

“THIS SEEMINGLY SO SOLID BODY”: PHILOSOPHICAL ANATOMY AND VICTORIAN  
FICTION

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rae X. Yan: “This Seemingly So Solid Body”: Philosophical Anatomy and Victorian Fiction  
(Under the direction of John McGowan and Beverly Taylor)

We often presume that “anatomy” is, simply, the scientific practice of deconstructing and dissecting the body. “‘This Seemingly So Solid Body’: Philosophical Anatomy and Victorian Fiction,” returns us to a period in the nineteenth-century when stable ideas of what it meant to anatomize and who could be an anatomist were undergoing serious challenge by a group of investigators interested in a now forgotten epistemology: philosophical anatomy. In the most straightforward sense of the term, philosophical anatomy describes the attempt to find universal forms and ideal structures common to all organisms through the practices of comparative anatomy. Philosophical anatomists saw the work of anatomy as one not specific to scientific communities, but common across many disciplines. I argue that philosophical anatomy reconstitutes anatomizing as more than a reductive, materialist science. Anatomizing, in this context, exceeds the simple dissection and reduction of human and animal bodies and becomes, instead, a creative reimagining of how such bodies relate to each other and even to non-human forces and energies. Studying the ways in which Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and George Eliot engage philosophical anatomy in their literary works, I reveal how philosophical anatomy profoundly shapes our present representational and interpretive practices.

To Liping Wu and Zhiping Yan.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the preface to his comprehensive series on animal structures *On the Anatomy of Vertebrates* (1866), the comparative anatomist Richard Owen (1804-1892) concludes that “every kind of anatomy ought to be so pursued as to deserve the ... epithet” of “philosophical”<sup>1</sup>—an idea that has provoked the central question at hand in this study: what did it mean to anatomize during the nineteenth-century? Owen himself delineates several approaches one could take to anatomizing. An anatomist could choose to pursue a general anatomy of plants (Phytotomy) or animals (Zootomy). Most anatomists, however, tended to pursue single-species studies. Such work in “Malacotomy” (the anatomy of mollusks), “Ichthyotomy” (the anatomy of fish), and “Hippotomy” (the anatomy of horses), alongside “Anthropotomy” (the anatomy of man), Owen stated, could offer knowledge “most accurate and minute, most valuable in its application to the repair of accident, the remedy of injury and decay, and the cure of disease.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, the anatomist could also pursue the study of organs and parts of the human body, which was the pursuit of “Physiological Anatomy,” a practice most necessary to medical research. Using the microscope to pursue physiological anatomical research was so important in and of itself that it had its own classification: “Microscopical Anatomy.” Separately, Owen reflected, pursuing Embryology, or Developmental Anatomy, “which takes a particular species in the course of

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<sup>1</sup> Owen was speaking of “homological anatomy” that “has been termed, grandiloquently, ‘Transcendental’ and ‘Philosophical;’ but every kind of anatomy ought to be so pursued as to deserve the latter epithet.” Owen, *On the Anatomy of Vertebrates*, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vi.

individual development,” was another course for a budding anatomist, as was the study of the “form and structure beyond the animals that *are* to those that *have been*” through Paleontology, one of Owen’s own specialties.<sup>3</sup>

Nestled in the midst of Owen’s list of the different categories of anatomical study was a type of anatomizing that seemed, unlike his others, in a state of flux: “Homological Anatomy.” Owen’s use of the term “Homological Anatomy,” no doubt, came from his work in defining distinctions between analogy, the study of “a part or organ in one animal which has the same function as a part of organ in another animal,” and homology, the study of “the same part or organ in different animals under every variety of form and function.”<sup>4</sup> As Devin Griffith traces in his study of analogy, Owen’s innovation in defining the difference between the two terms “was to tie the systematic relation of homology to a universal ‘archetype,’ the common, idealized form that expressed the common features of a group of homological organs.”<sup>5</sup> Owen’s homology itself “captures a kind of *formal analogy*” in bearing out “explicitly mental fictions” about such an archetype, one that Owen believed would reflect the fundamental Will of God’s design.<sup>6</sup> In *On the Anatomy*, Owen notes a resistance to categorizing this work of anatomy as “Homological.” While many anatomists were interested in comparing animal forms and structures, they were uninterested in using Owen’s more materialistic term to describe their pursuits. Instead, Owen

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>5</sup> Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy*, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 162.

admits, this kind of anatomical study “has been termed, grandiloquently, ‘Transcendental’ and ‘Philosophical’.”<sup>7</sup>

While our contemporary moment tends to define anatomizing as, first, a work of dissecting or cutting up the body and, secondarily, a practice meant “to lay open minutely; to analyze,”<sup>8</sup> Owen’s brief comment on the grandiloquence of “Philosophical Anatomy” alludes to a long-running history of anatomizing that has not always been understood as a material practice of dissection. Unlike other practices of anatomy, the “Transcendental” or “Philosophical” approach did not attempt to search for knowledge “most accurate and minute, most valuable in its application to the repair of accident, the remedy of injury and decay, and the cure of disease.” Philip Rehbock states that what came to be the “distinguishing characteristics” of philosophical anatomy were:

(a) the presupposition that a single Ideal Plan or Type (or, at most, a few such plans) lay behind the great multiplicity of visible structures in the animal and plant kingdoms, and that this Plan determined an organism’s functional capacities rather than being determined by them; (b) the further presupposition that the Ideal Plan acted as a force for the maintenance of anatomical uniformity, in opposition to the diversity-inducing (some would argue *degenerating*) force of the physical environment; (c) the belief that this *a priori* Plan, though it had no physical existence in its pure state, was nevertheless discoverable; and (d) the aspiration to discover additional concepts (‘laws’) which would

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<sup>7</sup> Owen, *On the Anatomy of Vertebrates*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> OED. “Anatomize, V.”

support and elaborate the Ideal Plan by specifying how apparent anatomical diversities may be seen as uniformities.<sup>9</sup>

Owen argues that in such an approach to anatomizing, the philosophical anatomist's "aim" for anatomy "concerns itself little, if at all, with function," or the inner-workings of the body; instead, the work of Philosophical Anatomy "led to generalisations of high import" about the nature of structure (the consideration of organizational elements) and form (the consideration of compositional elements), "beyond the reach of one who rests on final causes" such as Owen with his belief in the Will of the Creator.<sup>10</sup>

"This Seemingly So Solid Body" attempts to recover the broader idea of "Philosophical Anatomy." The nineteenth century was a period when many thinkers were evincing dissatisfaction with the idea of anatomy as a work of dissecting the body alone. In his study of Robert Owen and T.H. Huxley, Christopher Cosans has suggested that anatomy has been a "philosophical enterprise" since the birth of science; as Cosans notes, Aristotle's oldest extant accounts of dissection were as deeply interested in understanding the soul as they were in understanding the body.<sup>11</sup> Time, debate, and reflection have shaped anatomy's best ideals as a field to emphasize the more utilitarian scientific definition. Anatomists wanted to retain—in the language of transcendence and philosophy—a sense of a grander work behind the exploration of organisms' structure and form. This present work locates sites where a memory of this philosophical anatomy still lies preserved within Victorian fiction and contemporaneous scientific treatises.

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<sup>9</sup> Rehbock, "Transcendental Anatomy," 144–45.

<sup>10</sup> Owen, *On the Anatomy of Vertebrates*, vii.

<sup>11</sup> Cosans, *Owen's Ape & Darwin's Bulldog*, 17.

For authors like Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873), and George Eliot (1819-1880), the work of anatomy analogously to suggest the work of writing, highlighting questions of how to interpret and theorize narrative structure and form. We could even say that contemplation of the work of anatomy in Victorian literary fiction became a homologous replacement for a discussion about writing. When Stevenson's infamous character Dr. Henry Jekyll works at the laboratory table, he comes to "perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated" that the body is not to be understood as something concrete, but as a "trembling immateriality," with a "mist-like transience," that allows one like him to shake free of a material notion of "this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired."<sup>12</sup> Like many other fictional Victorian scientists of my study, such as *Middlemarch*'s (1872) Dr. Tertius Lydgate or *In a Glass Darkly*'s (1872) Dr. Martin Hesselius, Jekyll seems invested in a philosophical notion of anatomy. It is Jekyll's experiments with "that seemingly so solid body" that ultimately cause him to transform into the nefarious Hyde. Hyde, as the embodiment of philosophical ideals about the body, comes to "enslave[]" as much as "engage[]" the imagination of men like Mr. Utterson within the text and Stevenson's readership gripping the pages of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) outside it.<sup>13</sup> Victorian concepts of philosophical anatomy not only spoke to scientific thinkers, but to literary writers who, too, were trying to grasp the best way to anatomize. "This Seemingly So Solid Body" reflects on the reasons for philosophical anatomy's erasure from the annals of scientific history by the end of the century, puzzling, given that anatomy had figured so prominently in works of late nineteenth-century fiction.

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<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

## I. A History of Anatomy as Literary Practice

An understanding of late-Victorian anatomy requires context regarding an earlier history of anatomy leading up to the nineteenth century. The twentieth-century literary critic Northrop Frye was the first scholar to use the term “anatomy” to describe a literary genre as important to long-form prose fiction, Frye argued, as the novel, confession, or romance. According to Frye, notable anatomies included Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler* (1653), Robert Southey’s *The Doctor* (1837-47), and Lewis Carroll’s Alice books (1865 & 1872)—texts that all, in his estimation, followed in the tradition of an ancient form of Grecian satire that focused on exploring intellectual themes and attitudes through the “piling up an enormous mass of erudition” on a particular theme in an almost encyclopedic compilation.<sup>14</sup> The critic took the word ‘anatomy’ to best articulate the work of this genre from the title of Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Frye’s greatest example of the genre before Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). Frye saw Burton’s use of the term “anatomy” as central to understanding the genre’s focus, because it articulated the genre’s attempts to conduct “a dissection or analysis” of an intellectual idea, being far more descriptive than “the cumbersome and in modern times rather misleading” term “Menippean satire,” which described the genre before Frye’s intervention.<sup>15</sup>

Devon Hodges’s work on Renaissance anatomies shows that Frye’s critical renaming was certainly apropos: anatomies of all kinds flourished in the West during the Early Modern period. Alongside Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, we find works such as John Lyly’s *Euphues: Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and Thomas Nashe’s *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (1589). All such texts

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<sup>14</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 310–11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 311–12.



conflated the work of cutting into the body with the work of cutting into ideas in naming themselves anatomies, with *Anatomy of Melancholy* presenting itself most overtly as a critical reexamination of the form. Situating itself as a medical textbook on the subject of melancholia merely on its surface, Burton's text ranged far from its primary subject matter in elaborating on questions of demonology and digestion, geography and astrology, to further its exploration of the peculiar condition of the melancholic. With its encyclopedic range of references and both serious and satirical prose, *Anatomy of Melancholy* provoked readers to reconsider the work of anatomy. Instead of reiterating the idea of the anatomy as the practice of opening and cutting into the truth—getting to the core or uncovering a hidden meaning—its formal and topical composition suggested that the work of anatomy entirely departed from such close, objective observation altogether. Hodges argues that anatomists like Burton who position us to observe the process of anatomizing—searching the depths of a subject to acquire knowledge—actually reveal how anatomists tend to obliterate their subjects. A search for truth about a whole always relies on the fragmentation and dissolution of a literal body of knowledge. All anatomies promise that writers can “strip away false appearances and expose the truth,” as if peeling back layers of flesh.<sup>16</sup> However, the attempt to provide an objective, scientific approach to understanding the body always redoubles back to the decomposition of language and description.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy*, 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> Hodges calls her readers' attention to Ronald Paulson's survey of anatomy in *Theme and Structure in Swift's Tale of a Tub* (Yale 1960), where he notes that “the mass of detail with which they clutter their search for the absolute” is what makes anatomies so interesting. While Hodges interprets this as a *problem* of “totality” always leading the anatomist toward “fragmented matter,” I want to suggest that what Paulson locates as a tension between “clutter” and “detail” is the epistemological thesis underlying the anatomy: that the search for the absolute centrally involves the collection of all things in a way that flattens the hierarchy and valuing systems that would label one thing “clutter” and another “detail.” See Hodges 15 and Paulson 7.

