

PHYSICAL DISABILITY AND MASCULINITY IN MID-VICTORIAN  
NARRATIVE

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# PHYSICAL DISABILITY AND MASCULINITY IN MID-VICTORIAN NARRATIVE

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This dissertation examines the proliferation of weak or damaged male characters in the mid-nineteenth-century novel. A number of new literary types appeared on the scene in the novels of the 1850s, including the self-made man, the public schoolboy, and the muscular Christian. Because novelists sought to represent ideal types rather than idiosyncratic individuals, silent exemplars rather than effusive characters, authors needed a way of narrating the story of the hero without undermining his exemplarity. They did so by pairing the strong man with a weak friend who elicited emotions from the silent hero of these novels. The pairing of the strong man with the weak man led to a variety of narrative effects, including the juxtaposition of the ennui of the sickroom with active labour, and an emphasis on domesticity, sentimentality, and sympathy. The homoerotic friendships of the weak man and the strong man offered a queer perspective on the home and the increasingly industrialized workplace that sought to standardize men's bodies. The novels of Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*, and Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* all engage this narrative strategy. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, which is most commonly read as a female bildungsroman, is also a rewriting of contemporary versions of masculinity. The Tom-Philip rivalry is an example of a failed schoolboy friendship between a strong boy and a weak boy, and Tom's brief career in the warehouses of Guest & Co raises questions about the seemingly praiseworthy career of the self-made man. In recasting the

homoerotic friendships of the earlier novels as a rivalry, Eliot sets up the Tom-Philip as a source of affective and narrative energy. In the mid-century, the weak or disabled man became the emotional center of the novel, occupying a position quite close to that of the narrator. As a locus of feeling in the novel, the disabled man teaches readers how to read his strong companion, and how to feel rightly.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karen Bourrier received her BA in English from Queen's University, Canada in 2003 and her Master's in English Literature from 1780 to 1900 from Oxford University in 2004. She is the recipient of several awards, including a Commonwealth Scholarship tenable at Oxford University, and a SSHRC doctoral grant. Her work on disability and Victorian culture is forthcoming in the *Dickens Studies Annual* and the *Victorian Review*.

for my parents, Richard and Louise Bourrier

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It seemed almost impossible to write a novel whose hero was not maimed or disabled in the mid-nineteenth century. The phenomenon was so widespread that it caused George Eliot to complain of the “lavish mutilation of heroes’ bodies, which has become the habit of novelists” in her 1857 review of *Aurora Leigh* (quoted in Carpenter 52). “The possibilities for a contemporary fictional hero were, at present, limited to “the consumptive, the insane, the inane, the hunchbacked, the lame, and the blind” (22), according to journalist Justin McCarthy in 1866. Eliot and McCarthy were looking back on a decade of novels populated by weak or disabled men in the works of prominent Victorian authors from Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens to Eliot herself.

Why was there such a proliferation in the representation of masculine weakness and disability in the novels of the mid-century? Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert’s argument that women writers disable their male protagonists to give female characters more equal access to power—so that Jane Eyre can marry Rochester only after he has been maimed and blinded—continues to be influential, as has their suggestion that women writers of the period ventriloquized their marginal position through male characters with disabilities (802). Similarly, Elaine Showalter writes that it is a commonplace in mid-nineteenth century novels by women “for the sensitive man to be represented as maimed; Linton Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Phineas Fletcher in Dinah Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Charles Edmonstone in Charlotte Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and even such late versions as Colin Cravan in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* all suggest that men condemned to life-long feminine roles display the personality traits of frustrated women” (126-7). But the

argument that the disabled male is a projection of the woman author does not account for the persistent interest that a wide range of male writers—most prolifically Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, but also Charles Kingsley, Arthur Hughes, and G. A. Lawrence—showed in male characters who were physically damaged or disabled. The invalid or disabled man was a feature not only of the domestic and sentimental fictions of writers like Charlotte Yonge and Dinah Mulock Craik, and, most famously, Dickens, but also of the schoolboy novel and the adventure or romance story. Across genres, these writers often paired the weak man with a strong man, so that we find Tom Brown and George Arthur, Tom Thurnall and Elsley Vavasour, Amyas Leigh and Frank Leigh, Guy Livingstone and Frank Hammond, John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher, and Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem sharing affective bonds ranging from the closest friendships to the most intense rivalries. For a brief period in the mid-century, the representation of a strong man and his weak counterpart rivaled the more familiar pairing of the fair-haired woman and her dark-haired counterpart as a well-recognized novelistic archetype.

The pairing of the strong man and the weak man arose from a confluence of historical and literary forces. The rise of industrialization and specialized branches of medicine such as orthopaedic surgery contributed to the standardization of men's bodies. A new literary type, the self-made man or the muscular Christian, appeared in novels concerned with the rise of sporting culture and the reform of public schools. The figure of the weak or damaged male was appealing, I argue, because he performed the useful narrative function of eliciting and articulating emotions from the taciturn hero of these novels. In his study of middle class masculinity and domesticity in mid-Victorian England, John Tosh shows that the emergence of the strong, self-made man who was head of his home as well as of his business was fraught with tension. Many of the novels of the 1850s attempt to mediate this tension through the figure of a weak

or disabled man who elicits a richer affective life from the hero, and makes him at home in the domestic novel. The most well-known example of this pairing is found in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, which casts Tom Brown and George Arthur as the strong boy and the weak boy, each of whom will profit from the other's influence: the sickly and pious boy reminds Tom of values beyond the playing fields, and Tom's healthy love of game and sport invigorates Arthur. Examples of this pairing can be found in novels by Kingsley, G. A. Lawrence, Charlotte Yonge, Emily Brontë, Dinah Mulock Craik and George Eliot.

Although there are many idiosyncratic examples of disabled men in the Victorian novel—for example, Daniel Quilp or Edward Rochester—this dissertation focuses on the function of disability in novels concerned with representing the physically and morally exemplary man. There were many types of the ideal man in the mid-century, including the muscular Christians depicted by Kingsley and Hughes, the sensitive and devout tractarians of Charlotte Yonge, and Dinah Mulock Craik's dogged self-made man, who had much in common with the muscular Christian. The muscular Christian and the high churchman were two very different types: the muscular Christian excels at sport but is indifferent at school, while the high churchman is an effete intellectual. Yet, in each of these cases the presence of a disabled companion serves to elicit facets of the ideal man's affective life that would not be brought to the fore otherwise. He teaches the effusive and high-strung tractarian patience by the invalid's couch, and brings a tender and more expressive side to light in the taciturn muscular Christian or self-made man. The disabled man thus serves as a commentary and critique of normative masculinity.

Although these novels were written as medicine was becoming increasingly specialized, they do not present a medical narrative of disability, in which the physical difference is classified as pathology and cured. Rather, the novels are more interested

in the affective and narrative possibilities raised by disability. Following Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*, much of the work done in disability studies so far has recounted the ways in which the development of medicine standardized the body throughout the nineteenth century. For example, in *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis finds that deafness was initially accommodated in the family home, and only came to be seen as a pathology that needed to be addressed through special schools and medical intervention in the nineteenth century. In the early stages of disability studies, this broadly Foucauldian medical reading demystified contemporary notions of disability as essentially a medical problem. But there were many other discourses shaping the perception of disability in the nineteenth century, and often medicine was not the most important one. In this sense, the Victorians had a more interestingly open concept of disability than our own. A danger of the reading of the development of disability as pathology is that in focusing so closely on medicine, the reading can end up reinforcing the importance of the very medical model it seeks to undermine. While it may be historically true that the body was subject to increasing standardization throughout the nineteenth century, the plot of these novels does not follow the pathologization and cure of disability. Rather than dwelling on medical details, Victorian novelists were often more interested in the diffusive emotional and narrative effects of disability. In this dissertation, I depart from earlier work in disability studies by focusing on the affective, pedagogical, and literary discourses that were shaping disability in the mid nineteenth-century, bringing in medical readings only as they are relevant to the novels.

Despite a prevailing optimism that men's bodies could be straightened through the development of orthopaedic surgery and physical therapy, the increasing industrialization of took a high toll on worker's bodies, and incidences of injuries were high. In his work on the factory worker's body, Mike Sanders suggests that after the

agitation of the Factory Debates of the 1830s and 1840s, from the 1850s onward, there was a “veritable sea-change in judicial opinion concerning employer liability” that culminated in the Employer’s Liability Act of 1880 and the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1897 (320). Although the 1850s may not be the decade most readily associated with the Condition of England Question, factory injuries were clearly a source of discomfort and concern. At the same historical moment that men’s bodies seemed particularly vulnerable and pathologised, as Bruce Haley has shown, unprecedented cultural emphasis was being put on the healthy body. Although this project does not address the injuries of factory workers in a sustained way, the changing workplace significantly informs the perception of men’s bodies in the novels I consider. Tom Tulliver’s body, for example, looks quite different cramped up in the schoolroom than it does in the odiferous warehouses of Guest & Co. One of the central preoccupations of the novels that I discuss, especially *John Halifax* and *The Mill on the Floss*, is the effect of industry on men’s bodies and feelings, and the place of domesticity in the novel.

The narrative effects of the pairing of the strong man and the weak man were manifold. The pairing inevitably leads to an intense male friendship or rivalry whose sexual charge becomes part of the novel’s narrative energy. Often there is no woman to triangulate the relationship between the two men, but when a homosocial love triangle appears in *The Mill on the Floss*, the difference between the two men is cast as a physical difference rather than a class difference. The weak man recognizes and articulates forms of desire, including but not limited to sexual desire, which his stronger companion cannot. In doing so, he highlights the hero’s self-restraint in not voicing or acting upon these desires. For example, when Phineas Fletcher and John Halifax take a day off to go to the theater, which Phineas’s Quaker father strongly disapproves of, it is Phineas who continues to voice the thrill of the moment long after

it has past. The two men also have complementary narrative functions. The strong man's perspective is that of an actor in the public world, and his career often provides the plot, while the weak man offers a more domestic perspective that helps to elicit facets of the strong man's character not visible in public life. The weak man gives the reader pause from the relentless pace of the strong man's constant adventuring or working, while the strong man gives the life of the weak man a vicarious narrative shape.

Even when the weak man is not literally the narrator of a story, he is often the best observer of what is going on. For example, Charlie Edmonstone, whose sickroom adjoins the family parlour, overhears and comments on all the goings on of Hollywell, and is usually right when he comments on their characters, and critics have long read Philip Wakem, who shows unusual acuity in recognizing Maggie's relationship with Stephen Guest, as the character who most closely shares the sensibility of Eliot's narrator. This is not to say that Charlie's bad knee or Philip's hunch back somehow put them outside the action of the plot, but rather that their disabilities place them in a position that sharpens their powers of observation. Sometimes this position is literally physical, as when Charles's invalid couch is placed in such a way that he overhears private conversations, and sometimes it is a mental position, as when years of heart bitterness over his deformity make Philip particularly sensitive to the suffering of others. Male characters with disabilities played a key role in articulating the new forms of masculinity, from the self-made man to the muscular Christian, that marked the mid-nineteenth century novel. The pairing of the weak or disabled man and his stronger friend was a narrative strategy that novelists developed in order to represent new forms of masculinity. This narrative pairing inevitably faded from view as the self-made man was accepted on his own terms, the fad of muscular Christianity came and went, and the intense physical friendship between two men was increasingly



pathologised as queer. The efflorescence of weak and damaged men in the mid nineteenth-century novel is a powerful instance of the way that the body and the novel come to shape each other at a particular moment in the history of masculinity.

Disability studies has only emerged as a field of inquiry in the humanities in the last ten to fifteen years, but there is rich and long-standing body of work on illness and Victorian culture. The figure of the Victorian invalid has been available for interpretation for many years, and the work of Peter Logan, Miriam Bailin, Athena Vrettos, Jane Wood, Janet Oppenheim and Maria Frawley provides a rich context for work on disability in the nineteenth century. Additionally, critics like Erin O'Connor, Herbert Süssman and Gerhard Joseph have been interested in the narrative logic and materiality of prosthetics in Victorian culture. What disability studies can add to this existing criticism is a more systematic way of considering bodies as seemingly diverse as that of a man with a wooden leg like Silas Wegg or a confirmed invalid like Frederick Fairlie. One of the most important contributions that disability studies can make to Victorian studies is to show how social practices highlight certain corporeal traits—whether on the basis of race, gender, class, sexuality, or ability—in order to render the body a legible text.

Disability studies offers us a subtle framework for thinking about the literary significance of the many weak, damaged, and marked bodies that populate the Victorian novel. It gives us a way of thinking about how bodies that may seem to be quite different from our contemporary medical perspective—so that Frank Hammond's pneumatic constitution seems nothing like Charlie Edmonstone's inflammation of the knee joint—may actually be performing similar narrative functions in the nineteenth-century novel. Emphasizing literary form, Michael Bérubé calls for a disability studies that will push our understanding of the relationship

between ability and narrative form. Concluding a discussion of texts with cognitively disabled narrators, he writes, “Rereading narrative from the perspective of disability studies, then, leads us to reread the role of temporality, causality, and self-reflexivity in narrative and to reread the implications of characters’ self-awareness, particularly in narratives whose textual self-awareness is predicated on the portrayal of cognitive disability” (576). The impact of a narrator who has a different understanding of time and causality is immediately evident, but the impact of a narrator with a particular embodied experience is also wide-ranging. One contribution I hope that this dissertation will make is to trace out less familiar narratives of disability that do not conform to a model of pathologised illness and cure, but rather open up new ways of viewing the narrative function of disability.

Compelling arguments about the relationship between corporeal and narrative forms have been made outside disability studies. In his book, *Nerves and Narratives*, Peter Logan argues that a “new middle-class nervous body” (1) emerged in the late eighteenth century, whose most remarkable characteristic was a propensity to talk about itself. Logan traces this propensity through a range of texts, from the medical texts of Thomas Trotter through novels by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Eliot. In her recent book, *Invalidism and Identity*, Maria Frawley discusses a range of texts written by invalids in the nineteenth-century. She defines invalidism as “not simply a medical condition or exclusively social role” but “a cultural mentality, a mode of thought that shaped and a posture that expressed the way men and women conceptualized, experienced, and represented a wide range of afflictions” (3). Frawley brings an impressive array of first-person narratives to bear on the question of how invalids constructed their identity, but does not address at any great length the question of narrative form, and why it is important that all of the narratives she considers are autobiographical. In this dissertation, I address that critical gap by considering the

impact that a disabled narrator has on the form of the text.

The relationship between narrative and corporeal forms is less obvious but still important in the case of a third person narrator instead of a first-person invalid narrator. Miriam Bailin's work on the Victorian sickroom offers a good example of how the representation of illness influences narrative form in cases where the narrator is not an invalid. She argues that scenes of illness in the Victorian novel are "employed as registers of emotional tumult, as crucial stages in self-development, and as rather high-handed plot contrivances to bring events to their desired issue" (1). Despite their predictability, Bailin argues, "these scenes serve, in themselves and in their relations to larger narrative structures, as an adaptive strategy to encode and mediate competing personal, social and aesthetic imperatives" (1). In most of the novels I consider, characters suffer relapses and recoveries, and sometimes the invalid is able to leave the sickroom for a comfortable seat on his couch or in the garden. At these points, illness is not a crisis at the center of the story but rather a chronic condition at the margins of the narrative. In these cases, thinking about patterns of illness and recovery can still help us appreciate the subtleties of narrative form.

Disability studies scholar Martha Stoddard Holmes considers the relationship between narrative form, emotion, and physical disability, arguing that during the nineteenth century disabled bodies came to be interpreted in terms of an emotional code that also informed narrative form. Focusing on Victorian Britain as "a time in which "afflicted" and "defective" bodies permeated not only the plots of popular literature and drama but also published debates about heredity, health, education, work, and welfare", she analyses how these "texts' recurrent way of representing bodies and feelings helped produce not only a social identity for disabled people that was significantly defined in emotional terms, but also the distinctive identity of "disabled," and its co-product, "able," in a century in which disability and ability were

not the established (if ambiguous) rhetorical categories they are in Anglo-American culture today” (4). Taking her cue from nineteenth-century theatre, Stoddard-Holmes focuses on melodrama as the primary affective and narrative category of disability, but we might ask what other genres informed the representation of corporeal difference. I pay particular attention to the overlapping genres of the schoolboy novel, the industrial novel and the domestic novel as a sites that formulate ideas about exemplary masculinity through the representation of able-bodied and disabled men.

Disability studies offers a model for my reading of the relationship between the strong man and the weak man in its emphasis on interdependence. Work by philosophers on disability has shown that popular assumptions about human rights inhering in the individual are troubled when we start to think about whether people with severe cognitive or physical disabilities are entitled to these rights. Thus, feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay has argued that we might productively think about human rights as inhering in the dyad of the caregiver and the person cared for, rather than in the individual who, it is popularly supposed, earns these rights through his or her ability to be a productive (particularly in an economic sense) member of society. As I have discussed, the move away from the medical model of disability with its emphasis on individual pathology toward a social model of disability also signals a move toward notions of interdependence.

The pairing of the strong man and the weak man shows the narrative interdependence of two character types. In these novels, the self-made man’s fantasy of complete autonomy is always supplemented by the presence of the weak man who is both the strong man’s dependent and someone he depends upon in unexpected ways. This reading is in some ways similar to Alex Woloch’s recent work on minor characters in the Victorian novel, in which he argues, for example, that the reader’s sense of Pickwick’s character is filled out by his interactions with the minor characters

that flit in and out of the novel. However, the relationships that I discuss are more central to the novels at hand, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to say who is the major and who is the minor character, and my discussion of this pairing is largely based in its historical and literary context. In this dissertation, then, I hope to highlight the interdependence of the body and narrative form. In this sense, my reading of the strong man and the weak man may have more in common with Eve Sedgwick's homoerotic narrative pairings, in which ideology and narrative form are mutually constitutive. However, Sedgwick at times paints homosociality and masculinity with a broad brush, and I hope to supplement Sedgwick's work with an account of why one particular homosocial relationship—the pairing of the disabled and able-bodied man—predominated the literature of the mid-nineteenth century.

*Wuthering Heights* (1847) takes up the themes I consider in this dissertation, including the pairing of masculine strength and weakness, an anxiety over the ascent of the self-made man, and the desire to read the exterior of the strong man for signs of his interior life. Heathcliff can be read as a self-made man, but he has none of the redeeming features of a John Halifax or even a Tom Brown. He is taciturn, but his reserve does not conceal depths of hidden kindness. He is strong, but he uses his strength to harm others instead of protecting them. While John Halifax and Tom Tulliver clearly make their way in the business world through steadiness and perseverance, no one can say where Heathcliff makes his fortune. When Heathcliff returns to *Wuthering Heights* a rich man and seemingly a gentleman, Lockwood asks Nelly, “Did he finish his education on the Continent, and come back a gentleman? Or did he get a sizer's place at college? or escape to America, and earn honours by drawing blood from his foster country? or make a fortune more promptly, on the English highways?” Nelly responds, “He may have done a little in all these vocations,

Mr. Lockwood; but I couldn't give my word for any. I stated before that I didn't know how he gained his money; neither am I aware of the means he took to raise his mind from the savage ignorance into which it was sunk" (80). Heathcliff exemplifies Victorian anxieties about the self-made man whose money is not a traceable inheritance but a mystery. Like the other novels I consider, much of the narrative energy in *Wuthering Heights* is channeled through pairings of strong and weak man. The masculine pairings in Brontë's novel—Heathcliff and Lockwood, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, or, lastly, Hareton Earnshaw and Linton Heathcliff—crisscross and double back on each other, and are also significantly triangulated by the women in the book—Nelly Dean as narrator, Catherine Earnshaw and Cathy Linton as protagonists. But the very difficulty of sorting out these narrative energies makes them a provocative site for bringing out some of the central issues we will be tracing in the following chapters.

Heathcliff proves quite difficult for Lockwood to read at first, and his gentlemanliness is repeatedly called into question. In the first chapter of the novel, Lockwood describes Heathcliff as "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman—that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire" (3). Rather than acting as Heathcliff's foil, Lockwood assumes from his first meeting with his landlord that they are kindred spirits: "I have a sympathetic chord within that tells me it is nothing of the sort; I know, by instinct, his reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling" (3). This dislike of emotional extravagance is the key to the gentlemanly reserve of the other strong men I will discuss, but Lockwood goes on to describe Heathcliff's dislike of "showy displays of feeling" as an aversion to "manifestation of mutual kindness" (3), an attribute clearly not in keeping with the gentleman. One of the main functions of the gentleman's narrator-friend is to provide an opportunity for manifestations of mutual kindness. Instead Lockwood projects his

own recalcitrance on Heathcliff. “He’ll love and hate, equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence to be loved or hated again—No, I’m running on too fast—I bestow my own attributes over-liberally on him. Mr. Heathcliff may have entirely dissimilar reasons for keeping his hand out of the way, when he meets a would-be acquaintance, to those which actuate me” (3). Lockwood claims to have a peculiar constitution, which led him at the first sign of requited affection from a young lady, in his own words, to shrink “icily into myself, like a snail, at every glance retired colder and fatter” (4). If Lockwood tames Heathcliff’s excesses of violence, it is through his recalcitrance as a narrator and not through mutual kindness.

Catherine Earnshaw is perhaps the only character who brings out a kinder side in Heathcliff. When Nelly observes the two reunited after several years separation, she says, “They were silent—their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other’s tears. At least, I suppose the weeping was on both sides; as it seemed Heathcliff *could* weep on a great occasion like this” (142). Yet, almost as if to anticipate the later ideal of the gentleman whose reserve conceals a tender side, Catherine warns Isabella, “Pray don’t imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He’s not a rough diamond—a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic; he’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (90). She asks Nelly to tell Isabella “what Heathcliff is—an unreclaimed creature, without refinement—without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furz and whinstone. I’d as soon put that little canary into the park on a winter’s day as recommend you to bestow your heart on him!” (90). Nelly herself remarks on his return that Heathcliff, retains “a great deal of the reserve for which his boyhood was remarkable, and that served to repress all startling demonstrations of feeling” (88-9). Whereas a lack of demonstrativeness will become a key character trait of the gentleman as the century progresses, at the time the novel is set, the turn of the eighteenth century, Heathcliff’s lack of sensibility is suspicious. As

Emily Brontë was writing *Wuthering Heights* in the 1840s the status of sensibility in men was changing, and she plays with these various notions of manliness throughout the novel.

In addition to the pairing of Lockwood as narrator of the frame story and Heathcliff as the object of his narrative interest (mediated through Nelly), the pairing of the strong man and the weak man is represented in the pairings of Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, Heathcliff and his son Linton, and Linton Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw. Both Edgar Linton and his nephew Linton have bodies that are associated with an effeminate gentility. A young Heathcliff, well-aware of his dark complexion and uncouth manners, complains to Nelly of Edgar Linton: “if I knocked him down twenty times, that wouldn’t make him less handsome; or me more so, I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be”. Heathcliff’s invalid son with Isabella Linton is, similarly, “A pale, delicate, effeminate boy.” Nelly claims that Linton “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” (177). In Heathcliff, we can already see the main anxieties about the muscular Christian and the self-made man that were raised in the 1850s. Critics have argued that the many-layered narrative form of *Wuthering Heights* serves to contain its romantic content, or to mask its essentially impenetrable psychology.<sup>1</sup> I offer an alternate reading, in which the many layers and pairings in the narrative arise out of historical anxieties about the gentlemanliness of the self-made man and the potential for a man’s strength to bleed into brutality.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example the work of Beth Newman “‘The Situation of the Looker-On’: Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*,” *PMLA* 105.5 (Oct., 1990): 1029-1041 or J. Hillis, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.



My first chapter shows the prominence of the pairing of the weak or disabled man and the strong man. I consider works by muscular Christian writers Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley, and by their contemporary, G. A. Lawrence, who was often considered in the same breath as Kingsley and Hughes because of his fascination with masculine strength and martial virtues, but whose heroes lacked the moral fibre of a Tom Brown or a Tom Thurnall. I argue that the presence of a weak or disabled man in these novels helped offset the hero's strength. The taciturn muscular Christian who celebrates actions rather than words created a narrative challenge, which was addressed in part by the presence of friend whose effusiveness was part of his weakness. The presence of a weak friend also allowed the muscular Christian an opportunity to show a tender side. In order to be considered a gentleman, the muscular Christian had to be capable of feeling (though not of articulating) moral pain, which was often coded as physical pain. His sympathy for his friend's sufferings proved that he too had the capacity to feel pain. Many of these novels end with a transfer of this physical and moral suffering from the weak friend onto the strong hero. Amyas Leigh and Guy Livingston are maimed or permanently disabled, I argue, both to show that they too have the capacity for Christian suffering and to temper a strength that can easily bleed into brutality.

At first glance, few popular mid-Victorian novels seem to present such different ideals of masculine heroism than the swash-buckling adventure stories of Charles Kingsley, which celebrate the masculine form at its brawniest, and the pious domestic fictions of Charlotte Yonge, which show men as heroes of the hearth and home. Yet Kingsley, for all his antipathy toward what he perceived as the unmanly and un-English Puseyites, found himself quite taken with the works of Yonge, the Oxford movement's foremost novelist (Hayter 1). In my second chapter, I take up the themes of chivalry, honour, manliness, and self-sacrifice that help explain Yonge's

appeal to Kingsley. Yonge's novel offers another incarnation of the weak man-strong man pairing, with the difference that the strong man finds ample room for heroism in a domestic setting. Indeed, Yonge's critics have argued that the plot of *The Heir of Redclyffe* follows Sir Guy Morville's domestication and feminization as he comes to live with his cousins only to learn to sit still and not fidget, to control his temper, and finally to sacrifice himself in nursing the proud cousin who has dogged him from the opening pages of the novel. By portraying a male invalid in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Yonge places men in confined domestic roles. In her other novels, Yonge famously writes about female invalids whose forced confinement to the sickroom and moral influence from the invalid's couch is in some ways a continuation of their gender roles. Although Yonge's men are more domestic than Kingsley's muscular Christians or Lawrence's toughs, invalidism proves difficult for her male invalid, Charles Edmonstone. Charles's disability prevents him from coming to Guy's defense, and this pathos is perhaps one of the reasons for the outpouring of emotion from male and female readers alike. For Yonge reading was bound up with illness—she felt that novels were an indulgence for the sick and Charles is the most voracious novel-reader in *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Yonge's unobtrusive narrator gives the reader little guidance, and to some extent Charlie fills this role, recognizing the conventions of romance and the gothic at work, and anticipating what will happen next. His restlessness and ennui lead to his intriguing and mischief making and are necessary to set the plot in motion: in this sense his energy resembles that of the narrator.

The connection between embodiment and narrative form is more emphatic in Dinah Mulock Craik's 1856 bestseller, *John Halifax, Gentleman*. In Craik's novel, Phineas Fletcher, a confirmed invalid, narrates his friend John's rise from rags-to-riches. Through Phineas, Craik solves the problem of how to narrate the story of the self-made man, whose virtue is in part defined by his self-restraint and silence.

Phineas elicits the affective depths of a character largely destined by his industrial career to be viewed with suspicion as a social climber rather than a self-made man. John's triumphal career in turn provides Phineas's otherwise monotonous life with a vicarious narrative shape while Phineas provides the otherwise relentless story of John's work and success with a much-needed sense of rest and repose. As Phineas grows older and becomes a member of John's household as brother to John and his wife and uncle to John's children, he develops narrative crochets that allow for outbursts of feeling in John's steady story: he takes the side of the children in their love affairs even when it is not quite right and allows himself to digress from the main narrative thread when it takes his fancy. The perspective of the avunculate in these later chapters provides a rest from the patriarchal authority that characterizes John's story. Phineas's narration also ties invalidism with a literary strain that humanizes the self-made man, and also connects narrative production with the same kind of corporeal pain that Catherine Gallagher argues characterizes both industry and authorship in the nineteenth-century novel.

In my final chapter, I argue that *The Mill on the Floss* is in part a rewriting of the schoolboy friendships and the story of the self-made man that I consider earlier in the dissertation. Maggie, Philip, and Tom form a homosocial love triangle, but the difference between the two men is more of a physical difference than a class difference. Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem meet at the Rev. Mr. Stelling's boarding school, but the two can become friends only when Tom lames his foot. Instead of instilling a life-long appreciation of the classics and sport in one another on the pattern of Tom Brown and George Arthur, the two develop a quasi-erotic rivalry that continues over Tom's sister Maggie. Tom goes on to rise in business and in height at a rate that rivals John Halifax. The rivalry between Tom and Philip accomplishes some of the same affective and narrative work that the friendships of the earlier novels do.

Tom and Philip act as foils to one another, with Philip eliciting some emotion from the otherwise taciturn Tom. Eliot's narrator suggests to some extent that their affective differences stem from their physiological differences: as a hunchback, Philip is morbid, peevish, sensitive and sympathetic, while Tom's straight back matches his unbending morals and business prowess. This contrast raises questions of who is a worthy object of sympathy, and who is best able to feel it. Eliot's notion of sympathy is often rooted in a specific physiology. It is clear that Tom's unbending nature has not broadened his sympathies, while Philip's hunch back suits him both to receive and to give sympathy. Although Philip, with his broad sympathies, has long been read as a stand-in for Eliot's narrator, it is worthwhile to note that Tom also shares some of the narrator's propensities, including her love of maxims. The Tom-Philip pairing provides a model for the narrator's exploration of the question of how far men of different metals can sympathize with each other, and how the narrator can extend the reader's sympathies.

The weak or disabled male often shares a sensibility close to that of the narrator. But that is not to say that he is somehow outside the action of the narrative, or even on its periphery. Rather, in the examples that I examine, particularly from domestic realist novels which tend to privilege depth of character, the disabled man has a full inner life and often elicits the depth of other characters. In a brief coda, I extend the significance of the pairing of the strong man and the weak man beyond the mid-nineteenth century to the *fin-de-siècle*, where I find that boy's adventure stories, detective fiction, and decadent fiction all draw on similar pairings of masculine strength and weakness, though the binary is not always as clear as it is in the mid-century. Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or Dorian Gray, one man can be both the strong man and the weak man as the self-made man, be he scientist or artist, collapses into degeneracy. It is my hope that this dissertation will illuminate the ways in which

physical difference shapes and is shaped by narrative form, and stimulate more discussion of the significance of disability in the Victorian novel and beyond.

## CHAPTER 2

### PAIN, DISABILITY AND MASCULINITY IN THE FICTION OF CHARLES KINGLSEY, THOMAS HUGHES, AND G.A. LAWRENCE

*I cheer the games I cannot play;  
As stands a crippled squire  
To watch his master through the fray,  
Uplifted by desire.*

-William Johnson Cory, "Academus," *Ionica* (1858, written 1850)

Looking back on the novels of the 1850s, the reviewer for the *Saturday Review* found a broad spectrum of heroes, from the "curate-type", who inspired young lady readers with missionary zeal, to the "amateur prizefighter". He found much to lament in the state of the fiction of the 1860s, which put up the disreputable and effeminate hero of the sensation novel for the admiration of young ladies, and much to admire in retrospect in the fiction of the 1850s. "Thoughtful observers" wrote he:

can only regret that a literary creation which led to so many improving and useful efforts should have passed into oblivion. After the downfall of the curate-type there were two main attempts to place before young ladies in fiction a model man. We have had the genial hero, and the intense hero; muscle with, and muscle without, Christianity; cheery naturalism and gloomy animalism; Mr. Kingsley's young man, and the cool Captain of the author of *Guy Livingstone*. Both these types had their merits. The picture of an earnest, unconventional, God-fearing young fellow doing his duty without any nonsense or self-questionings, may be studied with advantage by a sex inclined

to frivolity and affectation. We cannot say as much of the compound of pugilism and French sentiment which the author of *Guy Livingstone* delights to embody in his heroes. Still, there is something in physical force that will always command, and not undeservedly, female admiration. Compared with the representative man of the popular sensation novel, even an amateur prizefighter becomes respectable. (438)

The reviewer calls attention to the variety of exemplary types of manhood in the 1850s, all of which he finds preferable to contemporary heroes of sensation fiction. What is so interesting about these types of masculinity, from the curate-type, to the muscular Christian to the frenchified pugilist, is that in novels they are all offset by the presence of another type, a weaker man who is the queer companion of the strong man. The sheer number of permutations of this pairing in the novels of the 1850s and early 1860s suggests that it was fulfilling an important narrative and cultural role. In this chapter, I set out the pairing of the strong man and the weak man as a prevalent motif that allowed mid-century fiction to negotiate the demands of a new kind of masculinity.

The epigraph to this chapter, from former Eton tutor William Johnson Cory's poetry, suggests that one aspect of the new masculinity, the rise of sporting culture in public schools, was so powerful that even an able-bodied man could find himself feeling "crippled". The epigraph also suggests that the pairing of weaker and stronger men (or boys) gave rise to powerful erotic tensions. The energies of the strong man at times threatened to erupt into incredible brutality and violence, and his chivalrous attitude toward his weaker friend kept this threat in check, and also allowed the weak man's piety and meekness to emerge. The weak man also helped his strong friend demonstrate his ability to bear both physical and moral suffering, which was an essential component of his manliness. Cory's poetry gestures towards these broader

themes, which were more fully developed in novelistic form.

