as the core component of the legend, insisting that:

> It is not necessarily the belief of the narrator or the belief of the receiver-transmitter that we have to consider; rather, we must consider, abstractly, so to speak, the *belief itself* that makes its presence felt in any kind of legend. The legend tells explicitly or implicitly almost without exception that its message is or was believed *sometime*, by *someone, somewhere* ... as much as it seems proven that the personal belief of the participants in the legend process is irrelevant, it also seems to be a rule that general reference to belief is an inherent and the most outstanding feature of the folk legend. (Degh and Vazsonyi 118)

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This ambiguity around truth status means that the contents of legends is frequently that which is unexplainable, unlikely, or even supernatural—indeed, the supernatural legend is a particularly common subtype of the genre. The listener or reader of the legend must evaluate these supernatural episodes, and decide whether or not to believe them. Unlike a fairy tale, which is marked as something outside of every-day possibility, "the legend never asks for the suspension of disbelief. It is concerned with creating a narrative whose truth is at least worthy of deliberation; consequently, the art of legendary engages the listener's sense of the possible" (Oring 125).

Myth

A myth is "generally regarded by the community in which it is told as both sacred and true. Consequently, myths tend to be core narratives in larger ideological systems" (Oring 124). The colloquial usage of the term "myth" is, confusingly, almost the opposite of its folkloric use; labeling a story as a myth is a strategy frequently used to discount it, to insist that it is untrue. However, within the field of folklore, a myth is a narrative that is deeply true to the community from which it springs.

Typically, myths are "set outside of historical time, before the world came to be as it is today," and they "frequently concern the actions of divine or semi-divine characters" (Oring 124). A myth is "a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all the

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parts thereof and given their order" (Honko 49). They often explain the world's origins or address how and why the world, its creatures, and its landscapes have come to be how they are. Folklorist Jeana Jorgensen argues that "one of the major functions of myth is to validate social norms, to explain why the world is the way it is, to rationalize the social relationships and power dynamics of a given society" (Jorgensen). Myths, in short, provide a narrative framework for how to understand the world and one's place in it.

Ballad

The folklore genre with which I begin is the ballad. The ballad is, of course, a type of folk song, or music which has been shaped and given a cultural sense of meaning derived from the live, performative contexts of oral circulation. While the folk song encompasses work songs and lullabies, street cries and custom songs, the ballad is a distinctive category in terms of form and content. Many different types of ballads have been identified, including murder ballads, broadside ballads, and border ballads. In the English tradition, ballads are frequently composed of quatrains and a simple rhyme scheme (mostly commonly ABCB). However, the ballad, which portrays "the features of an event, or a related series of actions, with some kind of dramatic plot or narrative thread," is most notable for its *narrative* force (Toelken 14). It tells an action-driven story, often with flat, stock characters in fictional or historical settings. The ballad is a musical category rather than a strictly prose category. However, the genre's emphasis on narrative as well as its profound influence on literature of the 19th century, particularly

British Romanticism, provides a rationale for the ballad's inclusion as a folk narrative touchstone in this dissertation.

Disability

While the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), defines "a disabled person [as] someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/ her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities," "disability" is a complex term that can refer not only to physical or mental difference but also to social perceptions (Yenika-Agbaw 93). Lennard J. Davis distinguishes between impairment and disability by drawing attention to the reality of the body and to reception, arguing that "disability is not so much the lack of a sense of the presence of a physical or mental impairment as it is the reception and construction of that difference. Contemporary theoreticians of disability distinguish between an impairment and a disability. An impairment is a physical fact, but a disability is a social construction" (Davis, "Dr. Johnson" 56). By contrast, Tobin Siebers promotes a socially constructed model of disability and pushes back against a medical definition, reframing disability as the product of social injustice, which requires change and accommodation in the social and built environment rather than the cure of disabled people (Siebers 3). While it is tempting to draw clear lines between able and disabled, neurotypical and atypical, "disability scholars encourage us to think of disability not as an absolute category or predefined set of categories but instead as a descriptive term that is highly unstable" (Schmiesing 4). In this dissertation, I follow Ann Schmiesing in my use of disability as "an expansive term

not hemmed in by rigid categorizations" (Schmiesing 5). I am less interested in definitively proving whether or not a particular instance of physical or mental difference constitutes a disability than in exploring how a "*narrative constructs difference as disability*" [emphasis hers], (Schmiesing 5). I consider a wide range of mental and physical difference, some realistic and some fantastical—mental impairment, intolerance of light or darkness, chronic illness, suicidal ideation, and more. Some terms that appear in the texts I examine are no longer in usage and/ or are no longer considered medically sound or socially acceptable. Yet each of these texts construct these differences as disability.

Queer

"Queer" can signify confusion, non-normative sexualities and identities, or simply peculiarity and oddness. In the nineteenth century, queer most frequently referred to the strange or eccentric, often suggesting a suspicious or questionable character. The term "Queer Street" was used colloquially, and extensively, in nineteenth-century British literature[12] to refer to a person experiencing some difficulty, most often financial in nature.[13] Definitions and connotations specifically invoking sexualities were not commonly associated with queerness until the twentieth century.

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[12] Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864) includes a chapter entitled "Lodgers in Queer Street" about a corrupt moneylender. The phrase also appears in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Great God Pan* (1890).
[13] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Queer Street refers to "an imaginary street where people in difficulties (esp. financial ones) are supposed to reside; (hence) the fact of being in a difficult position, in trouble, etc."

The queer can be that which "implicate[s] lives and theories relating to sexes and sexualities beyond the mainstream and deviating from the norm," but more commonly in current scholarship, it evokes a broader definition that encompasses "concerns about marginalization, oddity, and not fitting into society generally" and "embraces more than sex/gender/sexuality to deal with the problematics of those who for various reasons find themselves outside conventional practices" (Turner and Greenhill 4). A queer reading "unpick[s] binaries and reread[s the] gaps, silences, and in-between spaces" of a narrative (Giffney and Hird 5). Queer theory provides "a vehicle through which difference of all kinds might conveniently be mobilized" (Hughes and Smith 4). Hughes and Smith locate the queer in difference, a move that highlights that similar construction of queerness and disability. This "sense of difference" is "not confined simply to sexual behavior but ... may equally inform a systematic stylistic deviance from perceived norms in personal style or artistic preference" (Hughes and Smith 3). Queerness challenges the borders of socially acceptable norms, including the sexual and those more broadly defined. In this dissertation, queerness is that which is perceived as social difference, while disability is perceived as bodily/ mental difference, though the two categories frequently overlap.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I examine William Wordsworth's use of the ballad. First, I contextualize Wordsworth within the emergent concept of "folklore" by discussing collection practices and perceptions of "the folk," and then I turn to his personal correspondence to begin establishing his own perspective on disability and its role in his

poetry. The chapter ends with close readings of "The Thorn" and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," two poems from his landmark collection *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). In these readings, I illuminate some of the language and belief patterns that are rooted in British folklore, and I discuss how these patterns can underpin complex depictions of disabled experiences. Through this contextualization and close reading, I demonstrate that folklore, and the ballad in particular, is an animating force in Wordsworth's poetry as well as a useful tool for reframing untellable stories. I also highlight the tension between Wordsworth's narratives and the people who move through them by attending to his sources and his proclivity for adaptation.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and to the folk narrative genre of the legend. The novel is notorious for its ambiguity, raising questions of regarding its status as a realist or supernatural Gothic text, and for its fragmented narration. I argue that this ambiguity and fragmentation are narrative strategies that accommodate unstable, disruptive concepts such as disability and the supernatural. By mimicking the shape of the folk legend, a genre that thrives upon uncertain truth statuses and multiple narrative possibilities, the novel leverages uncertainty in order to transform unstable, even untellable experiences into a cohesive story.

Chapter Three explores the fairy tale, specifically the short stories of George MacDonald. Beginning with the classic literary fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" (1756) by Madame Beaumont, which is itself indebted to the long oral tradition of ATU 425: Search for the Lost Husband. I highlight the story's engagement with issues of disability,

disfigurement, and social alienation and demonstrate how it articulates societal expectations regarding beauty, ugliness, and ability. I then turn to George MacDonald's fairy tale "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen" (1882) analyzing it as a retelling of Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" and considering the tale's villain, Watho, as a collision between the fairy tale witch and the "mad" scientist.

Finally, Chapter Four addresses the folk narrative genre of myth and its redeployment in Arthur Machen's novella *The Great God Pan* (1890). I examine the Greek myth of Pan and its use in literature and art, noting its increasing popularity during the nineteenth century as well as its escalating association with queerness during this period. I argue that *The Great God Pan* calls upon the Pan myth in order to vocalize anxieties concerning unruly and disabled bodies that resist containment, treatment, or explanation despite advances in science and medicine. Rather than considering myth and science as binaries, I position myth as a continuous, disruptive force that is entangled and concurrent with modern civilization.

In each of these chapters, I demonstrate the ways in which folk narrative can shape depictions of disability and how they can provide a framework for making sense of mental and physical difference.

Chapter One. "With something of a lofty utterance drest": "Feeble" Bodies and Literary
Adaptation in William Wordsworth's Ballads

> The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to
>
> chuse 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;
>
> and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination.
>
> (Wordsworth, Preface 434)

Upon releasing the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), William

Wordsworth included a new essay, a "Preface" in which he explains the unusual style and

content of the collection. Often regarded as a kind of manifesto of the Romantic

movement writ large, the "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*" contains some of

Wordsworth's most frequently read prose, including the selection quoted above. *Lyrical*

Ballads marked a concerted effort to move from more stylized form and language to

verse that consciously attempted to echo the quality of oral text. Furthermore, he

emphasized "common life" and the everyday folk in many of his poems.[14] While these

qualities do establish and anticipate the tone and style that characterizes much of the

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[14] Coleridge's contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," is more
fantastical in tone than Wordsworth's poetry.

literature of the Romantic period, this passage hints at influences and affordances much less widely discussed.

Through reliance on balladic structure and language, appropriation of the lived experience of his rural "informants" (Gates 255), and adaptation of oral storytelling strategies, folklore profoundly influences Wordsworth's poetry. Furthermore, this reliance on folklore facilitates an exploration of disability and social exclusion. It is perhaps still counterintuitive to think of Wordsworth's poetry as communal and social when he is frequently regarded as an icon of Romantic individualism, though recent scholarship has complicated this simplistic association by illuminating dimensions of Wordsworth's poetry such as environmentalism[15], communitarianism[16], ethics[17], and disability studies[18]. His verse is deeply rooted in local lore, communication, and the experiences of the marginalized. By attending to subjects held to be "improper," unpleasing, and "incapable of being described so as to produce the grand effect of poetical composition," Wordsworth engages with people and stories that are less frequently told (Wilson and Dundas 113). While traces of folk-influence and non-normative bodies can be found throughout Wordsworth's oeuvre, his balladic poems are particularly rich texts for this line of inquiry.

In this chapter, I situate Wordsworth within the context of incipient folkloric principles and collection practices and examine the attitude expressed towards the

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[15] Mark S. Cladis, "Radical Romanticism: Democracy, Religion, and the Environmental Imagination"
[16] Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*
[17] Adam Potkay, "Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things"
[18] Emily Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability*

disabled body/mind in his personal correspondence. I conclude with close readings of two of his poems from *Lyrical Ballads*, "The Thorn" and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," identifying language and belief patterns drawn from British folklore and demonstrating the ways in which those patterns support a nuanced portrayal of the disabled experience. Through this contextualization and close analysis, I prove that the weight of folkloric traditions—their pervasive presence and influence—is a major animating force in Wordsworth's poetry and a potent resource for expressing untellable stories. Complicating the relationship between folklore and disability is the fact that the many of the stories that Wordsworth relies upon to explore illness, "feebleness," and bodily/mental difference are not his own. His poetry both recognizes the humanity of his informants but filters and subjugates their own experiences in service of his own artistic project. By layering the lenses of folkloristics and disability studies, the affordances and the limits of Wordsworth's adaptation of oral materials and personal narratives come into focus.

Wordsworth and Folklore

> No conscious invention can take the place of tradition, for he who would write a
> folk tale, and thereby bring a new life into literature, must have the fatigue of the
> spade in his hands and the stupors of the fields in his heart. Let us listen humbly
> to the old people telling their stories, and perhaps God will send the primitive

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excellent imagination into the midst of us again. –William Butler Yeats, "The Message of the Folk-Lorist"[19]

As a key figure of Romanticism, William Wordsworth has long been associated with generative solitude and individualism. Romanticism championed individual perception and emotion, and Wordsworth's poetry contributed to the solidification of this revolutionary mindset. In the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explains his belief that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" (Wordsworth, Preface 435). This iconic statement suggests a notion of the poet as a solitary creator, composing his lines in response to his individual conceptualization of the world.

However, no one exists, much less creates art, in a vacuum, and Wordsworth is no exception. The ideologies of his time exerted an influence upon him, as did his interactions with family, friends, and peers—most notably his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth, and his friend and intellectual companion Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The French Revolution, its progression, and eventual descent into turmoil and ineffectuality

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[19] Though Yeats wrote "The Message of the Folk-Lorist" in 1893, nearly a century after Wordsworth and Coleridge complied *Lyrical Ballads*, the sentiments expressed in this passage echo and amplify the rationale provided in Wordsworth's Preface.

made a deep impact upon the poet, an effect that has been discussed at length by scholars and by Wordsworth himself.[20]

One powerful influence upon Wordsworth and his poetry that has almost completely escaped critical scrutiny, however, is the rise of folklore as a concept and a discipline. Compared to other figures of the Romantic period, Wordsworth's work perhaps does not appear as steeped in in local lore. In her survey "Folklore in Nineteenth-Century English Literature," folklorist Katharine Briggs assesses and dismisses Wordsworth's folkloric credentials in a few brief lines:

> Of the poets of the Wordsworthian Romantic Movement Wordsworth himself, with all his studies of Lake District characters, gives us no outstanding account of local customs or of superstitions. We search in vain for witches, ghosts or fairies. He uses, however, a few historical and local legends such as Hartleap Well, The White Doe of Rylstone and The Feast of Brougham Casttle. (Briggs 196-7)

Briggs applauds the work of Wordsworth's collaborator Coleridge, writing that he "had a great power of evoking supernatural emotions and would naturally pick up and use folk tradition" (Briggs 197). Given Briggs' criteria of "witches, ghosts, or fairies," her admiration for Coleridge and lack of praise for Wordsworth is logical—indeed, Wordsworth's poetry has been discussed as a domestication of Coleridge's supernatural

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[20] For example, James A. W. Heffernan explores this connection at length in his book *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art*.

verse.[21] Much has been written connecting the supernatural poetry of the second generation Romantics, particularly John Keats, with folklore, but little has been said about their predecessor.[22] Of course, supernatural folklore is not the only available resource when writing folklore-inspired poetry, and Wordsworth's own inspiration is generally drawn from other aspects of oral narrative and folk belief.

Although the word "folklore" did not appear in print until 1846[23], folklore as a discipline emerged "in the early nineteenth century in the context of romanticism, a penchant for historical reconstruction, and the emergence of nation-states" (Dundes, "Introduction" 1). Tied closely to surging enthusiasm for nationalism, this early conceptualization of folklore allowed collectors, philosophers, and writers a way to create narratives about their homelands and to identify cultural riches and resources. Early British collectors included the likes of Bishop Thomas Percy, Sir Walter Scott, and Sir Frances Child but perhaps the most famous of these early folklorists are the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the editors of the widely influential *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*[24]).

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[21] In his article "A Home Where the Heart Is: Wordsworth's Domestication of Coleridge's Supernatural Poems," Mark J. Bruhn concludes that "Wordsworth's final opinion of Coleridge's narratives in their own right is probably unrecoverable, but his renderings of them, at once imitative and transmutative, suggest an ambivalent response."

[22] Christine Gallant's book *Keats and Romantic Celticism*, for instance, explores Keats' folkloric sources and the ways he makes use of them in his poetry.

[23] The first documented use of the word "folk-lore" took place on August 22, 1846 in a letter by William Thoms to the *Athenaeum* (Emrich 355).

[24] The Grimms' fairy tales are published collectively under many different names, but in English they are generally published as some variation of *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers' Grimm*, as is the case for fairy-tale scholar Jack Zipes' collection.

Although Wordsworth had a very different agenda from the Grimm brothers, his interests overlapped considerably with their own. In a short letter—sent out approximately four-hundred times in an effort to establish a folklore society—Jacob Grimm explains the value of "local legends which are told and known for their explanation of certain localities such as mountains, rivers, lakes, marshes, castle ruins, towers, rocks, and all monuments of remote antiquity" as well as tales that hinge on "tricksters" and "superstitions"—all materials that Wordsworth uses to inspire and enrich his own writing (Grimm, "Dear Sirs" 6). Likewise, the Grimms shared Wordsworth's reverence for the tales, customs, and beauty of "provincial towns rather than big cities; and villages rather than provincial towns; and among the villages, the ones which are most of all quiet and impassible, located in the forests or in the mountains" (Grimm, "Dear Sirs" 7). Their interest in particular occupations and demographics also coincides; in his circular letter, Jacob Grimm notes that "folklore tends to be more strongly retained by members of certain occupations such as shepherds, fishermen, and miners… question these individuals as well as old people, women, and children whose memories of transmitted folklore are fresh" (Grimm, "Dear Sirs" 7). Wordsworth likewise expressed a certain fascination with people of similar demographics, a tendency that becomes clear when reviewing poems such as "We Are Seven" and the Lucy poems (children); "The Thorn" (seamen); "Resolution and Independence" and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (the elderly).

Finally, a significant similarity between Grimms' and Wordsworth's approaches to folk materials is their decision to alter their informants' stories. Even though the

Grimms emphatically insisted upon the importance of accurate recording—in his circular, Jacob writes "above all it is important that these items be recorded in the most exact and detailed fashion from the mouths of the informants, faithfully and truthfully, without any cosmetic touch-up or addition, and where feasible in and with their very words"—they, Wilhelm in particular, could not resist heavily modifying the tales[25] in their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Grimm, "Dear Sirs" 5). Likewise, Wordsworth freely adapted his informants' own tales to suit his artistic desires. While it is possible to attribute these adaptations to the writers' drive to create a particular literary aesthetic, Dundes notes that "virtually all nineteenth-century…collections of folklore were duly adulterated and sanitized for literary and nationalistic ideological reasons" (Dundes, "Introduction*"* 5). Nationalism and its accompanying interest in national myth-making permeated social consciousness, impacting collectors and poets alike. The impulse to contribute to the formation of national ideology trumped any wish to represent the words of individual informants faithfully. This triumph of national myth over individuality provides an interesting juxtaposition to the dominant narrative of the Romantic individual. A similar tension plays out in Wordsworth's own poetry. Though he draws upon the stories on individual inhabitants of the Lake District, he is ultimately creating an idealized picture of the British folk: rural, nobly suffering, the earthy bedrock of British culture.

Wordsworth did not have an explicit mission to collect tales, as the Grimms did, but he did see value in the tales of rural Britain's population, as Barbara Gates discusses

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[25] In *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*, Ruth B. Bottigheimer discusses the implications of the Grimms' editorial practices with regards to gender, while Ann Schmiesing explores the consequences of the same on disability in her book *Disability, Disease, and Deformity in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*.

in her article "Wordsworth's Use of Oral History." She explains the manner in which the poet gathered oral stories:

> As one might expect, throughout his life Wordsworth, often with his sister Dorothy, continued to meet such folk in his ramblings through Britain; and it was these people who came to serve as informants for the Wordsworths, providing a steady flow of remembered history while they recounted local and national events. (Gates 255)

Gates describes Wordsworth as a proto-ethnographer or folklorist, collecting the tales of the folk and retelling them as episodes in his poetry, most notably in segments of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. "Heavy dependence," she explains, "upon oral sources of tradition, discovered directly…or through his reading of local histories, became characteristic of Wordsworth's own historical imagination," deeply influencing his poetic output (Gates 257). While Wordsworth drew inspiration extensively from the meetings that Gates describes, I would argue that retelling individuals' tales and preserving local history were not his primary objectives; instead, he re-framed them in ways that corroborated his own world-view and poetic agenda, and he used them as inspiration for his own creative work.

It is surely unreasonable to hold nineteenth-century collectors and writers to the ethnographic standards endorsed by contemporary folklorists. It would be particularly futile to hold Wordsworth, a self-declared poet, to those standards, as he had no intention

of repeating others' words without subjecting them to his own artistic impulses. Ironically, his sister, Dorothy, often models fine ethnographic writing in her personal journals—journals that Wordsworth explicitly references when creating his poetry. A particularly informative comparison from their respective works is Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence," first published in 1802, and the "Leech Gatherer" incident in Dorothy's journal, dated 3 October 1800. The working title of this poem was "The Leech-gatherer," after the Wordsworths' informant. The final title, "Resolution and Independence," links the poem more closely to Wordsworth and his own frame of mind rather than the old man or Dorothy, whose presence has been erased from the poem. Wordsworth describes the man they encountered in his poem, noting his physical frailty but simultaneously valorizing him as a larger-than-life representative of his land and demographic:

> His words came feebly from a feeble chest,
>
> But each in solemn order follow'd each,
>
> With something of a lofty utterance drest;
>
> Choice word, and measured phrase; above the reach
>
> Or ordinary men; a stately speech!
>
> Such as great Livers do in Scotland use,
>
> Religious men, who give to God and man their dues. (Wordsworth, "Resolution
>
>> and Independence" 548)

Although Wordsworth characterizes the old man as "feeble," he also idealizes and ennobles him, comparing his uneducated speech to great orators and men of religion—a typical nineteenth-century response of a folklorist to the idealized folk. By valorizing the leech gatherer, Wordsworth creates a symbol that bolsters British nationalistic ideals of humility, dignity, and fortitude, but he also lengthens the distance between his readers and the authentic lived experiences of the real man that inspired the poem. Yet, his choice of subject remains unusual—he chooses to meditate on the life of this man in his poem and to link his own experience to his subject, asserting worth where value might be denied.

By contrast, in *The Grasmere Journals*, Dorothy describes the man's physical appearance in detail: he is bent "almost double, he had on a coat thrown over his shoulders above his waistcoat & coat. Under this he carried a bundle and had an apron on and a night cap. His face was interesting. He had dark eyes and a long nose" (Dorothy Wordsworth 606). She notes precisely his attire in all its individual idiosyncrasies, describes his facial features, and explains the physical and financial difficulties of his chosen profession as a leech gatherer. Most notably, from a folkloric perspective, she transcribes his own words (Dorothy Wordsworth 606). Though her account of the leech gatherer is brief, it is dense with detailed information about this man, his health, his family, and his occupation. A comparison of this document with Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" reveals the critical distance between Dorothy, who produces detailed ethnographic work, with Wordsworth, who is producing a very different type of document.

Wordsworth was not an ethnographer or deliberate scholar of folkloristics; although he valued his meetings with the folk in rural Britain and listened with interest to their verbal accounts, his writing did not reflect his informants' stories in their own words. What, then, is Wordsworth's relationship to folklore? His Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* points towards an answer:

> The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse 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; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination. (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434)

Wordsworth wishes to express himself in "language really used by men," the language of the "folk," rather than through the elevated style so typical of poets of the preceding century (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434). The qualifying phrase "as far as was possible" denotes the limitations that Wordsworth placed on the use of this kind of language. He does not wish to reproduce their language verbatim but rather to mimic certain aspects of that language to create the desired aesthetic and emotional effect (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434). This studied reproduction filtered through the lens of his personal artistic vision— the "certain colouring of imagination"—is the strategy by which he creates his poetry (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434).

Wordsworth further expounds upon the significance of his source of inspiration: "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" (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434). Simple language, as spoken by the folk, was perceived as more authentic "because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434). He believes "necessary character" shaped by "rural occupations" to be more "easily comprehended…and durable" and that "in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature (Wordsworth, "Preface" 434). Divorced from situations that inspire "social vanity" and, by virtue of necessity, in close proximity to the natural world, these rural laborers represent to Wordsworth a pure, untainted glimpse into the heart of England and its people that he hopes to capture and disseminate in an edited form—an attitude remarkably similar to that of the Grimm brothers (Wordsworth, Preface 435).

Despite living much of his life in the Lake District and residing for a few years in a cottage, Wordsworth occupied a decidedly outsider status in relation to his informants. Firmly middle class and under no obligation to work for a living, his ability to devote himself wholly to writing and leisure set him apart from the laborers that appeared in his poetry. While a popular, well-documented tradition of peasant poetry—rustic verse produced by poor laborers—existed prior to and during Wordsworth's period of productivity, he was not a part of it, although he certainly benefited from the precedent

that such work set (McEathron 2). Wordsworth was not of the folk whose words he recreated, but he skillfully emulated their language and narrative strategies.

Wordsworth and Disability

In 1802, four years after the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth received "his first important fan letter" (Wordsworth and Hayden 33). John Wilson, a young college student who would eventually write for *Blackwood's Magazine* under the pseudonym Christopher North, wrote with enthusiasm and appreciation for Wordsworth's poetry, in which he "discovered such marks of delicate feeling, such benevolence of disposition, and such knowledge of human nature, as made an impression on my mind that nothing will ever efface" (Wilson and Dundas 112). Despite his high praise, a full third of his letter is dedicated to "an Error" that he believes Wordsworth has "inadvertently fallen into" (Wilson and Dundas 113). Wilson initially writes that Wordsworth has committed this error "in several cases," and his critique is general rather than addressing a specific poem:

> no description can please, where the sympathies of our soul are not excited, and narration interest where we do not enter into the feelings of some of the parties concerned. On this principle[,] many feelings which are undoubtedly natural, are improper subjects of poetry, and many situations[,] no less natural, incapable of being described so as to produce the grand effect of poetical composition. (Wilson and Dundas 113)

However, Wilson quickly identifies a single poem in which Wordsworth "ha[s] described feelings with which I cannot sympathise—and situations in which I take no interest": "The Idiot Boy" (Wilson and Dundas 113). While reservations about additional poems in *Lyrical Ballads* may have occurred to Wilson, he mentions only one poem that has offended his sensibilities in his letter.

In this narrative poem, Wordsworth details the events of a single night. When the elderly Susan Gale falls ill, her nearest neighbor, Betty Foy, send her son Johnny, the titular "idiot boy," to fetch the doctor from the nearby town. When Johnny fails to return, Betty and Susan entertain various speculations as to what might have happened to him, and Betty eventually leaves her friend to search for her son. At the end of the long night, Betty finds her son, and on the road, they are reunited with a miraculously cured Susan. When questioned as to his whereabouts during the night, Johnny will only reply "The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,/ And the sun did shine so cold!" (Wordsworth, "Boy" 202).

To Wilson, "[t]he affection of Betty Foy, has nothing in it, [to] excite interest" (Wilson and Dundas 114). While it is possible that the life of an elderly mother raising a neuro-atypical child is so distant from Wilson as to dampen his interest (though frankly the distance between himself and many of other's Wordsworth's characters is surely as great), the root of Wilson's disdain appears to be located in Johnny himself. Wilson writes:

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We are unable to enter into [Betty's] feelings—we cannot conceive ourselves

actuated by the same feelings, and consequently take little or no interest in her

situation. The object of her affection is indeed her son—and in that relation much

consists—but then he is represented as totally destitute of any attachment towards

her—the state of his mind is represented as perfectly deplorable—and[,] in

short[,] to me it appears almost unnatural that a person in a state of complete

idiotism, should excite the warmest feelings of attachment in the breast even of

his mother. (Wilson and Dundas 114)

To Wilson, the idiot is an unsuitable subject for poetry, as is anyone who cares for him.

To a contemporary audience, his unvarnished ableism is extraordinary. Wordsworth,

from his Romantic vantage point, clearly implicitly disagrees with Wilson's position,

since he authored and continued to champion the value of "The Idiot Boy," but he also

explicitly counters Wilson's judgement in a letter to his young reader.