Burton's seventeenth-century text recalled the rhetoric and methodology of an earlier, popular sixteenth-century anatomy: the Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius's series on the anatomy of man, *De humani corporis fabrica* (*On the Fabric of the Human Body*), published in the year 1543. The rise of modern medical anatomy is most often associated with the publication of Vesalius's series, which attempted to bring centuries of anatomical practice back to the work of closely analyzing the body. Prior to Vesalius's intervention, as Ernst Mayr notes, medieval medical schools taught anatomy "in a peculiarly literary way."<sup>18</sup> Great physicians of Vesalius' time tended to remove themselves from working with actual bodies. Characterizing physicians as "jackdaws" sitting "aloft on their chairs," Vesalius argues that these medical practitioners were removed from the actual work of anatomizing, "croak[ing] away with consummate arrogance" in their high chairs "about things that they have never done themselves but which they commit to memory from the books of others or which they expound to us from written descriptions" while the lowly "barber," or dissector, was given the task of cutting up the body despite being "so unskilled in languages that they cannot explain to the spectators what they have dissected" and thus prone to "hack things up for display following the instructions of a physician who has never set his hand to the dissection of a body but has the cheek to play the sailor from a textbook."<sup>19</sup> To revolutionize and modernize anatomy, Vesalius argued, the anatomist needed to first become a more flexible—we could almost say, interdisciplinary—figure: one who was as willing to put his hand into the viscera as he was to read the elevated works of philosophical literature that, during Vesalius's age, had come to define anatomy.

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<sup>18</sup> Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought*, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, li.

Though Vesalius argued for bringing medical practice back to the practical work of confronting the body, he never wholly denied the abiding understanding that anatomy was always defined by its relation to both bodies and texts. On one hand, Vesalius argued that the anatomical pedagogy of his time was backward. Anatomists preceding Vesalius were, he argued, more “absorbed in the stylistic quality of their own writing” than the material study of bodies.<sup>20</sup> Early modern anatomists relied upon knowledge of the body received from anatomical treatises “stitched together entirely from the teachings of Galen,” the Greek physician and philosopher of the Roman Empire, whom Vesalius showed to have fabricated several facts of the body, “facts” that were then passed down over the centuries.<sup>21</sup> New works on anatomy were merely ancient ideas—some entirely fictive—cut and sewn together into new bindings. Therefore, the work of anatomizing up to Vesalius’s age seemed more the work of textual interpretation in its most reductive sense—as the re-presentation of the ancient body of knowledge more than a representation of the facts of the body. Vesalius situates *De humani corporis fabrica* as an attempt “to recall this branch of natural philosophy from the dead,” the long-dead Galen.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, even as Vesalius advanced his books on anatomy as containing more accurate representations of the body and prescriptions for examining the body, he was still beholden to a longstanding tradition of anatomizing that saw its work of as much the work of writing as dissecting the human form. Indeed, as Richard Sugg suggests, Vesalius was creating a new dissective rhetoric that would sweep through Early Modern England in the century to come.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., liii.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Sugg, *Murder after Death*, 3–4.

Vesalius himself still calls upon “the assistance of the Muses” in “setting out afresh our knowledge of the parts of the human body in seven books.”<sup>24</sup> He admits that these seven books with their diagrams and texts containing the sum knowledge of the body will, most likely, replace real bodies themselves.<sup>25</sup> Though Vesalius’s books rejected the absorption in “stylistic quality” that allegedly characterized his predecessors, they were still rhetorically inflected texts themselves.

Thus, when Frye renamed the “Menippean satire” as “anatomy,” he did so in ways that reflected anatomy’s historical literary ties. Frye defines the anatomy in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) at its most “concentrated” as a type of work that “presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern,” as a type of work interested in intellectual problems and philosophical questions.<sup>26</sup> Such anatomies borrow the qualities of other genres of literature in handling “abstract ideas and theories” as one would in the form of the confession, and share many of the features of the novel, differing only by being “stylized rather than naturalistic” and “present[ing] people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.”<sup>27</sup> The result is often “the appearance of carelessness” as the texts seem mere amalgamations of knowledge, yet “the intellectual structure built up from the story makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative,” that challenged “novel-centered” and “careless readers” of fiction to take more

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<sup>24</sup> Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, liv.

<sup>25</sup> Vesalius states that his works will be “particularly useful also for those who cannot see the real things.” See *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 310.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

active roles in working through the ideas embedded in the anatomical text.<sup>28</sup> Much like the nineteenth-century concept of philosophical anatomy, Frye's description of a literary anatomy reveals an abiding concern with the question of unifying patterns; literary anatomies are as deeply invested in abstract as well as concrete thinking, as much involved in larger metaphysical questions as in material subjects. They also evince a certain optimism about the readers' capabilities to engage with the text itself. Frye's purposeful titling of his work as an anatomy of criticism perhaps suggests his own optimism regarding his readers' ability to understand the nature of his project in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Even as he articulates the characteristics of his generic categories, he emphasizes their porousness, a tendency to hybridity that reflexively reinforces his argument about the anatomy as an approach to exploring an idea.

Frye was not alone in his interest in the literary genre, the "Menippean satire," he renamed the anatomy. Mikhail Bakhtin rearticulates Frye's general points about the anatomy and also adds that an "extremely characteristic" aspect of the work involves its "confrontation of times from the point of view of the present."<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin's analysis of the genre reflects an underlying concern that the anatomy is always a self-conscious form, one that always recognizes its limitations by acknowledging its historical perspectives and its inheritances. In the anatomy's "unfettered and fantastic plots," Bakhtin states, "heroes of the absolute past, real-life figures from various eras of the historic past (for example, Alexander of Macedonia) and living contemporaries jostle one another in a most familiar way" so that the anatomy's goal seems to be "to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologues" through "experimental and provocative

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 26. Notably, Bakhtin uses the genre's original, classical name of "Menippean satire."

plots” that self-consciously mix the old and new.<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin’s sense that anatomy is entangled in practices of historiography suggests that to anatomize is to confront one’s place in history—a point that Charles Darwin and evolutionists explored in tracing the relations of bodies from different generations through anatomical study. Thus, anatomy is the form best suited to intellectual debates and foment. Bakhtin situates the anatomy’s rise during the classical era as coinciding with the rise of new religious order, Christianity, characterized as “an epoch when national legend was already in decay.”<sup>31</sup> Anatomy arises “amid the destruction of those ethical norms... in an epoch of intense struggle among numerous and heterogeneous religious and philosophical schools and movements, when disputes over ‘ultimate questions’ of worldview had become an everyday mass phenomenon among all strata of the population and took place whenever and wherever people came together.”<sup>32</sup> He may have as well been describing the great turns in the nineteenth-century, when a more secular science was making a similar argument about the national legend’s state of decay and throwing the epoch into intense struggle between religious, philosophical, and scientific schools over the “ultimate questions” about man and his being.

Where Frye and Bakhtin trace out the long history of the anatomy from its beginnings in an ancient Grecian tradition of satire through the Early Modern period to the era of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, part of my work in this project explores why authors of the Victorian era turned to the anatomy. Many of the authors I discuss begin their lives writing in more “romantic” or “novelistic” traditions—as Frye would categorize them—only to embrace “anatomical”

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

approaches in their later-life. While Frye simply notes these shifts, as in the case of George Eliot's career when he states that "the early novels of George Eliot, for instance, are influenced by the romance, and the later ones by anatomy," I locate possible reasons for why authors like Eliot shift to the anatomy.<sup>33</sup> Delving into nineteenth-century archive of scientific treatises and literary works that grappled with the definition and practice of anatomy, I uncover a lost history of anatomy, understanding that the concept of *forms* encompasses not only an understanding of literary techniques, like use of metaphor, syntax, and narrative perspective, but, as Caroline Levine argues, patterns of sociopolitical experience.<sup>34</sup>

## II. A History of Anatomy as Scientific Practice

The Victorian era is often noted for being the period when our modern understanding of humanistic and scientific disciplines solidified. The clearest example of this kind of disciplinary solidification may be found in the rise of biology, "the study of life," as a new field within the natural sciences. The term "biology" can be traced to the year 1800, when it was first used in an obscure footnote in a German medical publication and then, two years later, referenced independently by the German naturalist Gottfried Treviranus (1776-1837) and the French botanist Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829).<sup>35</sup> The historian of science William Coleman also notes that French philosopher August Comte (1798-1857) would pick up the term and famously popularize it in his *Course on Positive Philosophy* (1830-1842), as one of the six fundamental

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<sup>33</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 312.

<sup>34</sup> Levine, *Forms*, 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century*, 1.

sciences alongside mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, and sociology that defined his positive philosophy. By the end of the nineteenth-century, the term came to reorient the interests and investigations of nineteenth-century scientific investigators.<sup>36</sup> Where such investigators originally took an idiographic approach to analyzing nature in the early century—that is, an approach centered on cataloging the individual differences between different plants and animals—the biologist of the latter half of the century tended towards more nomothetic approaches to studying these bodies, which focused on finding general laws that determined the reason for differences between animals and plants.<sup>37</sup>

Most scientific thinkers exploring the natural world at the beginning of the century assumed a Christian teleology. Thus, for them, the work of dissection and collection was a way of finding examples of God’s well-ordered and timeless Will on earth. Yet biology carried within itself a new focus on issues of history and sequence that imagined nature as not beholden to a timelessness of singular Creation, but a record of history in itself. The nineteenth-century biologist increasingly found “intellectual satisfaction” in “a careful determination of antecedent conditions and ensuing consequences,” based on cosmological, geological, and now biological evidence that “progressive change was the most salient characteristic of natural phenomena”—

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<sup>36</sup> Another term for such scientific investigators is, perhaps obviously, “natural historian” or “naturalist.” However, given how frequently the term has altered to convey specific definitions over the centuries—and especially within just the nineteenth-century itself—I choose the more all-purpose “scientific investigator” to avoid confusing a post-Darwinian idea of natural history interested specifically in the *history* of biological development with an early nineteenth-century idea of natural history as the study of the three kingdoms of nature: animal, vegetable, and mineral. For a history of the term “natural history,” see Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century*, 7.



that the natural world was one that saw the effects of change over time.<sup>38</sup> This desire to articulate natural laws remote from Christian belief stemmed in large part from the work being pursued by a competing type of anatomist, who, in tracing the similarities and differences between bodies of living beings, plant and animal, began attempting to construct general laws of order from the chaos of a profound diversity of forms. These general laws required much more expansive thinking outside the traditional methodologies and affiliations that had defined medical work up to this point in history.