The pairing of the strong man and the weak man enjoyed an immense popularity in many forms in the novels of the 1850s, featuring prominently in novels whose authors were high church and broad church alike, and in the novels of those who professed no doctrinal allegiance at all. Then, almost as quickly as it became popular, this pairing disappeared from literature. Why should this be? In this chapter, I argue that the 1850s sparked an intense focus on and anxiety about the male body. The emergence of sporting culture, reforms to public schools and most prominently, muscular Christianity, made the male body an object of the public's lavish attention and admiration in a way that it never had been before. This model of muscular manhood emphasized physical strength balanced with self-control—the muscular Christian was capable of doing great damage but kept himself in check. Kingsley's hero also immediately understood what was right without thinking about it, and acted upon his instincts without wavering. In this model of masculine cognition, excessive self-reflection and talkativeness were seen as signs of weakness. This stigmatizing of self-consciousness can be traced back to Carlyle's formulation of unreflective hard work—the everlasting God-given mandate “Work thou in Welldoing” (*Sartor Resartus* 140)—as a mainstay against loss of faith and self-doubt.

Representing the inner life of a man who was slow to speak and bothered by no internal struggles was a difficult prospect for these novelists, who could not emulate their hero's anti-intellectual taciturnity. As James Fitzjames Stephens noted in his review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, “the intellectual gifts which his [Kingsley's] novels display are very unlike the simple athletic understanding, and the calm self-possessed good sense, which he rates so highly” (192). In fact, describing the ideal muscular Christian hero at all proved difficult precisely because there was nothing odd or unusual about him. Thus, muscular Christian authors often painted their heroes not



as individuals but as “types” of the young fair-haired straightforward young men that one could find anywhere in England. The weak or queer companion of this model young man, who is by definition odd, and whose oddness is often physical, throws his friend’s normalcy into relief. His weakness brings into focus a model of muscular manhood. These male bonds are in most cases established without the mediation of a shared female object—the interest lies entirely in the friendship between the men. Here, the model of Greek pederasty set up in Cory’s poetry, which is always in the background of the schoolboy novel, is recast as a stark physical difference rather than a dramatic age difference. The physical imbalance between the two men heightens the novel’s emotional register. While the strong man is seemingly complete in himself, part of his companion’s weakness is a longing for intimacy. The weak man is coded as feminine in his susceptibility to feeling and ability to understand and express his stronger friend’s inner life. He elicits unexpected moral capacities from the strong. While the strong man might seem self-absorbed in his physicality and complacent, and potentially even brutal, the weak man shows otherwise by giving his friend an opportunity to demonstrate his tenderness and sympathy, showing that the strong man too has feelings that his stoicism tends to disguise. The strong body is not callous, but has the ability to feel mental and physical anguish. It is not his own moral or physical pain that he feels most keenly though, but the pain of others, particularly of his friend. Suffering thus serves as a threshold to a new moral awareness for the strong man, showing his openness to character development and moral progress—without which there would be no plot. Seen in this context, the strong man and the weak man are mutually dependent: while the strong man provides physical support to the weak, the weak man is more unexpectedly an emotional support for the strong.

On a broad scale, this general dynamic sets up a number of dualisms—the focus of the strong man is on the surface on his outward calm, while the weak man’s

focus is on depth and his inward-looking passion. The pairing of the two shows that each has these innate capacities, and brings them to the fore. We can trace this dynamic in Charles Kingsley's narratives. For example, the marked difference between the strong, manly doctor Tom Thurnall and the weak, effeminate spasmodic poet Elsley Vavasour sets up a binary of strong and weak, reserved and passionate, and taciturn and loquacious. The pairing of Thurnall and Vavasour serves to structure the plot of Kingsley's novel, which centers around Thurnall's attempted reform of Vavasour. A similar argument can be made for *Westward Ho!*, which compares Amyas Leigh favourably with his brother Frank Leigh and his cousin Eustace Leigh. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Tom's friendship with George Arthur turns the narrative into one of the hero's moral progress, as the young scapegrace Tom learns piety from his weaker friend. The friendship between the two boys thus serves to structure the form of the schoolboy novel. The relationship between this pairing of the strong man and the weak man and narrative form becomes even more apparent in G. A. Lawrence's novel *Guy Livingstone* (1857), in which the story of the muscular prizefighter is told by his pneumatic school-friend. By the time Wilkie Collins published his critique of muscular Christianity in 1868, *Man and Wife*, the muscular Christian (Geoffrey Delamayne) is completely without morals, and his disabled counterpart, Sir Patrick Lundie, comes to the rescue as the perfect gentleman. Throughout the mid-century, this narrative pairing of a strong man with a weak man motivates a thematic exploration of male friendships and rivalries.

The strong man's moral progress is often expressed as an increasing ability to suffer on behalf of others. In her influential work on masculinity and masochism, Kaja Silverman, engaging Reik's work, reminds us of the long tradition of suffering male bodies on display, from Christ down through the Christian martyrs, in the Christian tradition (197). Silverman argues that the Oedipus complex is the primary

framework for thinking about masculinity, even those “non-phallic” masculinities which seem to fall on the margins of dominant Freudian readings (2). While it is provocative, this Freudian reading does not help us to think outside the paradigm of the castrating author and her feminized male protagonist. More helpful is Silverman’s assertion that there is a narrow boundary separating moral masochism and exemplary maleness (9), which speaks to the importance of suffering for the muscular Christian. In his recent work on the fin-de-siècle imperial contexts of masochism, John Kucich uses contemporary object-relations psychology to think outside the Freudian paradigm, arguing that figurations of masochism became a psychosocial language which addressed problems of social class and imperialism (2). Kucich argues that the adventure fiction of writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Rider Haggard “helped foster a fundamentally masochistic ethos of British masculinity, in which the ability to absorb pain stoically—or even ecstatically—was greatly prized” (9). By mastering himself, the British man became fit to master colonial others. The mid-century, with the spectre of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny looming large, also saw its share of British masculinity under duress. James Eli Adams historicizes masculinity and masochism in the mid-century in his work on Charles Kingsley, arguing that the “figure of male suffering occupies a powerful boundary position within the structures of Victorian gender in which fierce attacks on the dominant culture may also articulate fantasies of self-empowerment, or in which, conversely, Victorian discipline may be registered at its greatest intensity by imagining the pleasures of self-abandon, or self-destruction” (147). Kucich’s reading of masochism concentrates on fin-de-siècle imperialism, and Adams finds the tension between masculine desire and self-discipline expressed most clearly in the colonial situation. Anne McClintock also finds the masochistic strain most clearly expressed in the colonial context in *Imperial Leather*. My reading of the value of pain and suffering in the mid-century novel places the

context of male suffering much closer to home, in the public schools and hunting grounds of England.

The threat of pain loomed large in muscular Christian schoolboy and adventure novels, whether the threat was that of a small boy being “tossed” in a blanket by one of the big boys or beaten by a praepostor, or that of being speared by an Amazon or paralyzed in a riding accident. The ability to tolerate this physical pain without flinching was a sign of one’s manliness. Yet, as Wilkie Collins’s parody of muscle without morals in *Man and Wife* (1870) shows, the strong man also had to show himself capable of feeling moral pain, which was often conflated with his ability to tolerate physical pain. As we will see, a typical narrative pattern in these novels goes something like this: the strong hero befriends a weak or ill man or boy whose patient suffering teaches him the importance of piety and meekness. Eventually, the strong man shows that he too is sensitive to moral and physical pain, sometimes by responding to his friend’s illness, and sometimes by becoming ill or injured himself. Physical and moral pain, which are initially the province of the weak man, are thus transferred to the strong man, becoming a marker of the strong man’s manliness and morality. This reading differs significantly from influential second-wave feminist readings that follow Freud in seeing the maiming or blinding of a man as a symbolic castration. Although being injured or ill may have a chastening effect on the hero, suffering physical and moral pain is also irrefutable proof of his manliness.

### ***Muscular Christians and Other Animals: Kingsley’s Two Years Ago and Westward Ho!***

Charles Kingsley’s masochistic tendencies have been known since the discovery of courtship manuscripts in the British Library in the 1970s showing

Kingsley and his wife coupling and the torture of the saints (Chitty). But even without this archival evidence, one does not have to look far to discover scenes of physical and psychic suffering that are fundamental to Kingsley's vision of masculinity. His novels are rife with maiming, addiction, and fighting—indeed, his notion of gentlemanliness is bound up with a man's capacity to feel pain. Summarizing Amyas Leigh's upbringing in *Westward Ho!*, Kingsley says:

his training had been that of the old Persians, 'to speak the truth and to draw the bow,' both of which savage virtues he had acquired to perfection, as well as the equally savage ones of enduring pain cheerfully, and of believing it to be the finest thing in the world to be a gentleman; by which word he had been taught to understand the careful habit of causing needless pain to no human being, poor or rich, and of taking pride in giving up his own pleasure for the sake of those who were weaker than himself (8-9)

Men are gentleman for Kingsley by virtue of their capacity to spare others both physical and moral pain by bearing it cheerfully themselves. They do so through their actions rather than their words: when they speak the truth it is brief, and they are far more ready to protect the weak with their swords rather than their tongues. Pain becomes expressive when words fail.

Of course, the novelist needs to be articulate in order to tell the story of the muscular Christian. It comes as no surprise that Kingsley himself was deeply ambivalent about the value of words over deeds. In a verse to a friend, he wrote:

Tho' we earn our bread, Tom,  
By the dirty pen,  
What we can we will be,  
Honest Englishmen.  
Do the work that's nearest

Though it's dull at whiles,  
Helping, when we meet them,  
Lame dogs over stiles (Memoirs, Chapter XV).

Kingsley's impromptu verse speaks to many of muscular Christianity's main concerns: a deep suspicion of intellectual activity and writing as labour (the "dirty pen"), a promotion of a work ethic that sees no task as too menial to be done properly, and an emphasis on the ordinariness of the tasks at hand and of the man who accomplishes them. The muscular Christian needs a weaker object on which to exercise his chivalry—in this case the emblematic lame dog—because his morals can only be expressed through deeds and not words. Thus, the muscular Christian's code of ethics exists only within the dyad of the weak and the strong.

This suspicion of intellectual activity was in fact a problem for Kingsley in defining muscular Christianity. Kingsley did not like the term muscular Christianity, which was coined as a dismissive term in the *Saturday Review* (Newsome 198). But when he was pushed to define the mania he had started, he called it a "a healthful and manful Christianity; one which does not exalt feminine virtues to the exclusion of the masculine" (quoted in Newsome 210). This definition seems roundabout, but the lack of a clear definition is part of the muscular Christian's ethos of acting rather than speaking. In *Tom Brown at Oxford*, Hughes claims that although one might call his hero a muscular Christian, his own knowledge of the subject has been "gathered almost entirely from the witty expositions and comments of persons of a somewhat dyspeptic habit, who are not amongst the faithful themselves" (112). Indeed, he is not "aware that any authorized articles of belief have been sanctioned or published by the sect, Church, or whatever they may be" (112). The muscular Christian is too busy boxing, hunting, rowing, and riding to write about his ethics, while those who do write tend to be of a less sound constitution. Since much of the muscular Christian's virtue

lies in his ability to discern right from wrong without thinking about it, for the novelist to reflect on how this is so only undermines his project.

This anxiety about the trustworthiness of language can be traced back to Carlyle. For Carlyle, loquaciousness in working-class men is especially unsettling. In *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle imagines the Manchester operatives as strong but inarticulate men, and he takes it on himself to give voice to their agonies. The “Manchester manual workers,” he writes, “in return for their work, such modicum of food, clothes and fuel as will enable them to continue their work itself! They as yet clamour for no more; the rest, still inarticulate, cannot yet shape itself into a demand at all, and only lies in them as a dumb wish; perhaps only, still more inarticulate, as a dumb, altogether unconscious want” (26). In a rather eroticized description of these men, Carlyle imagines that “A deep unspoken sense lies in these strong men,—inconsiderable, almost stupid, as all they can articulate of it is. Amid all violent stupidity of speech, a right noble instinct of what is doable and what is not doable never forsakes them: the strong inarticulate men and workers, whom *Fact* patronises; of whom, in all difficulty and work whatsoever, there is good augury!” (23). For Carlyle, a strong sense of what is right necessarily coincides with an inability to articulate it. He thus goes on to ventriloquize the “Sphinx-question” of the Manchester strikers: “Behold us here, so many thousands, millions, and increasing at the rate of fifty every hour. We are right willing and able to work... We ask, If you mean to lead us towards work; to try and lead us” (23). At first Carlyle sets up the problem of speech as a problem of class, and solves it by having the author speak on behalf of the working classes.

What begins as a problem for working-class men that requires Carlyle to speak on their behalf, however, quickly becomes a praiseworthy characteristic of the ruling classes. In the second book of *Past and Present*, when Carlyle imagines how the

leaders of a medieval abbey might provide an example for present day leaders, he highlights Abbot Samson's taciturnity. After Jocelin praises the Abbot's multilingualism, Carlyle interposes, "Eloquence in three languages is good; but it is not the best. To us, as already hinted, the Lord Abbot's eloquence is less admirable than his *ineloquence*, his great invaluable 'talent of silence!'" (100). He claims that "The kinds of people Abbot Samson liked worst were these three: *Mendaces, ebriosi, verbosi*, Liars, drunkards, and wordy or windy persons;'—not good kinds, any of them!" (101). Carlyle's own verbosity undermines his deep suspicion of language. He addresses this problem to a degree in setting out his task as editor of Jocelin of Brakelonde's medieval chronicle. Speech is acceptable, writes Carlyle, if it is simple and true. "Veracity, true simplicity of heart, how valuable are these always! He that speaks what is really in him, will find men to listen, though under never such impediments. Even gossip, springing free and cheery from a human heart, this too is a kind of veracity and *speech*;--much preferable to pedantry and inane grey haze!" (54). Although genuine speech is an acceptable sort of loquaciousness, rhetoric remains a threat to the transparency of the Carlylean Captain of Industry. These issues of class and volubility become clearer in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, which we will discuss in Chapter Three, but for now, the most pressing concern is whether or not the muscular body can articulate itself at all.

Stephen recognized the dilemma inherent in representing the reserved muscular man. He speculated that the readers most drawn to muscular Christian works, in which display "the excellence of a simple massive understanding united with the almost unconscious instinct to do good, and adorned, generally speaking, with every sort of athletic accomplishment" (191), would be "the febrile, irritable, over-excited part of the generation" and that "such reading would be likely to calm or brace their nerves" (191-2). Stephen's speculation about the weak nerves of Kingsley's



readership might be true if we were to judge by the weak friends that are always drawn to the strong hero in the novels.

The greatest difficulty novelists encountered in depicting the new forms of manliness that were being shaped by muscular Christianity and the rise of the self-made man in the 1850s was how slow to speak he was. Representing a man whose taciturnity is part of his gentility proves to be a difficult project for novelists of the mid-century, and one which they often solve by having his friend emote for him. Stephen described this problem in his review of *Guy Livingstone*: “It is easy to say that a man has a ‘huge frame’ and ‘iron muscles,’ and to assign to him all the other conventional proofs of strength which novelists are so much in the habit of lavishing on their heroes” he wrote, “but it is a much more difficult and delicate matter to describe the influence which a constitution of that kind would produce upon habits of thought and feeling” (537). It is much easier to describe the effect of the nervous or sickly body on the constitution, since the sick body tends to speak for itself.

This program of self-denial seems odd in Kingsley given that he is most famous for denouncing the ascetic and monastic tendencies of the Catholic Church and Anglican High Church. But, as Adams argues, Kingsley’s program of muscular Christianity depended on the same rigorous asceticism he so disliked in the Catholic Church (17). The persistent interest that he shows in chivalry, which includes not only protecting but also suffering for others is given equal time in the most high church of novelists, including Charlotte Yonge. This preoccupation with pain bridges what might seem quite different types of masculinity, and, as we will see, is often negotiated through the friendship or rivalry of two men. Looking at two of Kingsley’s most representative novels, *Westward Ho!* and *Two Years Ago*, we find that the familiar pairing of the strong man and the weak man gives rise to a productive narrative tension that propels the plot forward. Kingsley’s intense homosocial rivalries and

friendships enable him to explore the interdependencies between men, as the weak man's volubility and psychological and physical oddities offset the muscular Christian's strength and silence. The weak man also gives the strong man the opportunity to show that he is capable of suffering without the need to give vent to this suffering himself. Pain can become expressive when words fail the muscular Christian.

It is difficult for the muscular Christian to express himself since his exemplarity lies in the idea that he is not an individual but a "type". The muscular Christian is recognizable, not only by his well-built frame, but also by his perfect conformity to the physical norms that were arising from the increasing emphasis on sporting culture, specialized medicine, public health, and sanitation. There is nothing odd or queer about the muscular Christian. Tom Thurnall of Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* is of that "bull-terrier type so common in England" (3); East warns Tom Brown that a boy will only get on at Rugby if "he's got nothing odd about him" (91); and George Eliot's Tom Tulliver is "one of those lads that grow everywhere in England, and, at twelve or thirteen years of age, look as much alike as goslings" (36). In *Man and Wife*, Wilkie Collins parodies the indistinguishable nature of young men: "The manhood and muscle of England, resemble the wool and mutton of England, in this respect, that there is about as much variety in a flock of Athletes as in a flock of sheep" (183). Collins is suspicious of the muscleman's morality. For writers like Kingsley and Hughes however, the muscular Christian's marked ordinariness becomes the visible sign of his Englishness and his honesty: a passerby can see plainly enough that there is nothing irregular in his face or his morals. The ordinary action of helping a lame dog over a stile is the mark of a man who goes about his business, doing right without thinking about it. At the end of the century, Margaret Oliphant described this "ideal young man of Victorian romance" as a "fine athlete, moderately good scholar,

and honest, frank, muscular, and humble-minded gentleman” (493). Paradoxically, the muscular Christian becomes conspicuous in his perfect ordinariness.

The supposed ordinariness of the muscular Christian only becomes obvious in contradistinction to the queerness of his companions. Kingsley begins *Two Years Ago* by setting forth the distinction between his muscular hero Tom Thurnall and his friend Elsley Vavasour. First introduced as a surly youth called John Briggs, this companion of the hero, Tom Thurnall, reinvents himself as Elsley Vavasour. Vavasour is Kingsley’s parody of the spasmodic poets: a man who goes home to write tortured verses about a shipwreck instead of helping with the rescue, mistreats his wife and children, and eventually succumbs to opium addiction and ill-health after a Manfredic jaunt in the Welsh mountains. Thurnall and Vavasour juxtaposed to one another from the very first pages of the novel. Where Thurnall is “sturdy, and yet not coarse; middle-sized, deep-chested, broad-shouldered; with small, well-knit hands and feet, large jaw, bright gray eyes, crisp brown hair, a heavy projecting brow” and a face that shows his “shrewdness and good-nature” (3), Vavasour, on the other hand, sports a “highly-developed Byronic turn-down collar, and long, black, curling locks” and the kind of “bad complexion” that indicates sedentary life and a melancholic temper” (3). Although the novel does present some critique of Tom Thurnall’s Brown family-like narrow-mindedness (84), the main plot is structured around Tom’s attempt to rescue his morally far-gone friend. This rescue takes the form of a physical intervention. Tom, who practices as a physician in between escapades in Australia and the Crimea, tells Elsley that “it may be a very materialist view of things, but fact is fact, the *corpus sanum* is father to the *mens sana*—tonics and exercise make the ills of life look marvelously smaller” (195), and recommends a course of boxing, shooting, sailing angling, gardening, walking, dumb-bells, beef and ale (196-7). He proposes a new, more pragmatic, subject for the verses of the author of *The Soul’s Agonies*: science and

the natural world (163), further suggesting that the poet should get a high desk made and compose his verses standing up (196-7). Tom fails to rescue Elsley, however, in a less extreme case, such as that of the Reverend with high church leanings, Frank Headley (35), helping the hero through a cholera epidemic and going off to fight in the Crimea is enough to combat a tendency toward weakness and effeminacy. In this case we see that Elsley's suffering, the suffering of the spasmodic poet who dwells on inward struggles rather than those of the wide world, is the unmanly kind of suffering. Tom Thurnall's suffering is of an entirely different sort—his concerns turn outward as he not only tries to rescue Vavasour and Frank, but also practices medicine, nurses his hometown through a cholera epidemic, and to crown his suffering, fights in the Crimea before he can marry his sweetheart, Grace Harvey, who is prone to self-sacrifice herself.

We see Kingsley's obsession with the masculine frame as a gauge of morality in his earlier and more popular novel, *Westward Ho!* (1855). Amyas Leigh, Kingsley's sea-faring Elizabethan hero, is juxtaposed with both his courtier brother, Frank Leigh, and his Jesuitical cousin, Eustace Leigh. In a scene that we will see repeated in *Tom Brown*, *John Halifax*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, Frank lays his "bloodless, all but transparent" and "delicate fingers" on his brother's hand, which is "hard and massive as a smith's" (303). The contrast between the two brother's physiques is borne out in the contrast between their characters. Amyas's stocky build goes hand-in-hand with his English commonsense. The English sailor trumps the Spaniard every time for "then, as now" he is "quite amphibious and all-cunning animal, capable of turning his hand to everything, from needlework and carpentry to gunnery or hand-to hand blows" (358). Furthermore, like Tom Brown, whose participation in sport at Rugby makes a fair and honest fighter of him, the English sailor of Elizabethan times practices "from childhood the use of the bow, and accustomed to consider sword-play and quarter-staff

as a necessary part and parcel of education, and the pastime of every leisure hour” (358). Kingsley’s hero shows his virtue through his brave actions, not his brave words. The narrative is suspicious of the eloquence and intellect of the silver-tongued Sir Walter Raleigh and other members of Frank’s circle (195). By contrast, Amyas only ever makes a speech to his crew but once, and when he does so, he does it “simply and manfully” (388), and the novelist does not record his words. Instead, he commends his hero’s more practical knowledge. “Luckily for him” Amyas is “no ‘genius’” but he is “as cunning as a fox in all matters of tactic and practice, and would have in these days” claims the narrator “proved his right to be considered an intellectual person by being a thorough man of business” (106). The muscular Christian isn’t unintellectual; rather, his intellect finds expression in practical projects rather than in words. This emphasis on taciturnity is in tension with the project of novel writing itself, and Kingsley’s weaker but more voluble men are the necessary companions of his taciturn heroes.

Frank Leigh, Amyas’s voluble but chivalrous brother, is a more admirable character than Vavasour. Frank is a friend of Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sydney, and his presence in the novel suggests that literariness does have a place in Kingsley’s work. Although Amyas is for the most part the model gentleman of the novel, Frank, who is “as delicately beautiful as his brother” is “huge and strong” (25) does have some lessons in chivalry to offer. A scholar and courtier who is part of Sir Philip Sydney’s circle, and who dresses in the latest fashions of Milan, Frank comes in for his fair share of censure from the narrator, who digresses: “Oh, Frank! Frank! have you come out on purpose to break the hearts of all Bideford burghers’ daughters. And if so, did you expect to further that triumph by dyeing that pretty little pointed beard (with shame I report it) of a bright vermillon?” (39). After a rapturous description of Frank Leigh’s dove-coloured suit with a broad dove-coloured Spanish hat and feather

to match, the narrator of *Westward Ho!* exclaims: “There—I must stop describing you, or I shall catch the infection of your own Euphuism, and talk of you as you would have talked of Sidney or of Spenser” (40). The narrator does concede that despite his foppery, the courtier has behaved like a man in saving a friend from a dozen braves in Italy (39).

The most admirable trait of the court wit is his chivalry, which the novel overtly discusses as having a female object, but which in practice is most often bestowed on a male object. Despite the muscular Christian’s distrust of the convoluted rhetoric of court wits, the narrator of *Westward Ho!*, grudgingly admits that Amyas would do well to imitate their chivalry. Thus, when Frank suggests to his brother that every realm should be ruled by a queen so that “weakness and not power” would “be to man the symbol of divinity”, “love, and not cunning... the arbiter of every cause” and “chivalry, not fear, the spring of all obedience,” Amyas grumbles ““Humph! There’s some sense in that... I’d run a mile for a woman when I would not walk a yard for a man” (308). The suggestion here seems to be that characters like Amyas would do well to import the chivalry being popularized on the Continent by figures like Castiglione, with its emphasis on the protection of the weak and women. This chivalry can only be adopted on the condition that the effeminate tendencies of the foreign courtier are tempered by a dose of English commonsense and practicality. Kingsley thus allows his heroes to form the “Noble Brotherhood of the Rose” in worship of the local beauty of Bideford, Rose Salterne. He admonishes his readers that, despite what may seem like an “extravagant fondness for Continental manners and literature,” this variety of “chivalry is only another garb of that beautiful tenderness and mercy which is now, as it was then, the twin sister of English valour” (160). It is perhaps this absence of chivalry in the Jesuit Eustace—who accosts Rose instead of worshipping her from afar—which proves his weakness and effeminacy to

be beyond redemption. Kingsley's interest in chivalry persists in his portrait of Stangrave in *Two Years Ago*, who draws parallels between the mores and manners of the American South to those of England. Chivalry is essential to the muscular Christian. As Thomas Hughes puts it, "the least of the muscular Christians has hold of the old chivalrous and Christian belief, that a man's body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak" (*Tom Brown at Oxford* 113).

In Kingsley, chivalry turns out to be a violent theme, for, as we might predict, Amyas expresses his chivalry through actions rather than words. When we first meet Amyas, we learn that he has been,

for some time past, on account of his extraordinary size and strength, undisputed cock of the school, and the most terrible fighter among all Bideford boys; in which brutal habit he took much delight, and contrived, strange as it may seem, to extract from it good, not only for himself but for others, doing justice among his school-fellows with a heavy hand, and succouring the oppressed and afflicted; so that he was the terror of all the sailor-lads, and the pride and stay of all the town's boys and girls, and hardly considered that he had done his duty in his calling if he went home without beating a big lad for bullying a little one. (8)

It may seem obvious that the strong man needs a weaker companion to prove his strength, but what is less obvious is the suffering that the strong man willingly endures to spare his friend. Here, we would do well to remember Amyas's definition of a gentleman as one who does everything he can to spare others pain while not flinching from it himself. The ability to feel moral pain as well as physical pain, then, is key to a man's becoming not only muscular but also Christian. Sensitivity is more typically the domain of the weak and nervous man, but his stronger friend must also be capable

of feeling pain.

Pain, however, can also be a punishment for foolhardiness. Kingsley recognizes that there can be a dangerous lack of prudence and self-restraint in his strong men. With his love of sport and risk-taking, the muscular hero runs the risk of becoming injured or disabled himself. Although there must be “nothing odd” about the body of the muscular Christian, a scar like the one that crosses Amyas’s right temple, “the trophy of some Irish fight” (303), far from being an indication of weakness or effeminacy, is actually the visible sign of his courage and daring. This bravado, however, can be taken too far. The injuries that the men sustain are commensurate with the risks that they take, and often more damaging. Several of the novels discussed in this chapter end with the maiming or death of the hero. In his over-zealous pursuit of the Spaniards, Amyas Leigh tries to steer his ship between a wall of granite and a breaker, and ends by blinding himself. Reflecting on his blindness, he compares himself to Samson in his strength and blindness, saying, “I have been willful, and proud, and a blasphemer, and swollen with cruelty and pride; and God has brought me low for it, and cut me off from my evil delight. No more Spaniard-hunting for me now, my masters. God will send no such fools as I upon His errands” (584). Amyas’s blindness certainly ends his Spaniard-hunting days, and is the impetus for his setting up of domestic life with Ayancora.

George Eliot was not slow to recognize the ending’s similarity to that of *Jane Eyre*, and many contemporary readers must have seen the parallels (113). The most familiar reading of the blinding of a male hero is the psychoanalytic one, which begins with Richard Chase’s 1948 Freudian reading of Rochester’s blinding as a symbolic castration, and works its way through Gubar and Gilbert’s second wave feminist reading of castrating the hero as a projection of the woman author’s desires. Mary Carpenter argues that Kingsley’s blinding of Amyas Leigh represents the “the



restoration of the phallic mother to the man-child” (61). Similarly, Stanwood Walker reads Amyas’s blinding as a moral chastisement (367). Although the familiar argument that blinding is a symbolic castration that tames the hero holds some weight in Amyas’s case, the loss of his vision is also a battle-scar, the visible indicator of his sometimes foolhardy acts of daring. Being chastened through this blinding is not necessarily a sign of Amyas’s effeminacy, but rather one of his ability to endure suffering like a gentleman as he sets up his own household back home in Bideford.

### ***Tom Brown’s Schooldays***

The ability to endure pain and injury is as much a part of the education of a gentleman as Latin by the mid-century. As he is introducing Tom to the school, East proudly announces that the games at a public school like Rugby are nothing like that those at private schools: “Why, there’s been two collar-bones broken this half, and a dozen fellows lamed,” he exclaims (98). East’s enthusiasm for injury as the visible emblem of one’s character is reminiscent of the battle-scars of Amyas Leigh and Tom Thurnall. The emphasis on being a fighter and a good sport starts at the beginning of Hughes’s novel. Tom Brown, like all the Browns, is a scrapper, and the bodies of this family answer well to their propensity for fighting, for “they are a square-headed and snake-necked generation, broad in the shoulder, deep in the chest, and thin in the flank, carrying no lumber” (3). Arthur, “a new boy” who is thirteen years old but does not look it, is “very delicate, and has never been from home before” and needs someone to fight for him (217). As headmaster and chaplain of Rugby, Arnold brings the two boys together so that the pious but sickly Arthur will have a good spiritual influence on the young scapegrace Tom, and so that the popular and energetic Tom will ease the timid Arthur’s transition from a coddled home life with his widowed

mother and sisters to the rough world of boys and men at public school. The opening of the second book is also the opening of a new life for Tom. As the narrator explains, “in his new character of bear-leader to a gentle little boy straight from home”, Tom “seemed to himself to have become a new boy again, without any of the long-suffering and meekness indispensable for supporting that character with moderate success. From morning till night he had the feeling of responsibility on his mind; and, even if he left Arthur in their study or in the close for an hour, was never at ease till he had him in sight again” (230-1). Building on David Newsome’s work, Claudia Nelson emphasizes the spiritual and moral aspect of the relationship, arguing that the Tom-Arthur relationship was idealized in the mid-century as Arthur guarded Tom’s purity, and pathologised and coded as queer toward the end of the century (52-3). The friendship between Tom and George Arthur is representative of the pairings of the strong man and the weak man, and shows how the affective relations of this dyad serve to structure the plot of the schoolboy novel.

The friendship between Tom Brown and George Arthur is only one of many formal and informal pairings of older and younger, or bigger and smaller, boys in the novel. Throughout Hughes’s novel we hear about the Praepostor system, the fagging system, and the “small friend” system. The friendship between Tom and Arthur exists in contradistinction to the informal “small friend” system but bears some similarity to the relationship between the praepostors and the fags. In the same chapter in which Arthur is introduced, we hear about the “small friend” system when a young boy demands that East and Tom fag for his friend on the playing field. The narrator explains that, “He was one of the miserable little pretty white-handed curly-headed boys, petted and pampered by some of the big fellows, who wrote their verses for them, taught them to drink and use bad language, and did all they could to spoil them for everything in this world and the next” (233). By contrast, the difference between

Tom and Arthur is a physical difference and not a stark age-difference (they are only two years apart), and is thus distanced from the implicit pederasty of the “small friend” system though it shares its emotional charge. Tom and Arthur physically and morally improve each other. Hughes presents the fagging system as a boon to both the praepostors and the fags. In addition to fagging for any older boy that needs it in the evenings, the narrator explains, “each praepostor had three or four fags specially allotted to him, of whom he was supposed to be the guide, philosopher, and friend, and who in return for these good offices had to clean out his study every morning by turns, directly after first lesson and before he returned from breakfast” (145). Performing fagging duties gives Tom a sense of belonging and purpose when he first arrives at Rugby.

The praepostor system was already in place when Dr. Arnold came to Rugby in 1827, but he famously used it, in the words of his former student and biographer Arthur Penhyrn Stanley, “as the chief means of creating a respect for moral and intellectual excellence, and of diffusing his own influence his own influence through the mass of the school” (117). Whereas the boys in the lower forms would see Arnold only when he occasionally heard a lesson, in chapel, or at examinations, Arnold himself instructed the sixth form, who enjoyed a close relationship with him that extended to summer holidays with his family in Westmoreland. He wrote in his journal, “I am convinced... that in the peculiar relation of the highest form to the rest of the boys, such as it exists in our great public schools” is the best means of raising the character of the entire school (quoted in Penhyrn Stanley 115). According to Stanley, he thus “determined to use, and to improve to the utmost, the existing machinery of the Sixth Form, and of fagging” (ibid). Arnold defined the Sixth form as the thirty or so boys who made up the highest class and “who having risen to the highest form in the school, will probably be at once the oldest and the strongest, and

the cleverest”, and the fagging system as “the power given by the supreme authorities of the school to the Sixth Form, to be exercised by them on the lower boys, for the sake of securing a regular government amongst the boys themselves, and avoiding the evils of anarchy” (quoted in Penhyrn Stanley 116). The doctor gave the system a high moral tone, exhorting the Sixth form to feel “like officers in the army or navy, whose want of moral courage would, indeed, be thought cowardice” and to look for “1st, religious and moral principals; 2dly, gentlemanly conduct; 3dly, intellectual ability” (Penhyrn Stanley 118).

The formal hierarchy promoted by the praepostor and fagging systems is reflected in the friendship between Tom and Arthur. The cross-age friendships that Tom forms throughout his time at Rugby are among his most important bonds. For example, Tom and East’s friendship with Diggs develops a spirit of independence in them even though he acts as their guide and mentor. Diggs is “a very queer specimen of boyhood” (176), “a big loose-made fellow, with huge limbs which had grown too far through his jacket and trousers” (174-5), “young for his size, and a very clever fellow, nearly at the top of the fifth” (176) who generally keeps to himself. Familiarly known as “the Mucker”, Diggs inspires Tom and East to stop fagging for the fifth form and begin their “war of independence”. By being willing to take a beating from the older boys for refusing to fag, Tom and East achieve their goal and only the institutionally approved fagging for the sixth form boys goes on from thenceforth.