In his reply, Wordsworth thanks Wilson for his appreciative words, but the bulk

of his letter is spent in defense of "The Idiot Boy." His argument is grounded in his belief

that the poet's duty is not only to replicate human feelings as they are but to expand or

even correct those feelings where they are lacking in empathy:

You have given me prais[e] for having reflected faithfully in my poems the

feelings of human nature[;] I would fain hope that I have done so. But a great Poet

ought to do more than this [;] he ought to a certain degree to rectify men's

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feelings, to given them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more

sane[,] pure and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal

nature and the great moving spirit of things. (Wordsworth and Hayden 37)

Beyond pure entertainment, Wordsworth articulates a rehabilitative aim for his verse: to

educate and inspire empathy in his audience. Paul Youngquist argues that Wordsworth's

aim is to "practise a physiological aesthetics, one that puts bodily health among its main

concerns," going so far as to say that "Wordsworth literally played the physician in his

early poems" (Youngquist 152-3, 153). It is clear from the poet's correspondence with

Wilson that he was deeply concerned with the ways that poetry could disrupt and

reconfigure perceptions of the body. Just as he turned to the language of the everyday

man, or "the folk," he turns towards their experiences and their bodies to challenge

Wilson's disgust and to expand the bounds of who can be a worthy poetic subject.

I have indeed often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower

classes of society towards Idiots as the great triumph of the human heart. It is

there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love, nor have I

ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and

virtuous sentiments without finding it hallowed thereby and having something in

me which bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust

and aversion. (Wordsworth and Hayden 37)

Wilson's disgust, Wordsworth suggests, "stems from petty social prejudice enabled by the rise of institutional care for the mentally disabled of the moneyed classes. He further charges Wilson with a sheltered lack of exposure to idiocy" (Guendel 69). This "lack of exposure" engenders disgust and disinterest. If one only associates with "Gentlemen, persons of fortune, professional men, ladies, persons who can afford to buy or can easily procure books of half a guinea price, hot-pressed, and printed upon superfine paper," the result is erasure of those with less social capital (Wordsworth and Hayden 37).

Wordsworth's defense of his poem's content is by no means fully satisfying from a contemporary disability studies perspective, though Claire LaVille argues that the poem itself "prefigures disability theory by asserting the value of a life widely regarded as disposable. It captures a 'joy' that comes from interconnectedness and that resists conceptualization" (LaVille 200). However, Wordsworth's justification hinges on the ennoblement of the caretakers, the "fathers and mothers," of the mentally atypical, lauding them for keeping their children at home rather than paying to have them kept in institutions, as was becoming the norm for families with more extensive resources. His defense of idiots for their own sake is more tentative. He takes pains to differentiate Johnny from "[tha]t class of idiots who are disgusting in their persons," a delineation that suggests that only a subset of the mentally atypical are suitable poetic subjects (Wordsworth and Hayden 37). Karen Guendel favorably contextualizes his perspective, noting that while Wordsworth's "ready concession that idiots can be disgusting may offend our modern sensibilities," but that "compared to contemporaries like Wilson and Coleridge, Wordsworth's attitude toward those who were considered idiots is much more

liberal-minded—and he is sensible of the difference" (Guendel 70). It is undoubtedly

more comfortable either to praise Wordsworth for both anticipating and improving upon

disability studies, as LaVille does, or to make flattering comparisons, as Guendel does,

but more useful still is to examine how Wordsworth's poems create space for stories

about those who are frequently denied narratives without recourse to apologism or

hyperbole. Despite the very real limitations of his own subjectivity, Wordsworth

reiterates his desire to effect real change with his poetry by creating sympathy where

none had previously existed:

> [It] is not enough for me as a poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men *do*
>
> sympathize [with] but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all
>
> men *may* sympathize with and such as there is reason to believe they would be
>
> better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with. (Wordsworth and
>
> Hayden 38)

While this passage might initially frame Wordsworth as a poetic channel to link the

unsympathetic to the suffering, his own letter complicates such a reading. He writes

repeatedly of his own ill-health—indeed he both opens and closes the document with

appeals that "my head aches violently, and I am, in [other respect]s unwell" (Wordsworth

and Hayden 38). In a letter primarily dedicated to the defense of bodily difference in

poetry, such personal references serve to highlight the importance of the theme

throughout the body of his own work.

While Wordsworth's letter demonstrates his interest, and even his agenda, regarding Johnny's disability, "The Idiot Boy" is "just one of several instances in which Wordsworth provokes his reader to consider and reconsider non-normative bodies and minds" (Stanback, "Disability" 50). In many of the poems published in *Lyrical Ballads*, "Wordsworth interrogates some of the ways that culture constructs disability from perceived physical and mental difference" (Stanback, "Disability" 50-51). This interrogation is mechanized through Wordsworth's adaptation of folk language and communication: "By staging ambivalent, metaphysically suggestive, and unresolved encounters between his narrators and variously disabled characters, Wordsworth models the kind of ethical inquiry and sympathetic growth that ... he hoped his poetry might elicit from his readers" (Stanback, "Disability" 51). It is through his narrators' observations of and conversations with the folk that reconsideration of odd bodies is made possible, and it is the folk superstitions, legends, and gossip that render his characters "sympathetic" and "interesting" by lending their stories a recognizable context.

This strategy does bring "sympathetic" attention to stories less frequently told, but it should be emphasized that these stories are not Wordsworth's, and his attempts to reframe the experiences of the rural folk as somehow more pure or noble feeds into problematic tropes frequently attached to disabled subjects. In particular, Wordsworth's reconstructed narratives could be understood as what is popularly known as "inspiration porn," a recently coined[26] phrase to label texts that objectify one population in order to

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[26] Disability "inspiration porn" was coined by Stella Young and popularized in her 2015 TED Talk "I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much," though it now circulates in both academic criticism and the disability studies blogosphere.

elevate a dominant population. In this case, Wordsworth's appropriation and simplification of other people's stories, reframed for the consumption of his peers, should be acknowledged as problematic.

Despite this, Wordsworth does admirably circumnavigate other common disability tropes. Though it is common to conclude a narrative about a disabled character by curing (or killing) them—such patterns were already entrenched in the folklore and literature of the Romantic period[27] —Wordsworth resists. Instead, his "disabled characters are, at the end of his poems, still very much the disabled individuals they were at the poem's beginning, all of them manifesting the corporeal signs (or 'symptoms') that mark theirs as non-normative bodies and minds" (Stanback, "Disability" 64-65). Disability does not make way for normativity, allowing the strange, unfamiliar, and the other to linger unchallenged. Instead of non-normative bodies being cured, "[w]hat changes is the narrator's perspective—or, in some cases, the poem's perspective—in relation to disability" (Stanback, "Disability" 64-65).

Wordsworth's "The Thorn"

A particularly fruitful dialog between folklore and disability occurs in Wordsworth's "The Thorn" from *Lyrical Ballads*, first published in 1798. This poem relates the story of Martha Ray, a supposed madwoman, and her dead baby through fragments, gossip, and hearsay. Wordsworth's careful construction of his narrator, the

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[27] The Grimms' fairy tales, for example, featured numerous stories that conclude with the erasure of disability, such as the curing of Rapunzel's blind prince, the death of Hansel and Gretel's visually impaired witch, or the disappearance and destruction of Rumpelstiltskin.

fascination with storytelling and ambiguity, and the use of balladic language all rely heavily on folkloric convention.

"The Thorn" is told by a narrator from whom Wordsworth takes great pains to distance himself. The story "is not supposed to be spoken in the author's own person" but "in the character of a loquacious narrator," he states in the Advertisement to the 1798 edition (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 419). In the second edition (1800), he explains in detail his conceptualization of this narrator. The man is:

> sufficiently common. The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. (Wordsworth, Note 425)

Wordsworth has vividly imagined his speaker, constructing him through his own Romantic memories and notions of talkative seamen, and it is through the focalization of this distinct persona that the reader receives the poem. The entire poem lies within quotations, heightening our awareness and perception of the story as a distinctly oral performance. In "The Thorn," we are keenly aware that Wordsworth is appropriating the voice of the folk and refining it to create an aesthetic effect.

Ironically, Wordsworth is not as divorced from his narrator as he desires his audience to believe. The speaker is "retired upon an annuity or small independent

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income," granting him leisure time—a situation that Wordsworth shared (Wordsworth, Note 425). More important, however, is the narrator's status as an outsider from the community that he describes. Wordsworth explicitly says that he is "not a native, or…accustomed to live [there]," just as Wordsworth does not truly belong to the communities of the people that he describes in his poetry (Wordsworth, Note 425). In his article "Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, and the Problem of Peasant Poetry," Scott McEathron makes the fascinating observation that the narrator harbors a "desire to be a folklorist, or at least an acceptable chronicler of rural legends," a drive that links him irrevocably to the poet that has created him (McEathron 20).

In addition to the appropriation of folk "voice" through the narrator, Wordsworth shapes "The Thorn" through allusions to superstition and supernatural occurrences. He elaborates on this theme in his "Note" on "The Thorn" in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Continuing to describe his garrulous narrator, he postulates that:

> Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause…they are prone to superstition. On which account it appeared to me proper to select a character like this to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind. (Wordsworth, Note 425)

Through the words of the narrator, Wordsworth explores the way a community's legends and folk beliefs can operate on the mind of an outsider. Confronted with supernatural tales of "voices of the dead," blood that can visibly stain moss for twenty years or more, a

ghostly baby face, and a possible grave that shakes when threatened with disruption, the narrator cannot (or refuses to) assimilate the impossible fragments into a cohesive, logical narrative (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 423).

Instead, the narrator claims ignorance. Again and again he says "I cannot tell" or "More know I not," emphasizing his second hand knowledge of the story, yet he cannot help but propagate the rumors and contribute his own voice to the creation of the story. The legend of Martha Ray and her baby is created by the community, and by inserting his voice into the conversation, the narrator is taking part in that community—just as Wordsworth's use of folk language, themes, and strategies inserts him into the discourse of folk tradition, even if he is an outsider.

It is this appropriation of colloquial language—of rumor, gossip, and insider/ outsider status—that enables a discussion of disability. In her excellent book chapter, Emily B. Stanback argues that "the primary theme of 'The Thorn' may be said to be the narrativity provoked by disability" (Stanback, "Disability" 56). "The thorn of the poem's title," she argues, "is the emblematic locus of the townsfolk's speculation" (Stanback, "Disability" 56)—in other words, their folklore: the stories they tell about the thorn and the beliefs that they hold regarding what happened there. As the poetic center of the narrative, the thorn "calls attention to the cognitive and narrative processes of those who talk about Martha. The poem's use of the thorn to engage with—and ultimately critique—conventional narratives would have been more immediately apparent to Wordsworth's early readership" (Stanback, "Disability" 56), a familiarity that hinges on the balladic language, a resource that I will discuss in the context of folklorist Barre

Toelken's work. Stanback does not explicitly address folklore in her chapter, but her assertion that "The Thorn" is, at its core, "narrativity provoked by disability" illuminates the affordances of folklore in such a reading of the poem. The imitation of oral speech, the reliance on a well-known ballad plot, and the heavy use of balladic language are the elements of "narrativity" that allow Martha Ray's fragmented story to be told. Transmitted through gossip yet resistant to the imposition of a single, objective "truth," "The Thorn" demonstrates how disability is socially constructed.

Very little about Martha Ray is actually known. She does not appear at all in the poem until the sixth stanza, and even then, she is not named. Of course, because the poem is presented as an oral performance, everything we learn about Martha Ray is hearsay. Referred to first only as "a Woman," Martha Ray remains unnamed until the tenth stanza, where her name is finally revealed, but only as an aside, indicated as such by its placement within parentheses (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 420). The narrator states that she wears a scarlet cloak, that she can be found by the thorn "[a]t all times of the day and night," and that she lives in a hut nearby (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 420). Of most significance, however, is the refrain heard frequently on Martha Ray's lips: "Oh misery! oh misery!/ oh woe is me! Oh misery!" (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 420). These are the only words that the narrator, and ostensibly the inhabitants of the neighborhood, purport to hear from Martha Ray. She certainly never tells a version of the story that circulates through the town and through the poem—the story of her jilting and her lost baby.

Though the death of her baby remains ambiguous—the narrator never determines whether or not he believes that Martha Ray actually killed the infant, although he

gestures towards absolution/ normalization when he says "I do not think she could!" (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 424)—the fact of her pregnancy seems reasonably well-established: "her state to any eye was plain;/ She was with child" (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 422). However, the assertion that follows requires some unpacking. The narrator adds that "she was mad" (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 422). While this madness could simply be read as a plot device that justifies and exacerbates speculations of Martha Ray's murderous potential, the label of insanity, and thus disability, informs the poem beyond plot. By providing a "casual diagnosis of Martha's mental status—as obvious to the layman as her pregnancy—Wordsworth's poem advances a conception of madness akin to recent definitions of 'disability': to be 'disabled' one must either have or be perceived to have a medically 'abnormal' body or mind" (Stanback, "Disability" 55-56). Because she is believed to be mad—to be irrevocably different from the neighbors who speculate about her—Martha Ray inevitably functions in her community as a disabled woman. As Stanback argues, "[t]here is as little need for professional corroboration of Martha's mental difference as there is of her pregnancy; it is enough that she seems and is said to be 'mad' for her to effectively function as a 'madwoman'" (Stanback, "Disability" 55-56). Her actual mental state, which is impossible to gauge through the remove of hearsay, gossip, and a narrator who has never actually spoken to her, is unknown and ultimately has no bearing on how is she perceived or treated by her community.

Monomania, a concept popularized in European nineteenth-century discourse of mental illness, is useful to consider in context of "The Thorn" because it may shed light on the easy reception of Martha Ray as a madwomen. A "new condition," monomania

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was defined as "a local but profound break in the unity of the psyche…in monomania, will separated from emotion, reason from will, emotion from reason" (During 86). More simply, monomania was perceived as a type of partial insanity distinguished by a single pathological obsession housed in an otherwise sound and functional mind. The onset of monomania was thought to incite additional conditions, including erotomania, infanticidal monomania, and theomania (During 86). The concept was "disseminated by the *médicin-aliéniste* Esquirol and by the psychiatrist Etienne-Jean Georget in the first two decades of the nineteenth century," and "a watered-down version of their definition spread like wildfire" through society, particularly the intelligencia and their literature (van Zuylen 3). Monomania "took hold of the nineteenth-century literary imagination" (van Zuylen 3) and is explicitly mentioned or depicted in texts as varied as "The Tell-tale Heart" (1843), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Moby-Dick* (1851), and *The Time Machine* (1895). In the context of "The Thorn," Martha Ray's infanticide could be understood as a product of monomania, since she does not exhibit violence towards anyone else. If her community believes that she has committed an isolated crime, the construct of monomania could provide a culturally legible way to make sense of her possible infanticide. Gossip about monomania would reinforce and perhaps even strengthen rumors of the murder.

Martha Ray's single reported refrain, "Oh misery! oh misery!/ oh woe is me! Oh misery!," does not reveal her past or her experience, and it might be surmised that the her otherness and outsider status is exacerbated by the absence of her perspective (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 420). Stanback, however, takes the opposite position, arguing that

"[b]ecause the narrator fails to describe what Martha has conveyed, she maintains some kind of agency and integrity. Her story cannot be transmitted in her absence" (Stanback, "Disability" 58). Ultimately, "The Thorn" does not validate any individual voice or perspective. It is only through disjointed gossip and repetition, fragmentation, and coded language that the story comes in and out of focus, insisting that the true story can never be known.

Not only does the voice of the narrator echo folk language in "The Thorn," but specific images are particularly saturated in folk connotations. For example, the thorn itself might initially seem an enigmatic symbol, but when viewed in the context of traditional balladic language, it is endowed with a wealth of meaning.[28] In *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folksongs*, Barre Toelken explores the signification assigned to roses, briars, graves, and thorns in British balladic tradition. Interestingly, these familiar symbols are inverted or corrupted throughout "The Thorn," providing a rich subtext that would have been largely accessible to Wordsworth's audience. By referencing these familiar motifs, Wordsworth is invoking a particular folk tradition, but his transformation of those materials signal a creative departure in their use.

In folk songs, "the rose almost always grows on the woman's grave and the briar (or some thorny plant or tree) typically grows the grave of the male protagonist" (Toelken

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[28] Wordsworth's interest in balladic form, content, and meter and the resulting impact on his poetry is one of the few connections to folklore that has been the subject of much academic study. A particularly thorough examination can be found in Paul Brewster's "The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth's poetry." There is, however, little discussion of nuanced balladic language.

41).[29] While the thorn of Wordsworth's poem is bare of "leaves," "prickly points," and

presumably roses or flowers of any kind, this very absence of growth suggests that

something has gone awry with the tale's love story (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 419). This

suspicion is confirmed when we learn that Martha Ray and Stephen Hill are still living.

They are not united in death beneath flourishing plants, freeing their traditional grave for

another character: the infant of so much speculation.

Toelken also notes the "extensive connection" in general folk speech and slang

between roses and female sexuality—almost any time a rose or rose bush are invoked, a

sexual event is soon to follow (Toelken 41). Again, the absence of roses—a vacancy

filled by the presence of the single withering thorn—signals the failure of Martha Ray's

pregnancy to come to fruition. Another common balladic motif of relevance is uprooting

or cutting down a briar—a process that might leave a barren "thorn" behind. The

destruction of a healthy, living briar heralds a violent conclusion to the ballad or tale,

suggesting that Martha Ray may well have committed infanticide (Toelken 41).

Also suggestive of infanticide is the conventional balladic association of female

villains with thorns, indicating that Martha Ray, who visits the thorn, has committed a

crime (Toelken 41). A particularly important intertext and folkloric source[30] is "The

Cruel Mother" (Child Ballad 20), with which Wordsworth was familiar—he "probably

read it in David Herd's 1776 edition of Scottish ballads…he knew it by 1798 and copied

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[29] See "Barbara Allen" (Child Ballad 84)

[30] Another useful source to consider, though it is more medical than folkloric, is Erasmus
Darwin's *Zoonomia*, which includes a section on "erotomania," or when a lover who has
been encouraged in their passion is suddenly neglected or disdained, which can result in
melancholy insanity (Hele-King 116). Darwin cites "the murder of Martha Ray in 1779, a
celebrated crime of passion" (Hele-King 116-17).

it out in 1801" (Fulford 323). The ballad exists in more than a dozen variants, but a

selection from 20B, a Scots version, illustrates the similarities:

> She sat down below a thorn,
>
> Fine flowers in the valley
>
> And there she has her sweet babe born.
>
> And the green leaves they grow rarely
>
> 'Smile na sae sweet, my bonie babe,
>
> And ye smile sae sweet, ye'll smile me dead.'
>
> She's taen out her little pen-knife,
>
> And twinnd the sweet babe o its life.
>
> She's howket a grave by the light o the moon,
>
> And there she's buried her sweet babe in. (Child 220)

Here the mother explicitly kills her baby and buries it near a thorn. While the narrator of

"The Thorn" is unwilling to make a definitive declaration regarding the infant and its

mother, Martha Ray's association with a thorn combined with the death of her child links

her to "The Cruel Mother," and, therefore, to charges of infanticide.

Finally, "the holy well with a thorn bush growing beside it is a well-known scene

in British folklore, and modern beliefs suggest that such wells were used to cure disease

and promote fertility in women" (Toelken 119). Wordsworth describes a parallel scene in

"The Thorn":

This Thorn you on your left espy;

And to the left, three yards beyond,

You see a little muddy pond

Of water—never dry.[31] (Wordsworth, "Thorn" 419)

While the scene here is adapted from its traditional use and form, it is still recognizable. The thorn bush of lore reappears as a single, dying thorn, while the fertility well manifests as a small pond—a pool associated with sadness and corruption ("muddy" rather than clear or restorative). Wordsworth has once again adapted symbols of fertility to suggest barrenness, signaling the inversion of the symbols' original purpose.

"The Thorn" functions as a particularly instructive case study for the ways that Wordsworth appropriates and adapts folk conventions in order to show how disability is constructed. His use of folk voice, community story-building and legends, and highly loaded balladic language demonstrate his engagement with folk materials and the strategies that he uses to deploy them in his poetry.

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[31] The 1820 edition of "The Thorn," published in *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth, Volume 2* includes a slightly revised version of this stanza, in which the narrator's exacting measurements of the muddy pond are removed. Paul D. Sheats discusses the stanza and why the couplet was altered in his article "'Tis Three Feet Long, and Two Feet Wide': Wordsworth's 'Thorn' and the Politics of Bathos."

Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill"

Another of Wordsworth's poems to harness folklore in order to explore non-ideal bodies/minds is "Goody Blake and Harry Gill." In this narrative poem, a young man named Harry Gill catches the old, impoverished Goody Blake pilfering wood from his hedge so that she might light a fire. When Harry Gill springs upon her and physically assaults her, she prays in the moonlight to God that he might never be warm again. Harry Gill immediately feels "icy cold," a state that no coats or blankets can rectify (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 326).

In "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," numerous folk narratives and superstitions collide, resulting in a literary text that is deeply embedded in local custom. Before turning to the bodies and the exchange between Goody Blake and Harry Gill, it is useful to first recognize the folk narrative that likely provides initial inspiration for the tale: the story of the man in the moon. This legend exists in many different versions but always features a person gathering kindling under the moon under dubious circumstances—just as Goody Blake collects sticks from Harry Gill's hedge under the moon. One of the more famous references to the man in the moon occurs in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when the amateur players prepare for their stage play: "Ay, or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and/ A lantern, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present/ The person of Moonshine" (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.51-53). Shakespeare's allusion functions as a "kernel[32]," an abbreviated reference to a previously told story already established in communal memory. Because the story of the man in the moon

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[32] See Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson's *Storytelling in Daily Life*.

already exists as a cultural resource, the story does not need to be explained, which continues to be the case at the time of the publication of "Goody Blake and Harry Gill."

Timothy Harley explores several versions of the man in moon story in his book *Moon Lore*, including one with Biblical roots: "[…] to our fireside auditors it is related that a man was found by Moses gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and that for this crime he was transferred to the moon, there to remain till the end of all things. The passage cited in support of this tale is Numbers 15.32-36" (Harley 21). There is, however, no mention of an exile to the moon in the verses cited, although the lore continues to circulate (*English Standard Version*, Numbers 15). Richard Proctor offers another version in his *Myths and Marvels of Astronomy*:

Ages ago there went one Sunday an old man into the woods to hew sticks. He cut a faggot and slung it on a stout staff, cast it over his shoulder, and began to trudge home with his burthen. On his way he met a handsome man in Sunday suit, walking towards the church. The man stopped, and asked the faggot-bearer; "Do you know that this is Sunday on earth, when all must rest from their labours?" "Sunday on earth or Monday in heaven, it's all one to me?" laughed the wood-cutter. "Then bear your bundle for ever!" answered the stranger. "And as you value not Sunday on earth, yours shall be a perpetual Moon-day in heaven; you shall stand for eternity in the moon, a warning to all Sabbath-breakers." Thereupon the stranger vanished; and the man was caught up with his staff and faggot into the moon, where he stands yet. (Proctor 47)

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In each version of the man in the moon story, the man gathering sticks is punished for his transgression—which is most often for breaking the Sabbath rather than stealing. However, Wordsworth's poem offers a creative twist to the legend by directing punishment away from Goody Blake, who is aligned with the man in the moon by virtue of her stick-gathering, and towards Harry Gill, who is analogous to the Moses/ godly figure who prevents unsanctioned stick-gathering. By inverting the legend and repositioning fault and wrong-doing away from Sabbath breaking or thievery and towards cruelty towards the needy, Wordsworth privileges a message of kindness towards ones neighbors over the strict upholding of less practical rules, emphasizing the importance of compassion over pure piousness.

States of health and frailty dominate the poem, driving the action forward. Goody Blake steals from Harry Gill because she is physically miserable and desperate to make her discomfort stop; she is so cold that she "cannot sleep a wink" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 324). Suffering from cold might seem to be too trivial or too context-dependent to qualify as a disability. However, it is the very context in which her suffering is embedded that invites a reading of this poem through the lens of disability.

First, the characters are defined almost solely through their fluctuating states of physical well-being. The poem opens with an exclamation and question as to what is wrong with Harry Gill: "OH! what's the matter? what's the matter?/ What is't that ails young Harry Gill?" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 322). The exclamation "OH!," a gasp of surprise or disbelief, paired with the repetition of the question "what's the matter?"

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suggests that Harry's condition is extremely unusual, meriting attention, and even an entire story of explanation. The word "chatter" appears four times in the next two lines, repetition highlighting the persistence and irregularity of his situation. His feelings of extreme cold persist despite the abundance of resources he has at his disposal, marking his physical distress as extraordinary and perhaps even eldritch. Bizarrely, Harry Gill's discomfort does not correlate to his environment in the expected way; his teeth chatter "[i]n March, December, and in July," "[a]t night, at morning, and at noon," and "[b]eneath the sun, beneath the moon" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 322). By contrast, Goody Blake's susceptibility to cold fluctuates with her environment, particularly with the seasons:

> 'Twas well enough when summer came,
>
> The long, warm, lightsome summer-day,
>
> Then at her door the 'canty' Dame
>
> Would sit, as any linnet, gay.

> But when the ice our streams did fetter,
>
> Oh then how her old bones would shake! (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 324)

Because Harry Gill's condition is persistent rather than seasonal or environmental, its cause remains speculative. What causes this "lusty drover," "so stout of limb" with cheeks "red as ruddy clover" and a voice "like the voice of three" (for so he is described

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before his confrontation with Goody Blake) to become so frail? (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 323). Ironically, it is Goody Blake's own physical discomfort, the nature of Goody Blake and Harry Gill's relationship, and the customs and folklore of their community that ignite Harry Gill's physical transformation.

The question of origins and source material for this poem has been of considerable interest to scholars, and numerous texts across a variety of genres have been identified as possible sources of inspiration. Potential sources include Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* (1680); an incident detailed in Addison's *The Spectator*; and Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's play *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) (Comensoli 51-56).

The most clear connection, which Wordsworth himself acknowledges in the 1798 Advertisement, is to *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* (1794), a medical text in two volumes written by Erasmus Darwin that addresses pathology, anatomy, and the workings of the body. Though Erasmus Darwin is now best known for his familial connection to his grandson Charles Darwin, it is notable that "Erasmus Darwin was regarded as the greatest English poet of the time when Wordsworth and Coleridge were in their early twenties" (King-Hele 114). The second volume of *Zoonomia*, published in 1796, "was a detailed catalogue of diseases, which Wordsworth plundered for *Lyrical Ballads*" (King-Hele 114).[33] The events narrated in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill are "drawn almost verbatim from the copy of *Zoonomia* that Wordsworth borrowed from

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[33] Wordsworth appears "to have concentrated mostly on Volume II…the case histories of the "Diseases of Volition" as Darwin calls them" (Hele-King 116). The poems that seem to have the most direct connections to this section of *Zoonomia* include "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "The Mad Mother," "The Last of the Flock," "The Idiot Boy," the "Forsaken Indian Woman," and "The Thorn" (King-Hele 116).

Cottle in early March, from the section dealing with mania mutabilis" (Bewell 370).

Richard Matlak suggests that the text's influence upon Wordsworth far exceeded the

acquisition of plotlines: "Wordsworth's newly adopted position on nature's mental life,

his emphasis on the symbiotic relationship of the human body to nature in reaching its

optimal state of physical and mental health, the corporal texture of his inner-body

imagery…all bespeak the bio-medical influence of Darwin's *Zoonomia*" (Matlak 75).

While Darwin's anecdote in *Zoonomia* is firmly embedded in the discourse of mental

illness, my interest in Wordsworth's adaptation of his text is centered around how

Wordsworth drew upon folklore in his refashioning of that mental illness.

Regardless of where he garnered his inspiration for the poem, Wordsworth chose

to label it as "A True Story" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 322). By portraying it in such

a way, he insulates it from any literary sources and frames it as gossip, as an

interpretation of events that may have actually occurred—in other words, as province of

the every day and the folk. This identification with the "common man" is heightened by

the particularly colloquial language of the poem, which is rougher by far than the

majority of Wordsworth's verse, and the use of a basic balladic rhyme scheme (ABAB

CDCD) rather than blank verse. While the language and rhyme scheme may appear

simplistic, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" exemplifies what Paul Edwards refers to as the

"living voice," which more accurately reflects language as it is spoken aloud rather than

the more formal expressions that are characteristic of written texts (Edwards 16).