In many ways, these nineteenth-century anatomists were indebted not to an English tradition of empiricism staked out by the Enlightenment scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1626), but an altogether separate tradition going back to ancient Platonic and Aristotelian idealism. Plato, with his “Theory of Forms” suggested that earthly phenomena were imperfect material manifestations of true forms—ideas or essences composing the ultimate reality. This way of thinking would become significant for many Continental thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly the German *Naturphilosophen* or nature-philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1802), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854), and Johann Wolfgang van Goethe (1749-1832). In Kant’s contemplation of forms, sensory experiences alone were not enough to know the external world. Up until roughly 1800, the early work of Schelling that responded to Kantian transcendental idealism would propose a more intuitive approach to understanding nature that tried to bridge the separation between the world of appearances and things in themselves. Relying on a Platonic, organicist conception of the world, Schelling suggested that nature was, in a sense, an absolute subject. Therefore, nature’s forms were found

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

in its natural ‘predicates’; nature was “self-organizing,” both its own cause and effect.<sup>39</sup>

Goethe—though rarely heeded by the scientific thinkers of his milieu, given his background as a popular poet and literary writer—offered several contributions to the *Naturphilosophie*. He advocated for seeing Nature organized by the kind of unity suggested in Schelling’s organicist work and created a term for this unity: a “unity of plan” (sometimes translated as “unity of structure” or “unity of organization”) that suggested that a single, general plan or archetype was shared by all organisms. Evidence of this “unity of plan” could be found in the serial homology of parts—a term Owen would later use—which showed that certain basic structures were repeated in the morphology of every species. Goethe also used the analysis of parallelisms in his transcendental idealism. Stefani Engelstein suggests that Goethe’s interest in philosophical or transcendental anatomy was related to his interest in Nature’s “codifiable” and “overlapping and infinitely proliferating systems” that suggested “an excessive openness to dissection and hence,” and in literary works, like his novel *Elective Affinities* (1809), an “excessive openness” to interpretation as well.<sup>40</sup> By emphasizing the diversity of available interpretations made clear through methodological practices of anatomy, “Goethe insisted on the responsibility of naturalists to investigate and reveal their own theoretical biases, and thus to situate the subject, as

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<sup>39</sup> In S.R. Morgan’s reading of Schelling, Schelling seems to follow similar lines of thought to Alfred North Whitehead, who in his 1927-28 Gifford Lectures emphasized Plato’s tendency to compare the *kosmos* or universe with the living organism. Studying organicism within early nineteenth-century British contexts, Chris Armstrong emphasizes that organicism is “a *grounding systematics for understanding all holistic structures*” that represents “a valuable attempt to transcend the growing technicity and instrumentality of the Western tradition, by derailing the mechanistic teleology inherent in the thought of means and ends to a more open-ended model,” supposedly the model of the universe (and its composite parts) as organism. See Morgan, “Schelling and the Origins of His *Naturphilosophie*,” 31–32; Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Engelstein, *Anxious Anatomy*, 26.

well as the object, of observation broadly in its natural habitat.”<sup>41</sup> While Goethe’s transcendental idealism would remain, more or less, ignored in much of the Continent until after the 1820s, his ideas would be pivotal for the cross-disciplinary philosophical anatomists of Britain.

Nevertheless, as the history of German transcendental anatomy demonstrates, philosophy, religion, classicism, and science were mixed together to develop the field of philosophical anatomy, a science that used material study as a means to pursue metaphysical speculations and assertions.

The formation of philosophical anatomy as a field in nineteenth-century Britain also owed a debt to research that came from France, especially to the pioneering work of figures such as Marie François Xavier Bichat (1771-1802) and the two titans of comparative anatomy: Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) and Étienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire (1772-1844).<sup>42</sup> As Michel Foucault’s extended reflection on Bichat in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) suggests, Bichat was a central figure for the advancement of medicine and science at the turn of the nineteenth-century, especially for his reimagination of how we should examine bodies.<sup>43</sup> Bichat rejected a way of analyzing the body that was central to early modern and eighteenth-century medical researchers: as individual parts or organs afflicted with disease. Instead, what Bichat saw in the body was an expansive array of systems of tissue material; his articulation of the body as planes of space, according to Foucault, allowed the medical practitioner to trace the visible movement of death. Bichat’s approach to imagining the body as interconnected structures opened up ways to explain the body crucial to the French scientific thinkers after Bichat.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>42</sup> Henceforth, Étienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire will be referred to as Geoffroy.

<sup>43</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 127–29.

Toby Appel's *The Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate* (1987) provides the definitive history of rivalry and collaboration between the two French anatomists. Cuvier and Geoffroy, too, were inspired by the classical ideas of Plato—though, to different ends. As a scientist devoted to a form of natural theology as well as to best scientific practices, Cuvier was unwilling to depart from a more conservative approach to imagining the body. A better dissector and more careful practitioner of the practical elements of anatomical work, Cuvier tends to be understood as the more teleological thinker: interested in collecting facts about the function of animals as they determined its structure. Cuvier's unwillingness to speculate in any way on the implications of his analysis made Geoffroy the more "philosophical" anatomist because Geoffroy, in contrast, was more interested in the process of abstracting from studies of form. The first volume of Geoffroy's *Philosophie anatomique* or *Anatomical Philosophy* in 1818 explored the fundamental question of the uniform or universal type in ways that took analysis of the body, once again, beyond the materialist work of looking at flesh and bone.<sup>44</sup> For Geoffroy, the form and the function of different parts of the body was less interesting than the principle of connections between parts and the resemblances between animal forms, the homologies that showed the unity of composition.<sup>45</sup> He wished to go beyond the boundaries of zoological and comparative anatomical study to pursue a fundamental law of nature, the single, *ideal* structure that could be

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<sup>44</sup> Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> This is what Henry Somers-Hall argues we should see as *the* transcendental aspect of Geoffroy's work: his interest in anatomical homologies is actually an interest in a transcendental unity of composition. While Owen is more famous now for establishing a concrete definition of homology, his definition in many ways undercuts the significance of Geoffroy's turn as Owen was more beholden to Cuvierian teleology than he was to Geoffroy's transcendental leanings. See Somers-Hall, *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation*, 228.

traced throughout all vertebrate species.<sup>46</sup> The anatomists' competing ideas would come to a clash in an infamous debate around the year 1830, one which saw Cuvier the “winner” for both professional and political reasons. Appel contends that though Geoffroy “lost” both the debate and a more significant stature in French scientific history, his interest in the radical work of philosophical anatomy brought him into conversation with major literary writers of his time, including George Sand and Honoré Balzac, who drew on his ideas in their literary fiction to expose the corruptions and absurdities inherent in French scientific, religious, and political institutions.<sup>47</sup>

No doubt, Britons must have been aware that their French counterparts were mixing and transmuting literary and scientific works in this way. One of my central concerns in this project has been to provide consideration regarding the extent to which British configurations of philosophical anatomy—literary and scientific—were conscious of the bleeding between truth and fiction, bodies and spirits, as the language and practices of philosophical anatomy proliferated during the nineteenth century. Though the biologist Ernst Mayr has claimed that “[m]orphology somewhat fell into disrepute after Cuvier and Geoffroy” as a “handmaiden of (medical) physiology” or a “purely descriptive” science,<sup>48</sup> my research into turn of century Victorian Britain shows Britons bringing French and German transcendental or philosophical anatomy back with them to much effect. Men such as Owen, as well as his British contemporaries Martin Barry (1802-1855), William B. Carpenter (1813-1885), Edward Forbes

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<sup>46</sup> Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 175–77.

<sup>48</sup> Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought*, 466.

(1815-1854), John Goodsir (1814-1867), Robert Edmond Grant (1793-1874), Joseph Henry Green (1791-1863), and William Whewell (1794-1866) brought philosophical anatomy into public consciousness through their works and writing.<sup>49</sup> Such scientifically-inclined anatomists found themselves returning to their classrooms and laboratories in Edinburgh—and later, London—with radically different ideas about the connection between the body and the greater world informed by the Neoplatonic ideas of Continental scientist-philosophers. In essence, Britons would come to reform the ideas of philosophical anatomy from the transcendental idealism of the German *Naturphilosophen* and the philosophical bent of Bichat and Geoffroy's French philosophical anatomy. Rehbock suggests that anatomists' interpretations of the "philosophical" aspects of this form of anatomy implied both a preference for topics or questions concerning the history and distribution of species and, more distinctly, a methodology for scientific practice involving a priori beliefs in ideal structures.<sup>50</sup> Anatomists essentially defined this form of anatomical practice as "philosophical" to suggest anatomy was "sanctioned as a sign of professional competence, its superiority lying in its reduction of the arcane facts of morphology to a set of 'laws,' which indicated a legislated organic process."<sup>51</sup> Though Rehbock emphasizes *how* philosophical anatomy sanctioned a level of "competence" to the consideration

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<sup>49</sup> These figures are all suggested by Appel and Rehbock as central to the uplifting of philosophical anatomy. See Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 223; Rehbock, "Transcendental Anatomy," 145. The work of my study of the arrival of philosophical anatomy in Britain primarily focuses on the influence of Robert Knox, who in the 1820s effected some of the most important changes to the history of anatomical pedagogy of his time. Nonetheless, I would like to recognize that these other figures were equally significant, and many were Knox's students and interlocutors during a period when philosophical anatomy was a significant component of the scientific discourse of nineteenth-century Britain.

<sup>50</sup> Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 197.

of morphology, I suggest “philosophical” anatomy struggled with what “competence” meant in professional capacities. That idea of professionalism which suggested knowledge was gained through the atomization of knowledge was antithetical to many philosophical anatomists during the nineteenth century. The “philosophical” nature of the anatomists’ work, I show, not only suggested a competing way of interpreting the body but offered a different way of thinking about the scientist as generalist over specialist.