Hughes intends this war of independence to stand in for a much larger political goal. As he addresses his boy-readers, he is certain that they will remember to stick up for the underdog in political battles when they are men. “You are brave, gallant boys”, he writes,

who hate easy-chairs, and have no balances or bankers. You only want to have your heads set straight, to take the right side: so bear in mind that majorities,

especially respectable ones, are nine times out of ten in the wrong; and that if you see a man or a boy striving earnestly on the weak side, however wrong-headed or blundering he may be, you are not to go and join the cry against him. If you can't join him and help him, and make him wiser, at any rate remember that he has found something in the world which he will fight and suffer for, which is just what you have got to do for yourselves; and so think and speak of him tenderly. (195)

For Hughes, learning to fight and suffer is part of a boy's training for manhood.

Political fighting and physical fighting collapse in Hughes's metaphor, to the extent that physical suffering seems an integral part of manhood.

By now it might seem as though Thomas Hughes's Rugby and Dr. Arnold have little in common with those of Arthur Penhyrn Stanley. Penhyrn Stanley's biography was the more official of the two, but his portrait of Arnold as above all a Christian gentleman looking to promote religious principles at Rugby to some extent elides the brutality of school life. In one particularly provocative moment, he quotes a letter in which Arnold says, "I do not choose to discuss the thickness of Praepostor's sticks, or the greater or less blackness of a boy's bruises, for the amusement of all the readers of the newspapers" (124),<sup>2</sup> thus both acknowledging and dismissing the violence at Rugby. It is against the backdrop of incidents like Tom's fistfight with Slogger Williams, or even earlier, the backswording games at the fair in the vale that only end when one opponent draws blood from the other's face (36), that George Arthur's piety and meekness emerge. Hughes exhorts English schoolboys to fight with their fists, writing, "Boys will quarrel, and when they quarrel will sometimes fight. Fighting with fists is the natural and English way for English boys to settle their quarrels"

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<sup>2</sup> Fitzjames Stephen, in his review of *Tom Brown*, says that a praepostor's cane is a penny cane and nothing more (189).

(301). “Learn to box” he encourages his boy-readers, “as you learn to play cricket and football. Not one of you will be the worse, but very much the better for learning to box well. Should you never have to use it in earnest, there’s no exercise in the world so good for the temper, and for the muscles of the back and legs” (301). Hughes allows that boys might excuse themselves from fighting if from a “simple aversion to physical pain and danger” but tells them, “if you do fight, fight it out; and don’t give in while you can stand and see” (302). The fight with Slogger Williams, of course, takes place only because Tom is defending Arthur, who has offended Slogger by truthfully telling a new master how many lines the class was supposed to learn for that day. The defense of the weak becomes the reason for fighting, as the narrator later explains, Tom “had largely developed in his composition the capacity for taking the weakest side. This is not putting it strongly enough; it was a necessity with him, he couldn’t help it any more than he could eating or drinking. He could never play on the strongest side with any heart at football or cricket, and was sure to make friends with any boy who was unpopular, or down on his luck” (334). Like Amyas Leigh’s fights on behalf of the weaker boys and girls, Tom Brown’s willingness to defend George Arthur is proof the Christian character that Dr. Arnold hoped above all to promote in his school.

Hughes is particularly interested in the physical differences between the two boys, and he explores these differences in the sickroom scene that brings out the physical and spiritual distinctions between the two as well as the intense friendship that binds them together. When he is finally allowed into his friend’s sickroom one evening, Tom finds Arthur “lying on the sofa by the open window, through which the rays of the western sun stole gently, lighting up his white face and golden hair” and is reminded of “a German picture of an angel” he knows (307). The narrator writes that:

Never till that moment had he felt how his little chum had twined himself

round his heartstrings; and as he stole gently across the room and knelt down, and put his arm round Arthur's head on the pillow, felt ashamed and half angry at his own red and brown face, and the bounding sense of health and power which filled every fibre of his body, and made every movement of mere living a joy to him. He needn't have troubled himself; it was this very strength and power so different from his own which drew Arthur to him

Arthur laid his thin white hand, on which the blue veins stood out so plainly, on Tom's great brown fist, and smiled at him. (308)

Arthur makes Tom promise to give up his cribs and vulgus books, but he also acknowledges what Tom has done for him. He confesses to Tom: "My mother brought our old medical man, who attended me when I was a poor sickly child; he said my constitution was quite changed, and that I'm fit for anything now. If it hadn't, I couldn't have stood three days of this illness. That's all thanks to you, and the games you've made me fond of" (315). The mutually beneficial relationship between Tom Brown and George Arthur mirrors the institutional pairings of stronger and weaker, and older and younger boys at Rugby. It also serves as a structuring device: before George Arthur is introduced into the narrative, Tom and the plot are in danger of meandering through his years at Rugby with little more to show for it than increasing athletic prowess. The arc of the plot follows Tom's moral improvement once Arthur is introduced, and the scene in which Tom sympathizes with Arthur's physical suffering shows us that his capacity for moral suffering is that of a gentleman.

***Muscles without Morals: G. A. Lawrence's Guy Livingstone and Wilkie Collins's Man and Wife***

The notion that sound morals naturally followed a sound constitution was

unsatisfactory to many Victorian thinkers, and Wilkie Collins and G. A. Lawrence both wrote novels that explore the potentially threatening situation of a strong body that is not tempered by a strong conscience. Lawrence, who like Hughes was a Rugby alumnus, published *Guy Livingstone; or Thorough* in the same year, 1857, that *Tom Brown's Schooldays* appeared. The novel was an immediate success, going through six editions in ten years (Fleming 46), and, according to *The Spectator*, influencing young men to “discard their turn-down collars and loose neckties” and dress “à la Guy”. “Even the chubbiest of the Adonises of the time affected ‘to set his face like a flint,’ and adopted to his sweetheart the tones of calm command, in place of the old ones of beseeching adoration” (quoted in Fleming 5). Although Lawrence’s novel is not a direct critique of muscular Christianity, it shares a topical concern with athleticism and physical prowess. In some respects the novel is a timely commentary on the cult of the athlete. However, as Norman Vance points out, it can also be read as a glamorous representation of a vanishing aristocratic world of hard riding and hard living (14). Lawrence’s portrait of brutal lawlessness in his novels influenced the reception of novels by Kingsley and Hughes as some of his reputation for brutality rubbed off on them (Vance 15), raising the level of anxiety surrounding the body of the muscular Christian.

Lawrence’s picture of school life at Rugby is much less flattering than Hughes’s. *Guy Livingstone* opens up with the narrator, Frank Hammond, a new, sickly boy, watching his first football match, and decidedly less enchanted with the spectacle than Tom Brown:

A dull afternoon toward the end of October; the sky a neutral tint of ashy gray; a bitter northeast wind tearing down the yellow leaves from the old elms that girdle the school-close of —; a foul, clinging paste of mud and trampled grass-blades under foot, that chilled you to the marrow; a mob of two hundred



lower boys, vicious with cold and the enforcement of keeping goal through the first football match of the season—in the midst, I, who speak to you, feeling myself in an eminently false position—there's the *mise en scène*.

My small persecutors had surrounded me, but had hardly time to settle well to their work, when one of the players came by, and stopped for an instant to see what was going on. The match had not yet begun. (1)

Lawrence surely paints a much bleaker picture of a boy's schooldays in this first chapter than the Homeric description of a football match that opens the first chapter of Tom Brown's life at Rugby. Here, rather than being an expression of healthy boyhood and school-spirit, the violent energy of the football match is a mirror of the threatened violence of the "small persecutors" that surround Hammond. Fortunately, the novel's eponymous hero, Guy, sweeps in to rescue Hammond. "From that first day when he interfered in my favour," writes Frank, "Guy never ceased to accord me the aegis of his protection, and it served me well; for, then, as now, I was strong neither in body nor nerve" (6-7). Frank is grateful for the protection, and the two develop a lifelong friendship in some ways similar, as we will see, to that between Phineas Fletcher and John Halifax. The key difference between Craik's pair and Lawrence's, or, even more to the point, Lawrence's pair and Hughes's Tom Brown and George Arthur, is that although he is physically weak, Frank is no spiritual stay for Guy. Frank's confession that he and Guy share a dislike of "more school work than was absolutely necessary" as well as a love of "light literature of a certain class" (7) is a dead giveaway that the narrator shares many of his friend's moral vices and none of his physical virtues.

As a narrator, Frank does not temper Guy's potential sexual and physical brutality: he only chronicles it. Frank describes Guy as a paragon of "the rarest union of strength and activity" that he has ever known: even at fifteen he looks "fully a year older, not only from his height, but from a disproportionate length of limb and

development of muscle” (2). Guy’s features are “very dark and pale, too strongly marked to be handsome” and in an intensely erotic description, Frank admires the “close-fitting jersey, and white trousers girt by a broad black belt” that are so well adapted to displaying Guy’s “deep square chest and sinewy arms” (2-3). The boy of fifteen is rather imposing for his age: “about the lips and lower jaw especially,” there is “a set sternness that one seldom sees before the beard is grown” and his eyes, which are “very dark grey, nearly black, and so deeply set under the thick eyebrows” that they look “smaller” than they really are, carry an expression that is “anything but pleasant to meet” (2-3). Frank does not deliver a moral sermon about the necessity of self-restraint in those who are blessed with physical strength, he only notes the capacity for brutality that he reads in Guy’s physiognomy. The rest of the novel bears out this potential, as Guy becomes involved in successive flirtations, love intrigues, and duels, all while hunting at least three times a week.

Lawrence’s novel stages the masculine body in peril, dwelling in detail on scenes of violence for their own sake. Early on, we get a description of an impromptu boxing match that Guy has with a prizefighter while he is at Oxford. At the beginning of the sixth round, Guy bears “only one mark”, “a cut on his lower lip, whence the bright Norman blood was flowing freely” (26). Frank protests that he “will not attempt to describe the hideous changes that ten minutes had wrought in his opponent’s countenance,” but nevertheless goes on to depict the awful sight “of the maimed and mangled Colossus” at length, with “his huge breast heaving with wrath and pain; his one unblinded eye glaring unutterably; his crushed lips churning the crimson foam” (26). Frank gives a blow-by-blow account of the moves that leave Guy’s opponent “a heap of blind, senseless, bleeding humanity” (26). Later in the novel, Guy’s brutality is tempered, but only slightly. When a lazzarone tries to rob Guy and his companions in Italy, Frank is sure that the villain will be “heavily

visited”, but “Livingstone only lifted him by the throat and held him suspended against the wall, as you may see the children in those parts pin the lizards in a forked stick. Then he let him drop, unhurt, but green with terror. A year ago, a straightforward blow from the shoulder would have settled the business in a shorter time, and worked a strange alteration in good Giuseppe’s handsome sunburnt face. But the old hardness of heart was wearing away” (250). Even on his deathbed, Guy’s strength remains to him. When his former fiancée’s brother threatens him, he takes up a small silver cup and crushes it flat between his fingers, demonstrating that he is dangerous at close quarters still (303). Much of the novel’s narrative force derives from the sense of Guy’s brutal potential, which is never quite given its full vent despite the extraordinary violence of some of the scenes.

Eventually, the brutality in the novel comes to demonstrate Guy’s capacity for suffering in much the same way that Amyas Leigh’s blinding does. After his fiancée dies of a broken heart having caught Guy kissing her rival at a ball, Guy recklessly rides his chestnut down a steep hill and tries to take a fence, but finds that he has overestimated his prowess and that of his horse, and is crushed beneath the animal (296). His companions quickly find that a spine injury has paralysed him. Although Guy never moans under the blow of an injury that “would have crushed a weaker man instantly”, and to which the “colossal strength and vital energy” of his “frame and constitution” yield “but slowly” (299), the novelist cannot allow his hero to live paralyzed, and the next chapter is the last one. Guy’s claim that he has suffered more from loneliness of heart than from his crippled limbs in this last chapter, suggests a connection between moral pain and physical pain. As Guy confesses to Hammond, “I have sinned often and deeply; but He who will judge me created me; and He knows how strong the passions of my nature were. He knows, too, how much I have suffered. I do not mean from *this*” (he threw his hand towards his crippled limbs, with

the old gesture of disdain); “but from bitterness and loneliness of heart” (304-5).

Here, we see something of a moral conversion brought about by the crippling of the hero. At the very end of the novel, then, Guy abruptly readjusts his values, recognizing that his moral suffering is more important than his physical suffering. Yet, like Kingsley’s similarly forced epiphanies, this abrupt conversion is not entirely convincing given that the entire novel has dwelt with sadistic pleasure on the physical.

Guy’s moral conversion has little to do with the presence of his sickly friend. Frank is not a morally edifying presence in the novel, but Lawrence is still playing with the contrast between the strong man and his weak friend to make his friend appear all the stronger. Frank is not fully-developed as a character-narrator. At moments, particularly those in which the novel recounts the intimate exchanges involved in Guy’s trysts, the novel seems to have more of a third person narrator. Although Frank’s presence as a narrator, or as a character who derives a particular narrative authority from a life of idle observation, is not as sustained as we will see in other novels, early on especially, his narrative crackles with an erotics of violence as he watches his strong friend ride, hunt and fight. Frank thus articulates the tensions that simmer underneath his friend’s muscular frame.

Significantly, Hammond describes Guy’s deathbed scene in terms of his incredible restraint, expressing Guy’s pain for the reader since no sign of it is legible on his body:

It was only self-control, almost superhuman, that enabled him to speak those words steadily, for the fierce death-throe was possessing him, before he ended. Through the awful minutes that followed, not another sound than the hissing breath escaped through his set lips; his face was not once distorted, though the hair and beard clung round it—matted and dank with the sweat of agony. The brave heart and iron nerve ruled the body to the last, imperially—supreme over

the intensity of torture. (305-6)

Guy's ability to rule his body imperially raises the question of whether his incredible self-control grants him the right to control others. The year of *Guy Livingstone's* publication is much earlier than the fin-de-siècle imperialist projects that Kucich describes as being mediated through a psychosocial language of masochism. We might ask, then, what this interest in pain and suffering is doing to concepts of Englishness earlier in the century, and why these novels need the constant presence of another sufferer, the weaker man in order to highlight, or in some cases to bring about, the moral and physical suffering of the stronger man.

To answer these questions, we need to turn to the parodies of muscular Christianity that Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins were writing by the 1860s, which deal with the question of race much more explicitly than the earlier novels of Kingsley, Hughes, and Lawrence. In reading the orientalism of the opening scenes of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), it becomes newly obvious that the muscular Christians, from Tom Thurnall to Tom Tulliver, are all fair. Dickens's Reverend Crisparkle is no exception, and one of the first things that we hear about him is how fair his complexion is. Unlike the fair-haired woman of the nineteenth-century novel, however, the fair man is not always perfectly good. "Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, fair and rosy, and perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water in the surrounding country... early riser, musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, boy-like" (14), is less of a moral influence than one would hope for from his muscles. In fact, he does little more than assist "his circulation by boxing at a looking-glass with great science and prowess", "feinting and dodging with the utmost artfulness" (51). The Reverend Crisparkle's preening does little to solve the mystery of Edwin Drood's death, which suggests that a love of bathing in cold water and boxing may strengthen one's constitution but not one's morals.

Wilkie Collins felt even more strongly that such was the case, and he set out to write *Man and Wife* (1870) as an explicit critique of muscular Christianity. In a reversal of Kingsley's typical pair of the morally and physically strong man and the morally and physically weak man, Wilkie Collins puts his critique of brawn without brains in the mouth of a courteous older gentleman with a clubfoot, Sir Patrick Lundie. Sir Patrick, the lame hero of *Man and Wife*, and Geoffrey Delamayne, its muscular villain, are introduced side by side, with the young man as "a striking representative of the school that is among us—as Sir Patrick was a striking representative of the school that has passed away" (61). Geoffrey is "young and florid, tall and strong" with "curly Saxon locks" and features "as perfectly regular and as perfectly unintelligent as human features can be" (61). He is "deep in the chest, thin in the flanks, firm on the legs—in two words, a magnificent human animal, wrought up to the highest pitch of physical development from head to foot", has pulled the stroke oar in the University races, and never been seen to read anything but a newspaper (61). By contrast, Sir Patrick is "little and wiry and slim" with a "wry twist of humour curling sharply at the corners of his lips" (58). The narrator remarks: "He carried his lameness, as he carried his years, gaily" (58). Right from the outset, Sir Patrick expresses his suspicions of the new type of man. As he tells his niece's fiancé, Arnold Brinkworth, he sees no sense in "crowing over" the "model young Briton" as a "superb national production, because he is big and strong, and drinks beer with impunity, and takes a cold shower bath all the year round" (68). Sir Patrick fears that this "glorification" of "the mere physical qualities which an Englishman shares with the savage and the brutes" has made his countrymen all too ready "to practice all that is rough" in "national customs" and to "excuse all that is violent and brutish" in "national acts" (69). Although athleticism may help a young man win a physical victory, it will not help him win a moral victory. As Sir Patrick puts it, the "essential principle of rowing and racing" teaches a young

men “to take every advantage of another man that his superior strength and superior cunning can suggest,” while there “has been nothing in his training to soften the barbarous hardness in his heart, and to enlighten the barbarous darkness in his mind” (213-214). Collins racializes brute strength as un-English. Recalling Guy Livingstone’s ability to rule his own body imperially even in his death throes, we might think of this ability to control one’s own pain and think of others as particularly English.

The potential threat of the uncivilized, un-English muscular man is great. As it turns out, Geoffrey Delamayne has seduced and deserted the novel’s heroine, Anne Silvester. Unlike Kingsley’s heroes, he lacks the self-restraint necessary to elevate his baser nature with chivalry. Despite his clubfoot, Sir Patrick has little need of Geoffrey’s protection. Instead, he extends the protection of a mind that is capable under crisis to the women of the novel. Indeed, he is so charmed by Anne’s womanly strength and modesty under adverse circumstances that he ends his long bachelorhood to marry her. This ending suggests that the kindness and courteousness of Sir Patrick’s more sensitive organization is what is needed to make amends for the damage inflicted by brute force.

Collins’s novel makes the suggestion that the muscular Christian’s emphasis on physical strength is not only dangerous to the weaker members of society whom he should protect, but also to the muscleman himself. Geoffrey’s doctor, the aptly-named Mr. Speedwell, claims that no small proportion “of the young men who are now putting themselves to violent athletic tests of strength and endurance, are taking that course to the serious and permanent injury of their own health” (217). There are, he says “young men who have to thank the strain laid on their constitutions by the popular physical displays of the present time, for being broken men, and invalided men, for the rest of their lives” (218). The doctor makes a distinction between a man’s

“muscular power” which is “no fair guarantee of his vital power”, for we have “two lives in us”, first “the surface-life of the muscles”, and second “the inner life of the heart, lungs, and brain” (218). Although Speedwell’s distinction appears to be a medical one between inner and outer organs, his suggestion that the muscleman is all surface and no depth also carries negative moral connotations: Geoffrey literally and metaphorically lacks the heart to support himself or others. It is no surprise, then, when the athlete collapses after a footrace. Dr. Speedwell declares: “He will never recover.... Paralysis is hanging over him. How long he may live, it is impossible for me to say. Much depends on himself. In his condition, any new imprudence, any violent emotion, may kill him at a moment’s notice” (500). Not having learned to restrain his anger, Geoffrey quickly and conveniently dies, leaving Sir Patrick to make amends and marry Anne. Collins’s curtailing of Geoffrey’s strength through injury and paralysis differs from Amyas Leigh’s blinding or even Guy Livingstone’s riding accident in that his physical suffering does not show that he has developed a capacity for moral suffering. We can trace the crucial difference in these conclusions in Geoffrey’s lack of a caring attitude towards Sir Patrick—he has not grown morally throughout the novel, and benefits from none of his club-footed friend’s gentility.

### ***Conclusion***

The body of the muscular Christian is always in peril, but we can read the maiming or blinding of Kingsley’s heroes in particular not only as a chastening, but also as a proof of their manly ability to suffer morally and physically. As we see from the parodies of Collins and Dickens, the muscular Christian’s ability to control this pain as well as his own potential brutality and raw sexuality is a mark of his Englishness. In order to have control of the nation, the muscular Christian must first



master his own body. Given that the strong man's self-mastery makes it almost impossible for readers to discern his physical or moral suffering, as in Guy Livingstone's deathbed scene, the presence of a weak or disabled man allows the readers some insight into this pain that the sternness of the strong man's body would seem to deny. As we have seen in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the sickly friend must show his strong protector the importance of suffering in order to teach him piety and meekness. The importance of this pain in the moral development of the strong men helps to explain why so many muscular Christian heroes become ill or disabled themselves; or if they remain in good health why it is important for them to sympathize with the physical pain that their friend experiences. As we saw in Amyas Leigh's definition of a gentleman as one who would suffer anything to spare someone weaker than himself, or in Thomas Hughes's exhortation to his boy-readers to fight for the underdog, the concept of pain is integral to the mid-century notions of chivalry that bind the strong man to his weaker counterpart. This chapter showed how the weak character brings an ideal of masculine strength into focus, but the next three chapters will turn to the narrative and thematic function of masculine weakness.

In many ways, few novels could seem a less likely pairing with those of Kingsley and Hughes, or than the notoriously amoral fiction of G. A. Lawrence, than conspicuously pious high church novels of Charlotte Yonge. Although Kingsley did in fact read and enjoy Yonge's work (Hayter 1), we can imagine the high church hero of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Guy Morville, as the type of high-strung effeminacy that spurred Kingsley to denounce Newman's theology. Yet, there are also few Victorian novels that give a higher place to self-denial, chivalry, and the importance of suffering for others than *The Heir of Redclyffe*. The next chapter will bring us to a very different setting: that of the genteel, intellectual parlour of a well-run high church home. At Hollywell manor, masculinity looks quite different than it does at Rugby or

in the Crimea. Having no need to prove his well-established gentility, Yonge's hero, Sir Guy, is effusive, emotional and demonstrative. He has, as his cousin observes, never had his sharp edges rounded off by public school life (*The Heir of Redclyffe* 68), and his education is completed in the parlour. Yonge places another cousin, Charles Edmonstone, who suffers from tubercular inflammation of the knees, not as Guy's emotional and expressive foil, but to think about the possibilities of masculinity in the drawing room. Yet, the pairing of the active boy and his crippled friend remains essential to allowing the hero to demonstrate his chivalry, tenderness, and capacity for self-sacrifice.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “THE SPIRIT OF A MAN AND THE LIMBS OF A CRIPPLE”: DISABILITY, MASCULINITY AND NARRATIVE FORM IN CHARLOTTE YONGE'S *THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE*

*I know I have what they call talent—I could be something.  
They think me an idle dog; but where's the good of doing anything?  
I only know if I was not—not condemned to—to this—this life...  
if I was not chained down here, Master Philip should not stand  
alone as the paragon of the family.*  
-Charlotte Yonge, *The Heir of Redclyffe*

As we saw in the first chapter, although literary critics have emphasized disabled masculinity as a feature of the work of sentimental women authors, the preoccupation with weak or disabled men in fiction was actually a widespread response to the cultural forces—including the rise of sport-culture, of the muscular Christian, and of the public school—that were reshaping masculinity in the 1850s. The phenomenon was also a literary one that spanned genres from the schoolboy novel to the adventure story to the sentimental and domestic fiction that we will consider at length in this chapter. Weak or invalid men like Elsley Vavasour, Frank Headley and George Arthur populate the novels of Kingsley, Hughes, and G. A. Lawrence in part as foils to an emerging version of masculinity that saw physical strength as commensurate with moral strength. Charlotte Yonge's work is interesting in this context because, although it is not immersed in the culture of sport and public school life of these novels, it shares their preoccupation with disabled masculinity. In

Yonge's domestic fiction, the representation of a disabled masculinity that is largely confined to the home allows her to expand the contours of domesticity by finding a place for masculine heroism in the sickroom. From the novel's first publication to the present day, critics have seen Yonge's preoccupation with disability as an extension of her supposedly marginal position as a sentimental women author. Yet this tendency to read the representation of disabled masculinity as an extension of the psychology of the woman author belies the larger cultural trends it participates in.

Critics were quick to notice the emotional outpouring *The Heir of Redclyffe* provoked. The critic for the *North American Review* proclaimed that Yonge's novel had found a large and tearful audience in America. "The soldier, the divine, the seamstress, the lawyer, the grocer-boy, the belle, and the hair-dresser peeping over her shoulder," he wrote, "joined in full cry, according to their different modes of lacrymation" (443). In *Household Words*, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins described the sad case of one young woman who refused to read any other novel: "She reads for five minutes, and goes up-stairs to fetch a dry pocket handkerchief; comes down again, and reads for another five minutes; goes up-stairs again, and fetches another dry pocket handkerchief," they wrote. "No later than last week, it was observed by her family, that she shed as many tears and fetched as many dry pocket handkerchiefs as ever" (622). Dickens's and Collins's lampoon and the *North American* reviewer's more earnest criticism are both evidence of a culture of sentiment around masculine self-sacrifice and suffering, two of the main themes of Yonge's novel, that can seem quite foreign to readers today, and was sometimes though not usually uncomfortable for the novel's original audience. I suggest that this outpouring of emotion stems from the relationship between sentimentality, masculinity, and most importantly, disability, as they shape the novel's form.

As Amy Cruse points out, soldiers and statesmen, from William Gladstone to

John Manners, were moved by Yonge's work (64). Another compliment to Yonge's affective power over men came from an unlikely source, G. A. Lawrence, whose notorious novel of high society life, *Guy Livingstone; or Thorough* (1857), paid tribute to the novel as an example of the kind of literature most likely to move men. While "very old and very young women, in the plenitude of their benevolence, are good enough to sympathize with any tale of woe, however absurdly exaggerated", writes Lawrence, men "yawn over the wailings of Werter and Raphael" but "ponder gravely over the last chapters of *The Heir of Redclyffe*" (276). This was certainly true of men in the army. Yonge's brother, Julian, wrote to say that nearly all the young men in his regiment had a copy of the novel (Coleridge 183), and her work was the favourite reading of hospitalized soldiers during the Crimean war (Cruse 51). Reading and invalidism seem to go together both in Yonge's novels and for her readers. One especially enthusiastic German reader, who eventually learned English by reading *The Heir of Redclyffe* countless times, wrote to Yonge, "It was in the summer 64 that I was in a water-place for the case of a lingering suffering of foot which forces me to lie on the couch now already three years, and there I read your book in a german translation and received it entirely into my heart" (Letter Olga von Wilamowitz to Yonge, 24 January 1866). Yonge's novel clearly struck a chord with male readers as well as female readers when it was first published, which suggests that the notions of "love, friendship, and honour" offered a "pattern for actual life" for more men than just Morris and Burne-Jones. The overwhelming emotional response of these young men further suggests that the scenes of male suffering were particularly touching.

Many of the novel's first readers found the plight of the crippled Edmonstone brother especially affecting. When, at one of the high points of the novel, Charles finds himself no more able to clear Guy of the aspersions that Philip has cast against him than his mother or his sister, he exclaims: "I say there is no greater misery in this

world than to have the spirit of a man and the limbs of a cripple” (239). The tension that Charles experiences between his masculine desire to be active in the world and his incapacitated frame is eventually resolved through Yonge’s idea that even men can find ample compass for their talents within the domestic sphere. In becoming his cousin’s defender within the home, Charles goes from being meddlesome and bored to being a productive member of the family who has found his duty. The critic for the *North American Review* remarked on this transformation in the Edmonstone brother: “The acute, satirical, but manly and kind-hearted cripple, Charles, is one of Miss Yonge’s best creations” he wrote. “The forced inaction to which he is subjected by his infirmity, in spite of all his natural vivacity and conscious ability, is one of the keenest trials of youth, and appeals strongly to the sympathy of a large class of readers. He goes on through the story in a course of improvement, moral and physical, which cannot be otherwise than gratifying to his friends and the public” (447). The same could be said of his cousins, Guy and Philip, whose moral improvement makes up the plot of most of the book.

*The Heir of Redclyffe* is largely about the problems of young men. In his review of Yonge’s work, R. H. Hutton, who was convinced that the then-anonymous author was either a woman or a clergyman, argued that most of her masculine are actually better delineated than her feminine (*Propsective Review* 462-3). The germ of the story came out of conversations that Yonge had with her friend and mentor, Marianne Dyson, who had written a story about the contrast between two characters, “the essentially contrite and the self-satisfied” (Coleridge 162). Yonge decided to see what she could do with the premise, and gave Guy Morville the contrite temper. On coming as a ward to his uncle Edmonstone’s home after leading an undisciplined life under the guardianship of his grandfather, Guy must learn to quell his excitable temper and integrate himself into the family home, which he does fully on marrying their

second daughter, Amy. The self-satisfied temper belongs to his cousin and heir, Philip Morville, who never trusts Guy's ebullience, and hounds him literally to the death. When Guy sacrifices his own life to nurse Philip in a foreign country, Philip, who was left with little after his father's death, inherits Guy's considerable estate at Redclyffe, and feels guilty about it for the rest of his life. Philip is right about his cousin's youthful enthusiasms and quick temper, but through constant self-reflection and humility, Guy manages to tame his demons and become a model of self-discipline, faithfulness, and proper feeling. Indeed, the code of gentlemanliness and chivalry presented in *The Heir of Redclyffe* demands nothing less than complete self-command and steadiness, tempered by humbleness and gentleness.

### ***Tractarian Manliness***

One prevailing theme of Yonge's novel is the arousal of over-powering emotions that must be reigned in for the sake of duty, which Yonge conceives of as a religious imperative to keep to the station in which God has placed one, and to find challenges that allow for self-resignation and submission to a higher call even in the narrowest of spheres. This thematic tension between the upheavals of emotion that threaten to disturb the equanimity of a life of quiet fulfillment of one's duty also operates at the level of the novel's formal concerns. Structurally, *Redclyffe* begins by engaging the readers's sympathies for Guy, then their anger at his wrongful accusation and their sorrow at his death. Yet the novel ultimately demands that the reader rein in the very emotions it has stirred up. For Yonge's characters, this sentiment is so gratifying in part because it acts as an emotional release from the demands of self-sacrifice and self-resignation of her novelistic world, and because it seems all the more heroic to reign in these overpowering emotions for the sake of duty as the novel drew

to a close. As Talia Schaffer has pointed out in her recent work on Yonge, a large part of Yonge's novelistic project seems to be to raise dissidence only to tame it ("The Mysterious Magnum Bonum" 247). The project of *The Heir of Redclyffe* is to raise emotional dissidence only to tame it as her characters learn to reign in their feelings for the sake of duty.

Discovering one's duty is not always easy for her characters, and the plot of many of her novels consists in her characters finding and fulfilling it. Yonge's novelistic form imitates this struggle since, perhaps counter to our expectations of such a didactic novelist, her narrator offers little in the way of moral commentary or judgment. In his recent work on realism and typology in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Gavin Budge notes that the third person narrator of a Yonge novel is not omniscient. The result, he argues, is that "characters in the novel, the figure of the author and Yonge's reader are placed on a level in regard to interpretation of events. Yonge's novels thus come to exhibit a curious kind of self-reflexivity in which questions about interpretation debated by characters in the novel are also ones which readers themselves must address, and to which the narratorial voice can offer no answers" (208). As Barbara Dennis points out, domestic realism is particularly suited to Yonge's religious affiliations with the Oxford movement, since the "general lessons of the movement are shown as revealed in the lives of the characters in her novels" (56). Since the narratorial voice offers little guidance, readers must decide early on how trustworthy varying interpretations of events are, relying in part on the response of the characters to events to guide their own emotional and intellectual responses.

The character in *The Heir of Redclyffe* who is perhaps closest to the reader's position is Charles Edmonstone. Charles observes most of the household goings on from the invalid's couch, and seems to act as a stand-in for the reader's emotional and moral trajectory. As an invalid, Charles is indulged and allowed a wider range of



affective responses than the able-bodied members of the Edmonstone household. He is allowed to dissipate his time in the pleasures of novel-reading, and he sets out the conventions of romance novels and thus the expectations of the reader in the novel's first chapters. Charles's knowledge of novelistic conventions, along with his keen wit and his emotional involvement, make him a sharp observer of the goings-on in his family, and he often serves as a sort of commentator on the narrative, with his judgments gaining all the more authority since the narrator withholds her own judgments on the novel's characters, largely restricting herself to a mimetic function. Charles also sets the machinery of the plot in motion. Being prone to fits of melancholy and peevishness, he tries to break up the ennui of his existence as an invalid by provoking his cousins and sisters. In fact, he is responsible for moving the plot forward by being the first to recognize Philip's jealousy of Guy, when, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, "For his own entertainment, he thinks to provoke the rival cousins to display themselves." In doing so, "he receives less entertainment than enlightenment, is the first to realize their true natures, and by becoming Guy's partisan discovers himself" (*Mid-Victorian Studies* 54). The narrative energy required to set the novel's plot in motion seems similar to the energy that moves Charles out of his boredom toward partisanship for Guy and finally to an acceptance of the challenges and duties of his own lot in life. Indeed, Charles is ultimately not exempt from the extraordinary self-discipline required of the rest of the family, and he too must learn to be pleasant and submit to his duty. While illness allows for a freedom of expression and emotion from which the novel derives much of its narrative energy, this affective response must be curtailed as the narrative draws to a close.