Despite the identification of the poem's literary and popular sources, little has

been said connecting "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" to folk narratives regarding legend,

superstition, or the supernatural. Interestingly Bewell insists that no supernatural forces

operates in the poem; Harry Gill, he believes, "falls victim to a self-made fiction"

because Harry is "convinced that it is his ill luck to have stumbled onto a witch and [is]

filled with icy horror" (Bewell 371). For Bewell, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" hinges

upon guilt and fear in the mind of Harry Gill rather than the curious social power

possessed by Goody Blake.

However, this psychological drama takes place because of Harry Gill's belief in

witchcraft and magic. It is possible that, once more, monomania could be a useful frame

of reference for Harry Gill's condition. Certainly, he is fixated on his experience of cold

after his confrontation with Goody Blake. Regardless of whether the punishment is

physically or psychologically carried out, its successful operation depends upon the

prevalence of popular or folk narratives detailing supernatural occurrences. More

specifically, it relies upon Goody Blake's legibility as a witch.[34] As Barbara Rieti, a

folklorist who specializes in witch and fairy lore, observes in *Making Witches:*

Newfoundland Traditions of Spells and Counterspells, "Witchcraft is all about power,

imagined and real. The existence of the proposed preternatural power is debatable…but it

is indisputable that the *idea* has allowed its possessors to influence thought, behavior, and

emotions of others" (Rieti 3). Admittedly, Wordsworth attempts to sidestep the issue of

witchcraft—after all, Goody Blake appeals to God rather than the devil:

  She prayed, her withered hand uprearing,

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[34] Appropriately, in Wordsworth's source, *Zoonomia*, the old woman is described as
looking like "a witch in a play" (Darwin 359).

While Harry held her by the arm—

"God! who art never out of hearing,

O may he never more be warm!"

The cold, cold moon above her head,

Thus on her knees did Goody pray (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 326)

Despite Wordsworth's choice to portray Goody Blake as a devout woman praying for

divine intervention, she nonetheless resembles a witch, a characterization that is quite

impossible to miss. After all, "[d]ire prediction is the cornerstone of witch lore," and

"elements of exchange," in this case the wood taken from Harry Gill's hedge, "permeate

every aspect of witch lore" (Rieti 11, 4).

Goody Blake fulfills many of the popular identifiers of a witch in English folk

belief. Most obviously, she is associated with the moon, a connection strengthened by the

intertextual presence of the man in the moon story. It is a simple truism to say that

witches have long been associated with the moon—one need look no further than the

mythic Hecate to verify this, but on a more contemporaneous note, Shelley mentions the

moon eleven times in his poem "The Witch of Atlas" (1820/1824). In his influential

Provincial Glossary (1811), Francis Grose identifies a witch as "almost universally a

poor, decrepit, superannuated, old woman; who, being in great distress, is tempted by a

man…this man promises her, if she will sign a contract to become his, both soul and

body, she shall want for nothing, and that he will revenge her upon all her enemies"

(Groves 255). While Goody Blake does fulfill some of Grose's descriptors, she lacks at

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least one: she clearly does not have all her needs met, as the major conflict in the poem occurs because she is trying to steal wood for a fire. Whether Goody Blake has made a pact with a strange man—clearly a reference to the Devil—or has elicited divine aid remains ambiguous in the narrative, problematizing her identity as a witch, at least according to Grose's definition.

Barbara Rieti offers a description of a witch that seems particularly analogous to Wordsworth's depiction of Goody Blake. Rieti asserts that the typical witch is female, elderly, childless, impoverished, and dependent upon the charity of others—in short, a marginalized figure living on the periphery of society (Rieti 82). It is the issue of denied charity that drives "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" forward: because Harry Gill refuses to offer Goody Blake charity—he attacks her when she tries to gather wood from his hedge rather than offering her any assistance—he incurs her wrath and she effectually "curses" him, a typical response from a witch who is denied charity (Rieti 6). "Social and economic relations were often inseparable ... Discord between individuals, especially over money or goods—asking too much, giving too little—breached the larger tacit social contract of fair dealing and mutual aid" (Rieti 11).

For Rieti, witches are those who are the most socially vulnerable, those who are perceived to be different and at a distinct disadvantage from their neighbors. In essence, stories about witchcraft are stories about power; "witch tradition is suffused with irony and inversion, from the vast power assigned to obvious underdogs to the victims' self-imposed psychodramas that are blamed on the malice of others" (Rieti 3). Occupying the role of the witch is a dangerous gamble and a tenuous balancing act, as the label can

inspire caution, acquiescence, or rejection. Such a role tends to be sought or bestowed on those who have minimal social power and few community connections, and it can grant a modicum of respect or attention—it can be leveraged for advantage. However, it can also serve as a justification for further ostracization or even for violence.

In her discussion of witches and their signifiers, Rieti does not identify disability or ill-health as a common attribute. Disability, however, is a useful category to consider alongside those that she already associates with witches. The most common characteristics of a witch are gender (female) and age (elderly), and they are frequently paired. Disability, likewise, is a state that is marked as other, as non-normative, and its presence can escalate the intersectional oppression experienced by the vulnerable.

Witches are frequently described as physically or mentally non-normative, in both oral accounts and in literature. Perhaps the most famous fairy tale witch, the cannibalistic baker of the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel," is described as doubly impaired; her red eyes "can't see very far," and she leans on a crutch to support her weight when she walks (Grimm, "Hansel" 239-40). Furthermore, her hand, like Goody Blake's, is "withered," which does not seem to impact her strength but is nonetheless an indication of physical deformity[35] (Grimm, "Hansel" 240). In a later chapter, I will address the Victorian witch Watho in George MacDonald's fairy tale "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen" (1879/82), a figure whose pursuit of knowledge is irrevocably tied to mental atypicality and pain. Again and again, in oral and literary

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[35] In his essay "Picturesque Aesthetics: Theorising Deformity in the Romantic Era," Essaka Joshua explores the connections between beauty, the picturesque, and deformity in the construction of Romantic aesthetics and demonstrates how this deformity is usefully categorized under the rubric of disability.

narratives, witches are described as different, either physically or mentally, in a way that exacerbates their social estrangement and reinforces the threat of otherness, and therefore danger, that clings to them.

Goody Blake suffers physical pain and her everyday activities are negatively impacted during the winter. It is useful, therefore, to think of her condition as chronic, a factor that fluctuates depending on other conditions. Her disability is largely the product of her environment—if she had access to better shelter or to more consistent heat, she might not experience the symptoms that interfere with her life. In her excellent study *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Ann Schmiesing sets a precedent for conceiving of disability as "an expansive and inclusive term not hemmed in by rigid categorizations," particularly in literature inflected by folklore (Schmiesing 5). "Instead of proving whether a character's physical or intellectual difference qualifies as a disability," Schmiesing proposes a focus on "*the manner in which the narrative constructs difference as disability*" (Schmiesing 5, emphasis hers). Goody Blake's physical frailty is the counterpoint to Harry Gill's almost excessive health—it is what sets her apart and what positions her as a thief, as a potential witch who has been denied charity.

It should be noted, however, that Harry Gill ultimately experiences the same physical symptoms that plagued Goody Blake. He loses his good health; his "flesh it fell away" and "his jaws and teeth they clatter; Like a loose casement in the wind" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 327). As denied charity breeds distrust, so here does it redouble disability in the text, leaving the denizens of the neighborhood less healthy and

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more socially disconnected. It is unclear whether Harry Gill is in turn alienated from his community, as Goody Blake is, but perhaps his ability to work is also curtailed. He does not seem to suffer the poverty and desperation of Goody Blake. Indeed, he has an embarrassment of resources; when he is cold, he still has access to "waistcoats" of "good duffle gray, and flannel fine; He has a blanket on his back, And coats enough to smother nine" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 322). Despite his layers and blankets, however, he is still linked to Goody Blake through their shared experience of disability, even as their neighborly relationship has further eroded.

While "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" interrogates the distinction between the supernatural and superstition, between reality and legend, it also raises social concerns about community. Even though Goody Blake is stealing from Harry Gill, she is a sympathetic figure. Wordsworth takes pains to describe her desperate situation: she is "old and poor," "ill fed," and "thinly clad" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 323). Although she works "all day" and an additional three hours into the night, she cannot "pay for candlelight" and after a "dull and dead" evening, she lays in bed so cold she could "not sleep a wink" (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 324). Her pitiful situation is heighted by the juxtaposition with the "lusty drover" Harry Gill, active, robust, and vengeful (Wordsworth, "Goody Blake" 323). Although Goody Blake is able to exact her own revenge upon Harry Gill, she is the more sympathetic figure of the pair, an outcome that signals an implicit social critique at work in the poem.

As David Sampson observes, Wordsworth's poetry often explores "continuity of community"—an issue that lies at the heart of folklore (Sampson 33). While "Goody

Blake and Harry Gill" does not document a real individual's experiences grappling with poverty, it does "imitate the caustic effect of poverty in order to cleanse from the basic or 'elementary' sense of community the encrustations of social status" (Sampson 33). Community, such as it is, in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" has failed: the isolated Goody Blake is reduced to stealing hedge wood to keep warm enough to sleep, while Harry Gill not only refuses her assistance or compassion but physically threatens her. Although its literal veracity is doubtful, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" manages to foster sympathy for the plight of the marginalized and impoverished while endowing this demographic with a self-defensive power—a power enabled by folk beliefs regarding the supernatural.

Although Wordsworth's poetry is, in many respects, intensely personal, his work also engages with the anonymous, communal conventions of British folklore in order to portray experiences that are frequently ignored or erased, including the experience of disability and subsequent social marginalization. Drawing upon his encounters with the people of rural England, Wordsworth combines their stories with balladic language, complex and displacing narrative strategies, and supernatural lore to create his poetry. Like the Grimms, Wordsworth often idealized the people he encountered and adapted their stories to create a nationalistic picture—in his case, a valorized, highly Romantic portrayal of rural England and its inhabitants. Wordsworth's poetry does frequently turn inward, dwelling upon his individual emotions and experiences, but it also expands outward, drawing upon folkloric conventions and communal narrative

Chapter Two. "Come, give me a true history": Storytelling, Unstable Bodies, and the Creation of a Legend in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Illness and disability pervade the fabric of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*[36], haunting the characters with a persistence that outstrips that of Catherine's ghost. The sheer proliferation of disabled and non-normative figures in the novel has not escaped scholars; in his short article "Sickness and Health in *Wuthering Heights*," Charles Lemon catalogs many of the illnesses that affect the occupants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, noting that none of the central characters live to forty years of age.[37] He concludes that lifespans were short at the time of Emily Brontë's writing of the text and that her family's circumstances, including the early death of her two sisters, would have normalized "suffering and untimely deaths" (Lemon 25). Emily Brontë herself died at age thirty, a year after completing *Wuthering Heights*. Other critics have identified Catherine as anorexic[38], Hareton as an idiot[39], and Heathcliff as monomaniac.[40] Even the landscape echoes bodily impairment; within the first few pages of the novel, the beauty and healthful properties of the landscape are in tension with the "stunted" trees and "gaunt" thorns, anticipating the frisson between health and illness, robust forms and

[36] The novel was originally published under the pseudonym "Ellis Bell."
[37] Lemon briefly notes that the servants Joseph and Zillah experience longevity and good health but does not offer further reflection upon this discrepancy.
[38] See Guiliana Giobbi, "The Anorexics of *Wuthering Heights*."
[39] See Emily M. Baldys, "Hareton Earnshaw and the Shadow of Idiocy: Disability and Domestic Disorder in Wuthering Heights."
[40] See Graeme Tytler, "Heathcliff's Monomania."

disabled bodies that move through that landscape (Brontë 4). The haunting effects of illness and disability parallel and augment the ambiguous supernatural haunting for which the novel is well known, contributing to the Gothic aesthetic of the text.

Wuthering Heights is the story of two households located on the moors of Yorkshire. The plot is complex and involves a host of characters that frequently share the same or overlapping names. A brief summary is as follows: Catherine Earnshaw[41] and her brother Hindley grow up with the foundling Heathcliff at their home, Wuthering Heights. Catherine and Heathcliff form an attachment but class and abuse encourage Catherine to marry her neighbor Edgar Linton, who lives at Thrushcross Grange. A vengeful Heathcliff seduces Edgar's sister Isabella, producing a son named Linton Heathcliff before Isabella's early death. Catherine never relinquishes her love for Heathcliff, and she too dies early, just after giving birth to her daughter, Catherine the younger. When Catherine the younger and Linton meet, they also form an attachment, which Heathcliff encourages and manipulates. Heathcliff kidnaps Catherine the younger and forces her to marry Linton shortly before the boy's death, leaving her in his power. Obsessed with Catherine the elder, Heathcliff dies soon after seeing her ghost, and Catherine the younger falls in love with Hindley's son, Hareton. Bookending the main story are first person narratives from Lockwood, who has let Thrushcross Grange a generation after the first events of the novel, and the majority of the story is recounted in

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[41] In order to distinguish between the two Catherines, I refer to Catherine Earnshaw Linton as "Catherine the elder" and to her daughter, Catherine Linton Healthcliff, as "Catherine the younger."

conversation between Lockwood and Nelly, a servant at Thrushcross Grange who grew up with Catherine the elder, Hindley, and Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights.

Wuthering Heights can be read as a document that models different ways to understand, or read, disability. Through the first person accounts of its characters, who each have unique relationships with supernatural folklore, competing narratives about disability emerge, presenting an array of possibilities to the reader. Evaluating these accounts, and learning to read disability, is not a straightforward task—there is no omniscient narrative voice to give the story an overarching cohesion or to provide a definitive perspective on the veracity of the events or experiences presented in the novel. Instead, a tapestry of oral narratives from conflicting perspectives and radically different experiences combine to create the text. Each story— and each experience of disability— must be evaluated on its own terms.

In this chapter, I am deliberately casting a wide net with what I consider to be "disability." I am drawing particularly on the issue of impairment in order to define disability as any physical or mental condition that causes suffering and distress or that interrupts or impedes everyday activities (Yenika-Agbaw 93). I also attend to the social model of disability, or the way that bodies and minds can be rendered incapacitated by ill-fitting environments, but impairment and the embodied experience of disability are of most relevance to my argument here (Siebers 3). Under this definition, chronic and even temporary illnesses can be considered under the rubric of disability in addition to constant conditions such as blindness or paralysis.

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Disability remains symptomatic throughout the novel; there is no single referent for this malaise, and thus no impetus or avenue for a cure. This inability to ward off illness mirrors the persistence and pervasiveness of the supernatural in the text, a parallel that I will return to later in this chapter. Though it might be tempting to locate the origin of conflict and even disability in Heathcliff, his presence cannot account for the physical delicacy of the Linton family. And indeed, the landscape itself suggests on a metaphorical level the presence of something insalubrious in the very atmosphere. This prevalence might be understood as having a normalizing effect on the presence of disability in the text—if it is everywhere and might emerge in anyone at any time, disability becomes the normate. However, the characters demonstrate a variety of attitudes towards the existence of disability, from denial of its presence and severity to actively seeking, even embracing non-normative physical and mental states. Wuthering Heights and the surrounding land is perhaps more accurately understood as a profoundly isolated space in which normative rules do not apply; rather, its denizens exist and fluctuate on spectrums of health and illness, as do their attitudes towards disability.

As this range of responses demonstrates, illness and disability do not occupy a stable place in *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly Dean, for example, frequently challenges or minimizes the existence of chronic illness or bodily/ mental impairment. In one memorable scene, Catherine the elder strikes her head repeatedly and has blood running from her lips, and Nelly insists that "there is nothing in the world the matter" with her (Brontë 93). This disavowal is not limited to Nelly but is also enacted by other characters, including Lockwood. The persistent rejection of disability even as it is constructed and

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revived in different contexts creates a destabilizing effect upon the category's ontological

status and makes the reader wonder whether it is even really present. What does it mean

to conjure the specter of disability only to refute it, even as character after character dies

from the effects of their conditions? How is disability operationalized in the text, and

who can read its presence? When is disability generative, destructive, or ambiguous, and

when can the effects of disability be harnessed to effect in the text?

Wuthering Heights is, in many ways, a text defined by uncertainty. The tale is

transmitted through an unreliable, biased narrator, and the text is rent with narrative gaps.

For example, Heathcliff vanishes from the neighborhood and the narrative for years, and

his whereabouts during his absence from Wuthering Heights are never disclosed. Even

the generic status of the novel is ambiguous—scholars have argued that it is a textbook

example of a Gothic novel while others have insisted that it falls squarely within the

province of realism. Within the narrative itself, the reality of the supernatural is itself a

subject of controversy. Some characters, like Heathcliff, embrace the existence of the

supernatural while others have opinions that fluctuate. Others wish to deny its presence

all together. I argue that the text's ambiguous relationship to disability echoes its

supernatural ambiguity. Like Catherine's ghost, disability is evanescent yet crucial to the

construction and atmosphere of the text. Often, the two aspects are linked; indeed,

Catherine's ghost is the eventual product of her chronic illness. The atmospheric sense of

decay can be linked to bodily and mental deterioration, and even emotional excess

catalyzes the emergence of illness. The Gothic mode might be understood as a conduit

for the text's differing attitudes towards disability. This link between disability and the

Gothic mode throughout the body of *Wuthering Heights* is not merely aesthetic; instead, they function as mutually reinforcing categories that describe non-normative bodies and the spaces through which they move.

The Gothic is a notoriously unstable category, but certain markers indicate its presence in a literary work. Some of the most central characteristics of the Gothic include the cultivation of terror or horror; themes of degeneracy and decay; heightened affect; the possible influence of the supernatural; threats of enclosure; a form defined by dramatic twists or fragmentation; doubling; sensitivity to the sublime; the presence of the brooding, Byronic hero; complex family genealogies and secrets; and sexual perversion. Fred Botting emphasizes that the "Gothic signifies a writing of excess" and "a return of past on present" (Botting 1). The Gothic dwells in discomfort, in the moments that cannot be fully narrated, in uncanny bodies and minds that resist normative categorization. The excesses and temporal elasticity of the Gothic creates spaces for ambiguous forms, of supernatural and human varieties, and these bodies trouble the margins of what it means to be human or monstrous. Because the Gothic harnesses the sensational, the excessive to illustrate moments of untellability through appeals to terror, horror, the sublime, it is well suited to address issues of disability. Catherine's illness is triggered, we are told, through excessive emotion. Heathcliff's obsessive and cruel behavior is identified as potentially supernatural, even demonic, by his wife, Isabella. Linton and Hindley's respective conditions of physical and mental weakness are positioned as the product of familial degeneracy and decay.

While the aesthetic of *Wuthering Heights* stems from the literary Gothic mode, its structure, narrative style, and even many of its climactic moments are indebted to a folk narrative genre: the legend. When a story's truth status is in question—when a tale invites the teller or listener to reexamine their perception of what might be true or "just a story," the folk narrative genre of the legend is at play.

My Introduction to this dissertation has already extensively defined the genres of "folk narrative" and "legend," but I return to these definitions here in order to establish their relevance to *Wuthering Heights*. As previously noted, Elliott Oring argues that "folk narratives are generally conceptualized to be those narratives which circulate primarily in oral tradition and are communicated face-to-face" (Oring 122-3). In addition, he identifies three defining characteristics of folk narrative.

First, folk narratives "tend to exist in multiple versions" instead of a single, authoritative version (Oring 123). Instead, multiple version exist concurrently, and each subsequent retelling creates a new, equally valid text. In *Wuthering Heights*, multiple commentaries on Catherine's ghost and potential hauntings are provided by different tellers and under different circumstances. Lockwood's initial experience or dream is recounted, and he quickly relates that encounter to Heathcliff. Other characters, including Nelly, Joseph, and Heathcliff offer their own assessments of this possibility as well.

Oring's second characteristic states that "as a result of this process of re-creation, the folk narrative reflects both the past as well as the present" (Oring 123). New, emerging versions must draw upon "past language, symbols, events, and forms which they share with their audience for their narrations to be both comprehensive and

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meaningful" (Oring 123). However, because each iteration of a folk narrative is dependent upon a new context, a new version inevitably "crystallizes around contemporary situations and concerns, reflecting current values and attitudes" (Oring 123). Folk narrative revives structures from the past in order to speak to the present. Although Catherine's death is nearly two decades past, her story continues to be told, and each iteration of its telling reflects as much about the perspective of the teller as it does about past events.

Finally, Oring notes that "a folk narrative reflects both the individual and the community" (Oring 123). A folk narrative is a balance between individual creativity and the limitations and constraints dictated by community acceptance. Retelling a narrative "relies upon a negotiation between the narrator and his audience. The narrator's individuality must find outlet in a narrative acceptable to the community if he is to be confirmed in his role as narrator" (Oring 123). Different tellers of the Wuthering Heights haunting relate it differently depending on context or audience—for example, as an outsider, Lockwood hears a version of the story with much more background information from Nelly than the fragments than Heathcliff provides in his short reflections.

As detailed in my Introduction, folklorists have identified many subgenres of folk narrative. The legend, however, is the folk narrative type most relevant to *Wuthering Heights*, and this sub-genre is defined by its ambiguous relationship to the truth. Lockwood does not quite know whether to believe the tales he hears about the occupants of Wuthering Heights, and he does not even know how to evaluate his own personal

experience in the house—his response to this collection of tales and experience is to probe their truthfulness, marking him as both the hearer and teller of the folk legend.

As discussed in my Introduction, legends recount an episode that is "presented as miraculous, uncanny, bizarre, or sometimes embarrassing"—there is always something unusual or noteworthy about the contents of a legend (Oring 125). Most significantly, "the narration of a legend is, in a sense, the negotiation of the truth of these episodes ... at the core of the legend is an evaluation of its truth status" (Oring 125). Different tellers and receivers of a legend might assess it as true, false, or indeterminate, but "this diversity of opinion does not negate the status of the narrative as legend because, whatever the opinion, the truth status of the legend is what is being negotiated. In a legend, the question of truth must be *entertained* even if that truth is ultimately rejected. Thus, the legend often depicts the improbably within the world of the possible" (Oring 125). Ambiguity around truth status means that the content of legends is frequently that which is unexplainable, unlikely, or even supernatural—indeed, the supernatural legend is a particularly common subtype of the genre. The listener or reader of the legend must evaluate these supernatural episodes, and decide whether or not to believe them. Unlike a fairy tale, which is marked as something outside of every-day possibility, "the legend never asks for the suspension of disbelief. It is concerned with creating a narrative whose truth is at least worthy of deliberation; consequently, the art of legendary engages the listener's sense of the possible" (Oring 125).

Considering *Wuthering Heights* through the lens of legend yields a reading that is curiously cohesive for a novel so frequently categorized as fragmentary or even

incomplete. The novel is notoriously resistant to interpretation, which has inspired countless contradictory readings, as well as assessments of its opaqueness or inscrutability. The legend provides a frame in which the pieces of the novel fall into conversation with one another, even when they are contradictory, fragmentary, or inconclusive, for it is the business of the legend to accommodate ambiguity or incomplete accounts and biased narratives. If *Wuthering Heights* is a narrative about the communal storytelling of a legend, it can be read as an attempt to highlight aspects of a community that might otherwise be untellable, namely the belief in the supernatural and efforts to account for illnesses and disabilities that do not yet have a "rational" explanation at the time the novel was written or set.

Though I am linking disability to the supernatural legend and the Gothic in *Wuthering Heights*, I do not suggest that the supernatural should be read as a metaphor for disability in this novel. Lennard J. Davis warns that "the problem with metaphor and disability is that disability already involves looking away. As the normate regards the person with a physical disability, the normate both wants to stare and to look away—both actions have the same ends, which are to objectivize and stigmatize by an interrelated process of fascination and rejection" (Davis, "Seeing" x). Instead, I ask what belief in the supernatural and the invocation of certain narrative patterns can reveal about disability. Supernatural legend, I content, can be harnessed in order to make some experiences of disability narratable; it can reframe that which might be untellable in a specific cultural context in such a way that non-normative bodies and mind can be narrated.

Lockwood: Ambiguity and The Creation of a Legend

Throughout *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood maintains a curious ambiguity

regarding the supernatural. As the first-person narrator who opens the text, his

perspective is foregrounded, and his attitude towards stories, ghosts, and the bodies that

create and sustain them sets the tone for the remainder of the novel. Because he is an

outsider, a temporary visitor to the neighborhood, and ultimately "Wuthering Heights is

an alien world for him, not really one he can see from the vantage point of detachment,

and he is incapable of appreciating things that are so important here" (McCarthy 49).

Furthermore, due to his lack of mobility during a protracted illness, he must rely on

stories and rumors in order to make sense of his new landscape. It is through his

mediation of these accounts that the story of *Wuthering Heights* is comprised. Though

"Lockwood is confronted with a mass of fascinating but confusing data which he must try

to piece together to make a coherent pattern" (Miller 363), his efforts to interpret these

materials remain inconclusive.

Lockwood, the narrator of the novel's outermost frame, meditates at length on

haunting and health as he convalesces at Thrushcross Grange soon after letting the

property and again after a months-long absence and subsequent return to the

neighborhood. Amongst scholarly discussions of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood is a

notoriously unreliable narrator. Terrence McCarthy writes that Lockwood "Lockwood's

fickleness and ignorance of his own character make him a thoroughly unreliable narrator,

for he judges others according to his own ideas of himself" and that he "passes on a tale

he never understands" himself (McCarthy 51, 50). Lockwood is undoubtedly a biased,

unreliable narrator, but what is the effect of his unreliability? And what is his relationship with the truth of the tale he tells? I argue that Lockwood makes use of folk narrative strategies to confront issues of disability and the ambiguous supernatural in order to weave unstable, potentially untellable experiences into a coherent story.

Some critics insist that it is Lockwood's voice that shapes the entirety of the novel—that instead of nested narratives in which each new speaker tells part of the tale in their own voice and inflection, the text should be understood as a master-narrative crafted by Lockwood who recreates or writes his own edited version of these inner narratives. In his article "Lockwood the Liar: a Call to Reconsider Wuthering Heights as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative," Nicholas Frangipane argues that "Lockwood tells so much of the story in an imitation of Nelly's voice that he nearly disappears for pages on end, seeming to work against our recognition of his mediation and attempting to negate this particular effect" (Frangipane 29). Lockwood, Frangipane asserts, is the voice that actually tells and mediates the entire story through his discursive power as a creative writer and his control of the metanarrative. Though consideration of narrative control is, I believe, necessary when evaluating this text, *Wuthering Heights* is constructed through multiple voices and stories. Frangipane's assessment relies on the act of writing within the storyworld and rests on the assumption that all narrators of novels are engaged in the act of writing. Instead, I consider *Wuthering Heights* as a hybrid text arising from multiple, often contradictory perspectives presented from a variety of different speakers and narrators—this is the storyworld that Brontë lays out in the novel, rich with a multiplicity of voices. While my position on narration in the text diverges

from Frangipane, he insightfully identifies the act of storytelling as a central subject in the novel. He asks us to

> consider *Wuthering Heights* as a reflexive novel, a novel that takes storytelling itself as its subject. By placing Lockwood in the position of the writer of a tale he must be fictionalizing—at least in part due to the limits of the abilities of human memory—the novel interrogates the mimetic nature of narrative (question the ability of stories to replicate so-called real world experience) and makes an argument about the limits of the ability of narrative to convey knowledge more than a hundred years before the postmodernists approached this territory. Ultimately, I think that Emily Brontë shows us that narrative cannot faithfully convey knowledge. (Frangipane 30)

Wuthering Heights is about storytelling, though I understand it as a series of competing, collaborative, or contradicting narratives as opposed to one master narrative orchestrated by Lockwood. It is not about "faithfully convey[ing] knowledge" but rather about efforts to tell narratives that can justify or explain that which is unknowable or unexplainable. No one narrator knows the full story of *Wuthering Heights*—instead, there are multiple versions and perspectives that can not "replicate so-called real world experience" but that provide glimpses of different experiences and perceptions.