Notably, anatomy was not just embroiled in disputes about scientific methods and aims, but also in social attitudes toward the practices of opening up bodies. The new generation of anatomists were able to advance the study of anatomy further than practitioners of the eighteenth century because their generation saw a massive change in attitude toward the work of anatomy and in legal understandings of the body. Since the sixteenth century, during the reign of Henry the VIII, the British anatomist was restricted in his supply of fresh corpses. Only the bodies of criminals could be used for anatomical dissection; thus, anatomizing was often linked to the barbarity of capital punishment. Within this limitation, anatomists often turned to forms of grave-robbing as means to find the supplies (i.e. bodies) necessary to their practice. In popular discourse from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the work of anatomy was often seen as synonymous with criminality both because the bodies of criminals were anatomized and because the body to be anatomized was attained criminally. For example, Henry Lonsdale, the biographer of the anatomist Robert Knox, recounts the corruption of the grave-robbing system of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century as almost cancerous in its spread through the community:

The guardians of the peace, the servants of the Church, and the exacting undertakers, as well as the Pharisaical “mutes” and other parties engaged in the last rites paid to

mortality, not only connived at the doings of the Resurrectionists, but readily took their bribes. How the “well-greased” palm could change the doleful whine of the sexton’s “Amen,” and open the gates of the sacred precincts to the thief of the night! Numbers were implicated in this traffic, and possibly viewed it in the same light as Jerry Cruncher, “honest tradesmanship of an agricultooral character.”<sup>52</sup>

Talking about the historical conditions before the Anatomy Act, Lonsdale could not help intermixing Charles Dickens’ fictional representation of eighteenth-century grave-robbing in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). His half-historical and half-fictional account of the corruption of the time speaks to the sensationalist aspect of anatomical work. For many, the anatomist was a caricature villain, part of a vast network of evil-doers. Yet despite the negative association of the “Resurrectionist” as morally corrupt body-snatcher, the public was, as Caroline McCracken-Flesher argues, well aware that there needed to be a change made to accommodate requirements for bodily subjects for research.<sup>53</sup>

The Anatomy Act of 1832 was ratified by British Parliament in order to resolve what was alleged to have become a crisis related to the work of the anatomist at the beginning of the Victorian era. This history of the connection between the dark underworld of Resurrectionists and anatomical research has been traced out thoroughly in recent years by scholars such as A.W. Bates, McCracken-Flesher, and Ruth Richardson.<sup>54</sup> As these scholars note, the end to these more overt crimes came with the passing of the Anatomy Act, some 5 years before Victoria would

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<sup>52</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 60.

<sup>53</sup> McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*, 24–25.

<sup>54</sup> See Bates, *The Anatomy of Robert Knox*; McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*; Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*.



ascend as queen. The Act made three explicit points about the work of anatomy. First, the study of anatomy was now recognizably and inextricably tied to the advancement of modern, medical science. Second, the supply of subjects to anatomize (i.e. human bodies) was recognizably insufficient to supply the needs of anatomists and medical professionals. And, third, such shortage of supply had resulted in “divers great and grievous crimes”—specifically, murder—“for the single object of selling for such purposes the bodies of the persons so murdered.”<sup>55</sup> The Act alluded to the events of the Burking Affair of 1828, when the public was made aware that two would-be Resurrectionists, William Burke and William Hare, had turned to murder to more easily supply fresh bodies to local Edinburghian anatomists. The combination of pragmatism and scandal surrounding the need to ratify such an act marked, forever, the work of anatomizing as a necessary evil that had to be controlled by sovereign right.

However, the Act not only came to determine the best way to mete out resources and organize certification for a burgeoning class of trained professional researchers, it also participated in the transformation of what it meant to anatomize in the nineteenth century. As Tina Young Choi suggests, “[i]n attempting to reinscribe the dead body within the labor and market economies of the living” the Act “pressed the social potential of the body to its logical extreme,” making dead bodies participants once more in the living world as commodity.<sup>56</sup> Ruth Richardson, analyzing the Act’s effects, shows how the Act’s consequence was to “single out the very poor for dissection,” since the Act stipulated the supply of bodies would come from the “unclaimed” remains of the hospitals and workhouses, which resulted in “[l]ess than *half a*

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<sup>55</sup> Great Britain, *The Anatomy Act, 1832 ; The Pharmacy Act, 1852 ; The Pharmacy Act, 1869 ; The Anatomy Act, 1871*, 902.

<sup>56</sup> Choi, *Anonymous Connections*, 106.

*percent* [of remains coming] from anywhere other than institutions that housed the poor.”<sup>57</sup> The Act, in effect, targeted the poor and working class to reimagine their bodies in new and startling ways, classifying bodies as capital to be used for the benefit of the state. This form of control, in many ways, reflects the imperialist “necropolitics” defined by Achille Mbembé. That is, the ways colonial power abroad and at home subjugate life to the power of death are parallel. That subjugation of the bodies of the poor creates what Mbembé calls “death-worlds,” where the poor and working class of Britain are forced into “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*,”<sup>58</sup> as objects that can only, finally, confer a ‘value’ at the moment when their bodies are opened up to add to the state’s accumulation of scientific-medical knowledge. One might say that following the Anatomy Act, anatomy was no longer directly affiliated with criminality, but with political economy. The violence behind anatomy remained but was now obscured by legal sanction. What would come from the Act and what the Act had to say about the work of anatomizing situated anatomy as a necessary evil for the cause of medical science: a practice unsavory, but necessary *specifically* to the advancement of medicine. Arguably, the Act’s explicit claims about what anatomizing was understood to be would result in the further insulation of scientific discourse from the language of the every day. As the Act came to define the value of anatomizing, who could be an anatomist, and the dangers of the practice—ossifying the term anatomy itself—the work of the scientific thinker became ever more inflexible.

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<sup>57</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*, 214–15, 271.

<sup>58</sup> Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 39–40.

## Arguments for a Philosophical Anatomy

A reflection on the subject of anatomy *and the Victorian era* is, on one hand, odd, given the history of scientific and literary anatomy that I have outlined. Focusing on an earlier Romantic period, in contrast, would seem more apropos. A Romantic configuration of anatomy would allow one to focus on a period contemporaneous to the scientific anatomical work that was taking off in the 1820s and 1830s. For example, denouncing “Our meddling intellect” that “Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things,” the long-lived Romantic poet William Wordsworth’s poem on anatomization, “The Tables Turned” (1798), condemns reader and writer alike for anatomizing when it states: “We murder to dissect.”<sup>59</sup> Though arguing for the benefit of returning to the natural world around us (as opposed to the dissecting table), Wordsworth’s poem is an interesting example of how the discourse of anatomy repeatedly underlines the relation between bodily and textual analysis. Like many literary models of the philosophical anatomist, Wordsworth’s poem reasons that the ways we anatomize bodies and the ways in which we approach texts are analogous. Just as the anatomist cuts into, cuts up, and catalogues the different parts of the corporeal body, writers and readers similarly slice in and through the textual body as part of their hermeneutic practices. Wordsworth’s poem presents this work as a troubled one and Wordsworth seems, in his poem, more critical of anatomizing as a primarily materialist practice—perhaps influenced by the pre-Victorian era sense that anatomizing was linked to a more unsavory, amoral approach to gaining knowledge. When he argues that “One impulse from a vernal wood/ May teach you more of man,/ Of moral evil and of good,/ Than all the sages can,” the analysis of text, like the anatomizing of a body, involves what Wordsworth sees as useless

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<sup>59</sup> Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned,” ll. 26–28.

“toil and trouble.”<sup>60</sup> At best, anatomizing a text is “a dull and endless strife” controlled by “mean preacher[s]”; otherwise, it results in the “murder” of its object of study, which often becomes mangled in the process of its dissection.<sup>61</sup> In his poem, the work of anatomy remains remote from an appreciation of the natural world; indeed, the study of the body, like the reading of the book, seems almost entirely removed from contemplation of Nature altogether.

Wordsworth was not alone in his Romantic depiction of the violent practices of textual and corporeal dissection. Perhaps more obviously, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is the first text that comes to mind when thinking of the problem of anatomy during the nineteenth century. The titular doctor who dares to create life from the anatomized bodies of the dead snatched from the grave is inspired to do so after reading scientific works by Early Modern thinkers including Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus. Victor Frankenstein, like Wordsworth’s reader searching through barren leaves, anatomizes scientific texts and snatched bodies in equally perverse and selfish ways. As a result of this poor conflation of ideas and practices, the anatomized body of the Adamic Creature that Frankenstein unleashes upon the world is both destructive and pitiful. The Creature’s mixed-up beliefs and his composite body, alongside Shelley’s nested texts of the Creature’s narrative, Frankenstein’s narrative, and Captain Walton’s frame narrative, suggest in literal and figurative ways the mixed-media literary genre of the anatomy described by Frye and Bakhtin. However, Shelley here evinces a kind of ambivalence to the actual practice of anatomizing, as she engages in the same kind of anatomizing for which she rebukes Frankenstein. Shelley Jackson’s 1995 reworking of Mary Shelley’s novel—*Patchwork Girl*—as a hypertext work of electronic literature takes Shelley’s formal anatomical leanings to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 21–24, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., ll. 14, 9.

their logical conclusion: locating the work of anatomizing as a work of assemblage or concatenation, as creative as much as it is destructive.<sup>62</sup>

The clearest link between Romantic literature and philosophical anatomy may be found in the history of young Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who studied at the University of Göttingen—the center of *naturphilosophisch* thought—in 1798 and 1799. There, Coleridge read deeply into the works of Kant and Schelling, whose ideas he borrowed heavily for *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and also studied physiology under the influential naturalist and anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), whose later works in comparative anatomy and the classification of human races were foundational for nineteenth-century racial science. Coleridge’s exploration of transcendental idealism and anatomy did not end there. He had befriended a founding member of the English Swedenborgian society, Charles Augustus Tulk (1772-1832), at a young age and, through Tulk, came to read the mystic treatises on philosophical anatomy by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772)—one of the principal anatomists I study in this work. According to records of letters sent to Tulk, later published in the Swedenborgian periodical *The New Jerusalem Magazine* in 1841, Coleridge had read Swedenborg’s *Regnum Animale* (*The Animal Kingdom*, 1755-1745) and *De cultu et amore Dei* (*The Worship and Love of God*, 1745) in the original Latin around the year 1827. In his letters, Coleridge opines “I remember nothing in Lord Bacon superior, few passages equal, either in depth of thought or in richness, dignity, and felicity of diction, or in the weightiness of the truths contained [in these transcripts].”<sup>63</sup> His thinking about the nature of text and the significance of

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<sup>62</sup> See Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*.

<sup>63</sup> Coleridge, “Coleridge’s View of Swedenborg,” 471.

studying the body could be traced to those early encounters with a transcendental anatomy in Germany.

Undoubtedly, there are many more examples of anatomy at work in the Romantic era. Tim Marshall and Janis McLarren Caldwell trace anatomical subjects in Shelley's *Frankenstein* creating links between Shelley's novel and the Anatomy Act as well as debates in vitalism—and, in Caldwell's case, have explored Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836) as a text that interested Richard Owen for its anatomical inclinations.<sup>64</sup> Yet what intrigues me most is why anatomy became significant again during its last gasp. Much of my study focuses on works written in the 1870s and 80s, when the actual work of anatomy in the scientific field changed following the advent of more precise technology and changes of emphases in the field toward more atomized studies. Despite a long history of anatomizing that emphasized, always, a connection between the philosophical, literary, and scientific significance of the knowledge anatomy uncovered, the Victorian era saw the slow dissolution of that multi-disciplinary ideal of anatomy as work of imagination as much as analysis. Rehbock counts the heyday of philosophical anatomy in Britain from 1830-1860.<sup>65</sup> Philosophical anatomists would slowly fade from the limelight of the history of science during the same period when Darwinian discourse about natural selection and evolution came to the fore, establishing in the latter half of the nineteenth century its hegemony in the fields we now call biology and zoology and the health sciences. It is surprising then, that the authors of my study were writing about philosophical anatomy decades after philosophical anatomy had more or less lost out to Darwinism. James

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<sup>64</sup> See Marshall, *Murdering to Dissect*; Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.