The notion of duty in Yonge's novelistic world is inflected by religious and gender-related concerns, which is perhaps not surprising given her status as the novelist par excellence of the Oxford Movement. It is well known that Yonge enjoyed

a close relationship with John Keble—one of the early leaders of the movement who moved from Oxford to the country for his health in 1836, to become Vicar of Hursley and Otterbourne. Keble prepared Yonge, who was then thirteen, for her confirmation, and her fatherly relationship with him became one of the most important of her life, with Keble encouraging her to write (Hayter 17). Duty, for Keble, seems feminized in that it consists of finding moral fulfillment by seeking out prospects for self-denial in an already narrow sphere. In his enormously popular book of poems, *The Christian Year* (1827), Keble writes that:

The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we ought to ask;  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God. (56-9)

The formal restraint of Keble's tetrameter couplets here mimics the restrained and narrow lives which Yonge's characters nevertheless find spiritually rewarding. Although finding and fulfilling one's duty seems to be a feminine predicament in these terms, Yonge's men are actually subject to the many of the same restraints as her women. The tractarianism of Yonge's male heroes is inflected by a code of gentlemanliness that draws on notions of chivalry, with its emphasis on honour, purity and proper feeling.

Critics have been quick to point out that Yonge was highly influenced by Kenelm Digby's popular conduct book and manifesto, *The Broad Stone of Honour*, which drew on medieval romance and classic epic to inspire modern men to embrace the chivalry of heroes past. (The town near Hollywell is in fact called Broadstone, and it is not difficult to hear echoes of Digby in the name "Edmonstone".) Digby writes that "Chivalry is only a name for that general spirit or state of mind which disposes men to heroic and generous actions, and keeps them conversant with all that is

beautiful and sublime in the intellectual and moral world” (quoted in Girouard 62, 86). He prizes the same feeling that influences Yonge’s heroes, elevating sentiment to a guiding principle for young men’s conduct. There “is much to be apprehended from the ridicule which is cast upon sentiment” he cautions his readers. By contrast, he writes, there “is no danger in this enlightened age, as it is termed, of men becoming too heroic, too generous, too zealous in the defense of innocence, too violent in hatred of baseness and crime, too disinterested and too active in the cause of virtue and truth” (Digby 176-7). Digby’s sense of the importance of generosity, noble feeling, and friendship between men informs Yonge’s code of gentlemanliness. His formulation of chivalry as a nostalgic response to a world bereft of finer feelings dovetails well with Yonge’s Victorian medievalism. Yonge blends the conventions of romance—*Redclyffe* includes an ancient family feud, a love story, and a hero who seems doomed to repeat the sins of his forefathers—with those of the domestic novel (Sturrock 99; Dennis 56). This privileging of chivalry as part of a code of gentlemanliness seems particularly appropriate to members of the high church, who were invested in maintaining their own station in life and in helping those in a less fortunate position. Not surprisingly given its geographical location, the Oxford Movement had a distinctly intellectual cast, appealing to art and literature as a means of arousing religious sentiment in the beholder. Tractarianism’s emphasis on refined taste and culture, as well as its geographical location in Oxford, made it particularly appealing to emotional and educated young men like Mr. Arabin in *Barchester Towers* (1857), or like Yonge’s own Guy Morville. Yet the themes of love, honour, and male friendship that chivalry promotes were widespread in the 1850s, which perhaps accounts for Yonge’s tremendous popularity even outside high church circles.

Not only were Yonge and leaders of the Oxford movement like John Henry Newman fans of Digby’s work, so were Broad church adherents like Charles Kingsley

(Hayter 1). The comparison between Yonge and Kingsley seems counterintuitive at first given that Kingsley's novels were motivated at least in part as a reaction against what he saw as the unnatural and unmanly weakness and effeminacy of high church principles. Despite Kingsley's well-known antipathy toward the Puseyites, however, Yonge's version of chivalry as a code of masculine conduct is not wholly dissimilar from the Christian socialism of the muscular Christian. Organizations like the Working Men's Association and novels like *Alton Locke* (1849) promote the betterment of the conditions of the working classes through the chivalrous actions of philanthropic men, which creates a hierarchy that is often expressed as a pairing of the strong and the weak. It was the project of the muscular Christian to nurse the weakened frame of the urban piece worker or the effeminate spasmodic poet back to health, if at all possible. Considering chivalry from this point of view, it is not surprising that heroism in two authors as different as Charles Kingsley and Charlotte Yonge begins to look quite similar, with the strong man depending on a weaker object to demonstrate his heroic capabilities. That the object of this chivalry is so often another man in Kingsley and Yonge opens up questions about the nature of masculinity, and this is where the two differ significantly. Kingsley's heroes are strong, practical, and sparing of their words. Yonge's heroes are humble, gentle, and self-examining almost to the point of morbidity. Kingsley's heroes find compass for action in the Welsh mountains or the jungles of South America, whereas Yonge's heroes find room for all of life's dramas in their own family homes. Despite these marked differences, Kingsley's and Yonge's shared preoccupation with chivalry goes some way toward explaining the similarities between the schoolboy and adventure novels we looked at in the first chapter and the domestic novels now under consideration.

Whereas chivalry opens up new vistas for romance and adventure in Kingsley,

however, in Yonge, the domestic sphere provides ample room for heroism. June Sturrock argues that the novel “shows Yonge’s domestic vision embracing and engulfing the masculine through a fusion of ‘realist’ domestic novel and romance, as Sir Guy Morville of Redclyffe becomes the domesticated hero of romance” (99). Sturrock suggests that Yonge’s high church novels are so deeply conservative that, in some ways, the demand that both men and women integrate themselves wholly into the home becomes a radical claim about the domestic nature of masculinity. “Rather than undercutting domestic ideology,” she argues that Yonge “actually extends it far beyond its conventional limitations and represents the domestic—and by implication the feminine—as morally, spiritually and culturally central for the male as well as the female” (25). I would add that in many of Yonge’s novels, the sickroom is central to the drama of hearth and home.

In *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the illnesses of Charles, Guy, and Philip allow for the integration and reconciliation of wayward family members. Miriam Bailin’s claim that the Victorian sickroom bears special significance as a place of respite from the pettiness of everyday life in which conflicts between and within characters can heal along with the body seems pertinent here (4). When Guy is briefly banished from the family home on suspicion of gambling, Charles’s illness flares up almost in sympathy with his cousin’s distress. Similarly, Philip’s long-standing antagonism toward Sir Guy subsides when his rival nurses him through the cholera epidemic that kills him. The crippled or invalid male body thus bears much of the moral weight of Yonge’s novel: it is the location of tenderness, piety, and proper feeling. It also serves to structure the plot. Guy learns to restrain his temper and his nervous tics alongside Charles’s couch, and Philip overcomes his pride and his antipathy toward the cousin who nurses him on his sickbed. In this way, the invalid male body seems to be the location of plot as well as of moral and religious value. The male body is thus also

integral to the genre of sentiment in Yonge's novel.

But invalidism had a religious register for Yonge that was not present in the same way for a writer like Kingsley. While in Kingsley a weak body often denotes a weak spirit, in Yonge physical weakness is often a sign of spiritual superiority. This is particularly the case with women. Contrasting the sensation fiction of the 1860s with the didactic religious fiction of the previous decade, the critic for *The Saturday Review* saw the didactic use of disability as a positive trait in women's fiction of the 1850s. He regretted that a certain character had lately dropped out of fiction, an "angelic being with a weak spine, who, from her sofa, directed with mild wisdom the affairs of the family or the parish" and who "was a favourite creation of our lady-novelists of the pre-Braddonian period" ("Novels, Past and Present" 438). "The perfecting of strength out of weakness, in the person of a disabled aunt or invalid sister, was a fascinating theme to such writers as Miss Yonge or Miss Sewell," writes the critic. "They were fond of exhibiting moral influence in combination with physical infirmity, which gave a piquancy to their domestic hero-worship" ("Novels, Past and Present" 438). If the combination of physical weakness and moral strength is a key element in the tractarian novel, the critic suggests that this is so because of the interest it lends to the home scene, and particularly the "domestic hero-worship" of the family. Margaret May in *The Daisy Chain* (1856) and Ermine Williams in *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), are examples of female invalids who exert a strong moral influence from their couch in Yonge's fiction. Although there is some tension between models of femininity and disability, in Yonge's fiction the lessons of self-resignation and submission to duty and one's lot in life that invalidism offers are similar to the lessons of womanhood.

### *Spectacles of Masculine Suffering*

Scholars working on Yonge have also pointed out that her men, able-bodied or not, are subject to the same religious principles of resignation and submission to duty as her women are. The whole arc of the plot of *The Heir of Redclyffe* follows Guy's induction into the home life of a genteel high church family (Dennis). As Hutton notes rather wryly in his review of Yonge's work, her attention to the details of domestic life is such that reading one of her novels is "like living for a few years, *at least*, with a well-conducted family; and it takes up almost as much time. You have all the small life as well as the eventful; you sit down to nearly every breakfast, you are admitted every day to almost every room" (*Prospective Review* 461). Hollywell domesticates Guy, curing him of his nervous habits and his hereditary temper. After spending the first seventeen years of his life alone with his grandfather, as Philip comments to Amy, Guy's sharp angles have not been rubbed off at public school as most men's have (68), and, as Mrs. Edmonstone notes, he retains his grandfather's "old-school deference and attention" in manner (39). In the Edmonstone family home, Guy learns not to fidget and to control his temper in much the same way that Jo March in *Little Women* (1865) does twelve years later in what some critics have suggested is a redaction of Yonge's work. Indeed, Barbara Dennis has suggested that his education resembles that of the young lady in these respects (*Novelist of the Oxford Movement* 57). He also shares something of the March girls' almost morbid anxiety to be good, which Yonge based on Hurrell Froude's famous guilt over trifles over hundreds of pages of his letters and journals, published in *Remains* (Coleridge 170).

Guy learns that it is also his duty to fulfill the station in which heaven has placed him, even if it involves the pleasures of balls, hunting, and riding. Early on,

Mrs. Edmonstone lectures Guy, who is anxious that he lives “too smoothly” at Hollywell (53), that, “If a duty such as that of living amongst us for the present, and making yourself moderately agreeable, involves temptations, they must be met and battled from within” (54). In Yonge’s work, proper religious feeling conserves social hierarchies, in which it is the duty of the rich to help the poor. Thus, Mrs. Edmonstone continues: “In the same way, your position in society, with all its duties, could not be laid aside because it is full of trial. Those who do such things are faint-hearted, and fail in trust in Him who fixed their station, and finds room for them to deny themselves in the trivial round and common task” (54). Guy finds ample room for self-denial in “the trivial round, the common task”. He gives up hunting, pegs away at his studies, and even finds that he must attend a neighbourhood ball from time to time instead of staying home with Charlie because such duties are attendant on his station. Submission to God and filial piety are key high church values, and they are perhaps more of a trial to one who is physically and financially able to enjoy all the pleasures of youth.

Invalidism underscores the need for resignation and submission to one’s lot in life, especially when the illness is chronic and seems to be dealt by the hand of God rather than any worldly force. Yonge was writing at a time when physicians like Benjamin Brodie—whose work on diseases of the joints secured him the Presidency of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1844 and that of the Royal Society in 1858 (Acland 31)—were mapping out the etiology of tuberculosis with increasing specificity, finding out “the exact value of pain in the joints as evidence of organic disease” and altering the practice in such cases so as to “greatly reduce the number of amputations” (Acland 20). Indeed, Brodie’s *Pathological Researches Respecting the Diseases of the Joints* went through five editions, with some alterations in each one, between the time he first delivered a paper in 1813 to the end of his life in 1864, and



the profits from the book greatly increased his income (Brodie 99, 127). As Mary Carpenter has pointed out, Charlie most likely suffers from tubercular inflammations in the hip joint (NAVSA 2005). But Yonge's novel remains fairly general with regards to the signs and symptoms of his illness, focusing instead on the duties it offers to his loving family and to the invalid himself.

Even though Yonge may not have known enough about current medical research to be more specific, her lack of specificity on this subject serves an important thematic function: it allows Charlie's invalidism to take on a moral and religious dimension. Indeed, the trials of invalidism provide a prime example of the demons that must be "met and battled from within" (54), even when this duty seems unpleasant. Whereas femininity and the self-sacrificing piety of the angelic invalid seem compatible, however, Charles does not attain the same spiritual resignation as Margaret May or Ermine Williams, rather chafing against his lot and wishing for a more active life in a way that is reminiscent of some of Yonge's able-bodied female characters, like Ethel May, who wishes for a wider sphere in which to do her duty. Nevertheless, in Yonge, to be feminine or ill often offers a spiritual advantage. The Edmonstone family home is a largely feminine sphere, with the three sisters and Mrs. Edmonstone predominating over the crippled son Charles and Mr. Edmonstone, who affably allows his wife's advice to guide him. Guy's struggle to accommodate himself to the domestic sphere of Hollywell in the first pages of the novel in some senses feminizes him.

Yonge's reconfiguration of domesticity and masculinity makes the home the stage on which all the dramas in the lives of young men are played out. Guy, who experiences no real home life before he comes to Hollywell as Mr. Edmonstone's ward, makes the connection between domesticity and invalidism explicit. On the morning of his wedding to Amy, Mrs. Edmonstone finds him alone in the dressing room that

adjoins her room and Charles's, contemplating the invalid's couch. The bridegroom confesses to her, "I could not help coming once more. This room has always been the kernel of my home, my happiness here" (387). Charles's couch is the site of many lively debates, family games, and shared reading. Guy is first introduced to readers in the second chapter of the novel, not as he crosses the threshold of Hollywell for the first time, but as the family brings him upstairs to Mrs. Edmonstone's dressing room to introduce him to Charles, who lays on his couch, "in the bright glow of the fire," attired "in a gorgeous dressing gown of a Chinese pattern" (15). Charles is the center of a room described as "one of the pleasantest rooms at Hollywell," having a "great air of its snugness, with its large folding-screen, covered with prints and caricatures of ancient date its book-shelves, its tables, its peculiarly easy arm-chairs, the great invalid sofa, and the grate, which always lighted up better than any other in the house" (15). In addition to being the room where Charles is to be found when "unequal to coming down-stairs", the dressing room is the space in which Mrs. Edmonstone undertakes much of her household management, from casting up accounts and speaking to servants and writing notes, to teaching her youngest daughter, Charlotte (15). Charles finds accommodation in this center of home and household management in a way that makes him central to goings on in the family. His presence in the room is an opportunity for Laura, Amy, Charlotte, Guy, and Mrs. Edmonstone to show their right feeling by being kind to him even when he is out of temper, and often an excuse to be together in the same room. Indeed, the sickroom knits the domestic circle together.

The sickroom serves to heal family wounds and allows for the development of the key tractarian values of humility, self-examination, and piety. Philip willfully travels to Recoara despite a known cholera epidemic. But, when Guy changes the route of his honeymoon to nurse Philip, he also finds his cousin changed. On his arrival, Guy marks "every alteration in the worn, flushed suffering face" that rests

“helplessly on the pillow” with “wasted, nervous limbs stretched out in pain and helplessness” and contrasts his “present state with what he was when they last parted, in the full pride of health, vigour, and intellect” (415). Illness has broken down Philip’s pride where little else could, and a few days into Philip’s convalescence Amy is touched to see “one wont to be full of independence and self-assertion, now meek and helpless, requiring to be lifted, and propped up with pillows, and depending entirely and thankfully upon Guy” (430). It takes a physical breakdown for Philip to make a moral recovery, and to attain the humility attendant on true religious belief.

The sickroom is also the place of Guy’s most daring act of heroism: braving a cholera epidemic for the sake of duty. Despite the “traces of repugnance” that Philip shows toward Guy during his more lucid intervals, Guy perseveres in watching him through his fever, showing himself to be “an invaluable nurse, with his tender hand, modulated voice, quick eye, and quiet activity” (414). The antagonisms of every day life are put aside in the sickroom, which is a space that offers a more capacious sense of the possible relationships between men in this historical and literary moment. So constant and tender are Guy’s attentions to his cousin, that the doctor proclaims that if “*le malade*” is saved, it will be “owing to the care and attention of *le chevalier*” (419), making the place of chivalry in the sickroom explicit. Yonge finds ample room for deeds of daring in the domestic sphere itself, and in the tenderness the space of the sickroom allows. John Tosh argues that nineteenth-century domesticity is difficult to square with homosociality and its emphasis on male-adventuring and heroism (5), but Yonge has found a way to do just this in her portrait of the sickroom.

Tenderness and piety are heroic masculine qualities in Yonge’s novel, and the way in which family members treat Charles says a great deal about their moral character. The happiest summer that the young members of the family spend together is spent in “reading, walking, music, gardening” and in constructing “a new arbour in

the midst of the laurels, where Charles might sit and see the spires of Broadstone.” “Work they did, indeed!” rhapsodizes the narrator, “Charles looking on from his wheeled chair, laughing to see Guy sawing as if for his living, and Amy hammering gallantly, and Laura weaving osiers, and Charlotte flying about with messages” (100-101). This scene of domestic felicity anchors itself in Guy’s treatment of Charles. As we have seen, Guy first ingratiates himself into the Edmonstone family home through his kindness toward their son, winning them over with his “great helpfulness and kindness” to the family’s only son, as he learns “the sort of assistance he requires” (25). When Charles first looks up at Guy’s “frank, open face,” he sees his “lustrous hazel eyes turned on him with compassion at the sight of his crippled, helpless figure, and with a bright cordial promise of kindness” (17). His attentiveness does not go unremarked amongst the family: ““Sir Guy is so kind that I am ashamed,”” says Mrs. Edmonstone to a neighbour, ““It seems as if we had brought him for the sole purpose of waiting on Charles”” (39). Under Guy’s care, Charles’s health flourishes. Guy convinces Mrs. Edmonstone to allow Charles to attend a musical review, where the invalid walks further than he has in years, sits out the whole breakfast, talks to the whole world and is tended carefully to by Guy on the way home (125-6). Not only does Guy improve Charles’s health and spirits, Charles is also key to Guy’s integration into domestic life. Before leaving on his honeymoon, Guy tells Charles, “I must thank you for a great part of my happiness here—for a great deal of kindness and sympathy” (375). Kindness and sympathy are traits that Guy shares with his invalid cousin, while their other cousin, Philip, embodies the hubris and self-satisfaction that were seen as so dangerous to tractarian values.

The way in which Philip condescends to help Charles shows the reader his pride and arrogance. Early in the novel, Charles tells a friend of the family, Mary Ross, about the altercations the two of them have been having over what kind of help

he needs. ““Could you guess what a conflict it is every time I am helped up that mountain of a staircase, or the slope of my sofa is altered?”” he asks. ““Last time Philip stayed here, every step cost an argument, till at last, through sheer exhaustion, I left myself a dead weight on his hands, to be carried up by main strength. And after all, he is such a great, strong fellow, that I am afraid he did not mind it; so next time I *crutched* myself down alone, and I hope that did provoke him”” (39; italics original). At the crisis of the novel, when Guy has been banished from the family on suspicion of gambling, his relationship with Guy’s accuser, Philip, only worsens. Philip is in “the thick of the persecution” of Guy and gives Charles some rather “impertinent advice” on how to manage the situation as he drags him upstairs. Angered, Charles lets go of his arm, and is in danger of falling down the stairs until Philip catches him. The family rumour is that Philip lets Charles fall downstairs and causes the gathering in the joint that results in a protracted illness, but the fact of the case, as Charles explains to Guy, is that it is his fault in “a moral, though not in a physical sense”, since he was antagonizing Charles by wrongly accusing Guy of certain misdemeanours as he helped the invalid up the stairs (342). That Charles’s ill or good health acts as a gauge of the family’s health is perhaps not surprising given that he also bears much of the interpretive weight of Yonge’s novel.

### ***Reading Invalidism***

Because Yonge’s narrator offers so little by way of interpretation, her characters’ readings of events offer some guidance. *The Heir of Redclyffe* is a self-reflexive novel, and it is Charles who most often draws the comparison between the happenings in his family and the conventions of romance. At the outset of the novel, when the characters learn that their father’s ward and cousin, Guy, will be coming to

live with them, Philip describes his visit to Redclyffe, with its “fine old red sandstone house crumbling away in the exposed parts,” its ivy covered gateway, and great quadrangle, as something “more like a scene in a romance than anything real” (10). Always at hand with a witty comment, Charles promptly suggests that Philip should either ignore the family feud between Philip’s and Guy’s branches of the Morville family, or have done with it and “fight it out with his grandson, which would be more romantic and exciting” (12). As an experienced reader of novels, Charles is also quick to ask, in the presence of Amy and Laura, who are both quite lovely, if there ever was “a beauty who did not fall in love with her father’s ward?” (14). This is exactly what happens when Amy falls in love with the handsome young ward, and Philip pursues the family feud, doubting Guy’s character and dogging him to the death. At the text’s close, characters make constant reference to how like the ending of a novel Philip and Laura’s marriage is, despite their having behaved very badly in keeping their engagement a secret for so many years. Charlotte exclaims angrily of Philip: “And to think of his marrying just like a good hero in a book, and living very happily ever after!” (533), while Dr. Mayerne reverses Charlotte’s conclusion, remarking to Charles that “One could not see them without feeling it was the first chapter of a novel” (545). Charles wittily concludes that Laura and Philip are “finishing off like the end of a novel, fortune and all, and setting a very bad example to the world in general” (579). *The Heir of Redclyffe*’s awareness of its own genre, perhaps unexpected in a sentimental novel, at once deflates the conventions of romance and makes them an acceptable part of Yonge’s domestic realism.

It is not surprising that much of the novel’s wry commentary on the conventions of romance comes from Charles, who, as an invalid, is allowed to indulge freely in the pleasures of novel-reading. Setting the scene at Hollywell early on, the narrator comments that Laura is constantly striving “to keep down the piles of books

and periodicals under which it seemed as if her brother might some day be stifled” (25). As Kathleen Tillotson points out in her work on Charlotte Yonge as a critic of literature, despite her status as a novelist, Yonge viewed contemporary novels, especially those in serial form, as “indulgences appropriate to the disabled, the convalescent, and the railway traveller” (“Charlotte Yonge as Critic” 60). Thus, Philip allows that Laura might indulge in reading *Dombey and Son* (1848) when she has “a cold or a toothache” (31), but otherwise recommends weightier works, like the hefty book of algebra he sends her, to occupy her mind. Coming from Philip, whose opinions are rather too rigid, this suspicion of novels and novel-reading redounds less harshly on Yonge’s own novel than it would otherwise. Nevertheless, Yonge’s work makes it clear that novel-reading is partly to blame for the Edmonstone’s Irish cousin Eveleen’s flightiness and subsequent elopement (147, 174). In the early parts of the novel, Charles is not subject to the same self-discipline as the rest of the members of the Edmonstone home, and his access to novelistic conventions places him in a privileged narrative position. Charles is in some ways on a level with the narrator since he not only understands and comments on the conventions of novels, but also sets the machinery of the plot in action. The narrator comments that Charles is “well-principled at bottom,” “but his idle, unoccupied life, and habit of only thinking of things as they concerned his immediate amusement” makes him “ready to do anything for the sake of opposition to Philip, and to enjoy the vague idea of excitement to be derived from anxiety about his father’s ward, whom at the same time” he comes to like more and more as he becomes certain that “the Puritan spirit was not native to him” (49-50). Charles’s “idle, unoccupied life” leads him to try to stir up action, or in other words the plot of the book, in Guy’s favour as he comes to recognize him as a hero worthy of imitation.

Being versed in the conventions of novels allows Charles to read the situations

around him with a specific paradigm in mind that turns out to be quite accurate. Although he is frustrated by the ways in which his disability thwarts his ability to participate in the goings-on of his family, his restricted mobility also gains him the perspective necessary to observe and critique what is happening around him. Charles's point of view brings to mind that of Ermine Williams, the invalid in *The Clever Woman of the Family*, who sees "the world through a key-hole" but whose "circumscribed view" gains "in distinctness" (121). In the same novel, Lieutenant Alick Keith, who has been wounded in the Indian Mutiny, credits his long convalescence with developing patience in him (421). Although Charles hardly attains the almost saintly wisdom of an Ermine Williams or a Margaret May, or even the patience and perspective of an Alick Keith, he is able to see the goings on of the household more clearly than anyone else. As a cripple, he is also allowed to indulge his anger at certain situations more than able-bodied members of the family, and this affective response often proves to be the right one. Unlike Ermine Williams or Margaret May, whose weak spines are combined with a pious outlook, Charles is an intriguer whose curiosity and sharp wit propel the plot forward.

There is a restless energy in Charles's boredom that seems akin to the narrative energy necessary to set the plot in motion. Indeed, Charles's ennui eventually becomes an emotional attachment to Guy that allows him to see that his friend has been wrongfully accused and to rouse himself out of his habitual peevishness and melancholy. In the first place, though, Guy is no more exempt from Charles's favourite activity of "poking up the lion" than Philip or his sisters (62-3). The knowledge he gains in provoking his cousin raises him to an authoritative position in the narrative. For example, early on, after Guy ruins his fun in spreading rumours about a lady neighbour's cigar smoking habits, it becomes an object with Charles to provoke the hereditary temper that Guy is trying quell. After the cigar incident, when



Guy kindly asks Charles if he would like help going upstairs to dress, Charles flatly refuses. “Having no other way of showing his displeasure” he remains downstairs “nursing his ill-humour”, until he has forgotten “how slight the offence had been, and worked himself into a sort of insane desire—half mischievous, half revengeful—to be as provoking as he could in his turn” (62). Charles wants to see Guy’s famed hereditary temper for himself, and the narrator comments that it becomes a “sport” with him “to try and rouse it”, which has the greater relish because it keeps “the rest of the family on thorns” (62). Keeping his otherwise well-behaved high church family on thorns is another way of saying that Charles stirs up the conflict that sets the plot in motion.

The narrator quotes Charles’s thoughts on the events that are taking place at Hollywell more than those of any other character in the novel. This focus on Charles’s thoughts has a practical purpose in that he is more of an observer of the romance and family feuds that fuel the plot than a participant in them, and thus he can step in for the narrator who reserves her own judgment on the situation. Since Yonge’s narrator takes herself to be an impartial reporter of events, Charles is also useful as a character with an emotional investment in the outcome of the plot. His involvement in and commentary on the plot are usually anchored in a particular affective investment, beginning with his irritability at being confined to the couch as an invalid. Having once succeeded in provoking the famous Morville temper with an offhand sneer about Charles I, Charles soliloquizes to himself, “I’ll let him alone; but it *ryled* me to be treated a something beneath his anger, like a woman or a child” (63). This soliloquy of Charles’s, in which we get direct access to his thoughts and motivations, places him in a privileged narrative position. In a novel in which the narrator offers so little by way of comment or interpretation, the direct quotation of a character’s thoughts on a given event gain greater significance than they would were the narrator more didactic.

Afterwards, when Guy explains his feeling that King Charles “suffered too much from scoffs and railings, his heart was too tender, his repentance too deep for his friends to add one word even in jest to the heap of reproach”, Charles begins to recognize that there is something fine in this young man’s feelings. “It was a rhapsody,” he thinks after Guy leaves the room, “yes it was. I wonder I don’t laugh at it; but I was actually carried along. Fancy that! He did it so naturally; in fact, it was all from the bottom of his heart, and I could not quiz him—no, no more than Montrose himself. He is a strange article! but he keeps one awake, which is more than most people do!” (64-5). The narrator picks up on Charles’s phrasing, remarking that “Guy was indeed likely to keep every one awake just then” (it happens to be hunting season), as if to affirm Charles’s interpretation of Guy’s character (65).

Shrewd and clever, Charles seems to have a knack for hitting on the most trying subjects in everyone’s lives. He discovers Philip’s tender spot when he mentions that Guy scribbles verses like a regular Petrarch, forgetting that his choice of this poet’s name suggests that Guy is in love with Laura (104). Having inadvertently provoked his cousin more than he meant to, he does not disabuse Philip of the idea that Guy is in love with Laura, and his meddling leads Philip to confess his own love to Laura while trying to protect her from an entanglement with her other cousin. Charles little realizes the extent of the mischief he has done in this case, but he is the first to realize that Philip is most likely in love with Laura himself in a conversation on the goings-on of the household with his mother. He mistakenly thinks that Laura will not find out the true nature of Philip’s feelings for her, being “very innocent of novels” (147), and Mrs. Edmonstone confesses that she also believes the young Captain to be in love with her eldest daughter. Lest the reader think this tête-à-tête between mother and son strange, the narrator points out that in such a serious case affecting his sister’s feelings as this one, Charles can be trusted, and “in fact, confidence was the only way

to prevent the shrewd, unscrupulous raillery which would have caused great distress, and perhaps led to the very disclosure to be deprecated” (147). Perhaps the more important reason for this scene, though, is that it allows Charles and Mrs. Edmonstone to act as commentators on the action, and to show readers through their remarks that they too should feel a secret engagement between Philip and Laura to be an almost unthinkable violation of filial piety, a key tractarian value. Although they may not be entirely reliable guides as to what is actually transpiring in the household—Philip and Laura, have of course, really formed a clandestine engagement—Charles and Mrs. Edmonstone are a guide to proper feeling here, preparing Yonge’s readers for the unhappiness that results from this lack of filial piety.

Charles is particularly well-situated within the domestic sphere to act as a commentator on and observer of the family drama. Since, in Yonge’s novelistic world, the home is integral to the formation of the masculine character, it seems appropriate that Charles’s forced confinement in the home should result in a certain perspicacity when it comes to finding out what is going on in the household. Late in the novel, Amy reflects that “Charlie really is the cleverest person in the world” for having figured out that a courtship was transpiring between Laura and Philip before anyone else (424). Charles’s knowingness is due not only to his powers of observation, but also to his position within the family. As we have seen, Mrs. Edmonstone’s dressing room, the center of household management at Hollywell, doubles as Charles’s sickroom, and also adjoins his bedroom. It comes as no surprise that Charles often knows things before he is told. Early on, we find that Charles has been privy to a tête-à-tête in which Mrs. Edmonstone advises Guy on the best ways to manage his hereditary temper. After Mrs. Edmonstone leaves, he calls out “Are you there, Guy? I want an arm!” while Guy for the first time perceives that Charles’s door has been ajar the whole time (49). Mrs. Edmonstone rightly surmises that Charles will know the

whole story of Guy and Amy's love before anyone tells him officially. As the narrator reminds us: "His room had a door into the dressing-room, so that it was an excellent place for discovering all from which they did not wish to exclude him, and he did not believe he should be unwelcome" (193). Charles is welcome not only to the goings on in the family but also to the narrative authority to be derived from this knowledge. He is almost always the first to know what is going on in the family, and his emotional reactions to different situations often guide the reader's reaction.

While Charles's day-to-day confinement to the couch allows him a privileged position as an observer, his more serious illnesses prevent him, and Mrs. Edmonstone, whose cares become completely absorbed in her son at these moments, from observing all that goes on at Hollywell. Were Charles to retain his sharp powers of observation at all moments during the narrative, he would impede the machinery of the plot by putting a stop to the tryst between Laura and Philip. Charles falls seriously ill just after Laura and Philip become engaged, and again when Guy is banished from the house on suspicion of gambling. Laura and Philip have particular reason to be glad when illness keeps him away from the dinner table, so that "not one suspicious eye could rest on them" (152). Having an invalid in the family also accounts for Laura's keeping a secret from her mother. "Mrs. Edmonstone had been so much occupied by Charles's illness," explains the narrator, "as to have been unable to attend to her daughters in their girlish days; and in the governess's time the habit had been disuse of flying at once to her with every joy or grief" (124). As is to be expected, Charles himself cannot attend to the goings-on of the family with his usual shrewdness when he is suffering from the excruciating pain of his chronic inflammations of the joints. When Charles is debilitated by illness just at the moment when Guy is banished, the narrator comments that "these gatherings in the diseased joint were always excessively painful, and were very long in coming to the worst, as well as afterwards in healing"

and he is constantly “either in a state of great suffering, or else heavy and confused with opiates” (266). Charles’s condition also takes up his mother’s time and attention, as she attends to him “day and night” and can “hardly spare a moment for anything else” (266). Indeed, Charles is “so entirely her engrossing object”, that when Philip comes back from Oxford having failed to clear Guy of charges of gambling, “her first feeling of disappointment” is that the news will “grieve Charlie” (266). The reader, who knows that Guy has not been gambling, but supporting his derelict uncle and hoping to help endow a sisterhood, is supposed to grieve with Charlie at this point in the novel. As is so often the case, Charles expresses those feelings that the rest of the family reins in.

Charles’s passionate involvement on Guy’s behalf acts as an emotional outlet throughout this moment of crisis. Charles, angered at Philip’s accusations, refuses “to go away with the womankind” and be shut out of this important conversation, demanding that Philip explain himself as soon as the door is shut. At this moment, Charles is an apt stand-in for the reader, who also wishes to glean what is going on behind closed doors at Hollywell. Charles ends up doing more harm than good to Guy’s case, offending his father who pours “out a confused torrent of Guy’s imagined offenses” and riling Philip (237). Charles also gives vent to his mother and younger sister’s (and possibly the reader’s) feelings that Guy is being unjustly accused. He is allowed to make these remarks in part because, as an invalid, he has not learnt the same principle of self-control as the rest of the family, and his “early habits of disrespect to his father” resurface when his temper is fairly roused (238). Despite his immobility, Charles does what he can to help his family. When Mrs. Edmonstone tries, as gently as possible, to break the news to Amy that she must give up her engagement to Guy in another conference by “the dressing room fire,” Charles, who can hear all that transpires in the other room, comes bursting through his bedroom

door into the dressing room “half dressed, scrambling on, with but one crutch, to the chair near which she stood, with drooping head and clasped hands,” promising that it is “only some monstrous figment of Mrs. Henley’s” (Philip’s sister who has started the rumour) and that he will sort it out (236). For all the rashness of Charlie’s promise, even Mrs. Edmonstone, who has “great confidence” in her son’s “clear sight” is cheered by his account of the situation, while the reader knows he is right and that Guy is innocent.