These different perspectives are, however, contained within the Lockwood frame—the outer-most narrative that bookends Lockwood's conversations with other

characters, Nelly's extensive oral tales, countless incidents of reported speech, and Isabella's letter. This frame distances the reader from the main plotline and introduces an additional layer of mediation to the internal narratives that comprise the majority of the novel. In a sense, it provides guideposts for how the reader might understand the stories told by other narrators and draws attention to significant issues, complications, and conflicts. Interestingly, Lockwood's credibility as a narrator is quickly thrown into question, and the extent to which he is ill-equipped to understand his environment, the denizens of the neighborhood, and their place-stories becomes readily apparent. When he arrives at Thrushcross Grange and seeks out his landlord, Heathcliff, at Wuthering Heights, he is immediately sympathetic to the man and even identifies with him. In the first paragraph of the novel, Lockwood describes Wuthering Heights as "[a] perfect misanthropist's heaven" and reflects that "Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name" (Brontë 3). As more of Heathcliff's character and behavior is revealed, Lockwood's poor judgment is thrown into sharp relief. Heathcliff's violence, abuse, and machinations are laughably at odds with the moniker of "a capital fellow, "and Lockwood's unreliability as a narrator grows increasingly clear. As McCarthy observes, "Lockwood's inept comments set the tone of doubt and uneasy judgment which are such a part of the book. From the start, Bronte is

working on a level of half-knowledge, uncertainty, and ambiguity," all hallmarks of the folk narrative genre of the legend (McCarthy 52).

Part of the reason for Lockwood's inability to comprehend or narrate the events at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is a result of his status as an outsider. He rents Thrushcross Grange on a whim, and though he states his wish for seclusion, almost his first action upon arriving at his temporary home is to seek out companionship. Unsurprisingly, considering the insularity and misanthropy that characterizes the occupants of the neighborhood, this impulse leads to unsatisfactory results: the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights are verbally abusive and decidedly uninterested in befriending him. Disappointed in their lackluster sociability and obstructed by the weather, Lockwood is forced to spend the night in their home on his second visit, whereupon he has the encounter with, or dream of, Catherine's ghost.

Lockwood does not know how to make sense of this encounter, and so he asks for the place's history from the inhabitants of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange in order to begin making sense of his experience. Initially, he uses the suggestive but ambiguous frame of a dream to relate the experience, but his language when speaking to Heathcliff indicates that he believes the experience to be supernatural. He describes a jumbled dream that features the inhabitants of the Heights and then narrates waking in Catherine's room due to concrete disturbances in his environment: "the branch of a fir-tree that touched my lattice as the blast wailed by, and rattled its dry cones against the panes" (Brontë 20). After listening "doubtingly an instant" and detecting the source of his disturbance, he "turned and dozed, and dreamt again" (Brontë 20). His choice of the word

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"doubtingly" primes the narrative for the encounter that he then relates: that of a youthful Catherine the elder crying at the window and the surprising violence of Lockwood's response. After inadvertently taking the child's hand, he drags "its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes" while she screams (Brontë 20). McCarthy designates this moment as "the cruelest deed in a cruel book, and it is important to remember that Lockwood, the polite, civilized gentleman, is capable, albeit in a dream, of greater cruelty than any of the savage inhabitants of Wuthering Heights" (McCarthy 54). While this is certainly a violent act, though in my opinion scarcely the worst in the novel, it is important to realize that Lockwood does not believe that he is interacting with a little girl but some kind of phantom. Lockwood perceives her not as a lost, terrified child, but rather something unnatural, something to be feared: a sinister creature from a legend. Notably, in this narration of the event, he genders the girl as "it," a pronoun that strips her of her humanity and re-categorizes her as something Other, something beyond the bounds of personhood. Experiencing what he calls the "intense horror of nightmare," he reacts out of fear and rejection of a body that he finds monstrous, but, intriguingly, he never says that he wakes (Brontë 20). Instead, he hears Heathcliff's footsteps. This failure to close this potential dream with a definitive waking opens the possibility that this encounter is not a dream at all but rather that he believes it actually occurred, leaving the entire episode tantalizingly open to interpretation, with its truth status in question.

When Heathcliff enters the bedchamber, Lockwood explains that the servant Zillah placed him there, supposing "that she wanted to get another proof that the place

was haunted, at my expense. Well, it is—swarming with ghosts and goblins!" (Brontë 22). In reply to Heathcliff's demands that he be quiet, Lockwood adds that "'If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me! ... that minx, Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called—she must have been a changeling—wicked little soul! She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years: a just punishment for her mortal transgressions, I've no doubt!'" (Brontë 22). His language here suggests that he understands this experience as a supernatural encounter— he labels the apparition as a "fiend," a "changeling," creatures that mimic the human form for sinister purposes, and he states that he believes she would have done him harm had she managed, vampire-like, to cross the threshold of the house. His use of the word changeling in particular invokes not only the supernatural but disability—scholars such as Susan Schoon Eberly and Joyce Underwood Munro have explicitly connected stories of changelings to descriptions of congenital disorders or ill health. Eberly points out that changelings are frequently described as "the infant or very young child who is different, whether that difference arises through injury, disease, or congenital disorder and there are times […] when the record is clear enough to suggest a fairly clear relationship between the child described and a known disorder" (Eberly 246). Changelings are associated with ill-health, strangeness, and liminality, a fitting creature to appear in Lockwood's dream that may not be dream. By the novel's conclusion, he expresses escalating doubt about the experience. His uncertain relationship with the truth status of his encounter, and the other episodes that he hears from Nelly, suggests that he is engaging with the genre of the legend.

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Lockwood's struggle to categorize his experience in Catherine the elder's room reflects the ambiguity of the legend, and this initial confusion echoes throughout the his portions of the narration, shaping how the reader receives his account—with Lockwood's judgment in doubt, his storytelling becomes a performance that is particularly vulnerable to interrogation and varying interpretations. Whether dream, nightmare, or supernatural encounter, the experience never quite settles in Lockwood's mind or narration, and his ambiguous assessment allows the tale's truth status to linger unresolved, a legend that can never quite be disproved. By collecting the fragmented pieces of the story of the haunting and the lives that precipitated it, he engages in the process of storytelling and meaning-making, never resolving the tale but imposing the shape of the legend to grant a degree of cohesion and tellability to that which would otherwise be disordered.

Part of what makes the story of Wuthering Heights untellable are its many representations of disability and illness. Adopting the lens of the supernatural legend, as Lockwood does, allows these bodily experiences to be narrated. Immediately after his encounter with Catherine's ghost, he falls seriously ill and is bedridden for months in his new residence at the Grange. It is in this state of illness and convalescence, which is severe enough to curtail his mobility and restrict him to his bed, that he hears Nelly's extensive tale about the history of the Heights and the Grange. His experience, whether dream or reality, quite literally catalyzes his own experience with protracted illness, providing a link between the supernatural, disability, and storytelling in the text. Again and again, the legend is invoked in order to make sense of what might otherwise appear to be random bouts of illness and flights of fancy.

Even the haunting that Lockwood experiences is curiously embodied. Her describes catching Catherine's hand and sawing her wrist against the broken glass of the windowpane until she bleeds. Ghosts are generally perceived as intangible, unable to be touched or physically harmed. But in *Wuthering Heights*, a ghost can be grasped, can bleed. The distinct physicality of this apparition sets the stage for the primacy of the body and the utility of the supernatural to absorb and reflect concerns about the body and its susceptibility to damage that persist throughout the novel.

Nelly Dean: Reading, Telling, and Untellability

Wuthering Heights is constructed through a first-person narrative, the majority of which is transmitted through Nelly Dean as she relates the history of the two households—Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange—to Lockwood during his convalescence. Lockwood also narrates portions of the novel, and a long letter penned by Isabella Linton Heathcliff also provides portions of the narrative. However, Nelly relates the vast majority of the story, and so it is her perspective, her oral narrative that shapes the greater part of the novel.

In a text in which so many characters are chronically ill or impaired, Nelly is remarkable for being largely able-bodied and healthy. Although Nelly has often been identified by scholars as a site of oppression in the narrative by virtue of her gender and social status, she intriguingly occupies a place of privilege from a disability-oriented perspective. She has the physical strength to perform chores, mind young children, and go on long walks around the moors and between the two households. The single

exception to this able-bodiedness is when she falls ill for three weeks and is prevented from looking after Catherine the younger.

Likewise, Nelly is privileged from a narrative perspective. As the first-person narrator and primary storyteller, she not only has access to massive amounts of information about the inhabitants of the two households but also the ability to craft her story as she sees fit. Nelly's perspective dictates the shape of the narrative and oversees the threads that create the cumulative web of the story, often mimicking the cadences and shapes of oral narrative. As she relates the story to Lockwood in his sickbed, she steps into the role of master storyteller, choosing what to relate, what to emphasis, and what to omit. Nelly must "be both teller and listener" and act "as an interpreter positioned between an unexplained character [Heathcliff] and an uncomprehending audience [Lockwood]. Though she is a storyteller in her own right, she is also a listener attempting to fathom the 'history' of an enigmatic Heathcliff" (Macovski 367-8). Nelly is most concerned with the province of the every day and the characters of the people who surround her, and this is reflected in the way that her story unfolds—she is less concerned with the supernatural and the otherworldly than Catherine the elder or Heathcliff, marking her as a character more aligned with the realist impulses of the novel.

Much of her information is concerned with bodily and mental states, and her discomfort and displeasure with atypicality is at once obvious and at odds with the experiences of other characters that she narrates. Nelly's reliable health and physical strength shape her experience and also inform the construction of perspective in her first-person narration; Nelly is particularly stalwart in her doubt of the existence or severity of

illness or disability. For example, when Catherine the elder insists that illness is eminent after a confrontation between Edgar and Heathcliff, Nelly reflects that "The stolidity with which I received these instructions was, no doubt, rather exasperating: for they were delivered in perfect sincerity; but I believed a person who could plan the turning of her fits of passion to account, beforehand, might, by exerting her will, manage to control herself tolerably, even while under their influence" (Brontë 92). This reflection comes after Catherine has already suffered one extreme bout with brain fever, an episode that deeply frightened Nelly and caused the doctor to note that the condition was likely chronic. In the midst of another episode of illness, Catherine tells Nelly that "she believed she was dying" (Brontë 94). Nelly relates that she "believed no such thing, so I kept it to myself and brought her some tea and dry toast" (Brontë 94). However, she notes that she was able to "preserv[e] my external composure, in spite of her ghastly countenance and strange, exaggerated manner" (Brontë 94). The tension between disbelief and disconcertion, even fear, is revived each time that Nelly confronts Catherine's illnesses, a pattern that continues until Catherine's early death.

Ironically, Nelly's privileged status as able-bodied works against her capability as an informed, knowledgeable narrator. She is not a skilled reader of disability— its influence upon the bodies and minds that surround her or the ways in which it informs the narrative that she tells. She can read it symptomatically, to an extent—she can see isolated instances of illness or infirmity. For example, she sees and acknowledges when Catherine the elder has severe brain fever. However, she cannot connect these isolated instances to the bigger picture or see how these individual episodes or conditions

cumulate into a lived, embodied experience that is profoundly shaped by disability and pain. Considering the saturation of experiences of physical and mental infirmity in *Wuthering Heights*, Nelly is very much at odds with the storyworld that she is responsible for depicting in her narrative. As a surprisingly hale and able person in a world otherwise characterized by non-normative bodies and minds, Nelly is often strikingly out of her depth when interpreting her surroundings. Her very ablebodiedness inhibits her ability to read her companions and diminishes her credibility and insight as a narrator of their experiences. Nelly holds the greatest narrative privilege in the novel—it is her voice that tells the vast majority of the story and her perception that shapes information before it is transmitted to the reader—but her limited experience of disability and her unwillingness to engage with it mark her as ill-equipped to narrate it.

What is the effect of this apparent mismatch between narrator and narrative? When there is tension between the content of a story and the way in which it is narrated, the reader's attention is drawn to both text and context. In the case of *Wuthering Heights,* again and again, disability is emphasized as each description of disabled experience jars against the voice through which it is conveyed. This dissonance highlights the friction not only between Nelly and the other characters but between the sick and the well more generally.

Catherine the Elder: The Embodied Gothic

The case of Catherine Earnshaw Linton, or Catherine the elder, the novel's first heroine, presents a particularly compelling case study of the link between the Gothic

supernatural and disability. Catherine is characterized, through Nelly's telling, as wild, emotional, and erratic in her behavior: "her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going—singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same" (Brontë 33). Even well before the onset of her first fever and illness, the connection between her emotional excess and her physical body is foregrounded. Nelly observes that Catherine "never had power to conceal her passion, it always set her whole complexion in a blaze," emphasizing the link between emotion and its inscription on her body (Brontë 55). While hysteria and irrational emotion were often associated with women and sickness during the Victorian period, Catherine's extreme emotional excesses seem noteworthy—not only does she leverage them for social power but she frequently revels in that excess and the impairment that follows, an attitude sharply at odds with that demonstrated by Nelly. Her initial exultation is often tempered by regret. She energetically sets events—and her decline—into motion, but she does not always enjoy the consequences, a pattern of behavior reminiscent of both the fairy-tale violation of the interdiction (Tatar, "Bluebeard" 183) and of the Gothic genre more generally.

This pursuit of illness is particularly pronounced when her relationships with Edgar and Heathcliff become tumultuous. Before they are married, Catherine quarrels with Edgar when he witnesses her tendency towards violence for the first time. After she hits him, he declares that he must leave her at once, revealing his dismay, and she replies, "Well, go, if you please—get away! And now I'll cry—I'll cry myself sick!" (Brontë 56). The pair quickly makes up, without incident. However, Catherine's threat to manifest illness at the bequest of emotion is eventually fulfilled.

When Heathcliff runs away after hearing Catherine state her intention to marry Edgar, Catherine actively cultivates illness. She waits outside at night in the midst of a storm, and, as Nelly tells us, "got thoroughly drenched for her obstinacy in refusing to take shelter, and standing bonnetless and shawl-less to catch as much water as she could with her hair and clothes" (Brontë 67). When she finally reenters the house, she refuses to change out of her wet clothes, when Nelly finds her in the morning, shivering and ill, she says, "Oh, she is naughty! ... She got steeped in the shower of yesterday evening, and there she had sat the night through, and I couldn't prevail on her to stir" (Brontë 68). This initial reduction of her illness to a fleeting acting of naughtiness is revised once the sobbing Catherine is sent to her chamber.

> I shall never forget what a scene she acted when we reached her chamber: it terrified me. I thought she was going mad, and I begged Joseph to run for the doctor. It proved the commencement of delirium: Mr. Kenneth, as soon as he saw her, pronounced her dangerously ill; she had a fever, He bled her, and he told me to let her live on whey and water-gruel, and take care she did not throw herself downstairs or out of the window. (Brontë 69)

Nelly is terrified by Catherine, and she identifies the source of her terror as the possibility of encroaching madness. What was once regarded as a trivial tantrum has transformed into a site of the unfamiliar in which an apparently healthy body has transformed into something frightening through the embodiment of excessive emotion.

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Intriguingly, this description of Catherine's illness conflates mental disability and physical disability. Specific language choices point towards both conditions; Nelly worries that she has "gone mad," and the doctor asserts that she is suffering from the onset of "delirium," words that suggest the presence of mental disturbance (Brontë 69). However, the doctor, Mr. Kenneth, also observes that she has a fever, a physical malady that he treats with the application of leeches. Finally, Mr. Kenneth cautions Nelly to prevent Catherine from throwing herself "downstairs or out of the window," actions of self-harm that denote extreme mental distress (Brontë 69). While many literary depictions of disability emphasize mental or physical conditions, Catherine's experience of disability is a combination of the two that cannot be untangled. Her pain is embodied, and yet it does not exist exclusively in the body. Despite previous critical attempts to diagnose her, Catherine's ailment cannot be definitively identified. Like disability on a broader scale in the novel, Catherine's condition is diffuse, and it cannot be warded off or diagnosed away.

The ramifications of Catherine's first illness ripple out beyond her own body, beyond even her own household. Nelly's initial fear quickly subsides, and she finds her patient "wearisome and headstrong" (Brontë 69). Edgar and Isabella's parents convey Catherine back to Thrushcross Grange with them as soon as she could be safely moved. Instead of putting an end to the illness, this prompts its spread: both Mr. and Mrs. Linton catch the fever and die "within a few days of each other" (Brontë 70). While it is the very definition of disease to spread and infect new bodies, there seems to be something narratively sinister about Catherine's brain-fever, which appears to be self-inflicted, even

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cultivated, and which spreads to the guileless inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange with disastrous consequences. Catherine's illness spreads even when it should be contained, to victims that should not be particularly susceptible, suggesting a kind of unknowable monstrousness that cannot be anticipated or countered.

After this episode Catherine's illness lies dormant for years, though she has seasons of "gloom and silence," but when Heathcliff returns after a three-year absence and he and Edgar argue, Catherine once more invokes illness (Brontë 72). She tells Nelly, "say to Edgar, if you see him again tonight, that I'm in danger of being seriously ill. I wish it may prove true. He has startled and distressed me shockingly! I want to frighten him […] I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own" (Brontë 92). She seeks illness in order to produce an emotional response from her husband, and she seems to relish the idea of disability as a state that induces a dramatic response. She refers once more to the power of her Gothic embodied excess: "Remind him of my passionate temper, verging, when kindled, on frenzy" (Brontë 92). The fit she calls up is violent and even uncanny. She "has blood on her lips," and she dashes "her head against the arm of the sofa" and grinds "her teeth, so that you fancy she would crash them to splinters" (Brontë 93). Her body remains recognizable and familiar, but it also becomes strange and sinister, taking on hues and movements that denote illness and forge ties to the ghostly or supernatural. As Edgar looks on "in sudden compunction and fear […] she stretch[es] herself out stiff and turns up her eyes, which her cheeks, at once blanched and livid, assumed the aspect of death," a description that suggests vampirism (Brontë 93). Her eyes flash, and "the

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muscles of her neck and arms" stand "out preternaturally" (Brontë 93). Catherine is

courting disability, even death, annihilating the self for an emotional effect.

While Catherine admits regret for her rashness in inducing this fatal illness,

particularly as what Nelly identifies as "madness" overtakes her mind, her thoughts—and

the kinds of narratives she tells—align ever more strongly with the supernatural.

Throughout the text, Catherine has favored glamour, passion, and dark reflections on

love—all hallmarks of the Gothic—and as she sinks deeper into disability, she becomes

preoccupied with the otherworldly. She tells Nelly that she sees a vision of her future

self, that the bed is "the fairy cave under Penistone Crag," invoking once more her

connection to changelings. She also fears that Nelly is a witch who "seek[s] elf-bolts to

hurt" her, and she insists that the room is haunted (Brontë 96, 101). Supernatural

narratives become the conduit through which her shattered mind makes sense of her

illness, pairing narrative with embodied experience.

To some extent, Catherine's fragility after she conjures her second major illness

could be read as a function of aging and cumulative exhaustion. She has abused her body

past its limit, despite the resilience it exhibited when she was younger, and she longs for

the carelessness and physical strength that she possessed in childhood:

> Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half
>
> savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them!
>
> Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few

words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills.

(Brontë 98)

She wishes to be "hardy" once more, to be able to move freely and to laugh away her injuries, a state now inaccessible to her. However, once again, ableness is not just expressed purely through physicality; the physical body and the mental condition are linked in her experience and reflections. Instead of laughing at her injuries, she is now "maddening" under them, suggesting that her physical infirmity causes, or at least aggravates, her mental distress. This connection between the physical and the mental are constantly reinforced throughout Catherine's experience of disability, reinforcing the artificiality of a physical/ mental binary and heightening the sense of her illness as diffuse and impossible to counter with prescriptive treatment or medicine.

This inability to diagnose, prevent, or cure Catherine's illness creates a haunting effect that echoes the appearance of her ghost earlier in the novel. Just as Catherine's ghost haunts her old home and the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, illness itself seems to haunt the characters. Furthermore, disability and the supernatural are linked through the construction and reinforcement of their ontological liminality throughout the text. The existence of both illness and the supernatural are in constant question, with some characters insisting on their reality and concreteness while others believe they are idle fancies. Interestingly, willingness to acknowledge disability and belief in the supernatural tend to track together in the characters of *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly, as previously stated, steadfastly disavows the presence of disability, and she is also frequently reluctant to

believe in the supernatural specters that haunt the landscape. By contrast, Catherine is fully immersed in the experience of disability—she considers it, conjures it, and, eventually, dies from it—and she is the most intimately bound up with the suggestion of the supernatural in the novel. Not only is it her ghost that lingers in her old room at Wuthering Heights, but her connection to the supernatural is heightened with the onset of extreme illness.

Her sense of place untethers from her physical location. Though she is in her room at Thrushcross Grange, a chamber she has occupied for many years, the place she sees before her eyes is Wuthering Heights and the land around it:

> "Look!" she cried eagerly, "that's my room with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it; and the other candle is in Joseph's garret. Joseph sits up late, doesn't he? He's waiting till I come home that he may lock the gate. Well, he'll wait a while yet." (Brontë 99)

Her perspective is not limited to her bedchamber there but rather she visually wanders around the estate, commenting on her own room, the servant Joseph's garret, and the gate in front of the house. This emphasis on place also influences Catherine's engagement with the supernatural, a connection that is reinforced throughout the text. Catherine's focus wanders from Wuthering Heights itself to the moors between her old home and Thrushcross Grange, but her perspective remains bound to her childhood and to her recollections of Heathcliff:

It's a rough journey, and a sad heart to travel it; and we must pass by Gimmerton

Kirk to go that journey! We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each

other to stand among the graves and ask them to come. But, Heathcliff, if I dare

you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself:

they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I

won't rest till you are with me. I never will! (Brontë 99)

She thinks first of the church between the two estates and of the graveyard there. She

recalls the confidence and daring attitude that she and Heathcliff exhibited towards that

place and its ghostly inhabitants, but her thoughts take on a more sinister cast as she

returns to the present, to the reality of her dying body. She dares Heathcliff, who is not

present in her bedchamber, to return to the graveyard, insisting that she will "keep" him if

he does because she does not wish to be there alone. Indeed, she insists that she will "not

lie there by myself" but that she will not rest at peace until he is with her there (Brontë

99).

The ghostly supernatural is always already bound to concerns about mortality and

death, but Catherine's liminal state during her illness, as well as her cultivation of

disability, heighten this connection. It is during her bouts of illness that her interest in the

supernatural, in ghosts and haunting, even in magically-loaded locations like the church

yard and the fairy caves, intensify.

As Catherine's illness progresses, it not only influences her conceptualization of the world around her but it reshapes her perception of herself. When she sees a vision of an aged Nelly, she seems convinced in the veracity of her perception but also to recognize that it is a vision of the future rather than a reflection of the present: "'I see in you, Nelly…an aged woman: you have grey hair and bent shoulders…That's what you'll come to fifty years hence: I know you are not so now. I'm not wandering: you're mistaken, or else I should believe you really *were* that withered hag" (Brontë 96). She asserts that she is grounded in reality despite the strangeness of her perception, insisting that because she knows Nelly is currently young—that this is a vision of the future—her mind is well-ordered and adhering to normative logic. However, she also imagines/ perceives that the "bed is the fairy cave under Penistone crags" and that Nelly is engaging in fairy-like activities, namely "gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool" (Brontë 96). Catherine's vision is not merely a musing about the future but rather a recasting of her world as decidedly supernatural— and is perhaps suggestive of the Sight, or the ability to see supernatural, particularly fairy-related phenomena, clearly.

Her own identity merges more clearly with the supernatural just a few lines later when she tells Nelly that the room is haunted. Just after asserting that she sees Nelly clearly and that she knows where she is, she describes a press, a piece of furniture, and the face that she sees reflected on its surface. Nelly insists that "there's no press in the room, and never was," noting to the reader that Catherine is merely seeing her own reflection in a mirror, but Catherine focuses instead upon the ghostly face (Brontë 96).

Nelly attempts to make Catherine recognize her reflection, but "say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl" (Brontë 96). Catherine insists that the face is "behind there still! ... And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone. Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted!" (Brontë 96). Nelly takes her hand and tries to comfort her, but "for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she would keep straining her gaze towards the glass" (Brontë 97). Finally, Nelly insists "There's nobody here! ... It was yourself, Mrs. Linton: You knew it a while since," to which Catherine replies "Myself! ... and the clock is striking twelve! It's true, then! that's dreadful!" (Brontë 97). It is unclear whether Catherine fully understands what Nelly is saying, but more significantly, it is unclear whether or not the reader is meant to believe that Catherine is actually experiencing something supernatural, marking this moment in the text as one of generic ambiguity. Regardless, Catherine's own face becomes narratively bound to a potential haunting, and she understands that she is implicated in its ontology, which she finds "dreadful" (Brontë 97). The more her illness deepens in severity, the more closely she is linked to the supernatural through her own mental preoccupations as well as through the events of the narrative.

Even Catherine's appearance in this phase of her illness is described in terms of the supernatural or otherworldly:

> when she was calm, there seemed unearthly beauty in the change. The flash of her
> eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer

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gave the impression of looking at the objects around her; they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world. (Brontë 122)

This description suggests that Catherine is already mentally entering another (supernatural) realm as she approaches death, though it is her physicality—her "unearthly beauty" and eyes of "dreamy and melancholy softness"—that conveys the change. However, just before she dies, Catherine the elder undergoes an extreme embodied experience: she gives birth to her daughter, Catherine the younger, whose name and person are a mirror of her mother. Thus, even as Catherine the elder physically exits the text, she leaves behind two Gothic remnants: the potential for her legendary ghost and her double, her daughter, haunting the text in her wake.

Heathcliff: Man, Demon, or Successful Reader?

It is a common move to identify Heathcliff as the origin of the discord in *Wuthering Heights*.[42] Before his arrival, the household is a stable unit with a clear line of succession, and its occupants are physically sound. Furthermore, there is no whisper of a ghost, as Catherine the elder is young, happy, and very much alive. At first glance, Heathcliff does not appear to fit into the paradigm I've laid out thus far in this chapter. His resistance to ill-health of any sort is almost preternatural when compared to the conditions that plague most of the other characters, and yet he is deeply invested in the

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[42] See Vereen Bell, "Wuthering Heights and the Unforgivable Sin."

existence of the supernatural. He is, however, keenly aware of the different expressions of disability that surround him, and it is his ability to understand, and even manipulate, these conditions that allow him to accumulate social power. Because of his success in reading disability, he gains the tangible status of master of both households as well as the narrative status within, and even beyond, the storyworld, positioning him as the lynchpin of the legend that is the story of *Wuthering Heights*.

Heathcliff's remarkable good health is worth consideration, for it is his physical constitution that allows him to persist when nearly all the characters from the first generation of the tale have died. Like Nelly Dean, he is rarely ill, and his body and mind demonstrate strength and resilience despite difficult circumstances. As a child, he suffers physical and mental abuse at his foster-brother's hands, never permitting him to forget that he is not a true child of the house, not a true Earnshaw. Critics have long speculated that Heathcliff is the bastard son of Earnshaw,[43] presenting a rationale for why Mr. Earnshaw would bring home an orphan child with no explanation. Mr. Earnshaw's choice of the name for the foundling both links him to the family and holds him at a distance. "Heathcliff" was the name of his late son who had died at a young age, a family name in a sense, and yet this is the only name that Heathcliff receives, serving as both Christian and surname. Like Catherine the elder, who has numerous points of connection to fairylore, Heathcliff too might be understood in the context of changelings—he is named for his foster-father's dead son, and his origins are decidedly enigmatic. Inspiring

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[43] See Alan Richardson, "Rethinking Romantic Incest: Human Universals, Literary Representation, and the Biology of Mind" and Eric Solomon, "The Incest Theme in Wuthering Heights."

resentment and rage from Hindley and devotion from Catherine the elder, Heathcliff ignites strong emotions of acceptance and distrust from his new family, and, like a changeling, he never wholly belongs.