<sup>65</sup> Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists*, 6.

Paradis and Thomas Postlewait have argued that this might be accounted for as a response to the rise of professionalization. That is, Victorian writers were attempting to “preserve the generalist spirit of knowledge, seen against the powerful trend towards specialization” in discussing science and its cultural significance within literary works.<sup>66</sup> While many of the writers of this study note changes and major historical shifts in scientific practice and cultural understanding, their efforts are intriguing because they not only discuss the sociopolitical conditions of formal study, but continually remind the reader of the earliest literary, spiritual, and mystical senses of the work of anatomy as the study of form. Thus, a central question motivating my study of philosophical anatomy during the Victorian era was what authors were trying to preserve in these last few texts about former great anatomists of their time.

A literary and scientific study of philosophical anatomy like “This Seemingly So Solid Body,” is indebted to the foundations in literature and science studies made by scholars such as Gillian Beer, George Levine, and Sally Shuttleworth, who have illustrated that the disparate “two cultures” (to borrow the much, and perhaps unfairly, maligned C.P. Snow’s term) of science and literature were, in fact, “one” during the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> While scholars tend to focus on the impact of scientific thought upon literary expression, Beer, Levine, and Shuttleworth have tended to find less unidirectional exchanges of ideas. In exposing the ways in which ideas travel

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<sup>66</sup> Paradis and Postlewait, *Victorian Science and Victorian Values*, ix.

<sup>67</sup> Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots*, Levine’s *Darwin and the Novelists*; and Shuttleworth’s *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science* have long been recognized as seminal texts for Victorian literature and science studies, with George Eliot notably at the center of many of these studies. Beer’s essay on “Translation or Transformation” in *Open Fields* and George Levine’s introduction to the essay collection *One Culture* contain the most concrete critical challenges to Snow’s “two culture” myth. See Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*; Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*; Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*; Snow, *The Two Cultures*; Beer, *Open Fields*; Levine, “One Culture: Science and Literature.”

back and forth between intellectual spheres, I am traveling along Beer's vision of the two-way traffic between science and literary discourses now quite familiar to scholars of literary *and* scientific studies bent. However, this work of literary criticism also serves in a different capacity as a counter-history of science in the vein of Appel or Adrian Desmond's studies of nineteenth-century science: I am reviving a lost history of science preserved in literary fiction. In the process of recovering philosophical anatomy in Victorian fiction within this study, I recognize that I rarely examine works of "responsible" science, but instead turn to what Desmond categorizes as "angry, dissident views" of a "science to change society" that was often shadowed by deep flaws in both rigor and methodology.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, "philosophical anatomy" may have faded from popular vocabulary during the turn into the twentieth century in large part because the scientific work was discredited by younger generations, suggesting it no longer seemed promising or relevant to contemporary debates.

I am not interested in the facts that science has produced, but what has been categorized as false, as fiction, because those bad fictions still have a deep hold on our contemporary understandings of the world in which we live. The history of science that I am interested in is, admittedly, all of the wrong kind. Looking to figures who were praised and punished for their dissident views and cross-disciplinary exchanges, such as Geoffroy, I, too, am insinuating myself into "the radical underworld" of secular anatomy schools and radical Nonconformist colleges central to Appel's and Desmond's studies of nineteenth-century scientific communities.<sup>69</sup> I am not interested in the best, luminous scientific geniuses, but often their foils: Robert Knox (1791-1862), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), Xavier Bichat (1771-1802). Some of these men were

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<sup>68</sup> Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



charlatans, hypocrites, or tragically short-sighted, more like dead ends as opposed to great turns in the history of science, but never central to the history of science in the same way they were central to certain Victorian plots. Though some of what I study here includes truly radiant works of Literature with a capital L, many of the works I look at seem an author's clumsy first drafts—often, because they are. As much as I explore more canonical works, such as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* or Eliot's much-referenced *Middlemarch*, I am interested in works that have failed to garner much critical study or public sympathy, that are themselves lost anatomies of narrative fiction. This is why I look to Stevenson's earlier writing on anatomy, "The Body Snatcher" (1884), and Eliot's late work of literary anatomy *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), as well as unconventional works, such as Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). Their experiments in anatomical form and the possibility of narrative indicate broader horizons to come. They, of course, anticipate Modernist forms, but only through reflecting and refracting back ancient configurations of knowledge and knowing.

The first chapter of my dissertation studies how Robert Louis Stevenson changed his approach to literary writing in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) after considering the value of anatomizing and philosophical anatomy in writing his short story, "The Body Snatcher" (1884). In "The Body Snatcher," Stevenson uses the real history of the Scottish anatomist Dr. Robert Knox, infamous for his involvement in the Burke and Hare murders, to write what has long been regarded as a venomous denunciation of professional medical men and their willingness to prey on the bodies of the poor. However, little critical attention has been given to the arc of Knox's scientific legacy to which Stevenson alludes in "The Body Snatcher": Knox's influential teaching of philosophical anatomy. I analyze Knox's theories of philosophical anatomy alongside the essays on fiction Stevenson composed during the five-year period

between when he began writing “The Body Snatcher” and when he published *Jekyll and Hyde*—“The Morality of the Profession of Letters” (1881), “A Gossip on Romance” (1882) and “A Humble Remonstrance” (1884)—to reveal Stevenson’s more ambivalent response to Knox, whose idealistic vision of philosophical anatomy Stevenson genuinely appreciates. This connection explains why Stevenson spoke so critically of “The Body Snatcher” and why he returns to the anatomist’s dissecting rooms to expound “transcendental” ideas of the bodily and literary forms in *Jekyll and Hyde*. More significantly, Knox’s influence explains how Stevenson comes to create an approach to writing that borrows directly from Knox’s theories of anatomizing from his scientific treatises.

In my second chapter, I explore why Emanuel Swedenborg’s early scientific treatises of philosophical anatomy were so deeply imbricated in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). Presented as a series of supernatural case studies set within a Swedenborgian cosmology, the stories within *In a Glass Darkly* vacillate between spiritualist and materialist explanations for the presence of specters haunting the text. I bring attention to Le Fanu’s complex meditation on the ethics of writing that stems from his critical reflections on the polymath scientist-cum-spiritualist Emmanuel Swedenborg’s theories of philosophical anatomy. Part of my chapter attends closely to how Le Fanu is responding directly to the translation and representation of Swedenborg in the Victorian era editions of Swedenborgian scientific work collected, edited, and translated by the English surgeon James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-1899). While Wilkinson is forgotten now, Le Fanu immortalizes him—and critiques him—through his representation of a fictional editor of *In a Glass Darkly*. The larger part of my chapter argues for an understanding of *In a Glass Darkly* as a work obsessed with what it means to anatomize. I show that Le Fanu repudiates Swedenborg’s limited approach to anatomizing

bodies and worlds. I reassess Le Fanu's work through a historical analysis of his scientific engagements with Swedenborg's full scope of eighteenth-century ideas to argue that *In a Glass Darkly* presents a holistic, formalist approach to constructing literary anatomies that recognizes anatomizing's simultaneous materialist and spiritualist inclinations.

My third chapter contextualizes George Eliot's depiction of the French anatomist Xavier Bichat in *Middlemarch* (1872) in order to contend that Eliot takes as much interest in Bichat's contemplations of the hermeneutic goals of philosophical anatomy as in the binding metaphor of his tissue theory that supposedly serves as the topical and formal metaphor for her novel. Canonical interpretations of *Middlemarch* emphasize the import of Eliot's metaphor of a society structured by tissue-like webs of connection and her novel's tissue-like structure. My reading, on the other hand, delineates how *Middlemarch* contains an underlying ambivalence toward the tissue-like structure of the novel through the work's significant ambivalence to Bichat's tissue theory. Reading Bichat's *Anatomie générale* (1801) alongside *Middlemarch*, I reveal how Eliot continually references Bichat's scientific treatises on philosophical anatomy to explain Eliot's unease with the tissue-like structure of her novels, leading to her turn away from this structure in her later career with her last complete work of fiction, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879). Noting that *Impressions* takes up the literary form of the anatomy as described by Frye and Bakhtin, I conclude by suggesting Eliot's encounter with philosophical anatomy shapes her late turn from the realist novel to a modernistic literary anatomy.

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## **CHAPTER 2: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANATOMY OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**

A chilling murder was committed on a dreary Halloween night in 1828, one so sensational that the citizens of Edinburgh were shaken to their cores by the revelations that came in its aftermath. For months, residents of Edinburgh were embroiled in speculation about the charges of complicity in the murders of sixteen individuals which fell upon one of the city's most well-known scientific luminaries. Doctor Robert Knox (1791-1862), the luminary in question, was at the time a leading teacher of anatomy in this principal European center of anatomical study. Yet after the body of a local woman named Margaret Docherty was found in his dissecting rooms, Knox became inextricably linked to the infamous "body snatchers" William Burke and William Hare who had murdered Docherty in cold blood. As investigators would discover, Burke and Hare had found means to profit from the sale of fresh bodies to local anatomy schools. However, rather than stealing corpses from fresh graves, as many other body snatchers did, Burke and Hare murdered Docherty, among several other working and lower-class locals. "The Burking affair," as it was called, exposed to public censure a long-standing underground, criminal economy of grave-robbing and "resurrection men."

As the English physician Henry Lonsdale wrote in an 1870 biography of his former teacher Robert Knox, despite Knox's acquittal in the murders, the story of Knox's involvement in the "Burking affair" came to dominate the Scottish imagination. Peddlers

“inundat[ed] the villages and hamlets” of the country with “piquant ‘broadsides’ and the ribald ballad” flagrantly linking Knox’s name to Burke and Hare.<sup>1</sup> As Lonsdale recounts, if one looked to “the corners of streets, at the mouths of narrow wynds, and issuing from lairs of iniquity,” one would find “women half nude, half drunk, and more than half savage, [standing] in groups, clamorously egging on both men and lads to act a desperate part towards Knox.”<sup>2</sup> Even Scottish children sang rhymes of Burke and Hare “wi’ a body in a box/ [g]aun to Doctor Knox.”<sup>3</sup> Lonsdale’s disdain for this depiction of a villainous Knox no doubt arose from his personal scorn for a class of men and women he saw as “half savage,” as well as from his biased reverence for his former teacher. However, his account of what became of Knox’s reputation, following that fateful Halloween night, reveals the prominence of the Knoxian narrative within a sensational Scottish oral history. Even Lonsdale himself, as Knox’s advocate, could not resist mixing up the sensational fiction with the facts of the story in telling Knox’s tale: his biography of Knox frequently digresses to consider the Shakespearian, and sometimes Shandian, tragedy of Knox’s life and makes frequent references to Burke and Hare, and all their ilk, as fellows to Jerry Cruncher from Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. The full Scottish children’s rhyme “specimen,” as transcribed by Lonsdale:  
 Burke an’ Hare  
 Fell down the stair,  
 Wi’ a body in a box  
 Gaun to Doctor Knox.