The novel’s first readers sympathized with Charles’s emotional response. When the manuscript was circulating amongst Yonge’s close friends, the Coleridge family, Sir John Coleridge (later Judge Coleridge) “said that when Philip came to inquire about Guy’s debts, Guy should have kicked him downstairs” an opinion which Julian Yonge improved upon “by saying that he would have horsewhipped him round the quad” (Coleridge 166). Yonge did not revise her manuscript based on these suggestions, but Charles remains the character who expresses the emotional investment of the novel’s first readers most closely. Having been the appropriate object of Guy’s tenderness when the young ward first comes to the Edmonstone family home, Charles is now the character who loosens the restraints around emotion in the decorous family home, allowing others to feel vicariously through his passionate reactions. Yonge conceived his emotional involvement as an important catalyst from the novel’s inception. In letters to Dyson, she wrote that she decided that Mr. Edmonstone would be reconciled to Guy in Philip’s absence, with Charles “saying all in favour of Guy” (Coleridge 174), and having “never given up his correspondence” through his whole banishment (Coleridge 176). At a time when Mr. Edmonstone has forbidden Amy from contacting Guy, Charles’s continued “confidence and sympathy, expressed in almost daily letters” until he falls too ill to maintain the correspondence (273), are an important emotional outlet.

As the novel draws to a close, however, Charlie must give up his propensity for the disobedience and melancholy that have been the source of so much narrative energy. Yonge aimed to provide an example for her readers, and Charles was no exception to this education in proper feeling. At the end of the novel Charles reflects to Amy that he owes his new character to Guy. ““No one else had such a power of making happy”” he says:

'Amy, I really don't know whether even you owe as much to your husband as I do. You were good for something before, but when I look back on what I was when first he came, I know that his leading, unconscious as it was, brought out the stifled good in me. What a wretch I should have been; what a misery to myself and to you all by this time, and now, I verily believe, that since he let in the sunlight from heaven on me, I am better off than if I had as many legs as other people.' (593)

Charles's moral improvement is indeed the subject of comment among his friends and family. As Mr. Ross comments that Charles Edmonstone is much improved to his daughter Mary after Guy has been in the neighbourhood for two years: “He has lost that spirit of repining and sarcasm, and lives as if he had an object” (169). Others are quick to notice an improvement in Charles when Guy comes on the scene as well. Although Laura feels guilty about partaking in too much amusement during the first summer that Guy is with the family, she tells Philip that it at least has had an improving effect on her brother. “But what can I do?” she asks him. “I try to read early and at night, but I can't prevent the fun and gaiety; and indeed, I don't think I would. It is innocent, and we never had such a pleasant summer. Charlie is so—so much more equable, and mamma is more easy about him, and I can't help thinking it does them all good, though I do feel idle” (118). Yonge saw Charles as the beneficiary of Guy's noble influence. In letters written to Dyson during the composition of *The*

*Heir of Redclyffe*, Yonge says: "I don't think Charles was in earnest enough before Guy came to take Philip as his *Bild*; it was Guy who made him in earnest, and by respecting Philip himself almost taught him to do so" (Coleridge 175). As she continued writing she found Guy to be a good influence on both Amy and Charles, just as they began to be a comfort to him. "Amabel is at this moment in the midst of comforting Guy about his doom," writes Yonge, "he has just begun to establish an influence over Charles and to develop a soul in her, both very unconsciously" (Coleridge 178).

Charles chafes against his lot in life, but he too must learn the value of self-resignation and self-sacrifice. Early on in the novel, in a rare moment of seriousness, Charles tells Guy that he knows he could make something of himself if only he weren't an invalid: "I know I have what they call talent—I could be something. They think me an idle dog; but where's the good of doing anything? I only know if I was not—not condemned to—to this—this life," says Charles, "if I was not chained down here, Master Philip should not stand alone as the paragon of the family. I've as much mother wit as he" (91-2). Guy gently suggests that Charlie is too clever not to spend his time in some sort of learning, and that he should spend part of every day reading improving books with his sisters. Despite his initial idle and mischievous nature, Charles is no more exempt from the demanding regime of self-renunciation and usefulness than the rest of the Edmonstone family, men and women included. At the close of the novel, Charles decides that he will be Philip's "private secretary" when he is a Member of Parliament, and imagines himself "triumphing in his importance, when he should sit in state on his sofa at Hollywell, surrounded with blue-books, getting up the statistics for some magnificent speech of the honourable member for Moorworth" (574). As Elisabeth Jay points out, "By the end of the novel, Charlie, like his creator, has found through his writing public influence and a means of offering support to his



family” (“Tractarian Aesthetics” 50). As readers turn the final pages of Yonge’s novel, it seems appropriate that the most voracious novel-reader in *The Heir of Redclyffe* should exchange the periodicals and light literature that once threatened to overwhelm his couch for blue-books.

Charles is perhaps the character who most clearly expresses the kind of emotional outpouring that the novel’s first readers experienced on reading Yonge’s novel. With the exception of more cynical readers like Hutton and Dickens, everyone from tenderhearted young damsels and sensitive country curates to shopkeepers and Oxford undergraduates could not help but weep over the story of Guy’s noble sacrifice. In a letter to Dyson dated 23 February 1853, Yonge described John and Charlotte Keble’s emotional engagement with her book in these terms: “It seems as if people were first angry, then sad, and then the peacefulness of the end grew on them; altogether the effect has been much more than I ever expected” (191). The reader’s emotional progress seems remarkably similar to that of Charles. Indeed, it seems as if the novel arouses these emotions only to subdue them, as Charles must go through a course of improvement in which the ennui that has been the source of so much narrative energy throughout the novel is replaced with “the peacefulness of the end”, as he becomes reaches equanimity in recognizing and fulfilling his duty.

In Yonge, no character, no matter how weak or ill he or she may be, is exempt from fulfilling his or her duty. As the novel closes, the pleasures of youth, including novel-reading, give way to the more sober pursuits of adulthood, such as getting up statistics from blue books. Yonge raises the stakes involved in fulfilling one’s duty, even if that duty is the domestic task of nursing a sick cousin, to a matter of life and death bound up in notions of chivalry and honour. It is not surprising that her depiction of young men struggling to find and fulfill their duty was greeted with such an emotional outpouring by her novel’s first readers. Yonge’s portrait is one of

masculinity in peril as her young men struggle to find compass for their powers of compassion and intellect within the home. Reading Charles as a stand-in for the reader who must eventually learn to rein in his own emotions raises questions about how the narrative form of the novel is related to the corporeal forms of its characters. Yonge's portrait of Charles's feelings of helplessness as a man and a cripple arouse the reader's sympathy. On a narrative level, Charles also embodies the ways in which Yonge hopes that the sentimental novel will work on her reader. Charles's emotional trajectory—from the initial curiosity that rouses him from boredom and the invalid's couch to take an interest in the goings-on of his family, to his increasing emotional investment in Guy and his relationships with Philip and his mother and sisters, to his eventual moral reform—is the emotional trajectory through which Yonge hoped to take her own readers. The relationship between novelistic and corporeal forms becomes even more emphatic in the next chapter, which considers Dinah Mulock Craik's novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman*, in which the paradigmatic story of the self-made man is narrated by his invalid friend.

## CHAPTER 4

### “THE DELICIOUS MONOTONY OF OUR DAYS”: DISABILITY, NARRATIVE FATIGUE, AND THE STORY OF THE SELF-MADE MAN IN DINAH MULLOCK CRAIK'S *JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN*

*There is a deep beauty—more so than the world will acknowledge—in  
this impassioned first friendship, most resembling first love, whose  
faint shadowing it truly is. Who does not, even while smiling at its  
apparent folly, remember the sweetness of such a dream?*

-Dinah Mulock Craik, *Olive* (1850)

It seems like quite a leap to move from the parlours of a genteel high church family in *The Heir of Redclyffe* to the world of dissenting trade, the tan-yard and the Society of Friends, found in the opening chapters of *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856). Yet both novels negotiate the question of what makes a true gentleman through a disabled male character who articulates emotions on the hero's behalf. In the case of Craik's novel, the invalid friend, Phineas Fletcher, actually narrates the rags-to-riches story of the novel's eponymous hero, John Halifax. The novel's vehement claim that one need not be well-born to be a true gentleman leads Phineas to catalogue the social movements that enable John's class mobility, from the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution around the time of John's birth in 1780 to the passing of the First Reform Bill in 1832 shortly before his death. This story also leads him to an emotional outpouring of admiration and affection for his successful friend. The social scope of Craik's novel is much wider than that of Yonge's, which focuses more narrowly on domestic high church circles. Because Yonge's well-born heroes have no need to

prove their gentility, her novel focuses on the moral and religious burdens of the gentleman and the values of self-sacrifice, piety, and chivalry. By contrast, Craik's self-made man straddles social classes through the values of earnestness, hard work and perseverance, which the novel shows as transcending class affiliations. Because John, with no birth or wealth to recommend him, must prove himself a gentleman through his hard work and restraint, Phineas carries much more of the narrative burden in Craik's novel than Charles Edmonstone does in Yonge's. Although John Halifax is the hero of the novel, Phineas Fletcher is its affective center.

Just as Yonge wrote about the social milieu into which she was born, Craik's biography, as it is told by her contemporaries and later critics, bears striking similarities to the life story of John Halifax: instead of the self-made man we have the self-made author. As the story goes according to Margaret Oliphant's obituary, after watching her father, the evangelical preacher Thomas Mulock, treat her mother "untenderley" for too long, "the young Dinah, in a blaze of love and indignation, carried that ailing and delicate mother away, and took in her rashness the charge of the whole family, two younger brothers, upon her own slender shoulders" (Oliphant 82). A long and arduous apprenticeship writing stories for women and children in periodicals, as well as four moderately successful novels, culminated in the publication of *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), which brought its author much of the same fame and fortune that its hero enjoys. Oliphant wrote that the germ of the story for *John Halifax, Gentleman*, came from a visit that Craik paid to Tewkesbury with her friend Clarence Dobell. Craik saw the name "John Halifax" on a tombstone and immediately came up with an idea for a story about a gentleman who was indebted to no one for his rise from rags to riches (Oliphant 83). Like Craik's idea for a story, John Halifax seems to spring to life fully formed. When we meet him he is a vagabond on the street, but he quickly gains employment. With no capital but his head

and his own two hands (17), John rises from the lowly state of tan-yard apprentice to become a successful mill-owner and patriarch. John Halifax may not quite reach the heights of the early nineteenth century's most famous self-made man, Isaac Holden, who went from cotton-piecer to mill-owner to MP and knight of the realm (Tosh 12), but Craik's hero is still a force to be reckoned with. Before he is twenty-one, Halifax teaches himself to read and write not only English but also Latin, quells a bread riot, and becomes partner in the tan-yard. The next thirty years are no less impressive as he single-handedly installs a virtuous MP in what was once a rotten borough, introduces steam power in his cloth mill without causing so much as a stir amongst his rustic labourers, and stops a run on his friend's bank. Craik's narration of the story of the strong, working-class, independent, and taciturn John Halifax from the point of view of his opposite—the weak, middle-class, dependent, and voluble Phineas Fletcher—suggests that the relentless self-control demanded of the self-made man requires an emotional outlet. Phineas's narration is certainly the occasion for emotion as he attempts to lead the reader to view his friend with the same love and admiration that he feels for him.

Both contemporary reviewers of Craik's novel in the nineteenth century and later feminist critics of her work in the twentieth century were quick to note that Phineas, who narrates the story of his successful friend from the marginal position of the invalid, occupies a feminine subject position. Rather than being a projection of Craik's position as a woman author, however, Phineas's position as a disabled narrator puts into motion a rich set of dynamics that underscore the relationship between corporeal and narrative forms. As the stronger John becomes Phineas's physical protector, and the more loquacious Phineas John's verbal champion, the two develop an intense and erotically-charged friendship that propels the first third of the novel forward. As is apparent in Yonge's portrait of the friendship between Charles and

Guy, in Hughes's portrait of Tom Brown and George Arthur, and now in Craik's writing about John and Phineas, the mid-century novel opens up a capacious sense of the possible relationships between men. The reviewer for *The Athenaeum* wrote that "The friendship between John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher is well managed, and opens a source of interest and emotion which we wonder is not oftener and more efficiently used in novels:—friendship has capabilities of interest quite as deep and as universal as love, only it requires more knowledge to handle it nobly and adequately" (520). Eve Sedgwick's influential account of homoeroticism in the nineteenth-century novel is pertinent here as well, as Craik's novel is centered on an intensely erotic friendship that crosses physical and class differences. *John Halifax, Gentleman* charts the rise of the middle classes through the affective bond between Phineas and John. Craik's novel also speaks to the representation of the male form—disabled and able-bodied—and its relationship to the form of the novel.

John and Phineas act as foils to one another: John is a strong, silent, self-made man whereas Phineas is a weak, voluble, invalid. A descendant of the Carlylean Captain of Industry, John is a gentleman because of his tremendous self-restraint and silence. Craik's solution to the problem of how to narrate the story of a man who is so sparing of his words is to have Phineas Fletcher, the hero's friend and companion, articulate those desires that he cannot or will not, including praising his friend's achievements. Arlene Young remarks that "John Halifax's gentlemanliness is in part represented by his restraint and understatement— characteristics not always shared by his creator or the narrator in their celebrations of his glory" (39). Phineas is able to be so extravagant in his praise of his friend in part because he bears a relation to an older type of fictional gentleman, the man of feeling, whose nervous and delicate constitution was easily moved to tears. Craik sets her story at the turn of the century, just as this type was yielding to the self-made man, whose physical prowess on the

rugby pitch was only equaled by his business acumen in the workplace (Oppenheim 145-7). Craik's thematic pairing of the businessman and the invalid thus speaks to a specific juncture in the history of masculinity, as well as enabling her to tell the story of the ascendance of the self-made man. Phineas's narration thus also functions on a literary register, providing an implicit defense of the literary world and humanizing the ideal of the self-made man.

The different kinds of energy that Phineas and John bring to the novel as narrator and protagonist act as pulses to one another. Phineas's intense longing for John during the weeks and months he spends in his sickbed can be read, like Charles Edmonstone's ennui, as a longing for action and plot. John's highly plotted life offers Phineas's life a kind of vicarious narrative shape. John's relentless course of self-improvement is tempered by Phineas's aimless indolence, which offers John, and the readers, a sense of much needed repose. This function changes throughout the novel when John marries Ursula and the John-Phineas relationship recedes into the background as John's marital life comes to the foreground. Nevertheless, Phineas remains in the Halifax household as kind of a bachelor-uncle and continues to narrate John's life. As a self-described queer bachelor with his own "crochets", Phineas continues to recognize and articulate forms of desire that the rest of John's household does not, occupying what Sedgwick would call an avuncular narrative position. His "crochets" as he grows older include a propensity to take the side of the young in love and to digress and confide these opinions to the reader. Most importantly, Phineas's delight in the "delicious monotony" of long stretches of time at Enderfield, John's family home, both accounts for long lapses of time in the narrative and softens what might otherwise be a tale of the monotonous work at the tan-yard and later the mill that takes John up the social ladder.

Phineas's narration allays Victorian anxieties that the self-made man is a social

climber who is only interested in getting on in a narrowly material sense. Unlike *The Heir of Redclyffe*, which represented the domestic sphere as an all-encompassing realm of experience in which all of life's most important dramas could be staged. By contrast, the story of a self-made man and industrialist, *John Halifax, Gentleman* shows the public sphere to be an important venue for masculine action. Craik's novel shares the industrial novel's preoccupation with a tension between the public and private worlds, asking how the tension between these two spheres might be negotiated, or, indeed, if they are so separate at all. Catherine Gallagher's influential argument that realistic novels of this period simultaneously associate and disassociate these two realms of experience describes the tension in Craik's novel well. "Industrial novels, especially those of the 1850s," writes Gallagher, "display this normal tension in an exaggerated form. They make the connection between the family and society one of their main themes and primary organizing devices, but they simultaneously emphasize that the family must be isolated and protected from the larger social world" (*Industrial Revolution* 114-5). Craik's novel is unique in that it negotiates this tension through the voice of a weak and effeminate man. As Eileen Cleere points out in her recent work on avuncularism in the nineteenth-century novel, a careful reading of the importance of aunts and uncles reveals an alternative perspective to Gallagher's emphasis on the nuclear family as the organizing principle of the industrial novel (3). Cleere argues that uncles, who often die conveniently so that a niece or nephew can inherit and who generally earn their wealth through industry and in the colonies rather than through patriarchal inheritance, come to stand for an alternative set of economic possibilities in the Victorian novel (8). Cleere's work is suggestive, but at times she pushes the economic significance of the avunculate so far that it sounds as though uncles are only an elaborate metaphor for systems of financial exchange in the novel. As such, she misses out on an opportunity to talk about the narrative work that uncles are doing as



characters in the novel.

Phineas is the perfect example of a character whose different investment in the economic systems that under-gird the novel—he provides the repose and affective engagement necessary to balance the relentless work and self-restraint of the self-made man—further structures the novel’s narrative form. This phenomenon is not limited to Craik’s work. In *Dr. Thorne* (1858), Trollope gives us another uncle whose disinterestedness counterbalances the taint of the money that his niece, Mary Thorne, stands to inherit from her other uncle, the self-made man Roger Scatcherd. John Halifax is the paradigmatic good self-made man while Roger Scatcherd, an alcoholic and workaholic, is the paradigmatic bad self-made man. Nevertheless, the avuncular perspective seems necessary in both novels to allow for a strengthening of the disinterested affective ties that an investment in business threatens to destroy. In the last two thirds of the novel, Phineas offers an avuncular perspective on both John’s nuclear family and on his position as patriarch of the mill. Eve Sedgwick argues that through an avuncular perspective, the family becomes a more diffuse and porous unit (71). Phineas’s rather queer narration of John’s story is an occasion for the arousal of sentiment in an otherwise restrained world. His romantic friendship with John and later his domestic relationship in the Halifax household moves the industrial novel in the direction of the domestic novel, softening the contours of the public sphere with the feeling of the private sphere. As an uncle rather than a father, Phineas offers an alternative and much more intense affective engagement from that of the patriarch of home and industry, whose very self-restraint assures his position as father. Phineas’s avuncularism—at once privileged as the main point of view in the novel and marginalized as the voice of a character narrator who is not the main character—is thus a source of tension and narrative energy.

The argument that Phineas's narrative voice as a cripple shapes the form of the novel departs from earlier criticism that suggests that the crippled narrator is a stand-in for the woman author, who is metaphorically crippled by her gender. At the same time, it takes seriously the suggestion of critics from R. H. Hutton to Elaine Showalter that there is a relationship between corporeal and literary forms, and extends this claim by attending to the ways in which Phineas's point of view as an invalid enables the story of a Captain of Industry to be told as a sentimental novel. Many of the novel's first reviewers were quick to suggest a connection between the author's body and the body of the novel. These reviewers suspected that, as a woman author, Craik used her effeminate and crippled narrator as a screen to disguise her partial knowledge of her true subject, the impossibly manly John Halifax. Craik was well aware of this criticism. In an essay entitled "Concerning Men" she wrote: "I have shared with many other female writers the accusation that all my men are 'women's men' *i.e.* men painted, not as they are, but after the ideal—a woman's ideal—of what they ought to be. Perhaps we might retort how very little men know of us, and how unlike to real women are the heroines of many male novelists" (2). Among the most scathing critics was Henry James, who wrote of Craik's "model gentleman": "We know of no scales that will hold him, and of no unit of length with which to compare him. He is infinite; he outlasts time; he is enshrined in a million innocent breasts; and before his awful perfection and his eternal durability we respectfully lower our lance" (168). R. H. Hutton claimed that Craik's novel showed a "curious inability to conceive of men as they are in relation to each other" (475). Taking up the "point of sight" of a man was an unwise move on Craik's part, but if she were going to write in a man's voice, he wrote, at least it was that of a "delicate, gentle valetudinarian" (475). Nevertheless, Hutton remained unconvinced of Phineas's masculinity. "During the early part of the tale," writes he, "it is difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Fletcher will fall

hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard is it to remember that Phineas is of the male sex. Afterwards, when he professes to be an uncle, the reader is constantly aware that he is really an aunt, and a curious perplexity is apt to arise in the mind on the subject” (475). The critic for the *British Quarterly* felt that Craik was more successful in writing from a man’s point of view. The reader, who “knows that he sees the life of John Halifax through the mind of Phineas Fletcher”—a “confirmed invalid” with a nature that is “delicate, susceptible, tender and feminine”—makes up for the woman novelist’s limitations, and pictures Halifax’s life as “fuller and stronger and more manly than it is” (“The Author of John Halifax” 43-4). For these critics, the reader is an actively engaged participant in determining the way gender is coded in the novel, deciding that Phineas is more feminine than masculine, and reassessing John Halifax’s manliness accordingly.

While the novel’s first critics saw the use of a crippled narrator as a strategy to cover up Craik’s inadequate knowledge of men as a female author, twentieth-century feminist critics seeking to recover her work have often seen Phineas, disabled and an outsider, as a projection of Craik’s situation as a woman writer in a patriarchal society. In her reassessment of the importance of Craik’s work to the Victorian canon, Elaine Showalter claimed that the novelist “expressed her sense of freakishness and abnormality” through “the crippled Fletcher and other maimed male characters in her fiction” (19). Similarly, Sally Mitchell noted the importance of disability in Craik’s oeuvre, writing that one “crucial feature” in her “map of interior territory is illness, disability, and the figure of the weak or damaged human.” Mitchell, like Showalter, argued that the disabled man was a stand-in for the woman writer: “Certainly the ill or disabled male is an inevitable persona for the woman who sees herself as being in every way like a man except that she has less muscular strength. Physical incapacity codifies the pain of helplessness, the lack of power and social position and financial

ability and legal right to control the circumstances of one's own life" (112). While critics have for the most part moved past readings of nineteenth-century novels as a reflection of the tortured psychology of the woman author, this reading of the disabled male body as a projection of the woman author's psyche has retained its cachet. As we saw in chapter one, several male authors of the 1850s, including Charles Kingsley, G. A. Lawrence, and Arthur Hughes, paired a strong man with a weak man in their novels in order to explore the modes of masculinity that were emerging with such force at the time. In this context, we can see that Craik's use of a crippled male narrator is not necessarily a projection of her situation as a female author, but rather a response to the institutions and literary conventions that were shaping masculinity throughout the mid-century. Nevertheless, earlier feminist critics have been among the few scholars to take Craik's work seriously. Their scholarship raises interesting questions about the relationships between gender, disability, and narrative authority that I hope to show are relevant to Craik's novel not as a projection of the woman author's situation, but as a subtle and interesting narrative strategy that allows her to explore the types of masculinity that were emerging as she wrote.

### ***A Love Surpassing Woman***

In previous chapters we have seen, to borrow the words of the writer for the *Saturday Review*, all types of hero from the "curate" or high-church hero to "the genial hero, and the intense hero" as well as "muscle with, and muscle without, Christianity" (438). John Halifax presents us with another type of hero, the self-made man, who is related to these other heroes in his earnestness and his desire to do good, but who differs from characters like Amyas Leigh and Guy Morville in that he starts life with no capital but his head and his own two hands. More than one critic has noted that

*John Halifax* anticipates Samuel Smiles's 1859 formulation of the self-made man, whose value lay not in his wealth but in his character, which allowed him to rise to the top of his chosen industry regardless of how low on the ladder he began (Gilmour 77; Melda 397). Thus, although a man can be a gentleman in rags if he has the right character, if he does indeed have the right character riches are likely to follow. In Smiles's estimation: "The crown and glory of life is character. It is the noblest possession of a man, constituting a rank in itself, and an estate in the general good-will; dignifying every station, and exalting every position in society" (314). Through self-culture, any man could obtain the character of a gentleman regardless of his station in life. No one promised, however, that the climb up the social ladder would be easy. In his advice to young businessmen in the early part of the century, Thomas Teggs emphasized self-regulation: "The first rules are these: Tell truth; be sober; be punctual; rise early; persevere; avoid extravagance; keep your word; and watch your health" (141). The self-made man's success was bound up in his vital power, and the regime required to keep him in tip-top shape—from the time he woke up to bathe in cold water to the wee hours of the morning when he taught himself Latin or double-entry book-keeping—could at times seem exhausting. As Miriam Bailin has pointed out, it is not surprising that in the work-obsessed culture that followed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the cult of the invalid developed alongside the "coexistent imperatives of self-discipline, will-power and industriousness" (12). In this context, Craik's pairing of John and Phineas begins to make sense as a narrative strategy that allows her to subdue the relentless self-discipline of the self-made man through the more restful tempo of the invalid's life.

It is not surprising that John Halifax shares the muscular Christian's emphasis on a healthy frame as an indicator of a healthy morality. Craik's portrait of John chimes in with the values of muscular Christianity, including the value of actions over

words. In fact, Craiks's library contained inscribed editions of all of Kingsley's major novels, and she and her husband, George Craik, shared a working friendship with the Kingsleys. This is not surprising given that George Craik worked for the publisher Alexander Macmillan, Kingsley's publisher and also a long-time friend of Dinah Craik's, but Dinah's friendship with Fanny Kingsley dates at least back to the 1850s.<sup>3</sup> If Craik was impressed with Kingsley's work, she was even more taken with Thomas Hughes. While she found *The Mill on the Floss* to be decidedly unwholesome, and troubling, she thought *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was the perfect antidote to any such intellectual morbidity. After much reflection, she decided that Hughes's novel would be the perfect birthday present to send to her brother Ben, who was then working as a civil engineer in Brazil: "I was puzzling a long time what on earth to send you:--till I thought of Tom Brown. And it is such a beautiful book—'one that no gentleman's library should be without.'—I read it over again last Sunday with infinite delight" (Letter to Ben Muock, 28 April 1860, UCLA). Craik had met Thomas Hughes a few weeks earlier at the Macmillan's house. She wrote to Ben, "Such a fine fellow—as like his books as ever he can be—not a bit of the "literary man"—regular English honesty--& simplicity, with a certain of what Dr. Williamson calls "healthy animalism" for he stands 6 feet & broad in proportion—& looks as if he could fight or row or run or anything. And it's such a bright wholesome pleasant face—it makes you smile all over to look at it—He is just over 40 with a wife and several children. He & his wife are coming over for an early tea to Wildwood soon—" (Letter to Ben Mulock, 16 March 1860, UCLA). Craik and her circle were greatly impressed by Hughes's novel, especially the sporting scenes. Craik wrote to Ben: "Clarence got on board an Oxford boat & saw all close: his description was really like a bit of Tom Brown. Annie read the "boat-race" in Tom Brown in the omnibus & was so excited by it, she

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<sup>3</sup> See the Parrish Collection at Princeton University Library and The British Library.

said, that she was near crying—greatly to her confusion” (Letter to Ben Mulock, 1 April 1860, UCLA). John Halifax is not a muscular Christian, but given Craik’s admiration for Kingsley and Hughes it is not surprising that he shares the muscular Christian’s physical virtues.

Craik contrasts John and Phineas's physical abilities. The first thing Phineas notices on seeing John is his physical prowess: “in person” says he, “the lad was tall and strongly built; and I, poor puny wretch! So revered physical strength. Everything in him seemed to indicate that which I had not: his muscular limbs, his square, broad shoulders, his healthy cheek” and “his crisp curls of bright thick hair” (9-10). Phineas admires John’s facial features, down to his “square, sharply-outlined, resolute chin” which “gives character and determination to the whole physiognomy”, if not the whole man (9). Similarly, John’s “muscular limbs” and his “square, broad shoulders” impress upon Phineas the stolidity of his character (10). When they first meet, Phineas, who has been brought up by a well-off Quaker tradesman, learns that his new friend has often been hungry in the past. “I put my hand on his wrist” he says, “his strong brawny wrist. Perhaps the contrast involuntarily struck us both with the truth—good for both to learn—that Heaven’s ways are not so unequal as we sometimes fancy they seem” (54). Phineas’s reading of John’s strong physique as a moral boon continues throughout the novel. When the two become friends, the differences in their physique become a topic of playful exchange. As they lie in a meadow one pleasant June morning, they compare their respective attributes. Phineas self-deprecatingly exclaims “what a fine specimen of the noble *genus homo*” he is at twenty, and John playfully replies that though he is of a “slight, delicate person” he is no longer lame, and possessed of “Big eyes, much given to observation” (which means staring at John) and “long hair, which, since the powder tax, has resumed its original blackness” and is, in John’s words “exceedingly bewitching” (79). John, by contrast,

standing at a full five feet and eleven and a half inches to Phineas's five foot four, is a man. On this, his eighteenth birthday, Phineas remarks: "Manhood had come to him, both in character and demeanour, not as it comes to most young lads, an eagerly-desired and presumptuously-asserted claim, but as a rightful inheritance, to be received humbly, and worn simply and naturally" (78). Phineas links John's manhood to his strong physique and his verbal reticence; for John to proclaim his manhood would be to undermine it, and there is no need for him to do so when his body bespeaks his manhood so clearly.

Especially in their boyhood days, the physical differences between John and Phineas are conducive to an intense physical and emotional friendship as John supplies the physical strength and mobility that Phineas lacks, and Phineas articulates the recesses of John's emotions. In the early chapters of the novel, Phineas's affection for John can at times seem extravagant—he calls his beloved David and thinks of himself as Jonathan after the Old Testament story of the friendship between the King of Israel and the warrior, and spends much of the first third of the novel being carried about by John. At the end of the first chapter Phineas recalls the passage from Samuel on this friendship—"the soul of Jonathan was knit unto the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"—and claims, "this day, I, a poorer and more helpless Jonathan, had found my David" (39). In his work on manly love in Victorian culture, Jeffrey Richards has shown that such relationships between men "surpassing the love of woman," to use the biblical language that Craik also borrows, were not uncommon in the mid-century, and that they were characterized as brotherhoods of a spiritual rather than a physical nature and promoted by ideals of chivalry and self-sacrifice that underpinned all-male institutions from the public school to the armed forces. As Richards has shown, these friendships, modeled on the heroic friendships of Greek and Christian literature, were encouraged in the 1850s as cultivating virtues



of duty, chivalry and manliness (112). This does not diminish the homoerotic charge of the Phineas-John friendship; rather, it is part of the more capacious continuum of possible relationships between men in the 1850s. Indeed, the biblical language gives Phineas a way of describing some of the most intensely erotic moments in the novel. When Phineas's father, the Quaker tanner Abel Fletcher, offers John his first job, Phineas exclaims: "I did not 'fall upon his neck,' like the princely Hebrew, to whom I have likened myself, but whom, alas! I resembled in nothing save my loving. But I grasped his hand, for the first time, and looking up at him, as he stood thoughtfully by me, whispered, 'that I was very glad'" (50). For Craik, the affective intensity of this bond is a way to demonstrate true manliness. Friendship with a weaker man in particular allowed the stronger man to demonstrate his gentleness and thus his gentlemanliness.

John certainly has these opportunities in abundance in the first half of the novel. He treats Phineas as tenderly as if he were his lover, and Craik does not shy away from the comparison. "If I had been a woman," confesses Phineas, "and the woman that he loved, he could not have been more tender over my weakness" (65). Phineas argues that tenderness is actually a masculine trait, noting that it is "a quality different from kindness, affectionateness, or benevolence; a quality which can exist only in strong, deep, and undemonstrative natures, and therefore in its perfection is seldomer found in women than in men" (53). Craik's portrait of the tender relations between John and Phineas is at times extravagant, and it seems worthwhile to quote two of the scenes of their early intimacy at length. Phineas draws out the scene of their first parting by calling John back to his door:

"Not goodbye just yet!" said I, trying painfully to disengage myself from my little carriage, and mount the steps. John Halifax came to my aid.

"Suppose you let me carry you. I could—and—and—it would be great

fun, you know.”

He tried to turn it into a jest, so as not to hurt me but the tremble in his voice was as tender as any woman’s—tenderer than any woman’s I ever was used to hear. I put my arms round his neck; he lifted me safely and carefully, and set me down at my own door. (37-8)

This scene is repeated a few pages later, as Phineas confesses that his one comfort is that he may not have long to live:

John looked at me—surprised, troubled, compassionate—but he did not say a word. I hobbled past him; he following through the long passage to the garden door. There I paused—tired out. John Halifax took gentle hold of my shoulder.

“I think, if you did not mind, I’m sure I could carry you. I carried a meal sack once, weighing eight stone.”

I burst out laughing, which may be was what he wanted, and forthwith consented to assume the place of the meal sack. He took me on his back—what a strong fellow he was!—and fairly trotted with me down the garden walk. We were both very merry, and though I was his senior, I seemed with him, out of my great weakness and infirmity, to feel almost like a child. (43)

The intense homoeroticism of these scenes sets the foundation for the male friendship that structures the rest of the novel from the position of the avunculate.