Regardless of the question of his parentage, which is never resolved within the text, he remains on the margin between family and outsider, child of the house and interloper or servant. Even the childhood he shares with Catherine and Hindley cannot ensure his belonging, and this initial closeness is what causes his relationship with his foster-brother to sour. Without a family name, wealth, or other resources, he is unprotected after the death of Mr. Earnshaw, and he uses the skills at his disposal to survive and, eventually, to thrive in the household in which he, in most ways, is at a decided disadvantage. His natural resources prove to be an unlikely and potent combination—he is notably able-bodied, he is attuned to the ebb and flow of illness and the undercurrent of disability that pervades the neighborhood, and he is able to manipulate these conditions in his favor. Even when he is beaten or otherwise harmed, his resistance to damage is almost unwavering. Only twice does Heathcliff experience ill-health; once, shortly after his arrival to Wuthering Heights, and again just precipitating his death. Both of these events are linked, intriguingly, to Catherine the elder, and they bookend his presence in the novel, serving as poles between which his is invulnerable, a figure which might inspire gossip, speculation, even a legend.

Heathcliff's origins remain enigmatic, and the story that Mr. Earnshaw tells, and that Heathcliff never contests, does little to recommend the foundling child. If he is indeed the child of Mr. Earnshaw from an extra-marital liaison, the specter of venereal

disease is invoked, if not ever addressed outright. However, the identity of his parents remains a mystery, and such speculation is of limited use. The only information revealed about Heathcliff is the story that Mr. Earnshaw chooses to tell. Producing the "dirty, ragged" child from the folds of his greatcoat like a magic trick, he insists on

> a tale of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool, where he picked it up and inquired for its owner. Not a soul knew to whom it belonged, he said; and his money and time being both limited, he thought it better to take it home with him at once, than run into vain expenses there: because he was determined he would not leave it as he found it. (Brontë 29)

Assuming this account is true, Heathcliff had been living alone on the streets of a city for some time, and yet he has remained remarkably healthy despite these desperate conditions.

Even after he arrives at Wuthering Heights, he remains resilient. When Catherine the elder and Hindley both contract the measles shortly after he joins the household, Heathcliff falls ill, too. Nelly recounts that he "was dangerously sick; and while he lay at the worst he would have me constantly by his pillow ... he was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over ... Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly: he was as uncomplaining as a lamb; though hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble" (Brontë 31). Despite the seriousness of this sickness, he throws off its effects quickly, and he never experiences ill-health again until he dies. This first and only encounter with

illness seems to both inoculate him against further harm and to attune him to what disability can be—after this experience, he demonstrates keen awareness of how illness and disability work, how to read them in others and, perhaps, how to resist it himself. As previously mentioned, this disease also serves as a connection to Catherine, who suffers from the ailment alongside him. Though Catherine's health deteriorates and fluctuates throughout her life, largely through her own will, this first episode of infirmity, shared as it is between the children of the house, levels the ground temporarily between them and allows the bond between Heathcliff and Catherine to begin developing.

Even comparatively minor brushes with physical harm do not influence him. When he is subject to abuse from the other children, he bears it with minimal reaction and with no apparent lasting effect physically. Nelly recounts that Heathcliff "would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame" (Brontë 30). By denying his abusers a reaction or acknowledgement that they are the source of his pain, he foregrounds the primacy of his own will over his body, reframing pain as something that he can cause, perhaps, but that cannot be forced on him by another.

Despite living a life largely free from physical impairment, Heathcliff is keenly aware of the pervasive illnesses and disability that surround him. Nelly, the other hale body amongst the central cast of characters, is unwilling to acknowledge the illnesses that impact her employers and is unable to understand how they shape the story that she tells. By contrast, Heathcliff takes interest in the ways that bodies and minds can be altered.

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Heathcliff is best understood not as the infector of his community but as a skilled reader, even manipulator, of health in others. By watching those around him, gauging their strengths and exploiting their weaknesses, he is able to understand and influence how health and illness fluctuate in Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and to use this information to his advantage.

His manipulation of disability and illness is most pronounced in his interactions with his adoptive brother, Hindley Earnshaw, and his son, Linton Heathcliff. While Heathcliff's cruelty touches everyone with whom he interacts, his sustained efforts to influence these two characters serve to consolidate his power and status in the neighborhood. His primary motivation does seem to be the pursuit of complete mastery of the Heights and the Grange, but his personal distaste for both characters certainly contributes to his choices as well. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley's bullying escalates to comprehensive degradation: he "drove [Heathcliff] from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead; compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm" (Brontë 36). These actions remove him from Catherine's company and create the rift between them that eventually leads to Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton. By contrast, Heathcliff resents Linton Heathcliff because of his weakness of constitution and temperament. Comparing him unfavorably to Hareton, Hindley's son, Heathcliff laments that such a frail creature should be bound to him by blood, calling him "tin polished to ape a service of silver" while he views Hareton as "gold put to the use of paving-stones" (169 Brontë). Heathcliff uses him and refuses him medical attention, preferring to let him

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die so that he himself will inherit the Grange. Successfully manipulating both Hindley and Linton leads to the consolidation of both households, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, under his own ownership and control. The households that offered little but scorn and rejection becomes his own domain.

Hindley shows a proclivity for violence at a young age—he pinches and thrashes Heathcliff throughout their childhood—but it is not until adulthood that his own illnesses become evident. The early death of Frances, Hindley's wife, serves as a catalyst for Hindley's descent into alcoholism, as well as an accompanying addiction to gambling. While these conditions would not have been recognized as disabilities or illnesses the same way that they are regarded in the twenty-first century, his excessive drinking impacts him dramatically enough to alter his daily life and his material circumstances. His drinking exacerbates his violent tendencies—on one memorable occasion, he almost kills his own son by dropping him over a bannister rail—and seems to worsen his gambling. These self-destructive tendencies are firmly in place well before Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights after a three-year absence, but Heathcliff immediately takes advantage of the situation. Flush with funds from an unknown source, he secures lodgings at the Heights, his rent an irresistible lure to Hindley, who uses the money to feed his addiction. Soon, Hindley begins borrowing money from Heathcliff too, putting up his own property as collateral. Nelly reports that "[Hindley] Earnshaw is worse and worse since [Heathcliff] came. They sit up all night together continually, and Hindley has been borrowing money on his land, and does nothing but play and drink" (Brontë 81). By the time Hindley dies, at "barely twenty-seven" years of age, Wuthering Heights is

mortgaged to Heathcliff, and Hareton, Hindley's heir, is left "little else than a beggar" (Brontë 144). Enabling and exacerbating Hindley's illness has been profitable to Heathcliff; by seeing and manipulating Hindley's alcoholism, he has taken control of Wuthering Heights.

His interest in Linton proves equally profitable. Though he is repulsed by Linton, he claims the boy after Isabella's early death. Upon Linton's arrival to Thrushcross Grange, Nelly describes him as a "pale, delicate, effeminate boy, who might have been taken for my master's younger brother, so strong was the resemblance: but there was a sickly peevishness in his aspect that Edgar Linton never had" (Brontë 155). Edgar wishes to be his nephew's guardian, noting the precarity of his health, but Heathcliff asserts his rights of paternity. Though Edgar attempts to dissuade his daughter, Catherine the younger, from forming an attachment to her cousin, her fascination persists. Heathcliff encourages this connection, at the expense of both children. He forces Linton to perform good health even when he is dying through threats of violence, and he writes love letters to Catherine the younger while signing his son's name. When Linton is on the brink of death, Heathcliff kidnaps Catherine and forces her to marry Linton, a union she would have willingly accepted, so that he ensures his own inheritance of Thrushcross Grange and his economic and social power over Catherine. By assessing Linton's condition and presenting a selectively curated version of Linton's health and temperament to Catherine, Heathcliff completes his designs on the neighborhood.

Heathcliff's treatment of both Hindley and Linton is unquestionably deplorable—he uses his ability to read disability to order to manipulate them both to their own

detriment and his own personal gain. Yet, Heathcliff is also able to read disability, to see

its presence and know its severity, and resist seeing it as the defining aspect. As

Catherine the elder enters her final illness, Nelly tries to warn Heathcliff away from her:

> Catherine Linton is as different now from your old friend Catherine Earnshaw, as
>
> that young lady is different from me. Her appearance is changed greatly, her
>
> character much more so; and the person who is compelled, of necessity, to be her
>
> companion, will only sustain his affection hereafter by the remembrance of what
>
> she once was, by common humanity, and a sense of duty!" (Brontë 116)

Nelly argues that his Catherine is gone and that he can experience no happiness or

fulfillment in interactions with her as she is now, that she is no longer worth knowing for

herself, only for the memory of what she once was. Heathcliff rejects this reading of

Catherine, arguing "that is quite possible…that your master should have nothing but

humanity and a sense of duty to fall back upon. But do you imagine that I shall leave

Catherine to his *duty* and *humanity*? And can you compare my feelings respecting

Catherine to his?" (Brontë 116). Heathcliff's valuation of Catherine is completely

unaltered, regardless of her physical and mental state, regardless of her proximity to

death. To Heathcliff, Catherine is not her illness—she remains Catherine.

In their final encounter, Catherine the elder lays her death at Heathcliff and

Edgar's door. They have "broken [her] heart," and she insists that "I shall not pity you,

not I. You have killed me—and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many

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years do you mean to live after I am gone?" (Brontë 124). Regretting her invocation of disability, her choice to undercut her own health, she notes Heathcliff's hardiness and believes that he will outlive her by many, many years.

Heathcliff replies to her accusation by saying "'Don't torture me till I'm as mad as yourself,' cried he, wrenching his head free, and grinding his teeth" (Brontë 124). After her death, he invites madness if its invocation might also return Catherine to him:

> Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul! (Brontë 130)

Heathcliff wants to believe in the supernatural, in a haunting, and even demands that Catherine haunt him after her death, invoking both the supernatural and disability in the same breath. Later, he tells Nelly that he has "a strong faith in ghosts: I have a conviction that they can, and do, exist among us!" (Brontë 220). Despite his invitation, he does not see Catherine's ghost, or weaken physically, for nearly two additional decades. He lives to become the man upon whom Isabella would write these lines: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a

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man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil […] I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married" (Brontë 106) He gains a keen awareness of disability and illness but also the ability to resist it; he calls upon the supernatural but cannot confirm its existence until he is near his death. He becomes a man who inspires gossip, writings, and oral tales as his neighbors attempt to make sense of his actions through story.

When, nearly twenty years after her death, Catherine the elder appears to Heathcliff—and he believes she does, regardless of whether readers interpret the text as realist or supernatural—Heathcliff dies. Critics have speculated that he perishes because his revenge is complete, because he believes that he will be reunited with Catherine, or because he starves himself to death. In the end, the reason itself does not matter as much as the fact that his death appears to be the fruit of his own will. Just as his early, brief brush with illness was linked to Catherine, his death seems to be a willed act that mimics the decisions Catherine made that lead to her own death.

The "Benign Sky" and "Unquiet Slumbers"

At the novel's conclusion, Lockwood walks homeward from Wuthering Heights and takes a detour toward the Kirk where Catherine the Elder, Edgar, and Heathcliff are buried. The final paragraphs of the text reads as follows:

> I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the
> moor: the middle one grey, and half buried in the heath; Edgar Linton's only
> harmonized by the turf and moss creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare.

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering

among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the

grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the

sleepers in that quiet earth. (Brontë 258)

Lockwood does not know, or cannot decide, how to read or narrate this scene, despite his

immersion into a prolonged bout of illness that rendered him temporarily bedridden.

Even as Lockwood looks at the consequence of chronic illness, he emphasizes the beauty

and tranquility of the heath—the moths, flowers, the gentle weather—and he projects this

sense of peace onto the bodies that lie in their graves beneath that landscape. Most

significantly, he wonders how anyone could imagine anything other than this serenity,

despite the turmoil and the physical and mental pain felt by those whose remains he is

regarding, as well as the hauntings that they—and he!—experienced. In a sense, he is

trying to tell a story of peace and tranquility while actually narrating another of unrest

and mortality. His insistence on tranquility undermines itself. His language choice and his

use of litotes focuses the reader on both the graves and the potentially "unquiet

slumbers," evoking both the disabilities that preceded death and the Gothic elements of

the text, particularly the haunting and supernatural unrest that Heathcliff and Lockwood

himself felt, even in the midst of denial. When he wonders how "any one could ever

imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth," the hypothetical language

he employs echoes the text's own ambiguity around the supernatural and around the

bodies impacted by the supernatural. Is the novel realist? Is it Gothic? There are many

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lenses that a reader could engage to interrogate the text, and this utterance is a linguistic

ally to liminality, constructed to provide access to multiple readings simultaneously and

ending the novel on a note of ontological ambiguity that is the province of the legend.

Chapter Three. "She had a wolf in her mind": Disability, Madness, and Epistemology in George MacDonald's "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen"

> I lay dying in the sun. All at once I drew a deep breath. A cool wind came and ran over my face. I looked up. The torture was gone, for the death-lamp itself was gone. I hope he does not die and grow brighter yet. My terrible headache was all gone, and my sight was come back. I felt as if I were new made. (MacDonald, "Photogen and Nycteris" 302-3)

In this passage from George MacDonald's literary fairy tale "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen," the physical experience of the body is of central importance. Spoken from the perspective of Nycteris, MacDonald's heroine, the passage immerses the reader in her bodily pain and then the relief from that pain. While under the sun, which she calls the "death-lamp," her pain blurs into the specter of annihilation—she is unable to breathe, she loses her vision, her head aches until her power of thought is shattered (302). And when the sun sets, her body is restored to a pain-free, more able state—her vision returns, and she is soothed by the feeling of the cool wind on her face.

This intense focus on the condition of the body persists throughout the narrative, driving the plot forward as the characters struggle to attain spiritual and physical equilibrium. While scholars have discussed the spiritual and religious quests that underpin "Photogen and Nycteris," the role of embodiment, disability, and pain has been largely overlooked. What does this emphasis on physicality mean? What does it mean to have a beastly or beautiful body in this tale, and how can thinking about disability destabilize, perhaps even queer, these categories? How can the frame of folk narrative and the traditional tale change the parameters of a literary fairy tale?

As discussed in the introduction, "disability" is a notoriously unstable term that can refer to more familiar categories such as the deaf, the blind, or the mobility impaired; to those with atypical mentality; or even to those with diseases such as cancer, AIDS, diabetes, or other chronic physical conditions. For the purposes of this chapter, I am using the term disability to refer to the way that bodies and minds can be rendered incapacitated by ill-fitting environments and also to the issue of impairment, or physical/mental pain and suffering.

Likewise, queer is a contested term, ranging from signifying confusion to alternative sexualities or identities to that which is peculiar or odd. As Roderick McGillis notes in own discussion of queerness and George MacDonald, the queer "suggests variously eccentricity, unpleasantness, illness, instability, and 'otherness.' (McGillis 38) That which is queer is that which is mysterious. We might say that queer connotes a border condition, neither one thing nor the other, neither one place nor the other (McGillis 88). McGillis notes that in MacDonald's own words, the author dislikes

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"finished, well-polished, sharp- edged *systems*" (Greville MacDonald 155). His work

questions, and challenges, social and psychological norms, without providing the reader

with answers to complex questions concerning our social and psychological condition.

He "queers" what he writes about, just as he "queers" the genres he chooses to write in"

(McGillis 90).

George MacDonald and the Fairy Tale

Regarded during his lifetime as an unconventional though popular writer and

spiritual maverick, George MacDonald (1824-1905) continues to fascinate contemporary

readers. Born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland in 1824 to a strict Calvinist family,

MacDonald lived his life in service to ministry, education, writing, and his family. His

writing spanned genres as diverse as sermons, essays, personal correspondence, and

novels, but it is his fantasy novels and his fairy tales, chiefly *The Princess and the

Goblin*, "The Light Princess," and *Phantastes*, that persist in anthologies and edited

collections of his work. Though MacDonald is by no means a household name, his

writing profoundly influenced luminary authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Madeline

L'Engle, and C.S. Lewis. Lewis in particular wrote extensively about MacDonald, and

his portraits "undoubtedly had the greatest influence in shaping MacDonald's image as a

holy, wise, and somewhat dull sage" (Gabelman 1).

Yet Lewis's somber assessment is only a part of the picture. In his book *George

MacDonald: Divine Carelessness and Fairytale Levity*, Daniel Gabelman follows

Victorian literary critic G.K. Chesterton in meditation on MacDonald's authorial

playfulness and levity, a characteristic that he finds particularly pronounced in MacDonald's fairy tales. While Gabelman's project uses the fairy-tale genre in order to launch a recuperation of MacDonald's playful Christianity, I am interested not in religious allegory but rather the way MacDonald uses the framework of the fairy tale to explore the workings of the body. Fairy tale bodies are, after all, bodies in flux, constantly doing things that they should not—beasts turn into men, mermaids' tails split and become legs, and birds become boys—and this is certainly true of MacDonald's tales.

MacDonald's fascination with the fairy-tale genre sparked long before he began penning his own. As David Robb points out, MacDonald was captivated by the fairy-tale tradition as a child (Robb 7). His "sense of fantasy and fairy tale" can be traced to his childhood in Huntly, and "the oral folk-material he encountered there and then has to be regarded as his literary starting-point" (Robb 7). This interest in fairy tales and Scottish oral tradition was not merely a fixture of his childhood but a crucial influence on his own literary works. According to Robb, "Scottish fairy tales were not simply a juvenile starting-point for his literary and creative journey, but a conscious companion throughout its long route," as were the literary figures Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg, who drew heavily upon Scottish folklore in their writing (Robb 7-8).

Unsurprisingly, the fairy tales that MacDonald ultimately wrote bear the influences of the tales he encountered in childhood but also explore the factors that shaped his own life. While scholars, including Gabelman, frequently examine the unconventional Christian aspects of MacDonald's fairy tales, little attention has been paid

to the disabled bodies that populate these stories. The experiences of disability, pain, and illness were as immediate to George MacDonald as his spiritual life—he lived a life constantly impacted by the frailties of his body. From an early age, illness was a material reality: "Never very healthy, MacDonald was the weakest of four boys who survived childhood ... and in letters from his early childhood he referred to physical illness and weakness" (Gabelman 91).

While the biographical details of MacDonald's life offer further weight to the portrayals of illness and bodily/ mental difference that appear in his fiction, the unconventional bodies are commanding independently of the author's own experiences. His oeuvre is populated with bodies that do not quite fit—bodies that cannot bear lightness or darkness, bodies impervious to gravity, bodies that age years in a day. Nowhere is MacDonald's penchant for creating odd bodies more prominent than in his fairy tales.

Fairy Tales and the Body

Though fairy tales[44] are stories with a long history, the academic study of fairy-tale studies is comparatively new: fairy-tale studies emerged as a distinct discipline in last decades of the twentieth century. In its genesis, the discipline was firmly entrenched in gender and sexuality studies. Scholars point to Alison Lurie's articles "Fairy Tale Liberation" (1970) and "Witches and Fairies" (1971) and Marcia R Lieberman's response "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale" (1972)

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[44] For a thorough definition of the fairy tale and the term's history, see the "fairy tale" entry in the key terms portion of my introduction.

as the catalysts of modern fairy-tale studies[45]. Through the nineties and first decade of the two-thousands, scholars continued to focus on the feminist affordances (or the lack thereof) in the fairy tale, examining classic texts, interrogating feminist retellings, and reviving texts that were not readily anthologized or canonized. In more recent years, fairy-tale scholars have embraced queer and post-colonial theory in their analyses[46], creating an increasingly intersectional field.

Fairy tales, like disability, are an aspect of culture that can be easily overlooked. Although they are often dismissed as the province of children or associated—dismissively—with women and girlhood, fairy tales have been harnessed for a wide array of ideological purposes and creative expressions. Fairy tales are an aspect of modern life so frequently cited and so omnipresent that they can easily elude scrutiny and simply fade into the background noise of popular culture. Their combination of prevalence and deflection of interrogation provides a compelling incentive to make these stories the subject of academic study.

Fairy tales themselves can function in a variety of ways. They can be didactic or instructive, subversive, entertaining, reflective, imaginative, or a combination of these impulses. They can reflect the bodies that we *should* have, the bodies that we should aspire to, or they can frighten us with bodies that are abject, grotesque, or otherwise

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[45] For a nuanced discussion of Lurie, Lieberman, and their legacy, see Donald Haase's "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches.*
[46] Some of the authors and works at forefront of this broadening of the field include Cristina Bacchilega (*Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder*), Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill (*Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*), and Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Maria Tatar (*The Annotated African American Folktales*).

undesirable. George MacDonald's fairy tales, however, side-step the didactic or even the

allegorical. They are not cautionary tales, nor are they instructive manuals detailing the

proper behavior of children. Instead, they construct characters who make mistakes or are

deeply flawed, characters who evolve over the course of a story but remain imperfect.

They frequently occupy non-normative bodies/ minds, and while physical typicality

might be restored by the end of a tale, disability and bodily difference is never fully

excised from the text. This is particularly true of his fairy tale "The History of Photogen

and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen[47],[48] (1879).

　　While the influences and intertexts that inform "Photogen and Nycteris" are

many, MacDonald's tale is particularly indebted to the popular fairy tale Beauty and the

Beast[49] (ATU 425C[50]), and putting these two fairy tales in dialog with one another is

especially illuminating with regards to the construction and reception of disability. While

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[47] "Märchen" is the German term for fairy tales, as well as a term favored by folklorists, and it is often associated with the fairy tales of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, a connection that MacDonald emphasizes with this title.

[48] In this dissertation chapter, I am working from an edition of the fairy tale based on the version published in *The Gifts of the Christ Child, and Other Tales* (1882) by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington in 1882. The fairy tale is also sometimes published under the name "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" or "The Romance of Photogen and Nycteris." The tale first appeared in serial form in *The Graphic* between December of 1879 and January of 1880.

[49] When I refer to Beauty and the Beast without quotations, I am denoting the body of work that falls into ATU 425C rather than any specific version. When the title of the tale is in quotations or italicized, I am referring to a specific text.

[50] ATU refers to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale type index, a system of classification used to identify reoccurring plot patterns in traditional folk tales. ATU 425 is the number associated with the body of tales broadly concerned with missing or monstrous husbands. ATU 425A designates those tales that feature a beast-bridegroom ("The Animal as Bridegroom"). ATU 425B designates the tales with patterns similar to "Cupid and Psyche" ("Son of the Witch"). Finally, ATU 425C encompasses the tales that resemble Beaumont's literary "Beauty and the Beast."

"Photogen and Nycteris" is not a straightforward retelling of Beauty and the Beast, MacDonald's tale reprises and redeploys many of the themes, motifs, and relationships modeled in the traditional fairy tale. I will return to these similarities later in this chapter, but first I turn to the affordances of a disability studies approach to examining Beauty and the Beast.

"Beauty and the Beast" and Disability

Why examine disability in Beauty and the Beast tales? This choice is perhaps somewhat counterintuitive—Beauty and the Beast is not the most likely candidate to become the touchstone for a discussion of disability and fairy tales. Many other tales have more obvious connections to disability. Snow White and the Seven Dwarves explicitly invokes dwarfism in the title of its most famous variant, many versions of Cinderella include the blinding of the heroine's step-sisters, and Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" details muteness and chronic pain.

Beauty and the Beast, however, is inextricably connected with issues of disability, disfigurement, and social alienation. The narrative is deeply concerned with societal expectations regarding beauty, ugliness, and ability. Due to his unsettling appearance and non-normative body, the Beast is excluded from everyday life. The unfolding narrative models the reintegration of a non-normative hero into society and challenges the objectivity of beauty and ugliness as stable categories. This fairy tale is also particularly useful for exploring complex embodiment and the social model of disability as opposed

to the medical model due to the ambiguity and mutability of Beast's body as well as the glorification of physical beauty through the characterization of Beauty.

At its core, Beauty and the Beast is a story about mismatches and mirroring. A reader can identify Beauty and the Beast because the protagonists appear to be fundamentally mismatched but eventually find a state of equilibrium. This process requires the negotiation of disability and bodily/ mental difference. The Beast is more than abnormal—he is actively excluded from society, whether as a result of his extreme ugliness or his unruly body. Despite the disability that causes the Beast's exclusion, Beauty learns to appreciate and accommodate her counterpart, which often results in a cure and his reincorporation into society.

While a conclusion with a cure is mandatory in traditional versions of the story, many literary retellings have actively resisted this narrative inertia by omitting the Beast's final transformation and highlighting the desirability of a non-normative body. Angela Carter pioneered this trend in her short story "The Tiger's Bride" (1979), and other authors including Robin McKinley and Emma Donoghue have reprised her non-traditional ending in their own revisions. However, nineteenth-century versions of the story also raise questions regarding cure-based transformations, even as they are perpetuated in the texts.

This fairy-tale type ATU 425 has a rich history that extends more than two thousand years into the past and exists in more than fifteen hundred known oral and literary versions, but the normative version of Beauty and the Beast is Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont's short story of the same name published in 1756 (Tatar 32-33).

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In this version, Beauty's father takes a rose from the Beast's garden, and the Beast demands either his life or the life of one of his daughters as payment. Beauty insists that she must be the one sacrificed, and she goes willingly to his castle, expecting to die. Instead, she lives a pampered and luxurious life there and becomes fond of the beast. After a brief visit home to visit her sick father, she returns to the Beast to find him on the brink of death. She declares her love for him, and he transforms into a handsome prince. The couple marries and lives happily ever after.

In Beaumont's version, the Beast is initially a disembodied presence rather than a physical entity. When Beauty's father first arrives at his castle, the Beast watches him from afar and attempts to act as a gracious host—he ensures that his horse is tended and that he has food, shelter, and new clothing after his ordeal in the storm. Despite refraining from directly interacting with Beauty's father, the Beast appears to be attempting to cultivate a positive relationship with him—a relationship that would not be possible should Beauty's father actually see his physical form or hear his unusual voice.

This abstention from direct communication highlights the extreme isolation that the Beast experiences in his castle. He is completely alone there—he has no family, friends, or regular visitors, nor do there appear to be any servants in the castle. In other versions, Beauty and the Beast are waited upon by invisible servants, but Beaumont dispenses with even this social connection. The social model of disability emphasizes the ways that perceived difference exclude individuals from society—the Beast exists in isolation because his cursed body is unacceptable, which becomes readily apparent when the Beast allows himself to be seen.

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When Beauty's father unwittingly violates fairy-tale interdiction by gathering "a branch with many flowers," the Beast appears (Beaumont 42). Beaumont does not offer a detailed description of the Beast's body, instead employing vague terms that leave his appearance to the reader's imagination. The Beast is so "dreadful" that Beauty's father nearly faints at the sight of him (42). In addition, his auditory effect is equally upsetting—he appears with a "loud noise," and his voice is "terrible" (42). The nature of these noises is never specified, just as the reader never learns exactly what the Beast looks like, but both Beauty's father and later Beauty herself are terrified by the noises that he makes. His means of communication is compromised just as surely as his physical disfigurement, redoubling the fear experienced by those who come in contact with him.

Despite these early failures at communication and interaction, it is conversation that serves as the centerpiece for the short story and conversation that eventually allows Beauty to fall in love with the Beast. He calls himself "ugly" (45) and "stupid" (46), but her treats her respectfully and listens when she speaks. Though she is still afraid of his physical and aural difference, she declares that she believes him to be good.

Beauty's growing affection for the Beast is juxtaposed to the sisters' traditionally desirable husbands: "Both sisters were very unhappy. The older one had married a remarkably handsome gentleman, but he was so enamored of his own looks that he spent all day in front of the mirror. The other one had married a man of great wit, but he used it to infuriate everybody, first and foremost his wife" (47). This admittedly heavy-handed comparison highlights the uselessness of physical regularity or intellect if such traits are not accompanied by kindness.