<sup>4</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 60.



Undoubtedly, Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher" (1884) is one of the most famous retellings of that Knoxian narrative. Stevenson's short story opens with an account of an unnamed narrator who witnesses a serendipitous reunion between a former medical student and alcoholic named Fettes and his erstwhile colleague, a now famous London doctor named Wolfe Macfarlane. The narrative focuses on an earlier period in the careers of both men, when Fettes and Macfarlane worked as sub-assistants to Mr K—, "a certain extramural teacher of anatomy" known for being "at the top of his vogue" in the city of Edinburgh.<sup>5</sup> As pompous young anatomy students, Fettes and Macfarlane accept what they recognize as the murdered victims of local body snatchers for Mr K—'s dissecting room, eventually becoming murderers and graverobbers themselves. Stevenson's thinly-veiled "Mr K—" alludes directly to the real Robert Knox, who was similarly "at the top of his vogue" in the city of Edinburgh at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though Stevenson was born several decades after the events of the "Burking affair," as Ruth Richardson notes, he would have been quite aware of Knox's history: not only had Stevenson "been raised by a generation whose childhoods had been shadowed by body snatching and burking," but also "one of his uncles had actually trained under Knox himself."<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, therefore, would have been conscious not only of the popular depiction of Knox's complicity in the "Burking affair," but also of the physician's reputation as one of the leading lights of anatomical training in Edinburgh.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stevenson, "The Body Snatcher," 81.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson, "Robert Louis Stevenson's The Body Snatcher," 413.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Knox was first among a number of individuals including William B. Carpenter, Richard Owen, and William Whewell, bringing philosophical anatomy to Britain in the 1830s. He synthesized French and German understandings of "philosophical anatomy,"

Criticism of “The Body Snatcher” tends to emphasize Stevenson’s distinctly negative attitudes towards “cold, light, and selfish” anatomists.<sup>8</sup> As Patrick Scott persuasively asserts, “The Body Snatcher” is Stevenson’s jab at the medical profession’s clear collusion in the body trade. Stevenson’s short story pointedly “redirect[s] blame for Edinburgh’s most famous murders, from criminality to respectability,” from the body snatchers to the anatomists.<sup>9</sup> Studies like Scott’s are essential for understanding the anxieties surrounding the professionalization of science during the nineteenth century, yet more critical attention needs to be given to the particularity of the biographical persona at the center of Stevenson’s work: Robert Knox. While Knox’s legacy has become the subject of several recent studies in the history of science, including A.W. Bates’ *The Anatomy of Robert Knox* (2010), Lisa Rosner’s *The Anatomy Murder* (2010), and Richardson’s authoritative *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (2000), fuller exploration of the connection between Knox and Stevenson illuminates a larger issue: the complex entanglement of anatomizing and ethics. Whereas scholars such as Caroline McCracken-Flesher and Julia Reid have studied how Stevenson’s representations of Knox throughout his oeuvre reflect prevailing skepticism towards scientific professionals, further attention reveals that Stevenson’s views transformed over the course of his writing career following his encounters with Knox.

This chapter uncovers the nuances of Stevenson’s critique of Knox in “The Body Snatcher,” focusing on the specifics of Knox’s career in philosophical, or transcendental,

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stemming from the Cuvier-Geoffroy debate and Goethe’s *Naturphilosophen*, to develop a British philosophical anatomy. Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 223.

<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 72.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, “Anatomizing Professionalism,” 114–15.

anatomy prior to the “Burking affair.” When we attend to Knox’s impact on the development of philosophical anatomy in nineteenth-century contexts, “The Body Snatcher” becomes far more than a neat tale revealing the exploitative work of the professional class. My focus on Stevenson’s interest in Knox and anatomy joins in larger efforts by scholars including Allen MacDuffie and Reid to counter dismissive accounts of Stevenson’s scientific interests, accounts that reduce his scientific engagements to mere dilettantism.<sup>10</sup> Reid, particularly, has shown that Stevenson was in “creative dialogue” with evolutionary scientists with whom he both agreed and disagreed, thereby informing my study of how Stevenson pursued an equally “creative dialogue” with the work of Robert Knox.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, I trace Stevenson’s position on anatomizing over a five-year period: from 1881, when he began writing “The Body Snatcher,” to 1886, when he published *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Analyzing the Scottish anatomist Dr. Robert Knox’s radical theories of philosophical anatomy alongside the fictional legacy of Knox depicted in “The Body Snatcher” reveals how and why Stevenson changed his attitude toward Knox and anatomizing over the course of his authorial career. Stevenson, I suggest, instrumentalized Knox’s theory of philosophical anatomy in “The Body Snatcher” for his own purposes, but over the next several years came to express his remorse for that instrumentalization in his essays on fiction such as

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<sup>10</sup> MacDuffie notes that most critical discussions of the role of science in Stevenson's novel tend to oversimplify its place in Stevenson's thinking, “to describe it as ‘Science,’ as a general cultural phenomenon that, most seem to agree, is indicted for overreaching, for presuming to master nature” “Irreversible Transformations,” 1. As Reid suggests, the relative neglect or dismissal of Stevenson’s scientific engagement by interdisciplinary critics is “part of a pattern of critical denigration which began soon after [Stevenson’s] death” *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle*, 6.

“The Morality of the Profession of Letters” (1881), “A Gossip on Romance” (1882) and “A Humble Remonstrance” (1884). Stevenson’s essays on writing and the ethics of his profession as an author outlines what he recognized to be the value of Knox’s ideas, which he sublimated under the scandalous story of exploitation in “The Body Snatcher.” After years of contemplating the import of philosophical anatomy, I argue, Stevenson attempted to reform the Knoxian narrative in “The Body Snatcher” through his novel *Jekyll and Hyde*.<sup>12</sup> By revising the story of philosophical anatomy and philosophical anatomists like Dr. Robert Knox, Stevenson ultimately developed a way of writing that evoked the best parts of the philosophical anatomist’s approach in a literary anatomy. As Oliver Buckton notes, “the reanimated corpse” is a “vital source of narrative energy” for the peripatetic, “cruising” Stevenson in *Treasure Island* (1883), *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), *The Ebb-Tide* (1894) and, centrally, in *The Wrong Box* (1889).<sup>13</sup> I turn to Stevenson’s understanding of the debates surrounding philosophical anatomy to explain a different turn: the author’s interest in a specific reanimated corpse: the resurrected Knox.

## **I. Knox, the Philosophical Anatomist**

According to Lonsdale, Knox’s legacy should have been recognition as the “admirable pioneer” of “philosophical anatomy,” sometimes also called “transcendental

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<sup>12</sup> Caroline McCracken-Flesher argues the opposite. She is also interested in how “Stevenson took another deeper detour through England and anatomy, this time entering by the doctor’s back door—in the neighborhood of Henry Jekyll,” but she states that this is because Stevenson emphatically does not regret his work (101). In thinking about the value of philosophical anatomy as expressed in the essays Stevenson produced, I offer a counterargument to McCracken-Flesher.

<sup>13</sup> Buckton, *Cruising with Robert Louis Stevenson*, 35–36.

anatomy,” which during the turn into the nineteenth-century “was then considered ‘French anatomy’.”<sup>14</sup> Despite Lonsdale’s tribute to Knox as a major pioneer of medical science, few contemporary historians would be able to clearly define what Lonsdale meant in referring to “philosophical anatomy.” Philip Rehbock understates the case when he writes that “[s]traightforward unambiguous definitions of [philosophical anatomy or] ‘transcendental anatomy’ are rarely to be found either in dictionaries or in the literature of those who claimed to practice it,” though most scholars agree that philosophical anatomists were interested in identifying an overarching unity of form revealed through the study of bodily structure.<sup>15</sup> According to the scientific thinker G. H. Lewes, philosophical anatomy was a “philosophical Method” of approaching anatomical study that operated on the belief that all organisms are constructed in a “uniform plan,” which could be revealed through the practices of comparative anatomy.<sup>16</sup> That is, philosophical anatomists thought of the body not just as an object to be opened up and contemplated, but specifically as a means to envision a fundamental network of relations among all living things as they were connected to a shared, universal structure. “Philosophical anatomy” was, then, a hermeneutic method for studying life with ethical and constructive ends; to anatomize philosophically is to search for likenesses and connection, and the philosophical anatomist was concerned with the search for sympathies across not only living beings, but also more cosmic forces.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 131, 122.

<sup>15</sup> Rehbock, “Transcendental Anatomy,” 144.

<sup>16</sup> Lewes, *The Life of Goethe*, 344–46.

Knox's professed objective in pursuing philosophical anatomy "was to explain in a connected chain the phenomena of the living material world... to trace a plan of creation, and to guess at that plan."<sup>17</sup> Knox had been among a few British scientific thinkers to go to Paris in the heyday of comparative anatomical studies. He met both Georges Cuvier and the father of French philosophical anatomy, Étienne Geoffroy Saint Hilaire, in their prime during his time in Paris and named the two professional rivals as his personal heroes.<sup>18</sup> He devoted a book, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists: A Biographical and Philosophical Study* (1852), to explicating the parallel lives and labors of the two anatomists and enshrined them alongside great artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Michel Angelo, and Raphael.<sup>19</sup>

Of the two, Knox favored Geoffroy more than Cuvier. Cuvier was the man whom Knox believed established the significance of anatomy to the science of the organic world. Cuvier established a "history of creation," by creating "a *demonstration* of the unity of all organic beings from the beginning to the end—the past, present, and future—

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<sup>17</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, n. 246.

<sup>18</sup> What this present study must elide is Robert Knox's other pertinent anatomical heroes: Xavier Bichat and, more significantly, the scientific and literary experimenter, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Knox was among the first to synthesize Goethe's *Naturphilosophie*-inflected ideas with Cuvier and Geoffroy's. Though Goethe was clearly aware of the French thinkers, it was not clear how aware Cuvier and Geoffroy were aware of Goethe's more obscure work in Germany, as Toby Appel's study of the Cuvier-Geoffroy debates well show. That being said, Knox is very attentive to Goethe, see Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, 12, 92; Knox, *Man: His Structure and Physiology*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Evelleen Richards marks that Charles Darwin was a close reader of Knox's *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, as Darwin cited that text, as well as Knox's *The Races of Men*, with obvious fluency in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). See Note on Richards, "The 'Moral Anatomy' of Robert Knox," 375.

the discovery of the true relation of that which has been to that which is, and without doubt, to that which is to be; a new cosmogony,” or theory regarding the origin of the universe.<sup>20</sup> However, Knox viewed Cuvier as merely a stepping-stone in the illumination of anatomy’s relationship to science, philosophy, and art. Knox’s true hero was Geoffroy, whom he believed showed an admirable desire to trace that “history of the progress of the human mind from error to truth, the discovery of which [Knox] presume[d] to be the only rational end of human existence.”<sup>21</sup> Knox disdained Cuvier’s use of institutional clout against his rivals, as well as the Frenchman’s legendary aversion to theorizing of any kind, including his own; to Knox, Cuvier had set the tone for uplifting “fact,” no matter how trivial, while shunning “theories” without reason.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Knox admired Geoffroy for exploring the theoretical implications of anatomical work. Geoffroy rejected the teleological views of Cuvier, who insisted on a strict biological determinism where function determined form.<sup>23</sup> Knox referenced Geoffroy consistently throughout his many works on anatomy, and often went so far as to criticize Cuvier, despite Cuvier’s wider popularity among scientific thinkers. Within his own writing, Knox established Geoffroy as the most important anatomist for the nineteenth century, as the man who took Cuvier’s idea of the history of creation and “startled the scientific and thinking world.”<sup>24</sup> To Knox, Geoffroy was “the great theorist” who also “endeavor[s] to

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<sup>20</sup> Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, x, 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> Rehbock, “Transcendental Anatomy,” 149.