Phineas calls on Victorian ideals of chivalry, which humanize the relationship between the strong and the weak, and the rich and the poor, to think about his relationship with John: “And though he never failed to maintain externally a certain gentle respectfulness of demeanor towards me, yet it was more the natural deference of the younger to the elder, of the strong to the weak, than the duty paid by a serving-lad to his master’s son” (58). In this passage, class-hierarchy enables the intense

homoeroticism that exists between the two boys. The labour-relations between the boys, as John is hired to help Phineas home, thus become personal relations. This is a common pattern in mid-Victorian thinking about how the gentleman comports himself in business. Much like Craik, Samuel Smiles admonishes his readers that a man's success as a gentleman is known not only by his upright dealings in industry, but also by the way in which he treats those weaker than himself. As Smiles argues, "Gentleness is indeed the best test of gentlemanliness. A consideration for the feelings of others, for his inferiors and dependents as well as his equals, and respect for their self-respect, will pervade the true gentleman's whole conduct" (333). Smiles goes on to tell an anecdote about the remorse of a man who strikes a passerby who treads on his foot without realizing that he is blind, and notes that the gentleman will always give others the benefit of the doubt, for he "will rather himself suffer a small injury, than by an uncharitable construction of another's behaviour, incur the risk of committing a great wrong" (333). Although the only advantages that the self-made man may possess may be, like John, his head and his own two hands (17), he will keep this capital in mind when considering "those whose advantages in life have not been equal to his own", and be "forbearant" of their "weaknesses", "failings" and "errors" (333). The idea of the gentleman is thus dependent on the existence of a physically or morally weaker person on whom he can lavish his gentleness.

Mary Klages argues that Phineas and then Muriel, John's blind daughter who dies in youth, both allow the Captain of Industry to demonstrate his gentle and thus gentlemanly nature. According to Klages, gentility, for Craik, "is related to gentleness and is marked by the deployment of a proper Christian moral sensibility and concern for the welfare of others in all areas of endeavor, including the economic realm. What makes John Halifax, the book's hero, into a 'gentleman' is not the wealth he gains through his honest work, but the love he generates and earns through his treatment of

his family and, by extension, his workers and dependents” (64). Similarly, Patrick Brantlinger argues that for writers like Carlyle, Dickens and Arthur Helps, Craik’s contemporaries, the best industrial relations are personal relations (111). John does indeed gain his first job in the tan-yard through his kindness to Phineas. Later in the novel, John’s workers accept steam power not because John has explained that it is a good business decision but because they have seen how tenderly John treats his blind daughter, Muriel, who spends every afternoon in the mill with her father. Phineas reflects that “the quiet way in which the Enderley mill people took the introduction of machinery, and the peaceableness with which they watched for weeks the setting up of the steam engine, was partly owing to their strong impression of Mr. Halifax’s goodness as a father, and the vague, almost superstitious interest which attached to the pale, sweet face of Muriel” (334). John explains to his young boys that the most productive labourers are those who work from love. He says: “Our people will work the better, because they will work from love. Not merely doing their duty, and obeying their master in a blind way, but feeling an interest in him and all that belongs to him; knowing that he feels the same in them” (308). Here, economic power has an affective base that is similar to the emotional register through which Phineas has been describing John’s work all along. John’s business strategy validates Phineas’s narrative strategy. Yet, Phineas’s avuncular perspective on John’s position as patriarch of the mill also subtly undermines John’s position as patriarch.

Phineas’s physical presence becomes a queer narrative presence. Craik links the physical differences in the two men to their affective differences. Robert McRuer argues that in contemporary American culture, disability and queerness are both popularly supposed to be legible on the body, while heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are invisible (2). Although, I would argue, Victorian notions of sexuality and able-bodiedness are more fluid than our own, Phineas’s weakened frame is

certainly the legible sign of his affective difference. Phineas is quick and emotional, whereas John's temperament is more considered and restrained. Phineas notices these differences early on. When John does not catch on that he is the one good friend that Phineas has hitherto wanted in his life, Phineas remarks:

He smiled, but only because I did. I saw he did not understand me. In him, as in most strong and self-contained temperaments, was a certain slowness to receive impressions, which, however, being once received, are indelible. Though I, being in so many things his opposite, had none of this peculiarity, but felt at once quickly and keenly, yet I rather liked the contrary in him, as I think we almost always do like in another those peculiarities which are most different from our own. Therefore I was neither vexed nor hurt because the lad was slow to perceive all that he had so soon become, and all that I meant him to become, to me. I knew, from every tone of his voice, every chance expression of his honest eyes, that he was one of those characters in which we may be sure that for each feeling they express, is a countless wealth of the same, unexpressed below; a character the keystone of which was that whereon is built all liking and all love—dependableness. He was one whom you may be long in knowing, but whom the more you know, the more you trust; and once trusting, you trust forever. (59)

John's restraint in articulating his emotions and Phineas's comparative volubility become significant in thinking about the structure of the novel. Phineas gives the reader the sense that there are depths to John's personality that he dare not plumb. Phineas positions himself as physically and morally weaker than John, and from this vantage point John comes to seem larger than life. Our lack of complete access to John's mind can at times seem frustrating—we are led to admire him as the hero of the tale and yet we are not privy to all the workings of his mind as Phineas conveniently

forgets the mechanics of steam power that John has taught him or refuses to narrate John's emotions. Yet, the sense that there are untold reservoirs in John's character that the narrative fails to tap is also necessary to our sense of him as a force to be reckoned with.

### ***The Grand Old Name of Gentleman***

Craik's positioning of Phineas as the narrator solves the problem of how to proclaim one's friend a gentleman when his reticence is a marker of his gentility. One of the reasons that Phineas is so necessary as a narrator is that John develops a tremendous amount of self-restraint, and in order to make this restraint heroic Phineas must show the reader the extent of the feelings that he is reining in. If John were completely successful in his efforts at self-control, no one would be able to tell that he was making them, but Phineas claims to know John well enough that he can decode these moments for the reader. When Phineas's father implies that John might be tempted to spend his first earnings from the tan-yard at the local pub, though his face is "crimson and quivering," he smothers "down a burst of tears" with difficulty (25). Phineas speculates that perhaps, "this self-control was more moving than if he had wept—at least it answered better with my father" (25). Later, when Ursula's cousin Richard Brithwood first insults John by denying his wife Caroline's request that the man of the people dine with them, though Brithwood speaks "savagely and loud," John remains silent. "He had locked his hands together convulsively," says Phineas, "but it was easy to see that his blood was at a boiling heat, and that, did he once slip the leash of his passions, it would go hard with Richard Brithwood" (209). When John is having difficulty supporting his young family, Phineas observes that, "Sometimes even a hasty word, and uneasiness about trifles, showed how strong was

the effort he made at self-control” (271). Craik’s affective metaphors here are hydraulic: John’s emotions are liquid substances (tears, boiling blood) that must be kept under pressure lest they explode. The control that John exercises over his liquid emotions is similar to his dexterously managed conversion of the mill to steam power, which is effected without worker agitation, explosions, or steam-related industrial accidents. John’s emotions thus help Craik to negotiate both the sentimental and the industrial novel.

Although he acts in many ways as a vehicle for the expression of John’s emotional life, Phineas also reigns in any unseemly impulses or desires that might simmer in his friend’s muscular frame. Requiring the most constant and tender attentions as a confirmed invalid, he effectively prevents his friend from sowing too many wild oats. John confesses that he is not sure of whether he is ready to meet the challenges of the world. “I don’t know. I’m not clear how far I could resist doing anything wrong, if it were pleasant. So many wrong things are pleasant—just now, instead of rising tomorrow, and going into the little dark counting house, and scratching paper from eight till six, shouldn’t I like to break away! Dash out into the world, take to all sorts of wild freaks, do all sorts of grand things, and perhaps never come back to the tanning any more” (82). John’s punishment for his one lapse of judgment as a youth in spending an evening watching Sarah Siddons perform as Lady MacBeth is to carry his friend ten miles to the theatre and another ten miles back home to Nortonbury after his money is stolen (63, 69). This incident is the clearest indication in the novel of the private inner struggles that John undergoes to restrain his desires, and is indeed the only wild oat that John sows for the whole novel.

In authors from Carlyle to Kingsley, the tremendous self-control required of the gentleman presents a problem with the representation of masculinity in literature of the mid-century: that of how to represent a man who is gentlemanly by virtue of his

lack of narratable qualities. Authors solve this problem by pairing a weak and voluble speaker with a more masculine and taciturn friend. Craik gestures toward another instance of the tension caused by an ungentlemanly desire to pour one's emotions out into literature in her epigraph for *John Halifax*, which she takes from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1851):

And thus he bore without abuse  
The grand old name of gentleman  
Defamed by every charlatan,  
And soil'd with all ignoble use (21-4).

Craik tellingly quotes only the first two lines of the quatrain in her epigraph, but her work shares Tennyson's anxiety about the status of the gentleman, whose very name can be "soil'd" by being used too freely. Given the concern about men who speak too much or too freely that Craik and Tennyson share, we can see that both Phineas and the speaker of the poem are in a difficult position when they proclaim their friends gentlemen. Like Craik, Tennyson uses an intense, homoerotic friendship between two men—a weak speaker who cannot help but praise his strong friend—to shore up the strong friend's status as a gentleman. This narrative device is fraught with anxiety. The speaker's uneasiness with the idea of eulogising his friend leads him to claim that he will not praise his friend through the whole of his poem. He writes:

I leave thy praises unexpress'd  
In verse that brings myself relief,  
And by the measure of my grief  
I leave thy greatness to be guess'd. (75, 1-4)

Here, the consolatory properties of verse offer the speaker an excuse for mourning his friend at such great length but not for dilating on his greatness, which, to be genuine, must be self-evident without the praise of the speaker. Craik solves the same dilemma



to some extent by having a weak man narrate the story of the self-made man, so that, like the speaker of Tennyson's poem who worries that others will accuse him of making a "parade of pain" (21, 10), the lengthy dilation on his friends' merits is a result of his weakness in longing for his friend, and not of his friend's weakness. Craik's novel deals with these same themes of male friendship, longing, and the status of literature as a gentlemanly profession, setting out the problem of how to talk about the gentleman when his silence is a marker of his gentility in even starker terms than Tennyson does.

You can rarely trust what the long-winded industrialist has to say in Victorian fiction. Things go terribly awry when the self-made tries to narrate his own story. In *Great Expectations* (1861), Pip tells the melancholy story of his attempt to be a gentleman from the time when he has already realized the pitfalls of that enterprise. More to the point, in *Hard Times* (1854), Mr. Bounderby's verbosity makes him an object of suspicion from the moment the scene first opens on him as he tells Mrs. Grandgrind of the trials of his childhood, which, he says, was pretty fairly divided between the cot of his infancy: an egg-box, and the bed of his youth: the muddiest of ditches. As the narrator comments, he was a "man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility" (53). Mr. Bounderby's physique has been swelled by his own puffery, and he has "a great puffed head and forehead" and a "pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start" (53). The narrator further comments that, "He had not much hair. One might have fancied he had talked it off; and that what was left, all standing up in disorder, was in that condition from being constantly blown about by his windy boastfulness" (53). The trials that Bounderby claims to have suffered through are not that different from those

that Phineas catalogues of John, who sleeps in ditches and lives in a garret long after he is well on his way to becoming a respectable businessman. Dickens's satire of Bounderby's oft-repeated claim, "I never wear gloves.... I didn't climb up the ladder in *them*. Shouldn't be so high up, if I had." (58), or as he tells his friend's wife, "I was to pull through it, I suppose, Mrs. Grandgrind. Whether I was to do it or not, ma'am, I did it. I pulled through it, though nobody threw me out a rope" (55), resonates with Phineas's earnest claims that his friend John started with no capital but his head and his own two hands, and was indebted to no forefathers for his history (17). Craik's portrait of John in these moments teeters dangerously close to Dickens's satire of the self-made man, were it not for the key point that John never praises himself. The sentiment that Phineas infuses these comments with as John's friend and admirer allows Craik to admire John unabashedly in a way that no omniscient narrator and certainly not John himself could. When Mrs. Pegler enters the scene late in the novel and claims Josiah as her own son, and it becomes apparent that the Coketown manufacturer has antecedents after all, the blow literally takes the wind out of Bounderby.

Craik ties John's self-control up in his taciturnity: his "remarkable laconism" manifests itself at key moments throughout the text (108). He first proves his worth to Phineas's father through his determined silence. When Abel Fletcher asks if he is a lad to be trusted, John seems to feel that this is a "critical moment," and gathers "all his mental forces into a serried square, to meet the attack" (11). He meets it, and conquers it, "in silence", neither answering nor declining his eyes (11). John's lack of response answers well with the tanner, who leaves him to escort his crippled son home. John's moral strength in remaining silent is only equaled by his physical strength, which he uses to carry his charge. As the two young men wait for the rain to pass before starting home, John again makes "no attempt to talk" (12). Later in their

friendship, when Dr. Jessop diagnoses Phineas's unspecified illness as incurable, John only listens with his hand on his friend's shoulder, and a "grave, sweet look", which provides "dearer sympathy" to his friend "than any words" (55). John teaches Phineas how to restrain his melancholic temperament, as the two "draw a curtain over inevitable grief," and lay "it in the peaceful chamber of silence" (55). The novel's emphasis on John's taciturnity poses a problem for the narrator. If silence is a virtue, how is Phineas to narrate John's story? John does occasionally chastise Phineas for his propensity to gossip. When Phineas wants to question Mrs. Tod about the handsome woman he and John have caught a glimpse of, Ursula, John gives "his veto so decidedly against seeking out people's private affairs in such an illicit manner" that Phineas confesses, "I felt quite guilty, and began to doubt whether my sickly, useless, dreaming life, was not inclining me to curiosity, gossip, and other small vices which we are accustomed—I know not why—to insult the other sex, by describing as 'womanish'" (148). It seems that, as an effeminate invalid, the narrator is not expected to have strength enough to bear the same moral burden as the novel's eponymous hero. Phineas's weakness in narrating John's story is in some ways an extension of his physical weakness: his record of John's history is in some sense both a testament to his friend and a betrayal of his confidences. Writing, as well as speaking, is suspect in Craik's work. As Phineas himself confesses, his youthful habit of keeping a diary, which, along with his vivid memory, allows him to piece together the narrative, is not only "very useless" but "sometimes harmful, and invariably foolish" (27). Foolish, fond and sentimental though it may be, Phineas's oddities are necessary to the production of the narrative.

Phineas's narrative affect stands in stark contrast to John's forthright speeches, which are rarely quoted in full. Instead, Phineas narrates these incidents through the sentimental lens that John's own speech is presumably void of. He tells us John

speaks well enough to quell riots, stop a run on the bank, and dissuade highwaymen from robbing him. He also wins a wife partly through his eloquence. Phineas never records the words with which John courts Ursula, but explains that, when “his tongue was once unloosed, few people could talk better than John Halifax”. This is not to say that he is “one of your showy conversationalists”, as Phineas puts it:

language was with him neither a science, an art, nor an accomplishment, but a mere vehicle for thought; the garb, always chosen as simplest and fittest, in which his ideas were clothed. His conversation was never wearisome, since he only spoke when he had something to say; and having said it, in the most concise and appropriate manner that suggested itself at the time—he was silent; and silence is a great and rare virtue at twenty years of age. (129)

John’s language is the transparent expression of his soul, unobscured by any showy “garb.” In fact, he shows great suspicion of any using any “vehicle” at all to express himself. In an early scene at Enderly, as he and his friend mull over the poetry of Phineas’s namesake, John claims that he cannot understand the Elizabethan dramatist’s metaphor of pawns as common people—a rather likely place for his understanding to fail him, given the novel’s attempt to unsettle the categories of common men and gentlemen. “That’s not clear,” John claims. “Now I do like poetry to be intelligible. A poet ought to see things more widely, and express them more vividly, than ordinary folk” (97). John’s statement could be taken directly from Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, a copy of which Ursula has recently lent him (127). Wordsworth’s formulation of a poet as a “man speaking to men” (255), and in the common language of men, fits John’s version of a forthright masculinity much more closely than the complex conceits of an early seventeenth-century poet like the narrator’s namesake, Phineas Fletcher. Craik thus locates this aspect of John’s mode of masculinity in a specific literary moment as well as a specific historical moment, while keeping

Phineas firmly rooted in a past of courtier poets and convoluted language. Here, Craik gestures toward a literary register that humanizes the self-made man—who controls and directs the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling in much the same way that John controls the overflow of his emotions, which, we recall, Craik describes as liquid and kept under pressure. On a pragmatic level, John needs to be literate in order to rise in business; on an imaginative level, he and Phineas, who read *Romeo and Juliet* to one another as well as the poems of Wordsworth and Phineas Fletcher, take an intrinsic pleasure in story-telling. Yet, Craik’s consistent emphasis on the taciturnity of the gentleman casts suspicion on literary enterprises, including her own novel.

Phineas Fletcher, who is named for the Elizabethan poet, is aligned with the literary in both its humanizing and its suspicious forms. His early attempts to pull John into his life and thus the narrative take on a literary register. Irresistibly drawn to John, Phineas uses his talents as a conversationalist to draw him into the narrative, talking to John of books, which make his only world, and of which John knows little (40). When John tries to leave again after the cantankerous family servant, Jael, objects to this ragged boy as company for her master’s son, Phineas soliloquizes, “Gone! It was not to be thought of” and smooths the matter over with John by offering to tell him the folktale of Dick Whittington, the boy who rises from rags to become Mayor of London (43). He never gets to the tale, but he does manage to keep John in his presence, and thus within the scope of the narrative, long enough to accomplish his goal of getting his father to offer John a job when he gets home from the tan-yard later that day. Later in the story, when Phineas has been hoping that John Halifax has been looking in after him during a long illness, his strategy of pulling John back into the narrative is once again literary. At every opportunity, he sends John “a little note, written carefully in printed letters” which he knows John can read, and also “a book or two, out of which he might teach himself a little more” (65).

When John re-enters the scene once more, with new clothes and a figure “increased both in height, compactness and grace” (66), he has indeed managed to teach himself to “read and add up” out of Phineas’s books, and consequently now goes around collecting money instead of skins for Abel Fletcher (67). On their afternoon outing, Phineas teaches John to write cursive with a rose stem in the gravel (72). Shortly after John learns to read and write he comes into his own in the world, rising in business and beginning a family. Although Phineas is still the literal author of John’s story, his importance in the plot becomes secondary, though his importance as a sentimental filter remains primary. Mary Poovey’s influential argument that the labour of the man of letters is made possible by the domestic labour of the housewife—both are invisible, humanizing, and comforting—seems pertinent here. Phineas does not set himself up as a man of letters, he only once refers to the physical writing of the novel only to dismiss it as foolish and fond (27)—his literary labour, like the housewife’s domestic labour, is successful because it remains hidden. Both are labours of love.

### *Narrative Crochets and the Avuncular*

Some of the novel’s most interesting affective peculiarities emerge in the gaps between the feelings of the character-Phineas and those of the narrator-Phineas. Although for the most part he effaces the actual writing of the novel as a suspect activity, Phineas explicitly positions himself as narrating from the present of the novel’s composition in the early 1850s the incidents of his youth and early adulthood from the 1780s to John’s death in 1834. We do not hear anything about how the twenty years between John’s death and the composition of the novel have passed for Phineas, but we can see his evolving relationship to the self-made man in the outbursts

of feeling that the narrator-Phineas experiences as he narrates the actions of the character-Phineas. Unlike the narrators of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* or *The Mill on the Floss*, who imagine a cosmopolitan and at times unsympathetic reader of the 1850s reading about the lives of schoolboys and girls in the 1830s, the narrator-Phineas often imagines a sympathetic audience who will at least remember the importance of the incidents that form the backdrop of his narrative, which range from popularity of Sarah Siddons at the turn of the century to the assassination of British Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812. Of Sarah Siddon's performance as Lady Macbeth, the narrator-Phineas says, "It was a glorious night. At this distance of time, when I look back upon it, my old blood leaps and burns. I repeat, it was a glorious night!" (94). This jaunt to the theatre in Coltham is the one wild oat that John sows, for which he is severely punished. Phineas at the time is too fatigued to say or do much, but his emotional recollection of this boyish incident indicates the emotionally charged perspective from which he narrates the incidents of the past.

Phineas links his illness to the wide sympathies that make him a good storyteller. He describes himself as susceptible to impressions, feeling "more quickly and more keenly" than his "strong and self-contained friend" (34). As he explains, illness and a "long introverted life" have made his memory "preternaturally vivid": "colourless itself" his memory has "had nothing to do but to reflect and retain clear images of the lives around it" (27). Phineas's invalidism, which allows him to write his friend's story, is a good example of the kind of pain that Catherine Gallagher has recently argued gives all labour, including literary labour, its value in nineteenth century economic thought (*The Body Economic*). John's "active busy life" gives a vicarious narrative structure to Phineas's idleness. In the opening chapters of the novel, Phineas struggles to keep John within the purview of the narrative. When John says "goodbye" after escorting Phineas home on that first rainy day, Phineas says, "I

started. The word pained me. On my sad, lonely life indeed, though ill-health seemed to have doubled and trebled my sixteen years into a mournful maturity—this lad's face had come like a flash of sunshine; a reflection of the merry boyhood, the youth and strength that never were, never could be mine. To let it go from me was like going back into the dark" (37). Phineas pulls John back into the narrative several times that day. He claims, "I had been revolving many plans, which had one sole aim and object, to keep near me this lad, whose companionship and help seemed to me, brotherless, sisterless, and friendless as I was, the very thing that would give me an interest in life, or, at least, make it drag on less wearily" (40). Here, the "interest in life" that Phineas hopes John will bring him seems akin to the narrative interest of the novel itself.

The form of the early chapters of the novel takes on the shape of Phineas's illnesses and recoveries, which are always marked by Phineas's desire to see his friend again after a prolonged separation. Several of the novel's early chapters begin with Phineas convalescing and bored, hoping to pull John back into the narrative. John quite literally serves as an element of plot in Phineas's wearisome life. John's presence gives Phineas's life a vicarious shape. After he first meets John, Phineas falls painfully ill: "it was one of my seasons of excessive pain" he says, "when I found it difficult to think of anything beyond those four gray-painted walls; where morning, noon, and night slipped wearily away, marked by no changes, save from daylight to candlelight, from candlelight to dawn" (50-51). As his pain abates, Phineas begins "to be haunted by occasional memories of something pleasant that had crossed my dreary life; visions of a brave, bright young face, ready alike to battle with and enjoy that world. I could hear the voice, that, speaking to me, was always tender with pity—yet not pity enough to wound; I could see the peculiar smile just creeping round his grave mouth" (51). Phineas imaginatively reintroduces John into the narrative, just before he literally re-enters the narrative. That winter, Phineas says at the beginning of the



next chapter, was “a long, dreary season, worse even than my winters inevitably were” (64). Yet again, the next chapter begins with Phineas experiencing some ennui: “Summers and winters slipped by, lazily enough, as the years seemed always to crawl round at Norton Bury. How things went in the outside world, I little knew or cared. My father lived his life, mechanical and steady as clockwork, and we two, John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher, lived our lives—the one so active and busy, the other so useless and dull. Neither of us counted the days, nor looked backwards or forwards” (78). Phineas claims that his life is “useless and dull,” but the days and seasons that slip “wearily away” for him allow Craik to mark the passing of time that transforms John from vagabond to successful businessman. Phineas’s wearisome life also allows the reader a sense of repose from what would otherwise be a relentless catalogue of John’s actions and achievements.

Where the opening chapters of the novel tell the story of Phineas’s friendship with John, by the time the two reach adulthood, the pattern of convalescence and recovery, and of John’s absence and re-entry, is reconfigured. Phineas becomes more of a background figure in the drama of John’s family-life, yet he continues to anchor the story in the affective fatigue of the invalid. Whereas Charles Edmonstone found the ennui of being ill tiresome, and worked to stir up the action of the narrative, once he is an established member of John’s household and secure of his friend’s presence forevermore, Phineas is happy to enjoy the “delicious monotony” of life in the country with John and his family. This narrative fatigue seems particularly appropriate to the story of the self-made man, whose relentless perseverance and hard work is subdued by the narrator’s description of long, deliciously empty days. Phineas credits his friendship with John with developing this perspective in him. In one of the last illnesses that book-ended the chapters of the first third of the novel so resoundingly, Phineas is taken ill, but not as ill as he has been. He admits to being weak, but claims

“sickness did not now take that heavy, overpowering grip of me, mind and body, that it once used to do. It never did when John was by. He gave me strength, mentally and physically. He was life and health to me, with his brave cheerfulness—his way of turning all minor troubles into pleasantries, till they seemed to break and vanish away, sparkling, like the foam on top of the wave” (124). This illness marks the beginning of a new narrative strategy on Phineas’s part, in which he attempts to thread together the crises in John’s life as a coherent narrative. Phineas describes the “delicious monotony” (275) of their new life at Longfield with a metaphor that strikingly recalls this next to last convalescence. They lived those years, he reminisces, in “such unbroken, uneventful peace, that looking back seems like looking back over a level sea, whose leagues of tiny ripples make one smooth glassy plain” (356). The pattern of the narrative for the last two thirds of the novel, then, seems to follow that of Phineas’s convalescence. Told in Phineas’s voice, John’s troubles also “break and vanish away, sparkling, like the foam on top of the wave” (247). Here, the hydraulic metaphors that Craik uses to describe John’s pent up emotions give way to the more peaceful flow of Phineas’s emotions, which sail smoothly over troubled waters. After his last illness after John’s marriage, when Ursula nurses Phineas rather than John, John does not re-enter the narrative as he has been wont to do. Instead, Phineas falls into “the habit of creeping over to John’s home, and sitting for hours under the apple trees in his garden” (247B). This quiet nook underneath a tree in John’s garden, or a quiet corner of his house, is the vantage point from which Phineas narrates the rest of the novel. This marginal position in John’s household lends Phineas a rather queer avuncular perspective for the rest of the novel.

“Uncle Phineas,” as he becomes known, has a certain queerness as a narrator in the last two thirds of the novel. As a bachelor uncle in what is at most times a model household, Phineas gives vent to the emotional tension that John and his wife

fail to articulate. Phineas's narrative "crochets" often manifest themselves in his reactions to the love affairs of John's children. He characterizes himself as an "old bachelor" who is "prone to moralize over such things" as the duty of women not to engage in coquetry since it can turn men off the entire sex (410). When John's eldest son, Guy, tells his parents that he is in love with a woman that they do not quite approve of (and, who, as it turns out, is in love with his younger brother Edmund) Phineas claims that he can sympathize with all the parties. "Those who in the dazzled vision of youth see only the beauty and splendor of love—first love, who deem it comprises the whole of life, beginning, aim, and end—may marvel that I, who have been young, and now am old, see as I saw that night, not only the lover's, but the parents' side of the question" he writes. "I felt overwhelmed with sadness, as, viewing the three, I counted up in all its bearings and consequences, near and remote, this attachment of poor Guy's" (403). Phineas imagines that he must convince an audience of young, love-struck readers of the validity of his narrative perspective, which allows him a wider range of sympathies than his friend John. Later on, when Phineas slips up and calls John's daughter "poor Maud" because it seems that she will never know of Lord Ravenel's love for her, he explains it as one of his crochets: "I really could not tell; it was a mere accident, the unwitting indication of some crotchets of mine, which had often come into my mind lately. Crotchets, perhaps peculiar to one, who, never having known a certain possession, found himself rather prone to overrate its value" (455). The narrator-Phineas undermines his earlier feelings as the reaction of one who has never experienced love, but he nevertheless allows them to stand as a counterpoint to John's interference in his children's love affairs, which he disapproves of when they involve titled lovers. Although Phineas claims that he may be prone to overrate that certain possession that he has never experienced, heterosexual love, he has of course experienced romantic friendship. His position as "brother" and "uncle" in John's

household is the legacy of that early romantic friendship, and it is this avuncular position that allows him to sympathize with John's children.

### ***Conclusion***

From this vantage point, Phineas's narration of what otherwise seems such an upstanding novel about the rise of the self-made man is decidedly queer. One might ask how the novel's emphasis on self-restraint and an upright physical and moral standing redounds on Phineas. Yet, these values are not so absolute that Phineas becomes completely pathologised. Craik sets up her narrative structure so that Phineas provides the necessary emotional and verbal counterpoint to John's taciturnity and self-restraint. John's Evangelical view of suffering allows that some moral strength may come out of physical weakness. Phineas remarks: "The physical weakness—which, however humiliating to myself, and doubtless contemptible in most men's eyes—was yet dealt by the hand of Heaven, and, as such, regarded by John only with compassion" (65). Phineas's disability provides an opportunity for the cultivation of piety, both in himself and others. Those who were more suspicious of Craik's sentimentality were also suspicious of this Evangelical reading of invalidism. Henry James describes Craik's Evangelical piety rather more acerbically as that "lively predilection for cripples and invalids by which she has always been distinguished" (169), and which she uses to teach readers to be as cheerful under the weight of their burdens as her disabled protagonists. John carries the moral weight on his strong shoulders in this particular novel, but it is clear that for the novel's first readers that Phineas's disabilities did not render him morally suspect in the same way that they would have by the end of the century, when physical weakness in men was coded as a sign of degeneration. Craik is in fact very careful to situate her novel historically from

the turn of the century to the 1830s in order to address the issues that were shaping the sinews of self-made men in the 1850s. Her novel exploits the historical transition from the man of feeling to the man of action as Phineas's narration domesticates John's involvement in industry. Phineas and John counterbalance each other in many respects, but it is clear that John's mode of masculinity is the exemplary one. Yet, for all the novel's emphasis on John's inner and outer strength, disabled masculinity still has a role to play in shaping its able-bodied counterpart. The focalization of the novel through Phineas's point of view thus underscores the relationship between corporeal and narrative form, and the narrative dependency of the novel's two main characters.

The tension that underlies the careful balance between the attributes of the strong man and the weak man in the first three chapters of this dissertation comes to the fore in *The Mill on the Floss*. The protagonist of Eliot's novel is not a man but a woman, and critics have long focused on *The Mill on the Floss* as Eliot's female bildungsroman. But the themes of masculinity that we have seen in the popular novels of the 1850s, including chivalry, self-help, and the pairing of a strong man with a weak man are also central to Eliot's novel. Rather than complementing each other thematically and narratively, however, Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem are antagonists, and their relationship underscores the tensions that underlie the other novels. In a homosocial love triangle that foregrounds the relationship between two men rather than the men and their beloved, Tom's and Philip's competing desires are triangulated through their shared love of Maggie. Tom shares many of the characteristics of the muscular Christian and the self-made man, but his sympathies are too narrow, and he can at times be the mean and grasping social climber that Victorians feared in the self-made man. Despite his strong frame, Tom is similarly lacking the Christian sympathies that tempered the muscular Christian's virility. Philip's nervous frame has given him a sensibility close to that of Eliot's narrator, and

the occasional irritability stemming from his sense of his own “deformity” recalls Charles Edmonstone’s peevishness or Phineas Fletcher’s crochets. All the elements that have made for an intense male friendship are there in the Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem relationship—including the shared boarding school experience and the disparity between their intellectual and physical abilities—but Philip does not help Tom develop his more tender side, nor does Tom bring Philip out of his peevishness and toward a more normative version of masculinity. The last chapter explores how Eliot exploits the potential rivalry between the strong man and the weak man for in *The Mill on the Floss*.

## CHAPTER 5

### TOM TULLIVER'S SCHOOLDAYS: REWRITING THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE STRONG BOY AND THE WEAK BOY

*If boys and men are to be welded together in the glow of  
transient feeling, they must be made of metal that will mix,  
else they inevitably fall asunder when the heat dies out.*

-George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*

Ever since the novel's first publication in 1859-60, critics have found Philip Wakem a puzzling presence in *The Mill on the Floss*. It is no overstatement to call the Maggie-Philip-Stephen, or possibly the Maggie-Philip-Tom, triangle one of the most perplexing love triangles (or quadrangles) in all of English literature. Maggie has rightly been the focus of much criticism of the novel, but by focusing on the relationships between the men, particularly as they are inflected by the contrast between Philip and Tom's bodies, we can start to make more sense of these triangles, and of the shape of the narrative. In this final chapter, I argue that the pairing of Philip and Tom in the first two books of *The Mill on the Floss* is a rewriting of the schoolboy friendships that preoccupied so many novels of the 1850s.

In her novel, Eliot takes up the themes of the self-made man, muscular Christianity, schoolboy intimacy, and boy's education that are so important to Kingsley, Hughes, Yonge, and Craik. Exemplary types like the muscular Christian and the self-made man rarely have to think anything through: in Kingsley's view, they know what is right without thinking of it, and these fixed principles assure their

success in the world. It is difficult to write about the inner life of a man who is a gentleman by virtue of the fact that he has no inner struggles—a novelistic problem which other authors have solved by having a friend speak for the strong but silent man. Eliot recognizes this difficulty, but she has Tom's inner life unfold through rivalry rather than friendship. Tom is sure of himself but narrow-minded, while Philip has wider sympathies but is peevish, and the rivalry between the two serves just as well as a friendship to give rise to these emotions. Rather than developing a close homoerotic friendship, as we saw in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Tom and Philip become rivals. But the failure of the schoolboy friendship also signals an important shift from these earlier novels. I argue that Eliot uses the well-established pairing of the strong man and the weak man in order to think about both the historical development of masculinity and its effect on novelistic form. Given that *The Mill on the Floss* is primarily a female bildungsroman, however, we might ask why Eliot engages the pairing of the strong man and the weak man. *The Mill on the Floss* is of course self-consciously a comment on the pairing of the fair-haired and dark-haired woman and femininity, but Eliot's pairing of Tom and Philip in the tradition of the strong-weak man is also a critique and commentary on current styles of masculinity.