This discrepancy between physical Beauty and virtue is an unusual move in traditional fairy tales: outer beauty is generally a signifier of inner virtue, while physical ugliness often represents a lack of morality. Think, for example, of Cinderella and her "ugly" stepsisters, or of the wolf that stalks Little Red Riding Hood—these characters' virtue, or lack thereof, is externalized and superimposed onto their bodies. This can function as a kind of short hand for a character's interiority—fairy tale characters are notoriously flat, lacking developed personalities or interior depth. This direct correlation holds true for the character of Beauty, but the Beast initially upsets generic expectations simply by being a good character in an ugly body. This distance between physical body and inner goodness facilitates Beaumont's emphasis on "virtue" as the most desirable trait in a spouse. Although she ends her story with a "cure," restoring the Beast's handsome, normative body, it is notable that Beauty chooses to marry him before the curse breaks.

Even after the Beast is cured, disability lingers in the text. Beauty's jealous sisters are cursed, transformed into statues that must stand outside Beauty's gate where they must be "witness[es] to her happiness" (49). There they will remain, immobile but retaining their senses, until they repent of their wickedness (49). While this lacks the obvious connection to disability evident in the punishment of Cinderella's stepsisters, whose eyes are pecked out by doves, this impairment alters their bodily states as surely as a coma. This is also an example of trope of disability as punishment that often appears in fairy tales.

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The thematic and narrative patterns entrenched in Beauty and the Beast tales are not restricted to this story. Instead, they serve as a powerful precedent for and influence on tales about romantic love, from fairy tales to novels to new media. In many ways, Beauty and the Beauty models cultural expectations regarding romantic love, and, when viewed through the lens of disability studies, it provides a possible map for navigating bodily differences within the context of a relationship. In "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: a Day and Night Märchen," MacDonald redeploys and expands this map in his portrayal of a physically non-normative Beauty and Beast who save each other and in his insertion of a neuro-atypical villain who cannot be redeemed.

Photogen and Nycteris

Although George MacDonald's fairy tales are generally considered to be original literary creations, his stories are heavily influenced by traditional, familiar fairy tales that circulated in both oral and written forms. His short story "The Light Princess" has long been understood as a revision of Sleeping Beauty, and I contend that there are significant connections between his "Photogen and Nycteris" and Beauty and the Beast. In his original literary fairy tale "Photogen and Nycteris," MacDonald takes up the mismatching and mirroring principle at the heart of Beauty and the Beast and amplifies it through his depictions of his protagonists' temperaments and bodies.

The narrative revolves around two characters, a boy named Photogen and a girl called Nycteris. Watho, a witch and the antagonist of the tale, steals them from their mothers at birth and meticulously shapes their upbringings to ensure that they are avatars

of the day and the night respectively—Photogen is never exposed to darkness or the nighttime, while Nycteris is kept in a windowless room and shielded from any light beyond a single, dim lamp. Both children grow to thrive in their extreme environments, their bodies adapting to their peculiar circumstances, but they each eventually chafe at the edges of their carefully circumscribed worlds. Photogen ventures outside after dark, but physically and mentally collapses, while Nycteris believes she is dying when she exposes herself to sunlight. Only by relying on one another as day transmutes into night and back again are they able to escape Watho and, eventually, to integrate into society.

Beauty and the Beast is a particularly illuminating intertext for this story. Due to its widespread popularity in both French and English, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 short story is the version with which MacDonald would most likely have been familiar, although Villeneuve's literary novella, the Grimms' "The Singing, Soaring Lark" and "Hans My Hedgehog," and various oral variants were also in circulation at the time. Beaumont's story might not initially appear to share much in common with MacDonald's romance—there are no iconic roses, inept fathers, or curses that, when broken, transform beastliness into beauty in "Photogen and Nycteris." However, Beauty and the Beast is, in essence, a story about mismatches and mirroring—a reader can identify a Beauty and the Beast tale because the protagonists appear to be fundamentally incompatible but eventually find a state of equilibrium. This process requires the negotiation of disability and bodily or mental difference as well as the exclusion from society that results from the Beast's unruly body. Despite the disability that causes the Beast's exclusion, Beauty learns to appreciate and accommodate her

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counterpart, which often results in a cure and/ or his reincorporation into society. When framed in this way, a Beauty and the Beast lens can help shed light on the dynamics at play in "Photogen and Nycteris."

Just as the protagonists of "Beauty and the Beast" are initially perceived as opposites, MacDonald constructs a rigid binary between his primary characters, deploying both form and characterization to contrast Photogen and Nycteris. His short story is divided into chapters labeled both thematically and numerically. After the first chapter, entitled simply "Watho," which provides a basic introduction to the witch, the following six expository chapters detail the circumstances into which Photogen and Nycteris are born and the peculiar methodology of their upbringings. These six chapters alternate back and forth between the two protagonists, their contents and their titles mirror images of each other: chapters II ("Aurora") and III ("Vesper") describe the protagonists' mothers and how they occupied themselves in Watho's castle; chapters IV ("Photogen") and V ("Nycteris") detail their births and physical descriptions; and chapters VI ("How Photogen Grew") and VII ("How Nycteris Grew") describe the environments in which they are raised and how those environments amplify their innate characteristic and preferences.

Photogen, despite his gender, initially appears to be the "Beauty" of the pair. Raised in relentless sunshine, Photogen is a creature of vitality, capability, and confidence. He spends his days hunting on the lands beyond Watho's castle and perfecting skills such as archery and swordsmanship. He has usually keen eyesight and hearing, and his physical strength and endurance are exceptional. While these characters

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are often coded as masculine and thus may seem at odds with the gentle, feminized characteristics often associated with Beauty, Photogen is still the character marked as socially acceptable and desirable. He is active, bold, and commanding—characteristics generally associated with protagonists, and he is integrated into the community, limited though it may be, in the castle.

His extreme confidence and boldness, however, are surprisingly fragile, as he learns when he decides to stay awake and remain outside after dusk for the first time in order, appropriately enough, to hunt down a beast. As the sun begins to set, his mind and body begin to fail him and the binary between characters begins to break down:

> a fear inexplicable laid hold of the youth; and as he had never felt anything of the kind before, the very fear itself terrified him. As the sun sank, it rose like the shadow of the world and grew deeper and darker. He could not even think what it might be, so utterly did it enfeeble him[...]his horror seemed to blossom into very madness. Like the closing lids of an eye—for there was no twilight, and this night no moon—the terror and the darkness rushed together, and he knew them for one. He was no longer the man he had known[…]he could scarcely stand—certainly not stand straight, for not one of his joints could he make stiff or keep from trembling. (MacDonald 287)

In this passage, Photogen is both queered and disabled—his sensibilities are what we might associate with the unmanly; he is "no longer the man he had known" as he quails

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before the enigma of a beast in the dark (287). He is "enfeebled," teetering on the edge of

madness, and his terror becomes a disabling physical experience (287). Convinced that

the beast he sought is now stalking him, and after hearing "a cry in the wood, half a

screech, half a growl," he tries to flee back to Watho's castle but faints on the edge of the

garden (288). This alignment with the feminine and the disabled destabilizes the reader's

expectations around heroism and facilitates the acceptance of Nycteris as his equal

counterpart. Indeed, instead of rescuing Nycteris from the darkness, he must first allow

her to teach him to live in the darkness.

By contrast, Nycteris, who lives a life of seclusion and darkness, can be

understood as a Beast-like figure. Other than Watho, Nycteris interacts only with Falca, a

household servant; she never sees another person, echoing the extreme isolation the Beast

experiences in the castle. Furthermore, she is never permitted to leave her room, leaving

her with very little information about the outside world. Like the Beast, she is solitary

and restrained by place, bound through the capriciousness of a witch rather than a fairy.

Watho teaches her music "and scarcely else," intending that she remain illiterate, but

Nycteris convinces Falca to teach her letters and continues to school herself from the

books she finds around her room (276). Introspective and curious, Nycteris longs for the

outside world, whose shape remains indefinite, and consoles herself with books and the

light of her single lamp.

When Nycteris finally escapes her room and finds her way outside, she, too,

experiences the heightened senses that characterize Photogen, albeit in a completely

different environment. Her night vision is almost supernaturally keen, and she can sense

and outmaneuver the wild animals that Photogen defeats in the hunt. She encounters Photogen, who collapsed with terror after the sun set and has lost use of his eyes, and watches over him, calming him by narrating everything she sees unfolding in the night around them.

This portrayal of Nycteris' super-heightened night vision might initially seem to play into stereotypes that haunt many depictions of disability, including the myths of compensatory senses and the "supercrip." Much of the vernacular discourse around disability endorses the concept of sensory compensation—for example, the belief that people with impaired vision develop extremely heightened aural capabilities. The related concept of the "supercrip," or a narrative protagonist who overcomes their disability through tenacity or extreme will power, might also seem to be at work here. However, Nycteris is not overcoming her disability at this point in the text. Her vision remains as it ever was—particularly suited to the environment which has shaped her.

Interestingly, in this first encounter between the protagonists, Nycteris misgenders Photogen, assuming that he is a girl like her. Photogen is extremely insulted by her assumption, believing that the feminine categorization is her commentary on his frightened demeanor. He says angrily, "'No, I am not a girl … although,' he added, changing his tone, and casting himself on the ground at her feet, 'I have given you too good reason to call me one'" (293) Nycteris reframes the labels and their relationships to one another when she replies, "Oh, I see! ... No, of course!—you can't be a girl: girls are not afraid—without reason. I understand now: it is because you are not a girl that you are so frightened" (293). This innocent re-appropriation of girlhood as confident and

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competent compared to the hysterical male continues to queer the prescribed roles of hero and heroine, male and female, and this destabilization escalates as the sun rises and their positions are reversed.

When the sun rises, Nycteris is utterly incapacitated. Not only do her eyes cease to function, but she experiences extreme physical and emotional pain. "It must be death," she thinks to herself, "for all her strength was going out of her, while all around her was growing so light she could not bear it! She must be blind soon! Would she be blind or dead first? For the sun was rushing up behind her" (295). For Nycteris, the sunrise serves as a conflation of blindness and death because her embodied experience of too much light is so utterly disorienting—she cannot see, hear, walk, or think clearly. She does not know how to survive this hostile environment, just as Photogen was certain he could not survive the darkness of nighttime, and "in despair and feebleness and agony, she [creeps] back, feeling her way with doubt and difficulty and enforced persistence to her cell," where she collapses (296).

These reversals persist throughout the text until Photogen and Nycteris realize that it is only through communication, cooperation, and mutual respect that they can learn to thrive in environments hostile to their bodies and to manage the accompanying pain. In Beauty and the Beast tales, it is generally Beauty who must learn to have compassion for the Beast, and, fittingly, it is Photogen who struggles to learn this lesson. At one point, he abandons Nycteris in the sun, failing to recognize her suffering, but it is through his own experiences of physical discomfort that he eventually learns to feel compassion and respect for her, illustrating the potential productivity of pain.

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The effect of this cyclical shift in power, ability, and confidence is to provoke questions and to elide certainties. As U.C. Knoepflmacher observes, MacDonald enlists "paradox, play, and nonsense in a relentless process of destabilizing priorities he wants his readers to question and rethink. The possibilities offered by an elusive yet meaningful alternative order thus replace the dubious certitudes of everyday life" (Knoepflmacher vii). Destabilization and disruption of certainties and hierarchies are, of course, major projects of both disability studies and queer theory. Disability studies unsettles that which is assumed to be certain and attempts "to pluralize the ways we understand bodily instability" (Kafer 7). "Photogen and Nycteris," so occupied with bodies and the way they move through fairy tale space, challenges standard perceptions about physicality and gendered identity, and suggests that different kinds of ability can complement each other. While both Photogen and Nycteris are ultimately "cured"—a common trope in disability narratives—the bulk of the story illustrates the productivity of adaptation and compassion rather than championing normativity, offering a space of resistance in which to discuss the potential desirability of different kinds of bodies and identities.

Desiring to Know: Watho the Witch

In the figure of Watho, issues of disability, madness, gender, and knowledge production collide. As the antagonist of "The Day Boy and the Night Girl," the witch is reviled—and yet she is the pivot upon which the tale begins to turn. We begin with Watho, and so we begin with wanting and knowledge, wondering with her how knowledge is produced and how to calibrate its worth.

Although the fairy tale is called "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen," the story opens not with a description of the titular characters but with Watho. Chapter 1, entitled simply "Watho," dispenses with a traditional fairy tale frame. Instead of starting with the words "once upon a time" or "a long time ago," as generic conventions prescribe, the first sentence reads "There was once a witch who desired to know everything" (MacDonald 273). Fairy tales most frequently open with a focus upon either the protagonist or the protagonist's parents, a move that aligns the reader's attention and sympathy with the protagonist and their family. This privileging of the witch, the antagonist, establishes Watho's centrality in the fairy tale, and primes her as a sympathetic figure as the narrative begins.

This first chapter is quite short. In its entirety, it reads:

THERE was once a witch who desired to know everything. But the wiser a witch is, the harder she knocks her head against the wall when she comes to it. Her name was Watho, and she had a wolf in her mind. She cared for nothing in itself -- only for knowing it. She was not naturally cruel, but the wolf had made her cruel. She was tall and graceful, with a white skin, red hair, and black eyes, which had a red fire in them. She was straight and strong, but now and then would fall bent together, shudder, and sit for a moment with her head turned over her shoulder, as if the wolf had got out of her mind onto her back. (MacDonald 273)

In this brief chapter, familiar fairy-tale tropes are mobilized and turned. Foremost is the quality of the "lack"—the disruption or deficiency that sets fairy-tale plots into motion. According to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, this lack is either the result of an act of villainy upon the hero's family or is simply something desired by the hero or his family. Instead of a missing object or the desire to find a spouse, the lack that animates "Photogen and Nycteris," and Watho in particular, is knowledge. While the quest for knowledge is not alien to the fairy tale—"The Story of a Boy Who Went Forth to Learn Fear" (ATU 326) details the adventures of a boy who hopes to learn how to shiver, for instead—this search is typically focalized through a particular piece of knowledge, experience, or lore. Watho's generalized wish for knowledge is presented as directionless, unfocused, and unlimited, hinting at the destruction it eventually generates. Her desires are boundless, a lack that can never be liquidated.

Like many literary witches, Watho is defined by her beauty and her cruelty. Significantly, Watho is positioned as a literary descendant of Lilith, embodying a dangerously potent femininity unfettered by familial ties or conventional morality. Throughout the nineteenth century, Lilith inspired numerous painter and writers; MacDonald would certainly have encountered her in various forms before penning "Photogen and Nycteris." Robert Browning rehabilitated her in his poem "Adam, Lilith, and Eve" (1883), imagining her love for Adam to be truer than Eve's own, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted her as a femme fatal in *Body's Beauty*, also known as *Lady Lilith,* (1864-73) and celebrated her beauty in his sonnet of the same name, paired with the painting (1868). In addition to sharing the long, vibrant hair and extreme pallor

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associated with Lilith in folklore and retellings, Watho echoes and amplifies the demon-woman's antipathy towards children through the bizarre experiments she performs on Photogen and Nycteris, as well as the extreme malice that she eventually demonstrates towards both children. MacDonald explores the figure of Lilith in greater depth in his 1895 fantasy novel *Lilith*, in which the titular character does eventually achieve a hard-won salvation, but redemption eludes Watho in her own tale.

Lilith-like disruptive femininity, however, cannot wholly account for Watho's characterization. Nycteris, Watho's surrogate daughter, also wishes to expand her knowledge base and experience more of the world, desires upon which she acts over the course of the narrative. She is characterized as wiser and more sensible than Photogen, and she frequently assumes a leadership position in their interactions. Her knowledge, however, is associated with a kind of spiritual mysticism directed by her love for her lamp and for light. Her first disobedient act against Watho is venturing from her room when her lamp "goes out"; she decides to follow it and eventually makes her way outside, where she encounters the moon for the first time. The moon replaces the lamp as her object of focus—that which longs to understand—giving her quest for knowledge direction and cohesion. From the moon, she also gathers spiritual and physical strength, confirming that the fairy-tale's ethos does not condemn the feminine pursuit of knowledge or betterment.

Indeed, MacDonald's fairy tales frequently feature wise female characters. Grandmother of "The Golden Key" acts as a helper, even as a fairy godmother, to the young female protagonist, Tangle, and Tangle herself gains knowledge of the world

around her over the course of the fairy tale. The young Irene is guided by her benevolent namesake in *The Princess and the Goblin*, and Irene proves to be a more apt spiritual pupil to the wise woman than her male counterpart, Curdie. Even the mild queen of "The Light Princess" gently pacifies her irritable, irrational husband and demonstrates patience and fortitude when coping with his impossible complaints.

The commonality between MacDonald's female characters who possess or gain knowledge in a way that the text sanctions lies in the source and direction of their knowledge. All of these women share a sense of awe and wonder in nature, and it is natural phenomena that they wish to experience and know more fully. Grandmother is a guardian of the forest, and she specializes in the care of the air-fish that populate it. Tangle herself joins a quest to pursue a rainbow to its source. And Nycteris is, of course, enraptured by the moon and believes it to be the font of all goodness in the world. Their interests, furthermore, are in nature as it already is—they neither articulate nor demonstrate a desire to influence or change the objects of their fascination, merely to know them as they exist in the world. Their knowledge is passive and "natural" and thus naturalized within the MacDonald's diagectic worlds. But what is the consequence of knowledge acquisition that is beyond the realm of the natural? What happens when a character wishes to employ a more active methodology in her quest to understand how the world functions?

While gender is certainly an important factor in the construction of Watho's character as defective, gender in of itself is not that which narratively damns her. Instead, her compromised characterization is the result of two intertwining, dominant traits. First,

she is curious, even consumed by her pursuit of knowledge, and she is not content to passively watch the world around her, preferring instead to actively conduct inquiries. She "desires to know everything," and it is this impulse that drives her to seek out the mothers of Photogen and Nycteris and to perform the experiments that shape the protagonists (MacDonald 273). However, this intelligence is complicated by the second trait, the "wolf in her mind" (MacDonald 273). While this metaphorical language initially suggests the presence of a witch's familiar, a common trope in supernatural narratives, this wolf more clearly denotes that part of Watho that is most disruptive, most socially untenable—her madness. Although she is physically able, "straight and strong," her madness overrides not only her mind but her body—she "now and then would fall bent together, shudder, and sit for a moment with her head turned over her shoulder, as if the wolf had got out of her mind onto her back," a description reminiscent of stereotypical fits that are frequently associated with various kinds of physical and mental disabilities (MacDonald 273). Eventually, Watho literally becomes the wolf—physically transforming into a lupine shape, a potent metaphor for the consuming nature of her madness. Only when she assumes the shape of the wolf, succumbing fully to her madness, is she killed. It is imperative, however, to understand Watho's madness not merely as metaphor but also as an embodied experience; as Lennard Davis rightfully observes, "before we can leap to the metaphor, we need to know the object. Before we can interpret the semiotics of disability, we need to understand the subjectivity of being disabled" (Davis, "Seeing" xi). Watho's experience of madness is both embodied and mental, drawing attention to the potential multiplicity of its manifestations.

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Madness: Impairment and Metaphor

Madness occupies a paradoxical position in the contemporary cultural imagination. While those who experience neuroatypicality often experience discrimination, prejudice, and even abuse or institutionalization, madness as a concept has been glamorized and mobilized as a metaphor for rebellion, particularly feminine rebellion. The iconic example of this reading of madness is, of course, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of Bertha Mason in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which Bertha's madness becomes a metaphor for Jane Eyre's—and Charlotte Bronte's—desire to rebel against the narrow strictures of patriarchal authority. While Gilbert and Gubar's intersectional engagement with both gender and disability is admirable, the reduction of madness to pure metaphor limits the usefulness of their critique from a disability perspective, despite the popularity of the argument. As Donaldson notes, "the figure of Bertha Mason as a rebellious woman subverting the patriarchal order by burning down her husband's estate has a certain irresistible appeal" (Donaldson 12). Likewise, a reading of Watho as a subversive figure has a similar appeal. Though nothing of her life before the opening of the narrative is known, Watho possesses her own estate—a castle and extensive grounds—that she holds without recourse to marriage. Instead of acquiescing to a husband's wishes and bearing children, she devotes herself to her own decidedly anti-patriarchal interests, most notably stealing the children of the aristocracy and raising them without interference, literally interrupting patriarchal lineage and societal stability.

Her rejection of both marriage and traditional motherhood can be understood as the kind of transgressive womanhood that Bertha Mason is frequently thought to represent.

However, the metaphor of madness as (female) rebellion, despite its appeal, is problematic. When madness is reduced to metaphor, the embodied experience of mental illness is erased; "this metaphor indirectly diminishes the lived experience of many peopled disabled by mental illness, just as the metaphoric use of terms like *lame, blind*, and *deaf* can misrepresent … the experience of living with those physical conditions" (Donaldson 15). Despite her position of privilege in her world, Watho experiences impairment and pain as a result of her madness. She suffers "strange attacks" with increasing frequency which escalate into "an illness which kept her to her bed" and away from the children and her cultivation of them (MacDonald 288). At the height of her illness, she learns that Photogen and Nycteris have escaped, she begins "to dance, whirling around and around faster and faster, growing angrier and angrier, until she was foaming at the mouth with fury" (MacDonald 306). Mental illness, for Watho, is felt acutely and physically, and it impacts her ability to function.

While mapping a formal diagnosis onto a fictional character is not a productive end goal in of itself, identifying disability in an attempt to reignite discourse around a text can be beneficial. As Rodas notes in her discussion of Jane Eyre and autism, "while diagnosis may not always be advantageous, coming to an understanding of autistic personality and a recognition of autistic characteristics, both within ourselves and in the world around us, can contribute to a more complex sense of identity and an enriches political consciousness" (Rodas 61). When the suggestion of a particular disability label

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"is intended not as an end, not as an incarceration of the character within the rigid framework of diagnosis, not as a gesture that cuts off meaning and interpretive possibility, but instead as a device to reopen discussion of the novel's politics and to challenge what seem to be some of our larger presuppositions regarding the political and social meaning of the individual," then it can be a productive move (Rodas 61-62). To this end, it is possible to suggest that some aspects of Watho's physical impairments, particularly her sporadic but debilitating tendency to "fall bent together" and "shudder," with her head moving in involuntary motions, reflect a late nineteenth-century understanding of epilepsy, though this is by no means the only available interpretation (MacDonald 273). The framework of epilepsy is useful because it provides context for how Watho's particular symptoms could have been regarded at the time of the tale's publication and for a more nuanced understanding of her alienation from wider society beyond her castle.

In an article in *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art* published in 1882, just three years after the first printing of "Photogen and Nycteris," a contributor emphasized his belief in the violence and instability of the epileptic patient, calling him

one of the most dangerous class of patients, some of the most atrocious crimes known for having been committed in the epileptic state. A father has been known to murder a whole household, or kill his wife, of burn his house … The violence of these patients exceeds the violence exhibited in any other kind of insanity; their

fury is blind; and without any provocation, they will rush at the nearest bystander

and tear, bite, or attack him with any implement or weapon they can seize.

(Chambers)

This description paints the epileptic as animalistic and extraordinarily violent, ready to

use his body or improvised objects as weapons to attack without prompting or reason.

Older texts on the subject construct epilepsy as the result of malevolent magic.

Dr. John Andree, author of *Cases of the Epilepsy, Hysteric Fits and St. Vitus' Dance*

(1746), rejects superstition, but he notes that many of his contemporaries view epileptic

fits as "so inscrutable as to attribute them to incantation" (Andree). Despite efforts to

demystify and to medicalize epilepsy, physicians persisted in descriptions of suffers of

the disease as spiritually damaged and physically abject, with a "livid appearance of the

lips" or a frail, failing body that is still somehow "plump and full of flesh" (Andree).

Such descriptions, "joined as they are to the onset's perceived relationship to nightmares

(incubi) and the lunar cycle, combine to make physicians' discourse as eerie and

potentially demonic as the superstitions it intended to repudiate" (Schillace 275). While a

disability oriented reading of the text does not rest upon the legibility of Watho as

epileptic—Watho remains suspect simply through her actions and her moniker of

"witch"—eighteenth- and nineteenth-century links between magic, spiritual bankruptcy,

and epilepsy only heighten her otherness and malevolence. Additionally, acknowledging

a potential epileptic subtext solidifies a perception of disability as concrete, as a lived

experience, overriding a purely metaphorical view of disability.

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While embodied disability is often erased as its depiction is reduced to metaphor, metaphor is still inextricably bound to her madness through the "wolf" in her mind. Perhaps in Watho's case, metaphor can enhance and augment embodiment. If we take Watho's embodied experience of madness as a given, the metaphor of the wolf can be understood as a means of highlighting her physical and mental experience, particularly the ways in which she is othered and excised from society.

The metaphor of the wolf is surprisingly fitting for Watho. Wolves were all but exterminated in Britain centuries before MacDonald wrote "The Day Boy and the Night Girl," lending them an almost mythical status when they appeared in literature (Strutt 12). The choice to align Watho with a symbolic wolf both exoticizes and others her. Although the fairy tale is set in a fantastical space, "an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures…filled with the marvelous," as is typical for the genre, the wolf remains a strange and threatening figure for MacDonald's audience (Thompson 8). Wolves were monsters from another place and time, displacing Watho from a setting that reads as a mythologized Britain and entextualizing her as a figure that belongs elsewhere and elsewhen.

The use of the wolf motif also can be understood as a challenge to Watho's ontological worth, if we read it as a complication, even contestation of her humanity. While both Photogen and Nycteris are exceptional, potentially "supercrip," with their highly adapted bodies and extreme sensitivities, they push the boundaries of the human without truly threatening that demarcation. Watho does not actively practice magic—I will return to this later—but her connection to wolfishness and her literal transformation

move her beyond the bounds of the human into a form that is superlatively monstrous. Her alliance with the animals that were systematically hunted and eradicated from Britain provides a narrative justification for her death, though this is complicated by the reemergence of her human form after she is pierced by Photogen's arrow.

The history of lupine eradication, as well as the fear and horror wolves inspired in the cultural imagination, heighten the connection between Watho's wolf and her madness. If madness is that which is pushed to the margins, that which is rejected as not-quite-human, British wolves and British madness follow parallel paths; in much of Europe after the middle ages, the mad were expelled from city centers, eventually forced into ships—literally forced off national land and set adrift—and, later, isolated in asylums and institutions (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 7-11). Wolves and madness are explicitly unwelcome in Britain at the time of MacDonald's writing—and it is no surprise that he replicates this expulsion in the fantastical realm in which his characters move.

Finally, it is worth noting that Watho is associated not only with wolves but werewolves, though that term is never explicitly used in the text. A werewolf, after all, is simply "a human being who changes into a wolf" (de Coudray 1). Accounts of creatures that toe the line between human and wolf have circulated throughout Europe since, and perhaps before, classical antiquity, though the characteristics and catalysts of the condition, often referred to as lycanthropy, are subject to debate.[51] Lycanthropy results from contamination, a contamination due to a bite from another werewolf or from an

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[51] In the fourth chapter of the Biblical Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar experiences madness that mimics an animal, even wolfish, nature.

already tainted family line, and this line of thinking opens this monstrous identity to discourses of health and disability:[52]

> Physicians ... have considered lycanthropy to be a disease of the mind and body since ancient times. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the height of the witch-hunts (when a number of alleged werewolves were sentenced to death), the focus of debate concerning the phenomenon shifted from a medical perspective to ecclesiastical questions about whether the Devil could empower and actual transformation or merely the illusion of transformation. Throughout this period a number of medical scholars maintained that the condition was a form of madness or melancholy, but it was not until the late seventeenth century that this view regained widespread credence. (de Coudray 1)

As conceptions of disability shifted and solidified over the nineteenth century, so did attitudes towards werewolves, particularly towards a "'rational' explanations of the phenomenon" (de Coudray 2). As ever, "texts about werewolves can be read as indices of the way in which 'reality' has been assessed, described and constructed at different moments in history," making them useful test cases for thinking about how the (un)ruly body is valued and feared (de Coudray 2). Some rationales offered for the belief in lycanthropy in the nineteenth century included:

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[52] In the medieval lay "Bisclavret" by Marie de France, lycanthropy is both treated as a disability and is the (indirect) means by which deformity is inflicted and perpetuated through generations.

a superstition originating in such sources as the crimes of sociopaths, an atavistic craving for blood or human flesh, or new mythological patterns brought about by mistaken word associations (the "disease of language studied by comparative mythologists.") (de Coudray 2)

During the nineteenth century, werewolves were less likely to be viewed as literal threats to health or to an orderly society but rather as a symbol for that which is reviled or abject, that which is to be rejected in order to maintain health and sanity. This, in turn, reinforces the label already explicitly attributed to Watho: that of the witch.