<sup>24</sup> Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, x.

see in Nature one system; and connecting man with the organic world, the existing organic world with the past and with the planetary system, that past system with the universal, endeavor thus to discover in these relations the great problem of Man's Creation."<sup>25</sup> Knox carried this idea of the two anatomists into his classroom. He attempted to inspire his students to see their work as not just practical, but "universal" and "planetary."

Philosophical anatomy of the kind pursued by Knox and Geoffroy had a much larger interdisciplinary impact in its consideration of "transcendental" laws of organization; it questioned what Toby Appel calls "the essence of science," and particularly tried to instantiate the essence of science in "ideas" as opposed to "positive facts," which Knox characterized as only the building blocks of knowledge production.<sup>26</sup> Knox was particularly concerned with the ways in which science instrumentalized facts, and scientific thinkers focused on "utility" over the grander philosophical, and "transcendental," possibilities of their works. "With man, savage or civilized, all is utility! To the wide expansive ocean he grudges its limits, calling it the unprofitable, the untillable sea," Knox rants in his consideration of *Great Anatomists*.<sup>27</sup> Knox only sees appalling and futile destruction in such a pursuit of "utility"-based scientific exploration. He mourns the possibility that:

If it will not, or cannot, come within the pale of domesticity for which Nature, it seems, did not intend it, the animal so offending becomes an

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>26</sup> Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, 8.



object of pursuit; man devotes it to destruction. Nature and her works are nothing to him. And should any compunctious feelings arrest for a moment his hand, staying the wide-spread desolation springing up around him, he is warned by unerring instinct of the tenure on which he holds disposition on the globe—destroy and live, spare and perish.<sup>28</sup>

Knox invocation of such apocalyptic imagery shows how ambivalent, even antagonistic, he felt toward a human-centered and material science. For Knox, being a philosophical anatomist meant that one was always trying to push beyond the boundaries of what science should do and be.

His vision of anatomical work was steeped in developing scientific imagination. What Knox meant by philosophical or transcendental was “but a form of descriptive anatomy on the human mind.”<sup>29</sup> His contemporary peers were “occupied with individual facts, disjointed details, or observations mechanically grouped together” in ways that disavowed the place of imagination in scientific work.<sup>30</sup> As Lonsdale stated, Knox “wished anatomy to be regarded, not as a heap of ultimate facts more or less isolated and detached, but as a consistent and rational science, each instance of which has an obvious relation to every other in the series.”<sup>31</sup> Among his students, Lonsdale argues that the motto of the dissecting theatre was “Knox *primus et incomparabilis*,” for Knox was not only a pioneer of anatomy in Britain, but distinctive for introducing “a *philosophy* in the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>31</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 248.

very manner of his teaching” that “opened out new channels of inquiry to his students, and developed a broader basis of anatomical observations.”<sup>32</sup> Knox established, in his own words, the idea that the anatomist was not simply a cataloger of the parts of the human body, for him “[t]he human mind, oppressed by conventionalism, was unequal to describe simply ‘the anatomy of man,’” and with the rise of the anatomist “[a]t last appeared the man, gifted with the *desire to know the unknown*.”<sup>33</sup> More succinctly, Knox saw his work as anatomist as a challenge to conventional scientific thinking about the value and the work of science. Knox was seen as a progressive for introducing the idea that a discipline such as anatomy, or teaching, could be philosophical at all.

Indeed, Lonsdale insisted that Knox’s fame as an instructor of anatomy came from his abilities to merge disciplinary practices—to combine philosophy, science, and even literary practices. “Knox was a Defoe in story-telling” and, in class, students found that “[t]he text and context, the narrative and the dialogue set forth by Knox, were uniformly clear and inviting to every avenue of the understanding. Men of culture—and there were many who sat on Knox’s benches—were rapt in admiration of the lecturer’s display of Esculapian lore, nay, an unfathomable fertility of literary and scientific resource.”<sup>34</sup> When Knox outlined his scientific theories, he showed how the scientist had to be a type of master narrator. Even Stevenson’s depiction of Knox in “The Body Snatcher” plays on Knox’s well-known ability to merge the practices of the literary writer

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 141. Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 230, 147.

and the scientific thinker. In “The Body Snatcher” the fictional Mr. K— is referred to as “a *bon vivant*” who distinctly “liked a sly illusion no less than a careful preparation.”<sup>35</sup>

Given his “eloquent” lectures on the subject of philosophical anatomy and his efforts to bring the most modern French anatomical studies to his students, Lonsdale argues, “Knox had no real competitor in the medical school of Edinburgh. His style, his illustrations, and insinuating speech, lent a fascination to the study of human anatomy; dissection was not only to be viewed as an introduction to the practice of surgery and medicine, but invested with the loftiest aims *quoad* science in general.”<sup>36</sup> Knox’s later publications on anatomy emphasized its relationship to the loftier philosophical aims of science, but also, particularly, to the work of art. In *A Manual of Artistic Anatomy* (1852), Knox described “the true relation of anatomy to art, meaning Fine Art” as “a matter of national importance;” for Knox, to “sketch of the nature of form as the grand element of beauty” was the goal, and in his *Manual*, along with his other works on anatomy such as *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, Knox theorized the beautiful and analyzed the “principle which must ever form the basis of a correct taste.”<sup>37</sup> His philosophical bent earned Knox his early fame.

Stevenson’s fictionalized depictions of Knox and his anatomy students conspicuously allude to Knox’s philosophical work in “The Body Snatcher.” Fettes, in particular, explicitly labels Macfarlane and their mentor, K—, as philosophers: “You are

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<sup>35</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 71.

<sup>36</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, n. 284; *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Knox, *A Manual of Artistic Anatomy*, v–vi.

a *philosopher*,” Fettes tells Macfarlane, “I was an ass till I knew you. You and K— between you, by the Lord Harry! but you’ll make a man of me’.”<sup>38</sup> Fettes’ designating Macfarlane and especially K— as, specifically, philosophers resurrects the history of Knox’s radical philosophical anatomy in a story otherwise meant to focus on and critique the history of the alleged “body snatcher.” Rather than emphasize the acts of murder themselves, Stevenson devotes considerable space in “The Body Snatcher” to elucidating the philosophical thinking behind the anatomists’ work and emphasizing Knox’s impact on young men like Fettes and Macfarlane. Indeed, Stevenson outlines for his readers what he believes Knox’s philosophy to be: Fettes’s lauding of Macfarlane and K— as philosophers stems from his belief in Macfarlane’s ‘philosophy’ regarding “the lions and the lambs.” Attempting to ease Fettes’s troubled conscience, Macfarlane gives a long and noteworthy monologue:

Why, man, do you know what this life is? There are two squads of us—the lions and the lambs. If you’re a lamb, you’ll come to lie upon these tables like Gray or Jane Galbraith [two lower-class murder victims supplied as dissection subjects for K—’s students]; if you’re a lion, you’ll live and drive a horse like me, like K—, like all the world with any wit or courage.

You’re staggered at the first. But look at K—!<sup>39</sup>

Later, “The Body Snatcher” revisits this metaphor of “lions” and “lambs”; however, the narrator more obviously critiques the grotesque moral ideology behind this “philosophy.” Depicting Fettes and Macfarlane “let loose upon a grave” in a “green and quiet resting-

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<sup>38</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 81. Emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 78.

place,” they are recast not as noble “lions” rightfully taking their “lamb,” but as parasites, sweeping in “[s]omewhat as two vultures may swoop upon a dying lamb.”<sup>40</sup> Throughout, Macfarlane makes much of K—’s influence on his thinking, and repeatedly emphasizes to Fettes their teacher’s role in making them philosophers by repeatedly calling on Fettes to reflect on Mr K—’s instructions, to “look at K—!”<sup>41</sup> Stevenson thereby lays the blame for Macfarlane’s parasitic philosophy squarely on the shoulder of K—, whom Stevenson describes and references second-hand, but never directly presents as a character.

Yet, the philosophy that Stevenson ascribes to his philosophical anatomists, Mr. K— and stooges Fettes and Macfarlane, differs from the real Knox’s conception of philosophical anatomy in striking ways. The “philosophy” of “the lions and the lambs” that Macfarlane models after the fictionalized Knox’s words and deeds does not elucidate the suggestive questions of anatomy and unity of form that Knox advocated during his tenure as anatomy teacher in Edinburgh. Instead, the philosophy Stevenson’s anatomists espouse sounds more like latter-century Social Darwinism as theorized by the likes of Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton. These Social Darwinists—writing after Darwin’s 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species* and the 1871 follow-up *The Descent of Man*—attempted to apply to human society biological concepts of natural selection that justified imperialism and racism from the late nineteenth-century into the early twentieth. Stevenson was both intimately engaged with and critical of Social Darwinism, and in “The Body Snatcher” he makes such ideation the subject of his disapproval once more.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 71, 74, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle*, 6.

However, he miscasts his critique upon followers of Knox at this moment in time. As scholars like Olena Turnbull have shown, Stevenson often “reacts strongly against such ideas of racial, cultural, linguistic, and literary superiority and inferiority, and survival of the fittest, of the inexorable evolution of a single dominant form,” and his work in making the two “philosophers” of K—, or Knox’s, mold so despicable serves as an example where the author reacts even too strongly.<sup>43</sup>

As much as Macfarlane repeatedly calls on Fettes to “look at K—!” as their model for the philosophy of “the lions and the lambs,” Stevenson clearly misattributes the idea of “survival of the fittest” to the teachings and actions of the fictionalized Knox of the 1820s. The philosophical thinking of Stevenson’s fictional anatomists anachronistically differs from what Knox would have taught when he was expounding his philosophical anatomy in Edinburgh lecture theatres. Given that, as Adrian Desmond states in *The Politics of Evolution* (1996), Knox strongly sided against those in power, Stevenson’s portrayal of a fictional Knox endorsing the rhetoric of might-as-right oversimplifies and even deforms Knox’s theories. As Desmond notes, the “radical underworld” of Scottish anatomy schools and free-thinkers, of which Knox was a part, had little reverence for the ideals that would inform Social Darwinism. Their philosophical anatomy compelled them to reject the idea of might-as-right and to seek, instead, a more sympathetic relationship among living beings: “Not for them the powerful and privileged surviving by exploiting and culling the weak, but an inexorable progress for all through harmony and cooperative

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<sup>43</sup> Turnbull, “Robert Louis Stevenson and Nineteenth-Century Theories of Evolution,” 232.

striving.”<sup>44</sup> Knox’s obituarist in the *Medical Time and Gazette* confirms this characterization of Knox as an opponent to hierarchized notions of might-as-right, by stating that “the first [characteristic] which would strike an ordinary reader [of Knox’s books] ... is the bitterness with which Dr. Knox inveighed against all authority, political, civil, and religious.”<sup>45</sup> In his short story, then, Stevenson supplants Knox’s philosophical anatomy—and its interest in systems that could unify “lions” and “lambs”—with ideas that historically developed after Knox’s, and which emphasized quite the opposite of philosophical anatomy: the significance of differences.