Eliot's schoolboy rivalry does some of the same emotional and narrative work that the schoolboy intimacies of the other novels do. The altercations between Philip and Tom motivate the plot in the second book of the novel, producing a compelling tension that draws our attention to the bodies of the two men. The relationship between the two men also brings up the question of what kind of body is best suited to be an object of, and to feel, sympathy. Philip Wakem's hunch back renders him both an object of sympathy, and his highly strung nervous organization allows him to feel sympathy. Yet, he is often peevish and morbid, and hardly a perfect model of the



sympathetic engagement with one's fellow men that the narrator recommends. Instead, the relationship between the two men—the “alternations of feeling” between sympathy and judgment—provides a model for Eliot's exploration of the limits of sympathy and the question of how sympathy is embodied. Philip has often been read as sharing the sensibility of Eliot's narrator, but considering Tom's role in the novel expands our appreciation of the narrator's emotional range. Although Tom is often seen as lacking the saving grace of sympathy, he shares the narrator's love of maxims. The Philip-Tom relationship thus inflects not only Eliot's notion of sympathy, but also her notion of realism.

### ***Schoolboy Intimacies***

The beginning of *The Mill on the Floss* is not an account of Maggie's time at Miss Firniss's boarding school, or of her time as a governess in the style of *Jane Eyre*, but rather, a story that we might call “Tom Tulliver's Schooldays.” In the “School-time” section that ends Book First, Eliot reworks the newly minted genre of the schoolboy novel in order to comment on the types of masculinity it promotes, from the self-made man and the muscular Christian to the sickly but pious friend. To this point the schoolboy intimacies between characters as different as Tom Brown and George Arthur, or Guy Livingstone and Frank Hammond, inevitably blossom into lifelong friendships. Eliot's novel critiques of the pairing of the strong man and the weak man in its a portrait of a failed friendship between the healthy active boy and his sickly intellectual counterpart. The narrative's energy in this section stems from the “alternations of feeling” between Philip and Tom, oscillating from warmth almost to hatred and back again. I read these “alternations of feeling” as a rewriting of the affective bonds, which transition from friendship to rivalry, between the strong man

and the weak man. Eliot's narrator often presumes that the reader is not sympathizing with her characters at a particular moment, and then attempts to gain the reader's sympathy for a character who may be unappealing. The Tom-Philip relationship thus provides a model of the struggle for sympathy in Eliot's realist world.

Tom Tulliver is a critique of and commentary on the Tom Brown and Tom Thurnall types of masculinity. If Tom Thurnall is of that "bull-terrier type so common in England" (3), Tom Tulliver is "one of those lads that grow everywhere in England, and at twelve or thirteen years of age look as much alike as goslings,—a lad with light-brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows,—a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character to boyhood" (36). Like Tom Brown, Tom Tulliver excels at sport. "At Mr Jacobs' Academy," the narrator tells us, "life had not presented itself to him as a difficult problem: there were plenty of fellows to play with, and Tom being good at all active games, fighting especially, had that precedence among them which appeared to him inseparable from the personality of Tom Tulliver" (140). Tom also shares the muscular Christian's practical, business-like acuity and indifferent performance at school. When Tom's faculties fail him "before the abstractions hideously symbolized to him in the pages of the Eton grammar" to Stelling's great frustration, the narrator reminds her readers that:

Tom had never found any difficulty in discerning a pointer from a setter, when once he had been told the distinction, and his perceptive powers were not at all deficient. I fancy they were quite as strong as those of the Rev. Mr Stelling; for Tom could predict with accuracy what number of horses were cantering behind him, he could throw a stone right into the centre of a given ripple, he could guess to a fraction how many lengths of his stick it would take to teach across the playground, and could draw almost perfect squares on his slate

without any measurement. (146-7)

Maggie sums up Tom's practical intelligence simply: "for all he doesn't like books: he makes beautiful whip-cord and rabbit-pens" (34). Although Tom shares some of the more admirable traits of the muscular Christian and the self-made man, including his fair complexion, his work ethic, and his cleverness in practical matters, Eliot argues that a well-built frame does not always lead to well-built morals. She links Tom's moral rigidity to his physical rigidity, although his "pink and white" masculinity initially belies his extraordinary rigidity. Set against Philip's sensitive nature, Tom's blundering insensitivity gives rise to the early conflicts in the novel.

The narrator describes the forced intimacy between the two boys, who are initially the only pupils at the Rev Mr Stelling's, as alternating between warmth and repugnance. On their first meeting, Philip feels "some bitter complacency in the promising stupidity of this well-made, active-looking boy" (171), while Tom thinks that having "ill-natured humpback as a companion" will at least be better than having no companion at all (170). This is not the most promising of beginnings, and the narrator comments that "the alternations of feeling in that first dialogue between Tom and Philip continued to mark their intercourse even after many weeks of schoolboy intimacy. Tom never quite lost the feeling that Philip, being the son of a 'rascal,' was his natural enemy, never thoroughly overcame his repulsion to Philip's deformity: he was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received" (174). The physical differences between the two boys are indicative of their affective differences: Tom is as morally rigid as his deportment, and Philip has been made sensitive by that "perpetually recurring mental ailment—half of it nervous irritability, half of it the heart-bitterness produced by the sense of his deformity" (175). If the correlative of a highly-strung nervous organisation is a heightened susceptibility and a wide imaginative capacity, then the result of an overly rigid deportment is a mind of limited

views and sympathies. Philip's sensitivity does not soften Tom's rigidity; rather it produces friction between the two boys. "In these fits of susceptibility every glance seemed to him to be charged either with offensive pity or with ill-repressed disgust—at the very least it was an indifferent glance, and Philip felt indifference as a child of the south feels the chill air of a northern spring. Poor Tom's blundering patronage when they were out of doors together would sometimes make him turn upon the well-meaning lad quite savagely, and his eyes, usually sad and quiet, would flash with anything but playful lightning. No wonder Tom retained his suspicions of the humpback" (175). Philip does not inspire Tom to feel a genuine interest in his studies, and Tom does not instill a love of sport in Philip. Instead of a life-long friendship that is crowned with the marriage of one friend to his schoolfellow's sister, the two develop a fractious relationship that culminates in Tom banishing Philip from his sister's side.

Eliot links the susceptibility of Philip's nervous organisation with his non-congenital hunchback, though, significantly, it is "the sense of his deformity" and not the deformity itself that causes his "nervous irritability" (175). The moral effect of deformity was a phenomena that medical men noted, and orthopaedic surgeon R. W. Tamplin's 1852 description of men who are "frequently morbidly sensitive from the consciousness of their deformity" and who yet possess "all the feelings and are susceptible of all the impulses which animate the breast of man" could describe Philip (*Lectures on the Nature and Treatment of Deformities* 3). Physical "deformity" thus gives rise to the susceptibility that causes both morbidity and a wider ranger of feeling. Philip's hunch back, already partly the source of "a life in which the mental and bodily constitution had made pain predominate" (343), seems to exaggerate his sensibility. Spinal curvature was just beginning to be seen as a surgical problem as Eliot wrote her novel, and she takes advantage of this shift in representing Philip's sensitivity as partly

rooted in his physiology more than her contemporaries do.

However, Eliot's wry observation, that, although Philip's deformity was "the result of an accident in infancy... you do not expect from Tom any acquaintance with such distinctions: to him, Philip was simply a humpback" (170) can be read as a caution against over-reading the medical aspect of what is, after all, an accidental deformity. Eliot was reading *The Origin of Species* as she was writing *The Mill on the Floss*, but this does not mean that the theory of natural selection overdetermines her portrait of Philip. Philip's susceptibility is related to the adaptation of his personality to his physical circumstances. The narrator is also suspicious of any direct correlations between deformity and unusual talent, as Tom does when he begins "have a puzzled suspicion that Philips crooked back might be the source of [his] remarkable faculties" in sketching donkeys and panniers (171). Any suspicions that the readers might share with Tom that Philip's hunch back has conferred remarkable abilities on him are allayed by the skepticism we attach to Tom's unsympathetic perception of Philip. As the narrator cautions, "Ugly and deformed people have great need of unusual virtues, because they are likely to be extremely uncomfortable without them: but the theory that unusual virtues spring by a direct consequence out of personal disadvantages, as animals get thicker wool in severe climates, is perhaps a little overstrained." (343-4). In a reading of evolutionary theory in *The Mill on the Floss*, Sally Shuttleworth argues that Eliot's presentation of Philip refutes the implications of Lamarckian theory of direct adaptation for human life, since he does not necessarily gain great virtues as a result of his hunch back (60). It is difficult to map any contemporary evolutionary or medical theories directly onto Philip's hunch back, though these theories offer some insight into his character.

This suspicion of drawing conclusions about character based on physiognomy also applies to other characters in the novel. The narrator warns readers against

interpreting Tom's average boyish physiognomy as indicative of his malleability. "Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross," she writes, Nature "conceals some of her most rigid, inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters; and the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink-and-white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features" (36-7). Nevertheless, as Tom grows up, Eliot suggests that there is a physical component to his moral uprightness, which becomes especially apparent when he enters the warehouses of Guest & Co. Uncle Deane describes the kind of men who are wanted in business as "men of the right habits, none o' your flashy fellows, but such as are to be depended on" (413). For all Eliot's dissatisfaction with Craik—on being compared with her in a review, she wrote to a friend, "Miss Mulock—a writer who is read only by novel readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture. A very excellent woman she is, I believe—but we belong to an entirely different order of writers" (quoted in Mitchell 104)—Tom, who stands half an inch taller than Halifax at a full six feet (352), is not as different from John Halifax as he might appear. Like John Halifax, Tom is not afraid to get his hands dirty or to deal with cheese, keeps a humble room in his friend Bob Jakins's house, and studies book-keeping at night. Nor are his financial and moral rewards so considerably less than those of Craik's hero when one considers that he manages to pay off his father's debt of £510 by the tender age of 19 (364)—an age when John Halifax has just been promoted from driving a cart full of skins to and from the tan-yard to collecting money for Abel Fletcher.

*The Mill on the Floss* is a rewriting of the literary pairing of the strong man and the weak man which predominated the novels of the 1850s. Eliot dilates on this contrast between masculine strength and weakness. In addition to Tom and Philip, we find the strong, Saxon and staid churchman Adam Bede paired with his weak, Celtic

and Methodist-leaning brother Seth, the unctuous and foreign Harold Transome paired with the stolid and English Felix Holt. It is also a specific rewriting of *John Halifax, Gentleman*. In the course of the two novels, Ursula Halifax and Maggie Tulliver are both compared to the “Nut Brown Maid” in the ballad who remains faithful to her banished lover, which is notably not the case for Maggie. Nor are the women in *The Mill on the Floss* the only ones more wayward than their counterparts in Craik. When troubles with irrigation threaten to stop their mills, John Halifax refuses to go to law under Christian principles, and instead solves his difficulties with steam power, suggesting that he effectively controls his temper, while Tulliver allows his blood to boil and his river to run dry, and ends by losing everything in a lawsuit. Robert Colby argues that “When George Eliot assured her readers that Tom was not “moulded on the spooney type of the Industrious Apprentice” (Book Fifth, Ch. II), she undoubtedly had Miss Mulock’s Bible-reading young tanner in mind, for Tom’s “practical shrewdness” and calculated virtue effectively offset the sanctimoniousness of John Halifax. Moreover, it must have been something of a jolt to readers of both ladies to turn from the David-Jonathan friendship of John Halifax and the crippled Phineas Fletcher to Tom’s thoughtless, even at times sadistic, treatment of the hunchbacked Philip Wakem” (219).<sup>4</sup> Here, Colby reminds us that in the novels we have considered hitherto, a chivalrous attitude towards those weaker than oneself is considered an essential character trait if one is to succeed in business.

Yet, Tom’s notion of manliness has little room for compassion to weaker men, and he succeeds in business nonetheless. As Tom tells his Uncle Deane, “I should like to enter into some business where I can get on—a manly business, where I should

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<sup>4</sup>In her note to the Penguin edition, A. S. Byatt tells us that the reference is to Hogarth’s progress paintings of *Industry and Idleness* (575). Nonetheless, we know that Eliot was familiar with Craik’s work, including Craik’s review of *Mill on the Floss* in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, and the extensive plot parallels warrant the comparison with *John Halifax* whether or not the specific reference is to Craik.

have to look after things and get credit for what I did” (241). Towards the end of the novel, Tom wins the admiration of the partners of Guest & Co by “riding home in some marvellous way, like Turpin, to bring them news about the stoppage of a bank” and thereby saving them from “a considerable loss” (381). Here, it is Tom’s physical and not his intellectual prowess that wins him favour, and his success depends not on the elegance of his bearing but on a rigidity which is at once physical and moral. Not surprisingly, Tulliver makes his son’s straight back a metaphor for his straightforward approach to duty when he pays off his father’s debts: “They’ll see I’m honest at last, and ha’ got an honest son. Ah! Wakem ’ud be fine and glad to have a son like mine—a fine straight fellow—i’sstead o’ that poor crooked creatur!” (366). Tulliver is not the only one who makes this connection between physical and moral uprightness; the men assembled at the dinner announcing the payment of the Tulliver debts remark that Tom looks “gentlemanly as well as tall and straight” (368). Tulliver attributes this gentlemanly deportment to his son’s education, but the straightness of Tom’s physique is clearly rather an index of his rigid sense of duty. These analogies between Tom’s sense of duty and his straight back are not surprising here since each is more or less explicitly a comparison with Philip Wakem’s hump back and his father’s crooked dealings with the law.

In 1859, the author of *The Habits of Good Society*, wrote: “Dignity can never go along with a slouching gait, and uprightness should be acquired in childhood by gymnastics and ample exercise” (249). Nor is it appropriate for a gentleman to have his shoulders “shrugged up” or to look “almost hump-backed” as one “moves heavily on” (250). In her enumeration of the physical qualities of a gentleman of the 1830s, Mrs. Tulliver says: “so far as talking proper and knowing everything and walking with a bend in his back and setting his hair up, I shouldn’t mind the lad being brought up to that” (14). Mrs. Tulliver associates intellectual knowledge with a specific kind



of deportment: walking with a bend in the arch of one's back to accentuate one's uprightness is a sign of making one's living through professional, intellectual labour rather than the slouching gait associated with a pedler like Bob Jakin or a miller like Luke. This posture was associated with the good horsemanship that Tom so prides himself on later in the novel. In *Riding Recollections*, Whyte-Melville wrote that "there is no better position for a rider than that which brings shoulder, hip, knee, and heel into one perpendicular line. A man thus placed on his horse cannot but sit well down with a bend in his back" (102). Actors were also proud of their posture. In an October 1863 article for *The Cornhill Magazine*, "The Miseries of a Dramatic Author," G. H. Lewes in a discussion of the "endless suggestions of actors to have their parts altered," remarked "One man, whose only qualification I ever could discover was the 'bend in his back,' of which he was not a little proud, pestered me day after day to have some confidence in him" (505).<sup>5</sup> Lewes's derision of this proud actor is both a clue toward mixed attitudes about men's moulding of their bodies, and the growing concern over men's deportment.

Tom's upright deportment is cultivated as part of his education. However, given Mr. Stelling's shortcomings as a teacher, it is not surprising that the cultivation of an upright deportment for Tom has been half-hearted from the start. Mr. Stelling makes some effort at moulding Tom's deportment, but when Mrs. Stelling has Tom mind "the little cherub Laura," Mr. Stelling's priorities become apparent: "it was certainly not the best thing in the world for young Tulliver's gait, to carry a heavy child, but he had plenty of exercise in long walks by himself" (151). Stelling resolves, nevertheless, to hire a drilling master in the next half year. The drilling master marks a shift from the dancing master who would have been employed even a decade earlier.

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<sup>5</sup> I am thankful to Ken Collins for pointing me in the direction of the references to Whyte-Melville and Lewes.

Lord Chesterfield's advice on manners in letters to his son (1774) were still being reprinted as the epitome of politeness as late as 1830, but Chesterfield's valuation of a "graceful carriage", acquired through a dancing master—since "no one can either sit, stand, or walk well, unless he dances well" (Stanhope 22)—was rapidly giving way by 1830 to a preference for a more military deportment. Instead of a dancing master, schools with middle class pupils such as Mr. Stelling's were likely to hire a drilling master, who would emphasize not the grace of the old, enervated nobility, but a modern and muscular gentlemanliness. The exercises he taught would "brace the muscles, increase the vigorous action of the frame, and promote a healthy constitution" (Gribble 59). These principles were made available even to those among the lower middle-classes who could not afford to hire a drilling master. Samuel Gribble, a retired Sergeant cum drilling master published his method in 1829 complete with instructions on riding and military formations. One of the specific purposes of these exercises was to straighten out deformities. "The succeeding Practices," Gribble writes,

will be found of great utility to the human frame, by opening the chest and affording the lungs ample space and power for a full respiration. They tend to square the shoulders and strengthen the muscles, and have often proved effectual in removing deformities, whether occasioned by natural weakness, or infirmity, or otherwise; as in the cases of crooked arms, knees bending inwards or outwards and a variety of other instances; in the cure of which, these exercises tend considerably to assist nature. (67)

The influence of a drilling master was meant to counteract any tendency toward physical irregularity or unmanly feebleness. Unfortunately, Mr. Stelling's drilling master, Mr. Poulter, is a parody of the conduct manual models. For all the "martial erectness" of his carriage (179), he succeeds only in enabling Tom to injure his foot.

As it turns out, Tom's being lamed is one of the most important incidents in the "School-time" section, for it is the only moment when the two boys can come together in the intimacy expected of the schoolboy novel. Philip is the only one in Mr. Stelling's household to anticipate that Tom might be worried about being permanently lamed after the accident: "It had been Philip's first thought when he had heard of the accident—'Will Tulliver be lame? It will be very hard for him if he is'—and Tom's hitherto unforgiven offences were washed out by that pity" (190-191). When he ascertains that Tom will not be lame and goes to tell him the good news, Philip puts out "his small delicate hand, which Tom clasped immediately in his more substantial fingers" (191). This moment, which highlights the physical differences between the two boys as their hands come together in a gesture of friendship, is one of the most significant tropes in the literary friendships between the strong man and the weak man. We have seen this same scene, which often takes place in the sickroom, between Tom Brown and George Arthur, Frank and Amyas Leigh, and John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher. Yet the friendship between Tom Brown and Philip Wakem lasts only as long as Tom's convalescence. A few days before the accident, when Tom asks Philip to come see Mr. Poulter's sword and then insults Mr. Wakem when Philip will not come, a breach forms between the two that is not easily mended. As the narrator tells us, "Their natural antipathy of temperament made resentment an easy passage to hatred, and in Philip the transition seem to have begun: there was no malignity in his disposition, but there was a susceptibility that made him peculiarly liable to a strong sense of repulsion" (185). After the accident, Philip feels that they are "no longer in a state of repulsion but were being drawn into a common current of suffering and sad privation. His imagination did not dwell on the outward calamity and its future effect on Tom's life, but it made vividly present to him the probable state of Tom's feeling: he had only lived fourteen years, but those years had, most of them, been steeped in

the sense of a lot irremediably hard” (190-191). He spends all of Tom’s convalescence with his schoolfellow and his sister, telling the story of the lamed Philoctetes and commiserating with the pair. But the friendship between the two lasts only as long as Tom’s lameness.

Philip does not consolidate his relationship with Tom by marrying his school-friend’s sister. As we learn at the end of Book Two, the friendship between two such different specimens of boyhood is not as natural or inevitable as the schoolboy novel makes it seem:

in spite of Philip's new kindness, and Tom's answering regard in this time of his trouble, they never became close friends. When Maggie was gone, and when Tom by-and-by began to walk about as usual, the friendly warmth that had been kindled by pity and gratitude died out by degrees, and left them in their old relation to each other. Philip was often peevish and contemptuous; and Tom's more specific and kindly impressions gradually melted into the old background of suspicion and dislike toward him as a queer fellow, a humpback, and the son of a rogue. If boys and men are to be welded together in the glow of transient feeling, they must be made of metal that will mix, else they inevitably fall asunder when the heat dies out. (194-5)

Eliot’s industrial metaphor of welding liquid metals that will not mix recalls the metaphor of steam power in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, which represents the emotional self-control of the self-made man. In this passage, however, a release of every day restraints that allows emotion to flow more freely is desirable.

The flow of liquids and emotions is much more difficult to direct in *The Mill on the Floss* than it is in *John Halifax*. In his own irrigation difficulties, Tulliver has recourse to the law rather than steam power, and the results are explosive. Despite his fiery temperament, Tulliver never thinks of applying steam to the mill. Uncle Deane

makes steam a metaphor for and a literal cause of the quickly changing times. Forty years ago, he says, “The looms went slowish, and fashions didn’t alter quite so fast – I’d a best suit that lasted me six years. Everything was on a lower scale, sir - in point of expenditure, I mean. It’s this steam, you see, that has made the difference - it drives on every wheel double pace and the wheel of Fortune along with ’em, as our Mr Stephen Guest said at the Anniversary dinner (he hits these things off wonderfully, considering he’s seen nothing of business)” (412). Uncle Deane proclaims that he does not “find fault with the change, as some people do,” but rather considers it “a fine thing” to “further the exchange of commodities” (412). Tom’s investment in steam power is rather more personal—he hopes it will make the mill a good enough investment for Guest & Co to consider purchasing it. When his uncle offers him shares, he asks about the possible repurchase of the mill instead, reminding his uncle, “If you remember, at the time my father’s property was sold, there was some thought of your firm buying the Mill: I know you thought it would be a very good investment, especially if steam were applied” (414). Whether Tom has the practical and emotional prudence to make steam answer his purpose remains an open question.

Tom, who is of the more even Dodson temperament than his fiery Tulliver father, is perhaps the most successful industrial product in the novel. The narrator describes Tom’s school course after the first two halves as going on “with mill-like monotony, his mind continuing to move with a slow, half-stifled pulse in a medium of uninteresting or unintelligible ideas” (196). The metaphor of Tom’s education as progressing with “mill-like monotony” suggests that industry, rather than ennobling him and bringing out his finer morals as it does with John Halifax, blunts his sensibilities. Eliot uses industrial metaphors to describe Tom’s sensibilities throughout *The Mill on the Floss*. Tom Tulliver is made of a rigid metal: he is “rather a Rhadamanthine personage” (57) who shares the single-mindedness of the muscular

Christian hero. Tom Tulliver, with his stubborn narrow-mindedness, is a critique of this ideal as Eliot aims to show that the inflexible morals associated with a muscular frame often lack the saving grace of sympathy.

Thomas Tegg, whose 1834 conduct book was aimed at lower middle class men who hoped to rise in the world, saw sureness of character as one of the most important characteristics of the self-made man. He wrote: “The surest guarantee of success in every great and laudable enterprise, is decision of character; and no one ever attained this enviable characteristic without acquiring the habit of acting upon fixed principles” (37). Yet, having rigidly fixed ideas does not always serve one well in personal relations. Tom, we learn, has “more than the usual share of boy’s justice in him,—the justice that desires to hurt culprits as much as they deserve to be hurt, and is troubled with no doubts concerning the exact amount of their deserts” (57). Even when his father is being sold up as a bankrupt, he sees “some justice in severity; and all the more, because he had confidence in himself that he should never deserve that just severity” (236) and he of course remains “inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable” (503) when his sister disgraces herself. Eliot’s pairing of a weak boy and a strong boy in the tradition of the schoolboy novel has done little to extend Tom’s sympathies. In the “Schooldays” book of *The Mill on the Floss*, we see that the pairing no longer works, and that a visit from Maggie is necessary to facilitate the relationship between the two boys. The breakdown of the pairing of the strong man and the weak man is even more apparent as we move to the fifth and sixth book of the novel, when the primary focus is not the failed friendship between two boys but the love triangles whose axis is Maggie.

## ***Love Triangles***

*The Mill on the Floss* asks the reader to consider how models of femininity inflect the pairing of the strong man and the weak man. If *The Mill on the Floss* is a rewriting of the schoolboy novel, it is also, more obviously, a romance. Eliot's novel does not take place entirely in the homosocial worlds of the public school and the warehouse. As the interest feminist critics have taken in her work attests to, it is one of the most significant reflections on the woman question written in the nineteenth century. Eve Sedgwick writes that "concomitant changes in the structure of the continuum of male "homosocial desire" were tightly, often causally bound up with the other more visible changes" in the nineteenth century, and that the "emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class" and that "no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relationship to women" (1). I depart from Sedgwick's account of the homoerotic love triangle in seeing the triangle as structured around physical difference rather than class difference.

The co-mingling of romance and the schoolboy novel in *The Mill on the Floss* points towards the way in which the failed male friendships and rivalries in the novel inflect the form of the more commented-on romance plots between Maggie and Philip, Maggie and Stephen, or (incestuously) Maggie and Tom. The position of the weak man becomes increasingly feminised in *The Mill on the Floss*. Maggie performs a narrative function similar to Phineas Fletcher or George Arthur by acting as the rigid Tom's expressive and emotional foil. This dynamic is reversed in the Philip-Maggie pairing, as Philip brings Maggie out of her ascetic phase to enjoy the pleasures of good conversation, good literature, and leisurely walks in the Red Deeps. Book Fifth of the novel, "Wheats and Tares," alternates chapters between Philip and Maggie's romantic

meetings in the Red Deeps, and the Smilesean self-help that shows Tom's increasing success in business. As its title suggests, the book ends in a mixed harvest, as the day when he finally pays off his father's debt is also the day when Mr. Tulliver's anger boils over, and he whips Wakem in the street and dies shortly thereafter. While we are meant to admire Tom's upright conduct as a son and businessman, we also see that the qualities which allow him to succeed in business leave him bereft of the sympathy that would allow him to understand Maggie's relationship with Philip.

Despite his wide sympathies, Philip has also been a difficult character for readers to make sense of. Some of the novel's first critics wrote about Philip in terms of his noble character and self-sacrificing love. In her review for *Macmillan's* magazine, Dinah Mulock Craik confidently wrote that Philip's love was "the only love that might have at once humbled and raised her [Maggie], by showing her how far nobler it was than her own" (445). Similarly, the reviewer for the *Spectator* wrote that Maggie's "higher faculties" awaken "the influence of a mind of wider range and finer tone than her own" (*Critical Heritage* 111). More recent critics, perhaps finding Philip's self-sacrificing love less palatable than the Victorians did, intimate that as a hunch back Philip is a less sexually attractive mate for Maggie than Stephen Guest, or avoid talking about him at all.<sup>6</sup> In an exception to this rule, Patricia Thomson has argued that Eliot's particular love triangle draws on George Sand's *Consuelo*, in which

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<sup>6</sup> One example of this trend is Nancy Paxton's reading, which focuses on Eliot's friendship with Spencer and social Darwinism. Paxton argues that Stephen Guest portrays his union with Maggie as her "biological destiny" (88) when he refers to "the natural law [that] surmounts every other" (495). Although Paxton is not explicit on this point, her argument implies that if Stephen is the biologically sound choice, then Philip is the evolutionarily inappropriate mate for Maggie. Similarly, in a discussion of Darwinian sexual selection, Gillian Beer argues that *Daniel Deronda* tackles the question of whether one can "escape from one's genetic and cultural inheritance" (218). In his recent article in *Dickens Studies Annual*, Thomas Reccio actually does write that Philip as a hunch back is an unfit sexual mate for Maggie. While it is fair to say that Maggie is more sexually attracted to Stephen than she is to Philip, to call Philip an unfit mate on the basis of his deformity is to ignore the rich relationship that he and Maggie develop, and his place in this literary love triangle, both of which I hope to explore in this chapter. In his book *Victorian Repression*, John Kucich offers a sustained and convincing reading of the Maggie-Philip relationship, arguing that it is most satisfying to the aesthetic Maggie as a sublimated passion that can never come to fruition.



the heroine must choose between her sensitive, deformed lover, Count Albert, and a less sensitive but more physically appealing man, Anzoleto (167). This reading should alert us to the importance of the masculine body in considering these love matches, a topic which is often touched upon but rarely explored fully in Eliot criticism. When most critics try to account for Philip's presence, they usually give him the briefest of mentions as a character whose marginality allows him to sympathize with Maggie and thus to occupy a position close to that of Eliot's narrator. Thus, Elaine Showalter writes that Philip, as a cripple, can empathize with Maggie's marginalization and is most qualified to comment on her situation (127), and George Levine writes that his sensibility is the closest in the novel to that of Eliot's narrator (303-4). There is a well-established tradition of reading Philip as a stand-in for Eliot's. This reading began with Barbara Hardy in her 1959 book on Eliot, who argues Philip "warns and prepares the reader. He sees it all—or nearly all. He recognizes her need, her clamping control of the need, and all the consequent dangers" (54). In Hardy's view, the letter in which Philip forgives Maggie for eloping with Stephen Guest also carries special weight as being close to the narrator's point of view (54-5).

Given that *The Mill on the Floss* is primarily a female bildungsroman, we might ask why Eliot engages with the pairing of the strong man and the weak man that characterizes so many mid-century novels about men. Stephen Guest in particular has most often been read in terms of Maggie's desire—he becomes the acceptable, non-incestuous replacement for Tom in the love triangle that occupies the last third of the novel. Despite his physical attractiveness, critics have long found Stephen Guest an unsatisfactory spiritual and intellectual match for Maggie. This criticism is imbedded in the novel itself. In his letter to Maggie, Philip writes, "I have felt the vibration of chords in your nature that I have continually felt the want of in his" (522). Most famously, Leslie Stephen pronounced that George Eliot did not realize what a "doll's

dressmaker” she had created in Guest, while F. R. Leavis’s wrote that the author was clearly taken in by her creation (quoted in Byatt 546). The critic for the *Guardian* also could not understand why Maggie “should be so fascinated by Stephen” and felt it most improbable that if Maggie had strength to break her chain at the last and most difficult moment, she could not have had strength to break it before” (130), and the writers for the *Westminster Review* called it a “daemonisch” and unreasonable passion (140). The reviewer for *Dublin University Magazine* complained that “Surely, no woman of Maggie’s sort would have let herself be wholly drawn away from her love for the deformed and suffering Philip by a mere outside fancy for the good-looking, sweet-voiced coxcomb, Stephen Guest” (150), but seemed no more impressed by Philip’s “eloquent sophistries” (149) than by Guest’s sweet-voice.

Reviewers frequently compare the merits of Stephen and Philip, only to end up satisfied with neither as a match for Maggie. The persistence of this pairing is a clue as to the importance of the connections the narrative sets up between the two men. Whereas many reviewers and contemporary critics have tried and failed to make sense of Stephen in terms of his relationship with Maggie, reading Stephen in terms of his relationships with men allows us to see more the subtleties of the function of his character. The Philip-Stephen pairing in the last third of the novel shadows the earlier Philip-Tom pairing, although Stephen’s class as a man of leisure effeminizes him. Stephen Guest is not a self-made man, but he is the son of a self-made man, the owner of Guest & Co. As the narrator archly tells us, his “diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure at twelve o’clock in the day are the graceful and odoriferous result of the largest oil-mill and most extensive wharf in St Ogg’s” (378). Stephen’s class status as a man of leisure feminizes him to a certain extent—he has developed some of the sympathies, intellectual interests, and artistic tastes of Philip Wakem, and is successfully Philip’s friend where Tom is not. But, despite Stephen’s muscular

physique, Stephen and Philip do not draw each other out in the way that Phineas and John or Tom and George Arthur do. Given his class position, Stephen is more able to risk expressing his passion than Tom is, but his sympathies are not as well-developed as Philip's. Stephen is not a neat replacement for Tom, nor is he a more palatable version of Philip. Instead, he calls our attention to the inadequacies of male friendship in the novel, and to the final breakdown of sympathy between men.

The world of business has done little for Tom's sympathies, and he shares the taciturnity of the muscular Christian and the self-made man. Eliot writes that "Tom's strong will bound together his integrity, his pride, his family regrets and his personal ambition, and made them one force, concentrating his efforts and surmounting discouragements" (321). He is determined to cut a fine figure in the world eventually, "but his practical shrewdness told him that the means to such achievements could only lie for him in present abstinence and self-denial: there were certain milestones to be passed and one of the first was the payment of his father's debts. Having made up his mind to that point, he strode along without swerving, contracting some rather saturnine sternness, as a young man is likely to do who has a premature call upon him for self-reliance" (321-2). Tom's self-reliance has not built up his moral character, and his silence is seen as less than admirable when his "usual incommunicativeness at home" prevents his quarrel with Maggie from being noticed by their parents (363). Tom works so hard that his friends worry about him. Bob tells Maggie that he's "as close as an iron biler," and that it worries him to see his boarder as he sits "by the fire himself so so glum-pish, a-knittin' his brow an' a-lookin' at the fire of a night. He should be a bit livelier now - a fine young fellow like him" (406). Maggie attributes Tom's unhappiness to her brother's preoccupation with business, but Bob thinks he has found out Tom's secret: that he is in love with his cousin Lucy. He tells Maggie about it, as he says "cause I thought you might work it out of him a bit, now you're

come. He's a deal too lonely - an' doesn't go into company enough" (406). But Maggie fails as Tom's expressive and emotional foil just as Philip does, and there is no rescuing the self-made man from his self-imposed taciturnity and glumness.