Watho: Witch or (Mad) Scientist?

In fairy tales, powerful, morally ambiguous women tend to be witches. Even if the term is not explicitly used, these women are frequently coded as such. For example, Snow White's evil stepmother, a queen, plies a variety of black magics again her stepdaughter, transforming herself into an ugly old hag and administering death through a variety of traditionally feminine objects (a corset, a comb, and a apple, in the Grimms' version of the tale.) She is not referred to as a witch, though her understanding of witchcraft is mentioned once, but the impression remains. This conflation of power and malice is strongly gendered. Rarely do we encounter a male witch. While male sorcerers or wizards do appear in fairy tales, their moral orientation is not pre-determined—they

help as often as they hinder, and they are often permitted a greater degree of moral

ambiguity than their female counterparts.

The witch occupies a central role in many of the most famous fairy tales[53], and

though many counterexamples exist, particularly the figure of the fairy godmother, the

combination of femininity and magic is generally suspect within the confines of the

genre. Even instances of benign female witchery tend to work against the stereotype—for

example, Elizabeth Gaskell's unwaveringly moral heroine in her short story "Lois the

Witch" (1859) is assumed to be practicing black magic against her kinsmen and

neighbors, and her community hangs her in an effort to expunge her witchcraft. Although

Lois is innocent, the plot of the story rests on the assumptions regarding the morality of

magical women.

Watho is explicitly labeled as a witch in the first sentence of the story, and thus

she is coded as the tale's antagonist, an amoral force who will actively work to create

discord in MacDonald's fairy tale world. Even her initial association with knowledge is

fitting—witches are associated with unofficial, "female" systems of knowledge,

particularly those related to childbirth, healing, and, more fancifully, aggressive magic

such as hexes and curses. This kind of knowledge, explicitly coded as feminine and

associated with the embodied experience of the female form, permitted a realm of female

expertise, albeit one that was increasing viewed as suspect as scientific knowledge and

methodology began to gain consistency and becomes institutionalized over the eighteenth

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[53] For discussions of the witch in the fairy tale, see Kay Stone's *Someday Your Witch Will Come* and Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde.*

century. In her station as a witch, Watho is positioned to wield this kind of embodied, magical knowledge and is accordingly assumed to possess a questionable agenda.

Magic, however, is conspicuously absent from "Photogen and Nycteris," and from Watho in particular. Though her actions are certainly amoral, her actions, while eccentric, are within the realm of the possible. She invites Aurora and Vesper to her castle, but she does not cast spells upon them in order to effect changes upon their unborn children; instead, she alters their environments through purely mundane actions. Likewise, after Photogen and Nycteris are born, she performs no magic upon them. Careful lessons and curtailed environments are the tools that she uses to shape their bodies and personalities. Watho exerts control over the world around her through actions that ultimately have very little to do with magic at all.

Interestingly, another kind of character altogether, from a different genre of literature, provides a useful lens for Watho: the scientist, and perhaps the mad scientist, although the latter term did not solidify as a cultural trope until the twentieth century. This trope arguably began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), an early, even foundational work of literary science fiction[54]—in *Frankenstein*, the scientist moves from the realm of quackery to the capable, even the godlike, gaining the ability to shape and even (re)create life anew. Of course, the ability to challenge the laws that govern life and death ignites many questions concerning what kinds of knowledge are permissible and what should remain beyond the reach of mankind. The trope of the mad scientist occurs

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[54] Brian Aldiss argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or a Modern Prometheus* is a foundational text in the genre of science fiction in his book *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction.*

when a scientist is out of step with society, generally through a combination of unusual, even antisocial personality traits, and is nearly always characterized by radical ambition and an inability or unwillingness to comprehend the repercussions of their experiments. Though "Photogen and Nycteris" predates this term, she can be regarded as a proto-mad scientist, as her character is defined by anti-social experimentation and disregard for her subjects.

For the purposes of this chapter, I am defining scientific knowledge as a way of systematically comprehending the physical or material world through empirical observation and experimentation. Magic and magical knowledge, by contrast, is mysterious, manifesting through supernatural power or influence. While this division might appear to be rigid, even binary, it would be reductive to view these two ways of knowing as entirely at odds with one another. Much of this division is a matter of perspective—the products of science can appear magical to an observer without expertise in the subject, and magical seeming trappings might serve to recontextualize a mundane activity, a blurring that can occur both in reality and in literature. For example, the effects of medicine upon the body might appear magical to those unfamiliar with pharmacology or herbology, while the supernatural consequences of a séance can frequently be accounted for by mundane explanations like levers beneath the ceremonial table. To return once more to *Frankenstein* as a case study, Victor Frankenstein's pursuit of "natural philosophy" harnesses "mathematics, and the branches of study appertaining to that science, as being built upon secure foundations" and chemistry to produce results

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that are far beyond the bounds of actual scientific methodology—results that are essentially magical (Shelley 48).

Watho's ways of knowing are much closer to the scientific end of the knowledge continuum. Her inquiries and experiments are rooted in the physical world, and she manipulates them through decidedly non-magical tactics. Her unconventional, unnatural methods of mothering provide a particularly powerful example of her epistemological impulses.

An Unnatural Mother

Despite the anachronism of the "mad scientist" trope, many of the characteristics of the figure were already being mobilized and mingled during the nineteenth century. Scientists and doctors were appearing more frequently in literature, in both realism and more fantastic works. Eliot's Tertius Lydgate of *Middlemarch* (1871-2) in particular, and indeed the other physicians and surgeons from the novel, helped to establish a strong precedent for presence of the scientifically minded man in the literature of the period.

Just as the witch is typically gendered female, the nineteenth-century scientist is nearly always male. This gendered divide persists even in the work of female authors; Mary Shelley returns to the troubled male scientist[55] and his apprentice in her short story "The Mortal Immortal" (1833). Other notable examples occur in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Arthur Machen's

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[55] While the word "scientist" is not used in the text of "The Mortal Immortal" (Cornelius Agrippa is referred to as an "alchymist"), the processes of experimentation detailed in the story suggest a scientific approach.

The Great God Pan (1890). If the witch is the repository of forbidden, magical feminine knowledge, the scientist is the equivalent for male knowledge production, epistemology derived through empiricism, repetition, and experimentation.

In the figure of Watho, both figures—the witch and the scientist—collide, a hybridizing of character and genre. Watho straddles these two means of knowledge production by virtue of gender and methodology. She is a hybrid, even queer, figure, both generative and sterile, as she shapes life and its characteristics through means that defy expectations regarding the body and the mind. She is a woman, but she does not adhere to the realm or the strategies that gender intimates. Instead, she employs a "masculine" methodology of meaning making. Though she is referred to as a witch, her actions more closely reflect the ethos of the scientist. She does not perform magic; instead, she performs elaborate, ill-advised experiments upon the denizens of her castle. Significantly, like Victor Frankenstein before her, Watho is primarily interested in the question of unnatural progeny. While her experiments are not quite so explicitly macabre as Frankenstein's grave robbing and mingling of body parts, Watho carefully cultivates the bodies and psyches of two children, Photogen and Nycteris, even before their birth. She, too, is playing with a kind of scientific motherhood, altering life through unnatural or scientific means instead of giving birth to children in the expected fashion.

These experiments begin when Aurora and Vesper arrive; Watho strategically alters the spaces they occupy as well as the kinds of nourishment that they consume. Aurora, the future mother of Photogen, occupies bright rooms full of windows; "their airy spaces, the brilliant landscape and sky, the plentiful sunlight, the musical instruments,

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books, pictures, curiosities, with the company of Watho, who made herself charming, precluded all dullness" (MacDonald 274). Likewise, the food and drink she consumes— "venison and feathered game…milk and pale sunny sparkling wine"—is invigorating and bright (MacDonald 274). Nycteris' mother, Vesper, is housed in a series of chambers carved into the rocky base of the castle, a space constructed "after the tomb of an Egyptian king, and probably with the same design" (MacDonald 274). In this windowless space, Watho "played to her mournful tunes, and caused wailful violins to attend her, and told her sad tales, thus holding her ever in an atmosphere of sweet sorrow" and "fed her upon milk, and wine dark as a carbuncle, and pomegranates, and purple grapes, and birds that dwell in marshy places" (MacDonald 274-5). These careful ministrations eventually cause the sun-drenched Aurora to give birth to Photogen, while the Hades-like diet and atmosphere shape Vesper's Nycteris. Though Watho does not give birth to these children herself, she is deeply, even intimately involved in their gestation, positioning her as a "mothering" figure, despite her external role. Interestingly, men are conspicuously absent from this process—both Aurora and Vesper are already pregnant when they arrive at Watho's castle, and almost nothing is said of their husbands, leaving room for Watho to assume a parental role.

MacDonald's description of her conditioning of Photogen as a baby is particularly ripe with language that establishes her "scientific" mode of operation:

And now the witch's care was that the child should not know darkness.

Persistently she trained him until at last he never slept during the day and never

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woke during the night. She never let him see anything black, and even kept all

dull colors out of his way. Never, if she could help it, would she let a shadow fall

upon him, watching against shadows as if they had been live things that would

hurt him. All day he basked in the full splendor of the sun, in the same large

rooms his mother had occupied. Watho used him to the sun, until he could bear

more of it than any dark-blooded African. In the hottest of every day, she stripped

him and laid him in it, that he might ripen like a peach; and the boy rejoiced in it,

and would resist being dressed again. She brought all her knowledge to bear on

making his muscles strong and elastic and swiftly responsive -- that his soul, she

said laughingly, might sit in every fibre, be all in every part, and awake the

moment of call. (MacDonald 275)

Watho's care of Photogen amplifies the attentions that she paid to Aurora preceding her

son's birth. In an almost parodic exaggeration of scientific method, she "trains" him to

sleep only at certain times and removes certain colors and influences from his

environment. There is an uneasy conflation of care and objective shaping in her

interactions with Photogen. She endeavors to make him strong and happy—but for the

sake of her experiment rather than for himself.

Although she is not the "mad scientist" of the twentieth century imagination,

Watho must be regarded as a practitioner of science who also experiences the physical

and mental effects of madness. Furthermore, her pursuit of scientific methods is

intricately connected to her madness. Watho's madness is linked inexorably to knowledge, to the wolf in her mind that makes her both curious and cruel.

The relationship between her madness and her intelligence remains ambiguous. It is unclear whether her madness hinders her quest for knowledge or if her madness is the font of her curiosity—this conflation between madness and intellect opens the text to a potential, although fleeting, reading of Watho's atypicality as generative. However, madness is ultimately her downfall, suggesting the futility of intelligence fueled by atypicality.

Curing, Killing, and the Fate of Disability

The final chapters of the story seem to erase disability throughout the text. This erasure is achieved through two of the most common narrative tropes concerning characters with disabilities: the cure and the kill. With the implementation of these narrative strategies, the text closes on a world emptied of disabled characters.

When Photogen and Nycteris flee Watho's castle, she transforms herself into a wolf and gives chase. By the time she approaches them, it is day, and Photogen is carrying Nycteris, as she is incapacitated by the sunlight. Though she cannot see, she smells the scent of a beast on the wind and warns Photogen of its approach. Photogen shoots two arrows at the wolf, and the second shot kills it. It is only when he removes the arrow from its chest that the corpse regains human shape, and he recognizes the wolf as Watho. Her death not only removes her from the narrative but removes one of the most profound instances of disability from the text.

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Photogen and Nycteris immediately marry and depart to find the king of their country in order to tell him their story. At his court, they are reunited with Photogen's parents and are gifted Watho's castle and land. Before less than a year passes, "Nycteris had come to love the day best, because it was the clothing and crown of Photogen, and she saw that the day was greater than the night, and the sun more lovely than the moon; and Photogen had come to love the night best, because it was the mother and home of Nycteris" (MacDonald 308). This extreme reversal of regard indicates that both Photogen and Nycteris no longer experience destabilization, disorientation, or pain when they are exposed to their non-accustomed environments. Instead, they have learned to adapt to a wider range of light and of experiences. They are "cured."

This reading shuts down disability in the text, leaving the world scrubbed clean of disabled bodies and minds. The instatement of Photogen and Nycteris as a married, able-bodied couple replaces the queer, disabled witch as ruler of the land, a turn that is certainly desirable for the inhabitants of the caste and its lands. However, the killing of Watho and the curing of Photogen and Nycteris codes disability as undesirable and as something that can be simply excised from the storyworld along with the antagonist.

In "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" George MacDonald takes up a traditional fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast, and adapts it in order to explore how magic and science shape the parameters of disability. I contend that the tension between magic and science creates a space in which disabled bodies can, for a time, be non-normative and productive. There are, however, limits to the affordances of this paradigm. In this taleworld, only limited kind of disabilities can be tolerated and only for so long before a

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cure or death restores physical and mental typicality. Ultimately, "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" stretches the imagination in terms of tolerance but draws hard limits around what kinds of differences are acceptable.

Chapter Four. "I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended": Hybrid Bodies
and Fractured Minds in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*

A creature with the torso and head of a man and the legs and hoofs of a goat

reclines in the shade of a cypress tree. His head is crowned with horns. A goblet of dark

wine sits on the earth beside him, and his hands cradle a flute made of reeds. Nearby, a

flock of sheep is tended by a young shepherdess, and the goat-man's eyes turn again and

again to the animals and to the woman who watches over them with keen attention. Now

and then, he brings the pipes to his lips, and the forest and the pasture fill with exquisite

music. And if, on occasion, a shriek of horror echoes through the trees, it will fall silent

soon enough, and tranquility will be restored to Arcadia.

This picture of Pan, an ancient Greek god of nature, shepherds and their flocks,

music, and fertility, seems far removed from the twenty-first century. Indeed, it seems

distant from the nineteenth century, when a very different kind of Pan terrorizes London

with the specter of queerness and disability in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*[56].

Pan is a minor god in a religious belief system that is no longer active[57]; he springs from

a myth that is no longer believed. Despite this, Pan remains a potent figure in

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[56] Machen's title is an allusion to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "A Musical
Instrument" (1860).

[57] Some contemporary neo-pagans might refute this, as many practitioners have
(re)incorporated Pan into their worship. However, contemporary neo-paganism uses
"folklore, or traditional expressive culture, to establish identity and create a new religious
culture" – it is not an unbroken continuation of the religion practiced in ancient Greece
(Magliocco 3).

contemporary culture. Guillero del Toro's iconic 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth* features a sinister faun who leads the young female protagonist on a magical but ultimately fatal quest. C.S. Lewis's weak-willed Mr. Tumnus betrays the Pevensie children to the White Witch in his book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) and more recently in the 2005 film adaptation of the same name. British literature of the Victorian period through the Edwardian era positively boomed with stories and poems that feature the goat-god.[58] To understand this proliferation of Pan figures despite the diminishment of his myth, it is first necessary to understand the genre of myth and how mythic narratives can persist even when they are superseded by a new mythic paradigm.

Myth is a type of prose narrative commonly studied by folklorists. A myth is "generally regarded by the community in which it is told as both sacred and true. Consequently, myths tend to be core narratives in larger ideological systems" (Oring 124). The colloquial usage of the term "myth" is, confusingly, almost the opposite of its folkloristic use; labeling a story as a myth is a strategy frequently used to discount it, to insist that it is untrue. However, within the field of folklore, a myth is a narrative that is deeply true to the community from which it springs.

Typically, myths are "set outside of historical time, before the world came to be as it is today," and they "frequently concern the actions of divine or semi-divine characters" (Oring 124). A myth is "a story of the gods, a religious account of the

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[58] For an extensive catalog of Pan's appearances in literature and art, see Patricia Merivale's *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times*. For an analysis of Pan's role and queer potential in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literature, see Mark de Cicco's dissertation *The Queer God Pan and His Children: A Myth Reborn 1860-1917*.

beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the

gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all the

parts thereof and given their order" (Honko 49). They often explain the world's origins or

address how and why the world, its creatures, and its landscapes have come to be how

they are. Folklorist Jeana Jorgensen argues that "one of the major functions of myth is to

validate social norms, to explain why the world is the way it is, to rationalize the social

relationships and power dynamics of a given society" (Jorgensen). Myths, in short,

provide a narrative framework for how to understand the world and one's place in it.

My interest in Pan, however, is not how he functions in Greek myth itself but how

he is transformed once those narratives cease to hold cultural primacy. A myth can cease

to function as a myth, folklorically speaking, and yet still persist as a potent cultural

narrative. In the case of the god Pan, his myth's fading resonance is a large part of why

he continues to appear in new narratives. Indeed, it is Pan's connection to the past that

animates him so fully in art and literature of later periods, particularly during the

nineteenth century when a fascination with Greek mythology proliferated among writers

and intellectuals[59]. Pan can represent a reconnection to the natural world, just as his death

can signify the severance of that connection. The landscapes and music in which he

dwells can be generative and restorative. But his connection to the past, particularly to a

mythological belief system of the past, can also be profoundly disruptive. He can be the

embodiment of an existential threat to social order, particularly to post-industrial culture;

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[59] Christine Gallant outlines the early nineteenth-century obsession with the Greeks and Romans in her book *Keats and Romantic Celticism*, while Robert Jenkyns explores the Victorian parallels in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece.*

his hybridity as a half-man, half-animal who transcends both categories with his ascension to godhood allows him a flexibility into unconventional states of being. His sexuality and his very body are threatening, and the greatest threat is that he might be able to transmit his otherness, that it might spread. This is at the heart of the horror—a horror of queerness and non-normative bodies and minds—in Arthur Machen's novella *The Great God Pan.*

Pan in Folklore

Pan's history is a complex tapestry that interweaves art, storytelling, and other folkloric strands with the myth at its core. "In antiquity, Pan was considered a relatively minor deity in the Olympian pantheon," and he was added to the pantheon long after most of the major gods and goddesses (de Cicco 17, *Queer God Pan*). His pre-Olympian existence remains shrouded in uncertainty: Philippe Borgeaud identifies "at least fourteen different versions" of Pan's origin story, adding that this ambiguity escalated with the passage of time (Borgeaud 54). During the reign of Tiberius, Roman scholars settled upon a version of the story: Pan was thought to be the offspring of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and Penelope, a nymph or perhaps the suitor-beleaguered wife of Odysseus of Homer's *The Odyssey.* When, as a baby, he made the god Dionysus smile, he was elevated to godhood. In visual art of the period, "Pan is often depicted accompanying Dionysos while playing the reed pipes" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 18).

Though the Greek gods are immortal, Plutarch writes of Pan's death, a unique and startling outcome for an Olympian. According to Plutarch, a sailor named Thamus hears

a voice call out three times and commanding him to sail to Palodes and cry out that the Great God Pan is dead. Thamus obeys the voice, sails his ship to Palodes, and shouts the message to the shoreline, whereupon "a great lamentation ... resounded through the peaceful evening sky" despite the lack of visible mourners (Irwin 159). Scholars have placed this event as occurring between 14 and 37 AD, concurrent with the birth of Christ, or concurrent with Christ's death on the cross (Irwin 159). By positioning Pan's death over the birth of Christ, his demise becomes synonymous with the eclipse of pagan belief systems by Christianity. Other classical sources, however, say that Pan is not dead but sleeping and that he will wake once more when humanity reconnects with the natural world (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 28). Intriguingly, late nineteenth-century thinkers were primed to consider the death of god(s) after the publication of *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* by Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer in 1890, the same year that Machen's *The Great God Pan* was released. Suggesting that societies progress linearly from magical belief to religious doctrine to scientific thought, Frazer identified the concept of the dying (and reviving) god, such as Pan, as central to nearly all mythologies around the world. While his theory was debunked within decades, Frazer's dying god proved extraordinarily influential in literature, impacting authors such as W.B. Yeats, H.P. Lovecraft, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce.

Just as his body confounds order, Pan himself can represent complex, occasionally conflicting, concepts. Unsurprisingly, given his half-goat form, he is regarded as the god of shepherds and their flocks. Though he is frequently associated with fields and pastures, he can be a guardian of many natural terrains, as well as a hunter

and source of discord. His parentage links him to wine and revelry as well as to fertility rites (Irwin 161). The pan pipes that he plays suggest playful merriment, while his ability to cause a "pan"-ic marks him as a more sinister being. His mere presence "can produce the kind of fear which has more than anything else perpetuated his name. One who sees Pan in the daytime, particularly one who disturbs his mid day sleep, risks death from the blast of his anger" (Irwin 161).

In *Pan and the Nightmare*, James Hillman argues that "Christians…at least since Eusebius [3rd to 4th century AD], saw the Devil in Pan" (Hillman 46). Pan's ability to inspire terror and panic, paired with the horns that crown his head and the goat-like hooves that appear in so many visual depictions, not to mention his association with unfettered sexuality, fed a conflation of the Christian devil with the god Pan (de Cicco *Queer God Pan* 126).

It seems that this association with the devil only heightens the appeal of an already complex figure, for "Pan or a Pan-type came to be useful for highly diverse purposes. He is a power-figure; the power is in himself and can be gained by men intelligent enough to ignore brain and to follow instead the promptings of blood, muscle, viscera, and glands" (Irwin 160). He can be a "punisher and a destroyer, an embodiment even of the diabolic" (Irwin 160). However, he can also serve as an emblem of "benevolence and protection, not only of flocks and the creatures of the forest but of sorrowing humanity as well" (Irwin 160).

Pan's "multiplicity of ... natures" equips the figure for the wide "array of his accepted roles among gods and humans" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 19). He is, at once, a

god "of shepherds and soldiers, woods and nature, rustic music and fertility, companion of nymphs and satyrs, follower of Dionysos and sometimes-friend, sometimes-enemy of Aphrodite ... function[ing] as a crystalline lens scattering light in many directions" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 19). Pan's hybridity and adaptability position him as a force at once generative and destructive, hopeful and dreadful. His mythic roots allow him to extend into later folklore and literature while retaining his form and granting remarkable plasticity.

The Queer God Pan

While the link between Pan and disability is currently understudied, the same cannot be said of the figure of Pan and queerness. In his dissertation *The Queer God Pan and His Children: A Myth Reborn 1860-1917*, Mark de Cicco uses the lens of queer theory to examine the cultural and literary history of Pan, illuminating his queer potential and how it is redeployed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts. De Cicco argues that "Pan is, and has been since antiquity, a queer figure. Within a normative society, Pan functions as a focal point for imaginatively alternative worldviews" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 6). Heightened sexuality, and often queer sexuality, has been a defining feature of the goat-god in "mythology, literature, and the visual arts. Put simply, Pan has always been queer" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 19).

De Cicco follows Sarah Ahmed and Ardel Haefele-Thomas, among others, who craft a broad definition of the queerness. In *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity,* Haefele-Thomas posits that "unlike the gender specificity

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found in gay and lesbian theories and historiographies, queer theory— especially given the historical definitions of 'queer'—supplies room for multiple, potentially polyvalent positions, conveying gender, sexuality, race, class and familial structures beyond heteronormative (and often bourgeois) social constructs" (Haefele-Thomas 3-4). For Ahmed, queerness is located in a sense of disorientation, in encounters that disrupt a normative or expected worldview. In *Queer Phenomenology*, she identifies a "queer orientation"—a recalibration toward a "'slantwise'" perception that "put[s] within reach bodies that have been made unreachable," and makes visible that which had previously been inaccessible (Ahmed 107). According to de Cicco, Pan "functions as a disorienting figure that shatters accepted notions of civilized order, and reorients those he encounters towards new, queer possibilities or orientations" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 195). This disruption might be restorative or energizing, but a more common outcome is terror. Encountering Pan is destabilizing, and not everyone who encounters him is able to recover.

Pan figures, including Arthur Machen's Pan, are "inherently queer, non-normative beings: they are creatures of powerful, unlimited will, with a greatly heightened sensitivity to nature and to other living things. They fiercely challenge conventional, heteronormative restrictions regarding behavior" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 9). Pan's "queerness transcends the bodily ... disturbing psychologically, temporally, spiritually, and sexually. The queer Gothic Pan is a remarkable manifestation of societal anxiety over the place and function of the non-normative" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 194). Disrupting the perceived order and hierarchy of Machen's England, Pan "projects on to the

'civilized' Victorian age an image of ancient chaotic forces that continue to shadow modern industrialized society, threatening disorientation should that chaos break through into the rational, physical world" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 194). A queer threat to modernity, sexual order, and the normative body, Pan blurs the boundaries between perceived binaries such as homosexual/ heterosexual, male/ female, and, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, sane/ mad.

In Machen's *The Great God Pan,* the queerness of Pan is foregrounded in two distinct characters: the god Pan himself and his daughter, Helen. At the beginning of the novella, Dr. Raymond performs an experimental brain surgery on his ward, a young woman named Mary, while his friend Clarke observes. Raymond's goal is to expand human awareness beyond perceived reality, to access realms that are shuttered to the mind; after the surgery, Mary will be able to see and experience vistas long inaccessible to humans. This lifting of the veil, what the "ancients" called "seeing the god Pan" troubles not only the established science of the day but the concept of linear time (Machen 2). By blurring the boundaries between science and mysticism, linear time and the timelessness of Pan's reality, Raymond primes Mary's encounter with Pan with queer potential.

The surgery is, in a sense, successful: Mary does indeed see Pan. However, he encounter is infused with terror and accrues unexpected side-effects. She awakens from the procedure with "a long-drawn sigh, and suddenly did the colour that had vanished return to the girl's cheeks," a hopeful response that is quickly undercut (Machen 7). When her eyes open, "Clarke quailed before them. They shone with an awful light, looking far

away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch

what was invisible" (Machen 7). That wonder instantly gives way to "the most awful

terror," which yields a profound physical response: "The muscles of her face were

hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and

shuddering within the house of flesh. It was a horrible sight, and Clarke rushed forward,

as she fell shrieking to the floor" (Machen 7). Mary never recovers from her encounter

with Pan. When Clarke visits her some days after the procedure, he finds her "lying wide-

awake, rolling her head from side to side, and grinning vacantly" (Machen 7). An

unrepentant Raymond designates her to be "a hopeless idiot" but celebrates his successful

lifting of the veil between the realm of the spirit and the human (Machen 7).

Unexpectedly to Raymond—but perhaps less surprising to those who know the lore

surrounding the figure of Pan, particularly the god's association with fertility—Pan has

impregnated Mary[60], and nine months later, she gives birth to his daughter, Helen. Mary

dies shortly after.[61]

It is perhaps possible to regard Helen's conception as nominally heterosexual. Pan

is male, and Mary is a woman. However, that is the limit of any normalcy surrounding

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[60] The name Mary is an obvious and inverted allusion to the Virgin Mary, the mother of
the Christian god Jesus. Machen's Mary is likewise miraculously impregnated by a god,
but she gives birth to a killer rather than a savior.
[61] Alternately, one might consider a realist reading of the text in which Raymond and/ or
Clarke rape and lobotomize Mary, and Helen is an angry but fully human orphan. This
reading, however, fails to account for the mechanism by which Helen convinces so many
men to commit suicide and for the description of Helen's morphing, "waver[ing]" and
"dividing" (Machen 46) definitively non-human body. Given Machen's personal
investment in mysticism and the occult, as well as the abundance of supernatural
creatures and scenarios that consistently populate his oeuvre, I have chosen to analyze the
novella as supernatural horror.

the conception. The pairing is, not cross-species precisely, but it spans the bounds of mortal and immortal, involving both a god and a human woman. Furthermore, Helen is not the result of straight, normative sex but rather the product of a spiritual encounter that spans different realities and physicalities. Mary is physically present in the human world when she encounters Pan—her body never leaves the surgical chamber—but what she sees is a different plane of existence. Helen's conception, invisible and disembodied but horrifying enough to rob Mary of her mortal awareness for the remainder of her life, can unequivocally be understood as queer.