Romance fails not only for Tom, but also for Bob himself. We hear of the "respectful adoration" that Bob Jakins pays Maggie, but class excludes him from the love triangle. The narrator digresses, "The days of chivalry are not gone, notwithstanding Burke's grand dirge over them: they live still in that far-off worship paid by many a youth and man to the woman of whom he never dreams that he shall touch so much as her little finger or the hem of her robe" (297). Bob's affinity with "a knight in armour" worshipping a "dark-eyed maiden" is tempered by the comic role he plays in the novel. Yet, he is just as successful as self-made man as Tom, having raised himself up in the world enough to support a small wife and child by the fifth book of the novel, and it is his investment opportunity that allows Tom to make the money that pays his father's debts. As his childhood friend and business partner, Bob Jakins seems to shadow and double Tom in a comic vein, but his status a few rungs down on the class ladder from Tom also seems to allow him more self-expression, albeit in dialect.

Just as Tom is not completely admirable as the strong self-made man, Philip's position as the weak man is also much more uneasy than it is in Hughes, Craik, or Yonge. As a voluble invalid, he is even more clearly feminized than his predecessors George Arthur and Phineas Fletcher. In her depiction of Philip's temperament, Eliot draws on contemporary physiology that linked spinal susceptibility with a feminized nervous organization. The new physiology indicated a connection between the spine and general nervous organisation. Research on nervous organisation seemed not to contradict, but rather to lend weight to pre-existing cultural assumptions about the intelligence and sensibility of those with abnormal spinal conditions. Spinal deformity

began to be associated medically as well as romantically with heightened intelligence and emotional susceptibility. Closely related to susceptibility is sensibility, a freighted term from the eighteenth century onward, when it connoted a codified set of morally correct emotional responses and stimuli that acted upon and revealed themselves on the body in emblems such as blushes and tears. As Markman Ellis notes, as early as the latter half of the eighteenth century, the language of sensibility was also employed in medical contexts, and particularly in descriptions of the nervous system (18-19). Eliot's use of the term has both medical and moral resonances. For Lewes, sensibility originated partly from the spine. The brain, he argued, was only the most important organ in the nervous system, and previous research had overlooked the importance of the spine as part of that system (*The Physiology of Common Life* II.4). Comparing the spinal chord and the brain, Lewes writes: "Similarity in structure implies similarity in property; and the ganglionic substance of the Chord being of a similar structure to the ganglionic substance of the Brain, there must necessarily be a community of *property* between them" (2.164). Or, to put it more bluntly: "the Spinal Chord being formed of grey matter as well as of fibres, it must have sensibility and power of reacting on nervous stimulus" (2.161-2). Suggesting that two types of substance compose the nervous system, Lewes claims that whilst the nerves in the cerebrum have the property of "neurility", the ganglia, the substance he attributes to the spinal chord, have the property of "sensibility" (2.6). Lewes's location of sensibility in the spinal chord suggests that this emotional receptivity and consequent capacity for sympathy are partly physiological characteristics.

The narrator depicts Philip's organisation, the source of his susceptibility, as feminine. His nerves, the narrator observes, are "as sensitive as a woman's" (444). Having been "kept aloof from all practical life" and being "by nature half feminine in sensitiveness," Philip has also developed "some of the woman's intolerant repulsion

towards worldliness and the deliberate pursuit of sensual enjoyment” (344).

Emphasizing the emotional responsiveness, or the involuntary responses that nineteenth-century physiologists like Marshall Hall sourced to the spine (Logan 168), the narrator links Philip’s spinal deformity to his effeminacy. Mr. Tulliver initially supposes that Philip’s hunch back, along with the fact that he “takes after his mother in the face” means that “there isn’t much of his father in him” (168), and Tom finds it “truly pitiable” that “the brown hair round” Philip’s “melancholy” face waves and curls “at the ends like a girl’s” (170). As far as the Deanes are concerned, Mr. Wakem “has brought up Philip like a girl,” meaning that he has not been brought up to participate in the economic sphere (438). This description of Philip’s femininity and renunciation cannot help but recall Maggie, who shares a close kinship with Philip.

When Maggie first thinks of Philip, it is in terms of taking a brother’s place in the triangle. She wishes to be “brother and sister in secret” (349). Later, she laments: “What a dear, good brother you would have been Philip,’ ... ‘I think you would have made as much fuss about me, and been as pleased for me to love you, as would have satisfied even me. You would have loved me well enough to bear with me, and forgive me everything. That was what I always longed that Tom should do” (341). Yet, the novel encourages us to read the Philip-Maggie pairing in terms of the conventions of romance and fairy-story, in which Tom’s education has been sorely lacking. Philip and Maggie’s very first meeting takes place before Maggie has passed “the golden gates” (195) of childhood, at a time not so far off from when she half-believed that she might really meet a “blinking dwarf in yellow” (114) on her journey across the commons. Maggie promises to kiss Philip again the next time that she sees him, but the narrator frames her failure to fulfill that promise with the fading of fairy story from her life:

The promise was void like so many other sweet, illusory promises of our

childhood: void as promises made in Eden before the seasons were divided,  
and when the starry blossoms grew side by side with the ripening peach—  
impossible to be fulfilled when the golden gates had been passed. (195)

If the terms upon which Maggie and Philip can live happily ever after are those of a pre-lapsarian state, these conditions are at least partly reinstated during their later meetings in the Red Deeps. When Maggie does kiss Philip as a child, it is with the innocence and earnestness that she kisses her brother (194), and, in a reversal of the Beauty and the Beast motif, her “dark eyes” remind Philip in turn of “the stories about princesses being turned into animals” (187). Philip thinks that Maggie’s eyes remind him of these animal-brides because they seem to be trying to speak kindly (193), and like the weak man who read depths in the expressions of the muscular Christian or the self-made man, he sees it as his job to elicit these emotions from Maggie.

Philip continues to try to elicit an emotional response from Maggie during her ascetic phase, and the tropes which seem to best express this relationship are once again those of romance. The pre-lapsarian state of this childhood romance is partly reinstated in the Red Deeps, the forest where Philip lends Maggie the romances of Sir Walter Scott and Madamae de Stäel, and where he longs to paint Maggie as a mythical Hamadryad among the firs (339). After Maggie tells her cousin of her romance with Philip in the Red Deeps, Lucy uses her familiarity with fairy stories and romance to read the situation. “There is something romantic in it—out of the common way—just what everything that happens to you ought to be. And Philip will adore you like a husband in a fairy tale” (403). Lucy—whom Maggie jokingly calls the “fairy godmother” who has “turned [her] from a drudge into a princess” (429)—envisioned herself as the orchestrator of this romance, who will make “a pretty ending” to all of her “poor, poor Maggie’s troubles” (403). Although, in witnessing Maggie and Philip’s first meeting after four years, Lucy cannot “resist the impression that her

cousin Tom had some excuse for feeling shocked at the physical incongruity between the two”, she concludes that it is Tom’s lack of engagement with “poetry and fairy tales” that prevents him from seeing their romantic potential (428). Thus, it is as a reader of poetry and fairy tale that Lucy is able to envision Maggie and Philip living happily ever after. Philip, unlike Tom, reads the right books, or, at least the books that are most favourable to his relationship with Maggie.

Philip's passionate investment in Eliot's heroine is not a reason to discount his perspective. In the opening of the novel, the boundary between the story and discourse levels of the narrative is broken by the appearance of a young Maggie, watching the mill with its “unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water” (10) along with the narrator. In a parallel scene, the narrator invites us to see Maggie anew on the banks near the Red Deeps. “You may see her now, as she walks down the favourite turning and enters the Deeps by a narrow path through a group of Scotch firs—her tall figure and old lavender gown visible through an hereditary black silk shawl of some wide-meshed net-like material; and now she is sure of being unseen, she takes off her bonnet and ties it over her arm” (310). The narrator, shifting to the present tense for a moment, invites the reader to see Maggie as she is now. But there is a character in the novel who is seeing things exactly as the narrator does, Philip, who appears in the Red Deeps a moment later as the story shifts back to the past tense narrative mode. The reader thus sees Maggie through Philip’s point of view. Philip’s mimetic skill in depicting Maggie rivals the narrator’s at certain points. He shows Maggie a miniature of her as she was in the “School-days” Book, and “Maggie saw her old self leaning on a table, with her black locks hanging down behind her ears, looking into space with strange, dreamy eyes. It was a water-colour sketch, of real merit as a portrait” (312). Like the author, Philip promises to make a picture of Maggie as she is now “among the Scotch firs and the slanting shadows” (318).



In his letter to Maggie, Philip writes of his (correct) assessment of what happened with Stephen Guest: “But perhaps I am wrong; perhaps I feel about you as the artist does about the scene over which his soul has brooded with love: he would tremble to see it confided to other hands - he would never believe that it could bear for another all the meaning and the beauty it bears for him” (522). Philip clearly sees himself in a position akin to that of the narrator-artist, and his portraits, as we are told, are of “real merit.” Earlier in his letter he writes:

I had seen what convinced me that you were not free - that there was another whose presence had a power over you which mine never possessed; but through all the suggestions - almost murderous suggestions - of rage and jealousy, my mind made its way to belief in your truthfulness. I was sure that you meant to cleave to me, as you had said; that you had rejected him; that you struggled to renounce him, for Lucy’s sake and for mine. But I could see no issue that was not fatal for you, and that dread shut out the very thought of resignation. I foresaw that he would not relinquish you and I believed then, as I believe now, that the strong attraction which drew you together proceeded only from one side of your characters, and belonged to that partial, divided action of our nature which makes half the tragedy of the human lot. I have felt the vibration of chords in your nature that I have continually felt the want of in his. (522)

Philip’s letter is the only character’s voice to be so fully interpolated into the text without the narrator’s mediation, and Barbara Hardy rightly argues that readers should give his interpretation some weight. When Philip, earlier in the novel in the Red Deeps, tells Maggie, “I don’t think any of the strongest effects of our natures are susceptible of can ever be explained. We can neither detect the process by which they are arrived at nor the mode in which they act on us” (317), his view of human nature

sounds like the narrator's and foreshadows the plot.

Philip also shares the narrator's preoccupation with all things middling, though, instead of feeling it is his artistic duty to extend his audience's sympathies through a faithful representation of the middle part of life, he is frustrated by what he deems his own mediocrity. He tells Maggie, "I'm cursed with susceptibility in every direction, and effective faculty in none" (339). He continues: "It might be a happiness to have many tastes if I were like other men".... "I might get some power and distinction by mere mediocrity, as they do—at least I should get those middling satisfactions which make men contented to do without great ones. I might think society at St Ogg's agreeable then. But nothing could make life worth the purchase money of pain to me but some faculty that would lift me above the dead level of provincial existence. Yes—there is one thing: a passion answers as well as a faculty" (340). Maggie shares Philip's dissatisfaction with the middle ground, complaining "I was never satisfied with a *little* of anything" (341). Philip and Maggie share this uneasy relationship with the middle station of life with Eliot's narrator, who is famously preoccupied with the middlingness of her subject.

Philip shares some of the narrator's capacity for sympathy, perhaps because he is so often an object of sympathy, or more often, of pity. On their first meeting, the narrator remarks:

Maggie moreover had rather a tenderness for deformed things; she preferred the wry-necked lambs, because it seemed to her that the lambs which were quite strong and well made wouldn't mind so much about being petted, and she was especially fond of petting objects that would think it very delightful to be petted by her. (186)

The narrator suggests that Maggie's "keen sensitiveness and experience under family criticism," much of which is directed at her unruly hair and brown skin, suffice to

teach her to behave “as if she were quite unconscious of Philip’s deformity... as well as if she had been directed by the most finished breeding” (193). Aunt Glegg remarks that Maggie’s complexion, so unlike that of the Dodsons, bespeaks a certainty that the “child ‘ull come to no good” (227), while Aunt Pullet links Philip’s “mis-made” physiognomy with his being “very queer and unked” (352). Maggie’s tenderness toward Philip remains partly predicated on his hunch back when they meet again, for “there was the old deformity to awaken the old pity” (309). Maggie is more likely to meet with the son of her family’s enemy because of her pity for him, which extends her sympathies: “poor Philip, whom some people would shrink from only because he was deformed. The idea that he might become her lover, or that her meeting him could cause disapproval in that light, had not occurred to her, and Philip saw the absence of this idea clearly enough—saw it with a certain pang, although it made her consent to his request the less unlikely” (316). Here the narrator’s transitions from Maggie’s point of view (poor Philip...) to something in between the narrator’s point of view and Philip’s (The idea that he might become her lover...) to what is definitively Philip’s (Philip saw the absence of this idea clearly enough...), suggests the narrator’s mediating function in Philip and Maggie’s sympathies for each other. Although Maggie and Philip’s shared experience as pitied and pitying outsiders allows them to share the narrator’s capacity for sympathy, they are by no means perfect models of sympathetic intercourse.

Indeed, Philip and Maggie are no more exempt from the narrator’s critique than any other character in the novel. When Philip first tries to convince Maggie to meet him in the Red Deeps, the narrator asks for the reader’s sympathy:

You can hardly help blaming him severely. He was four or five years older than Maggie, and had a full consciousness of his feeling toward her to aid him in foreseeing the character his contemplated interviews with her would bear in

the opinion of a third person. But you must not suppose that he was capable of a gross selfishness, or that he could have been satisfied without persuading himself that he was seeking to infuse some happiness into Maggie's life. (319)

A characteristic move on the part of Eliot's narrator is to presume that her reader is blaming her character, in this case Philip, for some fault, and then to plead for lenience. It seems that her version of sympathy, then, depends on her ability to mediate the relationship between her characters and her imagined reader. The narrator sees this relationship as tenuous: her readers are always ready to blame her characters for not acting in accordance with their own values. Eliot's notion of sympathy thus depends on her representation of human failings. These human failings are often rooted in the physiology of her characters.

### ***On Sympathy and Realism***

When Ruskin wrote, shortly after Eliot's death in December of 1880, that Maggie was pitiable and Tom a "lout," while the rest of the characters in *The Mill on the Floss* were no more than "the sweepings out of a Pentonville omnibus" (37.377), he was only elaborating on a critique that Eliot's narrator had already made of her characters. In a move familiar to readers from *Adam Bede*, Eliot's narrator often anticipates her reader's critique of her characters, and then tries to win her reader's sympathy for her less-than-perfect characters despite their flaws. Of course, the reader may not have been judging the character the narrator has in mind at all. But this narrative strategy heightens the emotional intensity around the moment that the narrator pauses to anticipate her reader's critique.

This strategy has a model in the Tom-Philip relationship. Tom's and Philip's judgments of each other, and their attempts at sympathy despite these judgments,

heighten the emotional intensity of their failed friendship. The question of sympathy, and of how possible it is to sympathize with someone very different from oneself, is central to the problem of Eliot's failed schoolboy friendship. While authors like Hughes, Lawrence, and Craik, all imagine schoolboy friendships transcending great physical and psychological differences, Eliot questions how possible these friendships are. Yet, she continues to tie a weak constitution with an intellectual superiority, and a robust constitution with business acumen. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot explores at length a problem that she only hints at in her earlier works: that of what physiognomy is most suited to be an object of and to bequeath sympathy. Although she critiques the model of the schoolboy friendship offered in the other novels, in which the weak man extends the strong man's sympathies, Eliot remains tied to the idea that a person with a weak or unattractive physiognomy is best able to feel and be an object of sympathy.

The best-known example of a moment when Eliot imagines her reader objecting to her portrait of a character and then imploring her reader's sympathy occurs in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, "In which the Story Pauses a Little". Anxious that her imagined lady reader will be offended that her clergyman, Mr. Irwine, does not always give perfect Christian advice, the narrator pleads for the reader's sympathy. Dilating on the aesthetic imperfections of her topic, she continues: "But, bless us, things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome, I hope?" (179).

But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. ... do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world - those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of

onions. In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! ... I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men (180)

Although she has begun with the imperfect Christianity of her clergyman Mr. Irwine, in her examples of characters who are not in the main story, Eliot dwells on unattractive bodies (work-worn hands, rounded backs, weather-beaten faces, or elsewhere in the chapter, the “wife who waddles” or the “sallow-cheeked matron”) as the ones most needing our sympathy. Eliot asks, not only who is most deserving of our readerly sympathy, but also what kind of body is best equipped to extend those sympathies.

In Eliot's world-view, often a less-than-perfect body, like Philip Wakem's, is most suited to both bequeath and be an object of sympathy. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, another unattractive character, the Rev. Amos Barton, who has “a narrow face of no particular complexion—even the small-pox that has attacked it seems to have been of a mongrel, indefinite kind—with features of no particular shape, and an eye of no particular expression, is surmounted by a slope of baldness gently rising from brow to crown” (15), is seen through the “tender, short-sighted eyes” (15) of his wife Milly.<sup>7</sup> The narrator mediates on “the loving light of her unrepenting eyes” (16) as best suited for companionship with an imperfect man. The narrator remarks, “I, for one, do not grudge Amos Barton this sweet wife. I have all my life had a sympathy for mongrel ungainly dogs, who are nobody's pets; and I would rather surprise one of them with a pat and a pleasant morsel, than meet the condescending advances of the loveliest Skye-terrier who has his cushion by my lady's chair” (16). This passage

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<sup>7</sup> Shortsighted eyes can sometimes be indicative of a metaphorical short-sightedness in Eliot, as is the case with Dorothea Brooke and Silas Marner, but here shortsightedness obviously leads to greater sympathy.

recalls the one from *The Mill on the Floss*, in which the narrator tells us that Maggie always delighted in petting the wry-neck lambs, because she imagines that they will think it especially delightful to be petted by her (186). Maggie's childhood emotions are often described in terms of her relationships to animals (she lets Tom's rabbits die, she is like a little skye terrier following Tom, or a Shetland Pony shaking her wild mane). The narrator, and Maggie's sympathy for unattractive or deformed animals early on in the narrative is extended to people later on.

Tom enjoys the most robust and upright demeanour of any character in *The Mill on the Floss*, and his sympathies are similarly unbending. He is perhaps the character in Eliot's entire oeuvre who most lacks the saving grace of sympathy. If anyone in the novel is a man of maxims, it is Tom, and as the narrator remarks:

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. (518)

Although the narrator censures Tom's lack of sympathy, she shares his love of maxims. The passage above is in fact a maxim condemning men of maxims. Tom is certainly not a figure for the narrator in quite the same way that Philip is, but the narrator's by turns sympathetic and censorious persona does seem to mimic the alternations of feeling in the Tom-Philip relationship. Tom is thus both in need of and integral to Eliot's vision of sympathy and her realist narrative strategy.

Tom can be read as a figure for the recalcitrant reader whom Eliot imagines unsympathetically condemning her characters. However, figures like Tom are also able to see the unornamented truth of some situations. When Tom says he can't be certain about anything Maggie does when it comes to Philip Wakem, the narrator

remarks: “There was a terrible cutting truth in Tom's words - that hard rind of truth which is discerned by unimaginative, unsympathetic minds” (409). But she goes on to give us Maggie’s perspective: “Maggie always writhed under this judgment of Tom’s: she rebelled and was humiliated in the same moment: it seemed as if he held a glass before her to show her her own folly and weakness - as if he were a prophetic voice predicting her future failings - and yet, all the while, she judged him in return: she said inwardly, that he was narrow and unjust, that he was below feeling those mental needs which were often the source of the wrong-doing” (409). Maggie acknowledges that Tom is able to see the basic situation, but lacks the sympathy to appreciate its subtleties. In these scenes, rather than Philip developing these qualities in him, Maggie supplements Tom’s taciturnity instead, accusing him of lacking pity and sympathy. After Tom discovers Maggie’s secret meetings with Philip in the Red Deeps, she taunts him “You never do wrong, Tom,” and he responds “with proud sincerity”: “Not if I know it” (355). In Eliot’s framework, never making a mistake is not admirable. As Maggie accuses Tom, “You have been reproaching other people all your life—you have been always sure you yourself are right: it is because you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims” (360). She goes on, “You have no pity—you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. It is a sin to be hard—it is not fitting for a mortal—for a Christian” (361). Early on, the narrator notes that Tom never doubts the decisions that he has made, while Maggie is always wishing she had done something different (57). Tom has little ability to feel regret and self-doubt, and these qualities are essential to Eliot’s narrator. *The Mill on the Floss* is a historical novel, set in the recent past, with a narrator who shares some of Maggie’s regret about the past.

Like *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* and *John Halifax, Gentleman*, *The Mill on the Floss* is a novel that looks back to the recent past (the 1830s and 1840s) to make sense



of the present. Thus, when Eliot thinks about the ways in which the schoolboy, the self-made man, and friendships between men have been represented in contemporary literature of the 1850s, she does so with a sense of doubt that allows her to both critique and sympathize with a model of male intimacy that no longer works to mould the plot around the shared character development of a weak man and a strong man. The failed friendship between Tom and Philip is clearly a lost opportunity, but one that points to the productive energies of otherwise negative affects in producing sympathy. The Philip-Tom rivalry is predicated on the very different sensibilities that seem in part from their different physiognomies. Eliot critiques the model of the schoolboy friendship based on physical disparity, but she does not escape from her own historical moment, and continues to depict her strong man as a taciturn businessman and her weak man as a voluble intellectual.

This narrative pairing of the strong man and the weak man does not work in the same way after Eliot's novel. Although the schoolboy novel and types of the self-made man continue to flourish even in popular culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the confluence of historical circumstances that produced this instantiation of the pairing was particular to the mid-nineteenth century. Muscular Christianity experienced a brief popularity—by the end of the 1860s it was being parodied by Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. Nor did it seem as imperative to insist that the self-made man could be a gentleman after the mid-century—as the enormous success of John Halifax shows, it was in fact a premise that Craik's audience was willing to embrace from the start. The idea that a weak or invalid man might soften the contours of his stronger self-made friend no longer seemed as natural to the late Victorians as it did in the mid-century. Instead of supplementing a taciturn and rough masculinity, deformity and weakness were pathologised and coded as queer. Perhaps this collapse is why so many of the representations of the strong and weak man in *fin-de-siècle*

fiction are in fact representations of the same man, as is the case in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The conclusion will consider the ways in which the pairing of the strong man and the weak man was transformed after the 1850s, in the pairing of detectives and criminals that dominate the sensation fiction of the 1860s, in the pairings of male friends and adventurers that we find in writers like H. Rider Haggard, and in the dandies who seem to be both aesthetic self-made men and degenerate weak men.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The task of this dissertation has been to explore one instantiation of the pairing of the strong man and the weak man, which centered on mid-century ideals of masculinity—muscular Christianity, the self-made man, the rise of sporting culture and the reform of public schools. The pairing also spoke to a particular set of issues in the history of masculinity—the taciturnity and reserve of the true gentleman, the need for opportunities to show his tenderness and gentleness, and the place of weakness and sentiment within this narrative logic. The psychology produced by this dyad informs and enables the structure of the narrative. The weak man often bears the brunt of the emotional work of the novel through to the end of the century. Indeed, the character who occupies the position closest to the narrator in these novels is often wounded, maimed, or otherwise marked as odd or disabled. The pairing of the strong man and the weak man continues in the sensation and detective fiction, boy's adventure stories, and the decadent novels of the fin-de-siècle.

The sensation novels of the 1860s that immediately followed the mid-century domestic and adventure fiction that we have explored often reverse the moral valence of the pair. Sensation fiction often pushes gender boundaries, and in Wilkie Collins's fiction we find a host of masculine plotting women and effeminate men. Collins's fiction also questions the mid-century expectation that strong muscles will inevitably lead to strong morals, and his novels often reverse this expectation, casting the muscular Christian as the villain and the weak man as the hero.

Most obviously, to return to Collins's parody of muscular Christianity, *Man and Wife* (1868), we find the muscular villain Geoffrey Delamayne paired with the gentler and more gentlemanly club-footed man Sir Patrick Lundie. Less obvious, perhaps, is the subtle coding of the real thief of the moonstone in the novel of the same

title, Godfrey Ablethwaite, as a kind of parody of the muscular Christian. By contrast, heroes like Franklin Blake in the same novel and Walter Hartwright in *The Woman in White* (1860) are more slight and sensitive men. Perhaps the most specific masculine pairing to structure a sensation novel is found in *Armada* (1866). Instead of a fair-haired woman and her darker-haired counterpart, Collins's novel explicitly contrasts a dark man and a fair man, both named Allan Armadale. The dark Armadale serves as narrator for much of the novel, and if he is not outright weak he is undersized and un-English, while the fair Armadale is superior in size and strength but inferior in intellect. In these novels, the weaker man always has the stronger morals. Collins continued this pairing of strong villain and weak hero throughout the 1870s, when, as Tamara Wagner notes, "the contrast between muscular men of the world and sentimental heroes recurs endlessly" (489). Wagner goes on to consider *Poor Miss Finch*, *The New Magdalene*, and *The Law and the Lady*. While the weak man has consistently been a moral force in the novels of the mid-century, in the world of sensation fiction, he is idealized to the point that a nervous, sensitive masculinity becomes the normative masculinity. Yet, in Collins's novels the weak man is often unable to extend his good influence to the strong man.

The detective figures in particular in sensation fiction are often marked as weak or ill.<sup>8</sup> For example, in *The Moonstone* (1868), one of several detective figures, Ezra Jennings, is queer and not well-liked, and quite different from the well-built villain-sailor who steals the stone. He uses opium to manage the pain from his chronic illness and this experience gives him some insight into the narcotic trance that caused Franklin Blake to unwittingly take the stone from Rachel's bedroom. We can trace a line through the sensation fiction of the 1860s through to the detective fiction of the

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<sup>8</sup> For more on detectives with disabilities see Irving Zola, "Any Distinguishing Features? The Portrayal of Disability in the Crime-Mystery Genre," *Policy Studies Journal* 15.3 (March 1987): 485-513, and Sander Gilman, *Fat Boys: A Thin Book*, Lincoln, U of Nebraska P, 2004.

1880s and 1890s. In Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, instead of the strong man and the weak man, we have two weak men, Watson, the narrator who suffered a war injury in Afghanistan, and Holmes himself, whose nervous and effeminate sensibility is linked to his ability to solve mysteries. In the opening scene of *The Sign of the Four*, Holmes offers Watson a solution of seven percent cocaine, which Watson politely declines on the ground that his "constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet" and he "cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it" (3). Holmes admits that the influence is likely "a physically bad one," but finds it so "transcendently stimulating and clarifying" that any ill effects on his health are of small moment to him (3). Watson shares the weak man's propensity to praise his superior friend, but unlike Phineas Fletcher, he shows some peevishness at being forced to do so. While the function of the weak man in the novels of the 1850s is to elicit and expand the inner life of the strong man, the function of Watson's narration is often to obscure Holmes's train of thought so that the mystery will remain a mystery until the end. Watson is not always pleased with his function as chronicler of his friend's achievements. When Holmes makes a negative comment about the pamphlet Watson wrote chronicling his last case, he writes,

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of the weather. (7)

Holmes's taciturnity does not conceal depths of benevolence, and Watson amplifies his

egotism. The resulting narrative, which depends on the obfuscation of the plot, is quite different from the novels earlier in the century.

While Arthur Conan Doyle's stories arguably contain two weak men, Rider Haggard's *She* has two strong men who nevertheless counterbalance each other, and whose pairing provides an erotic tension even more heightened than that of the earlier novels. Horace Holly, the narrator, and his ward Leo Vincey, are first observed walking down the street together by another pair of university men, one of whom appreciatively exclaims of Leo: "why, that fellow looks like a statue of Apollo come to life. What a splendid man he is" (10). The other man confirms that he is the handsomest man in the university, and one of the nicest too, nicknamed "the Greek god," while his guardian, Holly, is as ugly as his ward is handsome, being nicknamed Charon. Holly describes himself as "Short, thick-set, and deep-chested almost to deformity, with long sinewy arms, heavy features, deep-set grey eyes, a low brow half overgrown with a mop of thick black hair, like a deserted clearing on which the forest had once more begun to encroach" (20). Holly takes to brooding and becomes "misanthropic and sullen" but finds new life and a use for his introspection in narrating his adventures with his ward, who is less loquacious than he is but not nearly as reserved as a Kingsley hero. Although he describes himself as monstrously ugly, Holly is also, as he puts it "gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers" (20). As such he is more than fit to accompany Leo across Africa. The physical contrast between the two men, along with their combined physical prowess heightens the novel's erotic emphasis on masculinity and virility. While there is ample ground for comparison between the adventure novels of the end of the century and the novels of Charles Kingsley, this emphasis on an eroticized muscular physicality that finds its full force in the colonies is quite different from the more domestic industrial masculinity of Craik and Eliot. The unabashed eroticism of

Haggard's pairing shows that the strong male body is still an object of attention and admiration at the end of the century, even if one has to go further a field to appreciate the spectacle.

Some works of the fin-de-siècle collapse the strong man and the weak man. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) combines elements of the detective story and the decadent novel. Deformity is not always paired with debility in the nineteenth-century novel, indeed, Mr. Hyde has a "remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution" (72). Dr. Jekyll, whom we get very little physical description of compared even to his friends Mr. Utterson and Dr. Lanyon, is much bigger than Hyde with a "past fairly blameless" (43). Hyde, on the other hand, is repeatedly described as very small:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him.

(41)

Jekyll and Hyde do not complement and supplement one another morally as in the friendships between the strong man and the weak man that we saw in earlier novels, and physical weakness here is not a sign of spiritual superiority. Instead, Stevenson's tale is a fantasy of degeneracy that is not bound by the physical strength and blameless past of one man, even though he is the same man as the degenerate.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) expands these themes, mapping physical and moral degeneracy and physical and moral beauty onto the same man. It is possible to read Dorian as an aesthetic self-made man who eventually collapses into

weakness and degeneracy. At points, Wilde's fable insists on the correspondence between physicality and morality as surely as any Lombroso photograph. Basil Hallward warns Dorian, "People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even" (181). Yet, the novel also evinces a great pleasure in self-determination outside of any supposed biological constraints. In the end, however, like the jewel encrusted tortoise in *À Rebourse*, which collapses under the weight of its own unnatural and decadent beauty, Dorian too collapses under the weight of his self-creation:

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was. (251)

One particularly interesting account of the pleasures and pains of observation and invalidism can be found in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Perhaps surprisingly, James's novel weaves together the themes of disability, sentimentality and narrative form as tightly as any work by Charlotte Yonge. The pathos of Ralph Touchett's invalidism and his unrequited love for his cousin Isabel Archer frame the narrative. Just as surely as Charlie Edmonstone provokes the feud between his cousins for his own amusement, Ralph Touchett sets the plot of *The Portrait of a Lady* in motion when he divides his fortune with his attractive young cousin. Provoked that Isabel will not divulge her reasons for refusing Lord Warburton, he exclaims,

'Of course you mean that I'm meddling in what doesn't concern me. But why shouldn't I speak to you of this matter without annoying you or embarrassing myself? What's the use of being your cousin if I can't have a few privileges?



What's the use of adoring you without hope of a reward if I can't have a few compensations? What's the use of being ill and disabled and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life if I really can't see the show when I've paid so much for my ticket?' (169)

Here, Ralph claims that if his disability, an advanced pulmonary disorder (203), has brought him pain it has also bought him the privilege of being an observer.

Unfortunately, the spectacle he witnesses is as painful as his illness. As the plot progresses the narrator observes, "Poor Ralph Touchett, as soon as the autumn had begun to define itself, became almost a prisoner; in bad weather he was unable to step out of the house, and he used sometimes to stand at one of the windows with his hands in his pockets and, from a countenance half-rueful, half-critical, watch Isabel and Madame Merle as they walked down the avenue under a pair of umbrellas" (210). Ralph recognizes Madame Merle's machinations before anyone else, but is able to do little about it. In James's novel, the position of the observer has become painful and ineffective where it was once pleasurable. Yet, this inefficacy only serves to heighten the sentimental spectacle of disabled masculinity.

Surprisingly, the narratives that most closely follow the mid-nineteenth century structure of pairing a strong man and a weak man have been published or filmed in the last twenty years. There is a twist in these narratives, in that the weak boy usually teaches his stronger friend an appreciation for literature to the extent that he is able to narrate the story himself. John Irving's popular novel, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989), follows the pattern of the weak boy humanizing his school friend and is a direct literary descendant of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Through Owen, who is small enough to play baby Jesus in an elementary school play and has a fixed-voice box that causes him to shout every time he speaks, John, like Tom Brown, gains faith and begins to apply himself in school. He learns to appreciate Thomas Hardy, and

eventually becomes an English teacher at a private girl's boarding school in Ontario and writes the story of his friendship with Owen. In the young adult book and film *Freak the Mighty* (book published in 1993 by Rodman Philbrick and film released in 1998 by Peter Chelsom and Chaos productions), Kevin Avery, the "freak" of the title who is small and quick-witted but suffers and eventually dies from a respiratory disorder, teaches Maxwell Kane, his slower-witted, slower-moving and larger friend to read and write. Max also eventually writes the story of their friendship. The plot of a schoolboy friendship between a stronger boy and a weaker boy, each of who has something to learn and something to teach, has retained much of its affective currency over the last 150 years.

These recent novels show that there is a persistent cultural connection between physical weakness and the humanizing function of literature. Literature is seen as teaching the strong to protect the weak, and teaching the strong, in effect, to become fully human through their tenderness and care for others and their newfound literacy and ability to articulate these feelings. This pairing is not always felicitous, but its very persistence suggests that a normative type of strong masculinity exists only in contradistinction to masculine weakness and disability. The literary pairing of masculine strength and weakness opens up a new critical space in which we can consider the interdependence of narrative and corporeal forms, what it means for the disabled to narrate, and to narrate disability itself. For the Victorians, to learn to read masculine strength and weakness as complementary, humanizing forces, was to learn to read rightly.

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