Furthermore, queerness is a useful frame to make sense of the enigmatic figure of Helen as she appears in the remainder of the text. As a young girl, she lures, perhaps even seduces though the narrative is deliberately ambiguous, men and women into their own encounters with a terrifying Pan. Those who meet her in adulthood describe her through contradictions: she is at once the most beautiful and abhorrent woman that they have ever seen, and she intrigues and repels in equal measure, fascinating the men who come into her orbit. It is in her death, however, that her physical queerness is made most boldly manifest. In Chapter 8: Fragments, Dr. Robert Matheson, who was present at Helen's death, recounts what he saw. Matheson's account is prefaced with a note by an anonymous editor, explaining the disorderly state of the text. The manuscript, found after Matheson's sudden death, was written in "Latin, much abbreviated, and had evidently been made in great haste" and deciphered only partially and with difficulty by the editor (Machen 45). This fragmentary, occasionally impermeable language reflects the ambiguity surrounding Helen's body:

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I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again

reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that

which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being.

The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward

form changed. (Machen 46)

Death reveals the queer ambiguity that has always underpinned Helen's body, despite it's

ostensibly female/femme presentation. "Pan's influence has fundamentally queered

Helen's body," shaping her into an entity that defies simple categorization (de Cicco,

Queer God Pan 242). In a disturbing, atavistic turn, "Helen's wavering, morphing form,

moving through a reverse or parallel evolutionary process, signals the collapse of

traditional modes of interpreting and regulating conceptions of time, species, gender,

sexuality, the body, and human nature itself" (de Cicco, *Queer God Pan* 242-3). As

Helen's body sheds its living shell, binaries and categories collapse, yielding chaos and

queer disorder.

Pan and Disability

In *The Great God Pan* Machen's Pan and Pan-figure Helen are not only

fundamentally queered but also connected to disability. As theorists such as Robert

McRuer have demonstrated, queerness and disability share a similar method of cultural

production. If queerness is that which unsettles or disrupts, defining disability as a

physical or mental disruption from the norm provides clear parallels between these categories. McRuer illuminates these connections through his theory of "compulsory able-bodiedness" (McRuer 2). This compulsory able-bodiedness "produces disability" and is "thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness" (McRuer 2). Not only are compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality entwined, but they are symbiotic, "contingent" upon each other for their continued social production (McRuer 2). This remains true in periods when both queerness and disability are "wedded but invisible" as well as more contemporary times in which such identities are much more visible, even "spectacular" (McRuer 2). In *The Great God Pan,* queerness and disability are attributes that can result from exposure to a Pan figure, and they remain contingent upon one another.

Because much of *The Great God Pan* is fragmentary and told in glimpses from multiple perspectives, the novella is rife with narrative gaps. Key experiences and moments are omitted or expunged from the story. Again and again, narratives are truncated just as they begin to address exactly what unfolds when a character is exposed to a Pan figure. For example, in chapter two Clarke reads a written account of Helen's friendship with a young girl named Rachel M. When he reaches the point where Rachel is about to narrate "a wild story," her reported speech is cut off as Clarke "close[s] the book with a snap" (Machen 13). Machen's reader is never privy to Rachel's story—which, considering the context, involves a queer sexual encounter, one that Clarke finds too horrifying to contemplate—and this pattern of truncated and fragmentary narration continues throughout the text. A determined reader must piece together the disparate

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story fragments in order to create a reasonably complete picture of Helen's origins, life, and death, and even a careful reader cannot recover all the pieces.

It is possible to begin to make sense of this piecemeal structure by framing *The Great God Pan* as a kind of detective story. In his article "'More Than Human': The Queer Occult Explorer of the Fin-De-Siècle," Mark de Cicco positions *The Great God Pan* as a story in which the straight male detectives and scientists attempt to impose order onto Helen's queer Gothic body. To an extent, these men are successful—Villiers, Clarke, and Matheson are able to locate Helen in London and to force her to commit suicide, thus preventing her from continuing her killing spree in England's capital. However, the narrative gaps persist, and the straight male detectives and men of science remain confounded and horrified by what they have faced and they continue to struggle articulating what they have encountered. They are striving to tell an untellable narrative, or what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as the Gothic "unspeakable[62]." The events that befall them defy the structure of the reality that they know—the Pan's mythic reality has encroached into their world, denying the rules that govern the human body, and they are not equipped to deal with the repercussions. Scholars have framed Pan's intrusion in terms of nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding "deep time," or "abysses of temporality" (Worth 261):

> By imaginatively attributing an impossible antiquity to symbolic
>
> forms…[Machen] robbed such forms of their differentiating power, their

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[62] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines the Gothic unspeakable in her book *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*.

comforting status as privileged markers of humanity. Throughout Machen's

fiction the cultural and the biological, jointly projected into remote pasts, are

perplexingly mingled, blended: he figures disconcerting continuities precisely

where nineteenth-century historiography had begun to insist upon divisions, lines

of clear demarcation. In short, he probes at the faultlines of modern

historiography in order to generate readerly anxieties. (Worth 216-7)

By collapsing the distinction between history and myth, Machen generates a horror

fueled by folklore, by a fear of an atavistic, mythic past that is temporally adjacent to the

present rather than safely located in a linear, unreachable past.

When the past collides with the present, there are consequences. *The Great God

Pan* is, in a sense, a narrative that probes the limits, and the consequences, of science,

particularly medical science. Raymond's risky but bold procedure is initially portrayed as

a crowning achievement of what science can offer humanity; it is the culmination of

years of twenty years of intensive research into "transcendental medicine" (Machen 1).

While Clarke wonders if Raymond's claim is "a phantasmagoria—a splendid vision,

certainly, but a mere vision after all," Raymond takes pains to illustrate the ways in

which his endeavor is connected to contemporary science and medicine (Machen 1). He

even provides a genealogy of his research, noting "Digby's theory, and Browne Faber's

discoveries" as a means of contextualizing himself in the work of his peers even as he

claims his own knowledge to be advanced beyond their purview (Machen 2).

Despite his references to the scientific theories and discoveries of others, Raymond stands as an isolated figure, at least in regards to his medical work if not his social life. He does not work with a team, partner, or mentor but rather pursues his study as a solitary activity. In many ways, his actions and perspective echo that of Watho, the witch-scientist examined in the previous chapter. Like Watho, Raymond pursues unfettered, limited knowledge, specifically knowledge of the human body, and, like the witch, he demonstrates no compassion towards his subject. While Watho kidnaps Photogen and Nycteris from their mothers, Raymond rescues Mary "from the gutter, and from almost certain starvation," as ostensibly benevolent course of action (Machen 4). However, Raymond leverages his act of kindness as license to expose Mary to his experiments, remarking just before the procedure that "I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit" (Machen 4). He too is the sole of parent of queer family, and he regards Mary not so much as a child but as a resource that can be used to further his own knowledge. It is worth noting that Mary does verbally consent to participation in the experiment that kills her, but as she is wholly dependent upon him and likely ignorant of the possible side effects, or even the purpose, of the experiment, her consent must be regarded as problematic and perhaps even coerced.

From Raymond's experiment springs Helen and two divergent vectors of disability that overlap periodically throughout the text: idiocy and suicidal ideation. These conditions are the result when bystanders are exposed to Helen's true nature and/or to the elements of the mythic world that she brings to the human world; as the daughter

of a human woman and a god, Helen functions as a bridge between the mortal and the

mythic. When that bridge is crossed, mental chaos and collapse is the result.

The first response to Pan detailed in the text is "idiocy," and it follows

immediately upon the completion of Raymond's experiment. Little information about

Mary is provided in the text. She is absent during the long conversation between

Raymond and Clarke detailing the goal of the experiment. When Clarke wonders whether

the procedure is truly safe, Raymond responds that he is free to risk Mary's life because

without his intervention she would have died as a child. When Raymond summons her to

the surgical room, she speaks very little but demonstrates acquiescence and affection to

Raymond. Dressed all in white, Mary is an extraordinary, compliant beauty. When she

inhales the concoction in Raymond's green phial, she "grew white, whiter than her dress;

she struggled faintly, and then with the feeling of submission strong within her, crossed

her arms upon her breast as a little child about to say her prayers" (Machen 7). She

remains unconscious while Raymond cuts away a small circle of hair from her scalp and

makes the incision, but when she wakes, it is clear that something has gone wrong (as

quoted in part above):

Suddenly, as they watched, they heard a long-drawn sigh, and suddenly did the

colour that had vanished return to the girl's cheeks, and suddenly her eyes opened.

Clarke quailed before them. They shone with an awful light, looking far away,

and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch

what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most

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awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. It was a horrible sight, and Clarke rushed forward, as she fell shrieking to the floor. (Machen 7)

Mary's initial response to the procedure suggests a return of health and success for Raymond's ambitions - the pallor that claimed her during the course of the surgery receded, and she clearly is able to perceive something inaccessible to Raymond and Clarke. Longing and wonder suffuse her as she reaches her hands towards something unseen, as she tries to touch what she beholds in the realm of spirit. Her wonder shifts quickly to terror, a terror that produces a profound physical affect: her muscles "convulsed" and she "shook from head to foot," indicating the severity of her shock (Machen 7). Little additional description is given over to Mary. On a subsequent visit, Clarke visits Mary and finds her "lying wide-awake, rolling her head from side to side, and grinning vacantly" (Machen 7). Raymond tells his friend that "it is a great pity; she is a hopeless idiot. However, it could not be helped; and, after all, she has seen the Great God Pan" (Machen 7). The chapter abruptly terminates, and the next chapter shifts to Clarke's passion for eccentric, occult documents and does not provide further information about Mary.

Raymond uses the term "idiot" to refer to Mary's condition after her encounter with Pan. In his seminal text detailing the history of mental disability, David Wright distinguishes between idiocy and lunacy:

The nineteenth-century term of "idiot" referred to persons who were considered as

suffering from mental disability from birth or an early age ... idiocy reflected a

permanence of mental disability ... "Lunatics," by contrast, referred to all those

who, though previously "sane," suffered from a temporary or permanent

impairment of mental ability. By its very definition "lunacy" was not considered

congenital, and in many cases held the promise of either cure or remission.

(Wright 10)

According to Wright's definitions, Mary should be classified as a lunatic rather than as an

idiot—as demonstrated by her interactions with Raymond and Clarke prior to the

experiment, she was sane, or neurotypical. It is her encounter with Pan, mediated by

Raymond's surgery, that alters her mental state rather than a congenital factor. However,

theorists have long noted that the nineteenth century was a period in which norms

surrounding disability were being created and solidified. Martha Stoddard Holmes notes

that "[i]n (roughly) the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, a notable slipperiness of

terminology meant that any number of words or phrases ... might be applied to people we

would now consider intellectually disabled: idiot, imbecile, mental defective, simpleton,

mindless person" (Holmes 10). Raymond's use of "idiot" rather than "lunatic" is not

especially remarkable. Despite his status as a scientist and medical expert, his casual,

inaccurate usage of the term suggests that he cares very little about what has happened to

his ward, and he certainly does not indicate that he will attempt to further understand or

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address her condition. She has served her purpose in his experiment, and while the outcome is "a great pity," he does not seem terribly remorseful about what he has done to her (Machen 7).

Idiocy here represents an erasure or loss of the self. Mary is effectively emptied during her encounter with Pan beyond the veil. Her personality and will are gone, and she becomes an empty shell that is filled with Pan himself in the form of his daughter, Helen. Mary becomes a conduit for the mythic, at the cost of self-annihilation. This is, of course, an extremely problematic portrayal of disability from a contemporary perspective, but framing disability as a profoundly negative identity, even as an erasure of meaningful identity, is a typical move in nineteenth-century literature—and one that frequently persists even in twenty-first-century literature.

The second instance of intellectual disability in the text concerns a young boy named Trevor. Like Helen's unfortunate friend Rachel M., Trevor dwells in "a village on the borders of Wales, a place of some importance in the time of the Roman occupation, but now a scattered hamlet, of not more than five hundred souls" (Machen 9). This tranquil village is on the border of a large forest, where Helen spends her days, and is also the site of several ruins and artifacts that denote a long-forgotten but still active connection to the Greek and Roman gods, and to Pan in particular. These remnants of Pan-worship are fragmentary and decontextualized, disconnected from their original functions in worship, yet they function as conduits to the Roman past, enabling Helen to access Pan's power in her present.

Trevor, like Mary, initially possesses good health and an apparently normative mental state. But just as Mary is stricken with idiocy when she meets Pan and conceives Helen, Trevor is irrevocably altered when he sees Helen and her father Pan in the woods beyond their village. The encounter is filtered through many different people and perspectives—it is relayed in a written account by Clarke in which he records a "Singular Narrative told me by my Friend, Dr. Phillips. He assures me that all the facts related therein are strictly and wholly True, but refuses to give either the Surnames of the Persons Concerned, or the Place where these Extraordinary Events occurred" (Machen 9). The story outlines Helen's day-to-day life in the unnamed village and details Trevor's and Rachel M.'s Pan encounters, though Rachel M.'s story is not wholly reproduced due to Clarke closing the book and curtailing the narrative within the novella itself. Some of Trevor's reported speech is included, but the bulk of his story is filtered through his father (Joseph W.), Dr. Phillips, and finally Clarke.

Unlike Mary's singular and dramatic encounter and response, Trevor is exposed to Pan twice before he experiences mental collapse. The inciting incident takes place when the seven-year-old Trevor takes his father dinner while he labored in the forest near the "old Roman Road," a location squarely within Pan's purview (Machen 10). As previously noted, Pan is a god not only of shepherds and the pastoral but, increasingly in the nineteenth century, of the natural world writ large. Deep within the forest is Pan's domain, and a structure built during the Roman period merely accentuates his potency in this place. After delivering the cheese and bread, Trevor leaves his father to search for wildflowers alone in the wood, but when his father hears "the most dreadful screams,

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evidently the result of great terror, proceeding from the direction in which his son had gone," he runs after his son, following the sound deeper in the forest (Machen 10). When he is found, Trevor says that he fell asleep while picking flowers but was awakened "by a peculiar noise, a sort of singing he called it, and on peeping through the branches he saw Helen V. playing on the grass with a "strange naked man," who he seemed unable to describe more fully" (Machen 11). The terrified Trevor is unable to provide more information, and when Joseph W. investigates further, he finds Helen, sitting alone in a glade. While Joseph W. concludes that his son is experiencing the aftereffects of a bad nightmare, Trevor's terror persists, and "[f]or many weeks ... the boy gave his parents much anxiety; he became nervous and strange in his manner, refusing to leave the cottage by himself, and constantly alarming the household by waking in the night with cries of 'The man in the wood! father! Father!'" (Machen 11).

Although *The Great God Pan* is chiefly a retelling of the myths surrounding Pan, the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood serves as a useful intertext for this scene in particular. Little Red Riding Hood is amongst the most prevalent fairy tales in the Western world, and the wildly popular versions edited by Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, among many others, circulated widely in London before Machen composed his novella. Maria Tatar writes that the fairy tale "tell[s] us not only about encounters between predator and prey but also about human interactions that foreground innocence and seduction. [Little Red Riding Hood] is a story about appetite in all its shadings of the term, from primal hunger to sexual desire, both tainted by the threat of desire turning dark and deadly—desire so rapacious that it feeds on human life," a summation that

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translates to Machen's tale of a (part) animal antagonist with an annihilating sexual hunger (Tatar, "Little Red" 5). Both Little Red Riding Hood and Trevor's Pan encounter are, at their cores, stories about children in the forest who meet an uncivilized, dangerous monster there. These children initially enjoy their time in the natural world: Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood "entertain[s] herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and gathering bouquets of little flowers" (Perrault 16), while Trevor "went to look for flowers in the wood ... shouting with delight at his discoveries" (Machen 11). Their journeys into the woods become sinister when they meet strange creatures who hunger for them. There is a well-documented sexual undertone in Little Red Riding Hood stories, as Tatar attests above. Pan, likewise hungers for mortals, and his hunger has a decidedly sexual edge, though this is implied rather than stated outright throughout Machen's novella.

Trevor's story does not end after his encounter in the woods. After several months, Trevor's terror and symptoms seem to recede, but when the boy sees a Roman "stone head of grotesque appearance," recently excavated and built into the wall at a neighbor's house, Trevor suffers a mental collapse (Machen 12). The head is, unsurprisingly, "that of a faun or satyr," a tangible synecdoche for Pan himself (Machen 12).

Judging from his reported speech, Trevor's first Pan encounter is with both Helen and the physical embodiment of Pan. Helen's sole encounter, by contrast, might be called spiritual, but more specifically it is disembodied and occurs, if not completely in Pan's mythic realm, than on its liminal threshold. Intriguingly, Trevor's second encounter does

not directly involve Helen or a physical manifestation of Pan but rather an object that is imbued with Pan's energy and malice. Furthermore, only Trevor appears to be so closed attuned to the stone head and susceptible to its influence. The stone head is positioned in a place of prominence in Joseph W.'s employer's home, and ostensibly many people, chiefly the employer's family, must see it frequently. However, only Trevor suffers a "severe" shock that causes him to "suffer[] from a weakness of intellect" marked enough to be referred to as "an imbecile" (Machen 12). Dr. Phillips, the friend who relays the story to Clarke, says that he has seen the stone head firsthand, and that "he has never received such a vivid presentment of intense evil," but he does not bear any lasting consequences for the viewing (Machen 12). This insulation from the stone head's potential demonstrates that a more immediate brush with Pan is necessary to trigger a strong response. While the artifact is not dangerous in of itself, a prior exposure to Pan can transform it into a locus from which horror, shock, and intellectual disability can spread, even when Pan himself, nor his avatar Helen, are present. In this way, Pan's "pan-ic" can infect the human realm even when he remains beyond the mythic veil.

Of intellectual disability, Martha Stoddard Holmes writes, "The category, if we unmask it, reveals the degree to which intellectual performance functions as a passport to the realm of the human or relegates individuals to a liminal place between the human and animal" (Holmes 12). In *The Great God Pan* this liminality is reconfigured to encompass a space not only between the human and the animal but also the divine. If exposure to Pan is the catalyst of idiocy, then the subjects, in this case Mary and Trevor, are marked as adjacent to the divine, mythic world by virtue of her disability. And yet this status

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represents loss and annihilation, and the touch of Pan is at once divine and also fundamentally destructive and disruptive.

The second type of disability that Pan, through Helen, unleashes on London is suicidal ideation. Suicide may initially not appear to fall neatly under the umbrella of disability, but its function in the text and its close relationship to the instances of "idiocy" reveal that this action stems from the mental trauma inflicted by Pan. Suicide, an outcome of extreme depression, anxiety, and other frequently invisible factors, is now squarely regarded as a symptom of mental disability or as a disease, though other personal or cultural factors can also contribute. In 2002, data from the Department of Health and Human Services estimated that "Ninety percent of suicide completers have a diagnosis of mental illness or substance abuse and as many as 80% have a mood disorder ... In this regard, suicide can be considered the fatal outcome of mental illness" (D'Orio and Barlow 125). More recent studies frame suicide as a mental health and public health issue (Nutt). A new American report found that more than half of the suicide completers did not have a known mental health condition but noted that the vast majority were likely undiagnosed (Center for Disease Control).

During the nineteenth century, however, suicide was regarded very differently. Instead of a result of mental illness, suicide was traditionally linked to "modernity" and more specifically to city life that is antithetical to traditional family structures and values. In the early nineteenth century, social critics "warned that the growth of cities would be accompanied by an assortment of social ills, all of which could be traced to the destruction of traditional social relations. While this belief had more ancient origins, the

fear of the modern took on a special intensity in the nineteenth century" (Kushner 461).

Of particular importance was the "assertion in 1820 by Etienne Esquirol, the leader of the

French asylum movement, that 'madness is the disease of civilization,'" directly linking

mental disability with city life (Kushner 461). Following Esquirol's assessment, self-

destructive actions were increasingly held us an evidence of the corrupting dangers

inherent in urbanization, and suicide became a measure for social wellbeing (Kushner

461). Increasingly, "hypotheses about the causes of suicide were tied to sentimental

visions of the family and to an ambivalence toward social change," and therefore

"warnings of nascent suicide epidemics were coupled with nostalgic portraits of rural life.

Since the nineteenth century, experts have concluded that the best safeguards against

suicide lay in the restoration of traditional values, especially the patriarchal family"

(Kushner 461).

How does this context illuminate suicidal ideation and suicide completion in *The

Great God Pan*? Suicide occurs in the novella when a man becomes socially, and perhaps

sexually, intimate with Helen. While other suicides are referred to in the text, the

majority take place in London while Helen is living under the name Mrs. Beaumont. As

Mrs. Beaumont, Helen gains a reputation for throwing extravagant, successful parties.

Upon her return from South America, she "take[s] London almost by storm" and gathers

"quite a court around her" comprised of the city's most fashionable (Machen 35). Those

who enter her orbit, however, are those who might find themselves exposed to her malice

and even to Pan himself. The most common response to seeing the mythic beyond the

veil is suicide. This, of course, ties in with the traditional Christian view on suicide,

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which is that suicide is a mortal sin that will condemn a soul to hell, where the devil (a kind of Pan figure, as previously discussed) awaits.

Interestingly, the men who experience mental distress at Mrs. Beaumont/ Helen's hands are those who are most in love with their lives. Of those who commit suicide, the man to be described in most depth is Lord Argentine, "a great favorite in London Society" (Machen 31). Risen great in rank and wealth over the course of his life, Lord Argentine "declined to be jaded, still persisted in enjoying life, and by a kind of infection had become recognized as the cause of joy in others, in short, as the best of company" (Machen 31). And yet even he is susceptible to the psychological horror that Helen wields. At this juncture, Helen is directly targeting those who most enjoy modernity, those who have most comprehensively rejected her father's natural realm.

It seems notable that Helen's victims in London respond to her influence with suicide, while Trevor, who lives in a small village, experiences idiocy. Because *The Great God Pan* is fragmentary in nature rather than a clear, linear portrayal of events, it is impossible for a reader to know the full scope of Helen's activities and the extent of the damage she inflicts on those she meets. Instead, it is only possible to see glimpses of what she has done. It is possible to argue that an outcome of suicide is linked not to the city but instead correlates with the growth of Helen's power as she ages –chronologically, Mary and Trevor are among her first victims, while the suicide epidemic occurs just before she is identified and forced to commit suicide herself. However, considering the cultural context surrounding suicide in the nineteenth century, the London setting seems worth considering. Helen's targets in Chapter 6: The Suicides are very much of the city.

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They are residents who not only dwell in London but are embedded in London society and enjoy what the city has to offer. When the nineteenth-century French alienist Jean-Pierre Falret writes that "civilization plays a great role in the production of suicide," "it was quite clear to his readers, particularly to other alienists, that 'civilization' was synonymous with contemporary urban life. For while 'civilization' exposed the brain to increased stresses and excited an excess of passions and desires that could not be satisfied, these pressures, wrote Falret, were 'almost unknown' in rural regions of Europe" (Kushner 463). Lord Argentine and the other victims are very much in the demographic described here.

Yet, this assessment is complicated by the fact that Pan is *not* of the city - he is a god with deep roots in the natural world, the pastoral, and pre-industrial landscapes. What does it mean that these suicides are triggered not by the city itself but rather from a god of nature?

The answer to this question lies in Helen herself. She is the daughter of Pan, and therefore irrevocably linked to nature, but she is also the daughter of a human woman who was homeless on the streets of London before Raymond brought her home. Mary, as far as the reader knows, lived her entire life in London, and she gives birth to her daughter in London before she dies. Helen, the product of Pan and Mary, is not only a queer figure in terms of her parentage but of her association with place and topography. As a hybrid being, she can move freely through the pastoral world and through the streets and parlors of London. She can provide a vector for the anti-modern, uncivilized Pan to infiltrate the cityscape that is generally far beyond his purview.

The form that mediates damaging influence to the men of London is indisputably modern and "civilized." Helen, styled as Mrs. Beaumont, is a force in London society, a hostess of dinner parties, and a presence among the city elite. Yet through her, her victims are exposed to a reminder of a wild, mythic, pre-industrialized world that holds untellable horrors. Pan and all he represents cannot be safely held in the human mind— knowledge of him and his mythic world represent a kind of annihilation to Lord Argentine and his peers. When faced with a version of reality that they cannot accept, they are overtaken with such extreme mental distress that they end their lives rather continue to behold what they experience as his evil nature. It is not the modern world that is killing these men, though perhaps they are more susceptible due to their modernity, but rather the irreconcilable clash between their world and that of Pan.

The Great God Pan harnesses the myth of Pan to express anxieties around unruly and disabled bodies that cannot be contained, treated, or explained by advancements in science and medicalization. Myth stands, not as a binary to science, but as a continuous, disruptive force that has always already intruded into civilization Helen's queer, unruly body, the product of Pan's intrusion into nineteenth-century England, is the locus from which disability and mental chaos spread, but since she is not the source, merely a single avenue available to the force that is Pan, there is no way to fully address the threat, not even with Helen's death. The straight male able-bodied protagonists can observe the symptoms that result from exposure to this Pan figure, and they can stem the tide by killing her, but Pan remains and could potentially broach the veil between worlds again, infusing the text with a horror that lingers even after the final page is turned.

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Out of Pan's Woods

From Pan's woods to Heathcliff's moors, the landscapes of British nineteenth-century literature are populated by odd bodies and haunted by the specter of disability. In this dissertation, I have considered both realistic, recognizable disability, such as intellectual disability in "The Idiot Boy," and fantastical conditions, like Watho's wolf. I have considered chronic illness in *Wuthering Heights* and the erasure of disability through "cure" and "kill" narratives in "The History of Photogen and Nycteris."

In each chapter, a different folk narrative genre serves as a touchstone. Wordsworth imitates and adapts the ballad form, an influence so central to his composition that he names his poetry collection *Lyrical Ballads*, a clear connection stated explicitly. Gossip, competing narratives, and biased narrators create a legend in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. George MacDonald pens literary fairy tales with roots in Scottish lore, inverting traditional fairy tales and eliding gendered expectations. A distant god is revived in *The Great God Pan*, unleashing a terrifying, mythic force into the modernity of fin de siècle London.

Folk narrative, when underpinning these works of literature, can serve as an animating force in depictions of disability. During the nineteenth century, scrutiny of the human body and mind escalated, and scientific and medical discourse offered new language and strategies for cataloging and evaluating health and abnormality. In nineteenth-century literature, folk narratives could accommodate odd bodies even as social perceptions of those bodies shifted; they could create a space in which fear and

anxiety was given voice, but they were also capable of creating progressive spaces in which stories and experiences that are otherwise untellable might be told. In writing "The Idiot Boy," Wordsworth hoped "to a certain degree to rectify men's feelings, to given them new compositions of feeling," and to put them into harmony with nature and each other (Wordsworth and Hayden 37); he aimed to make a subject considered to be undeserving of attention worthy of sympathy and interest. Brontë's electrifying tale of Heathcliff and Catherine invites speculation about the nature of health, illness, and the supernatural, forging links between these categories even as it resists conclusive answers. MacDonald crafts a witch whose madness is the conduit to her knowledge but also the catalyst to her death. Machen's fragmented novella positions Pan as a disruptive force positioned just beyond the veil, ready to rupture the order and civilization of fin de siècle London with glimpses of wonder and horror.

Each of these authors and texts have exerted a profound influence on British, and American, fiction. Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* was a watershed text of British Romanticism, and Wordsworth is still among the most recognizable and commonly read poets in the Western world. The tortured love and supernatural potential of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* has deeply informed our contemporary conception of the anti-hero and romance, directly influencing, for better or worse, texts as wildly popular as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. George MacDonald's fairy tales and fiction helped shape the work of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, staples of twentieth century fantasy and templates that contemporary authors build upon to this day. Machen's supernatural tales provided the foundation of Weird fiction and horror, inspiring the likes of H.P. Lovecraft

and Stephen King. The way these authors wrote about bodies matter; their narrative strategies echo through the long nineteenth century and can still be heard in contemporary media.

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