## II. Stevenson, the Body Snatcher

In a story that moralizes so strongly against instrumentalizing bodies, especially those of the dead, the author himself, ironically, instrumentalizes Knox. Stevenson co-opts and dissects a textual body—the legacy, or narrative, of Robert Knox as a popular figure—to focus his story on the sensational in ways he elsewhere explicitly argued writers of fiction are ‘morally’ bound to renounce. Stevenson may have published “The Body Snatcher” in 1884, but he had actually finished composing the work much earlier, during the summer months of 1881—the same period during which he wrote and published an essay for *The Fortnightly Review* titled “The Morality of the Profession of Letters.” In this essay, Stevenson specifically outlines “two duties incumbent upon any man who enters on the business of writing: truth to the fact and a good spirit in

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<sup>44</sup> Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 3–4.

<sup>45</sup> “The Late Dr. Knox,” 683.

treatment.”<sup>46</sup> Stevenson argues that writers have an ethical imperative to unify across traditional boundaries of “caste or country, or all veracities in his own parochial creed” and to attend closely to “each man’s knowledge” to avoid making false presumptions.<sup>47</sup>

The author, he states:

must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable, and bright.

Everything but prejudice should find a voice through him; he should see the food in all things; where he has even a fear that he does not wholly understand, there he should be wholly silent; and he should recognize from the first that he has only one tool in his workshop, and that tool is sympathy.<sup>48</sup>

Certainly in “The Body Snatcher” Stevenson fails to be “supple, charitable, and bright,” or to employ the tool of “sympathy.” He paints the anatomists in overly simplistic terms by labeling Fettes, Macfarlane, and K— as “insensible to the impressions of life”; “closed against all general considerations”; and “incapable of interest in the fate and fortunes of another, the slave of his own desires and low ambitions.”<sup>49</sup> Stevenson perpetuates early nineteenth-century prejudices against anatomists that presuppose essentialist class and professional differences by imagining his anatomists as belonging to a professional and social elite difficult to sympathize with. Furthermore, he emphasizes the anatomist’s faults at the cost of losing “the food,” as he calls it, of anatomists’ work

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<sup>46</sup> Stevenson, “The Morality of the Profession of Letters,” 45.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>49</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 72.



and ideas: philosophical anatomists' attempts to advance medical research, to reform the thinking of scientific professionals, and specifically, to find the sympathies between living beings. Instead, as McCracken-Flesher states, "Stevenson anatomizes Doctor Knox and his assistants in gory detail and with slow deliberation."<sup>50</sup> While McCracken-Flesher demurs to suggest why Knox may have deserved such careful anatomization, it is notable that in his careful dissection of Knox, Stevenson becomes his fictional K—'s double, himself cutting up and pulling apart the anatomist's scientific legacy.

Readers during Stevenson's time noted the author's misuse of Knox's legacy as well. One reviewer, Joseph Goodsir, wrote bitterly to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, where Stevenson published "The Body Snatcher," to complain of Stevenson's treatment of Knox: "It will be said, of course, that 'The Body Snatcher' is only a piece of fiction," and thus Stevenson should have free rein with his depiction, but, Goodsir argues, "being himself an Edinburgh man would have presupposed [Stevenson's] better acquaintance with the facts upon which he founds his story."<sup>51</sup> Further, Goodsir references evidence that Knox was vindicated of his alleged complicity in body snatching and, despite public censure, pursued his teaching of philosophical anatomy to positively influence thousands of lives. Though perhaps biased towards his former teacher, Goodsir was speaking the truth; even two years after the events of the trial, Knox was still a very popular teacher in Edinburgh. Despite the accusations leveled against Knox, he still enjoyed a large

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<sup>50</sup> McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in both Isobel Rae and McCracken Flesher's monographs. See Rae, *Knox: The Anatomist*, 150; McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*, 99–101. Goodsir sent his review to the *Pall Mall Gazette* as a letter, currently held at the National Library of Scotland (MLS170, 48-67), but it was never published.

following among a broad range of Scottish intellectuals. Before the “Burking affair,” between the years 1826 and 1828, Knox’s class enrollment was nearly double that of his nearest rival.<sup>52</sup> Even during the most difficult times at the height of the Burking scandal, when Stevenson suggested Knox “skulked through the streets of Edinburgh in disguise,” Lonsdale recounts his teacher’s lectures as well-attended, and by “a scholarly, earnest, and appreciative class” of supportive medical students, as well as “English barristers, Cambridge scholars and mathematicians, Scottish advocates and divines, scions of the nobility, artists, and men of letters.”<sup>53</sup> Even two years after the events of the trial, Knox’s anatomy class was the largest in the country, with five hundred pupils enrolled.<sup>54</sup>

Though students must have been leery of Knox’s involvement with “the Burking affair,” they still flocked to his classrooms because they were, perhaps, more influenced by his reputation as a progressive scientific thinker. Labeled a “savage radical” within the scientific and political world, Knox was celebrated for many years by his students for his ability to synthesize an “enormous amount of information on all subjects connected with natural history and fine art, which flowed without effort from his lips” and which “conspired to make him justly a favourite with all who formed his acquaintance.”<sup>55</sup> The short story’s characterization of Knox as an elitist scientific professional only interested in fame and fortune, according to his supporters, missed the mark; to use A.W. Bates’

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<sup>52</sup> Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 77.

<sup>53</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 71; Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 131.

<sup>54</sup> Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> “The Late Dr. Knox,” 684, 683.

words: “[i]t makes a good story, though it is substantially untrue.”<sup>56</sup> As Lonsdale explained in defending his teacher’s work, his primary focus in the production of a biography on Robert Knox was to dispel the classification of Knox’s anatomical work as pinched and constrained, where his students saw it as expansive. Lonsdale believed Knox’s fall from grace to be not only the fall of philosophy’s place within science, but also the loss of philosophical anatomy’s broader and thus more universal and unifying ethical work. Lonsdale’s arguments about Knox’s anatomical studies and their cultural significance centered on the idea that it was Knox’s philosophizing that acutely demonstrated the need to recognize the relationship between networks of ideas and people.<sup>57</sup> When Lonsdale spoke so admiringly of how Knox “wished anatomy to be regarded, not as a heap of ultimate facts more or less isolated and detached” but as “a consistent and rational science,” he did not see scientific thinkers as the beneficiaries of this thinking alone, nor did he define “science” as the narrow pursuit of knowledge that could be utilized by man. Indeed, Lonsdale repeatedly emphasizes that Knox “was in hopes that, in due season, Nature’s great organic laws, in all their harmony and simplicity, would be revealed to the earnest searcher after truth,” which in the history of philosophical anatomy had also included “earnest searchers after truth” in the mold of literary writers, such as George Sand and Honoré de Balzac, who had befriended Geoffroy, the aforementioned forefather of French philosophical anatomy whom Knox himself befriended during his year abroad studying anatomy with the masters in Paris.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bates, *The Anatomy of Robert Knox*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 248; Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 176.

Thus, in writing of great anatomists alongside great artists, he saw two, or more, seemingly disparate groups not just as equals in their pursuit, but methodologically and ethically bound to each other.

As many historians have noted, however, Knox had a complicated history after “the Burking affair.” As a “savage radical” who frequently alienated his peers in Edinburgh with his scornful pride and who remained tight-lipped about his own culpability and actions during the course of “the Burking affair,” Knox was eventually forced to leave the city as teaching options became increasingly closed to him. His life in the decades following became that of an itinerant lecturer of popular, two-bit racial science. Though Knox recognized that “as regards structure, it is certain that the differences [between races] are to a great extent, unimportant,” when he became a lecturer on racial science, he insisted that the different races differed in “intellectual character, and physical structure.”<sup>59</sup> Knox’s turn to hack anthropology became yet another scientific scandal of his lifetime, one that his supporters also tactfully negotiated, and sometimes sidestepped, in their representations of his legacy. For example, his biographer Lonsdale suggested that Knox had real financial need to peddle himself as a lecturer on race and anthropology in the style of Johann Freidrich Blumenbach, who catalogued the anatomical differences of the various races and formed a hierarchy of racial type, for the necessities of sustaining a large family and keeping away from real fears of starvation.<sup>60</sup> Lonsdale insisted that Knox’s turn to hack theories of racial science and anthropology derived strictly from pecuniary necessity, and not from real belief.

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<sup>59</sup> Knox, *Man: His Structure and Physiology*, 168.

<sup>60</sup> Lonsdale, *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox, the Anatomist*, 239–40.

Evelleen Richards notes that, undeniably, Knox's work consistently reflected a "racist radicalism," despite his abolitionist views, but also that Knox's "moral anatomy" was further distorted over the course of time as it became "pressed into institutional service by James Hunt, the racist founder of the Anthropological Society of London."<sup>61</sup>

Knox *was* a known anti-colonialist following several years in service in Africa, as well as an abolitionist; however, as Bates argues, even if his "idiosyncratic work on race was pressed into service by pro-slavers and the imperialist Anthropological Society of London," he was at least partially complicit in that work.<sup>62</sup> Richards notes that even with Knox's more radical anti-colonialist and abolitionist perspectives, he tended to "[reduce] all social and political phenomena to the basic biological category of 'race'," and Knox insisted, despite his recognition of anatomical similarities, that the human races differed so much that they were "entitled to the name of species."<sup>63</sup> "The Body Snatcher" slightly alludes to Knox's later-career racial science when it so definitively categorizes poor and working-class bodies like Gray's and Jane Galbraith's as special Others (lambs, and not wolves). In any case, it is clear that Stevenson confuses the fictional Knox's early philosophy with that of more eugenic bent.

Still, in failing to attend to Knox's well-known early work as a scientific thinker, "The Body Snatcher" rendered the Scotsman a major disservice; the story instrumentalized his infamy in order to construct its moral framework. More significantly, Stevenson's inclusion of his reference to the type of "philosophical"

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<sup>61</sup> Richards, "The 'Moral Anatomy' of Robert Knox," 373–76.

<sup>62</sup> Bates, *The Anatomy of Robert Knox*, 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> Richards, "The 'Moral Anatomy' of Robert Knox," 391, 393.

thinking permeating Knox's labs miscasts the work of philosophical anatomy. This misconception of philosophical anatomy against or parallel to the grain of the theory's actual scientific significance ironically formed a part of philosophical anatomy's early development as well. During the philosophical anatomist Geoffroy's lifetime, his nonacademician advocates, such as Sand and Balzac, arguably also "had only a superficial grasp of his scientific doctrine" and, in fact, used "what they wished to see in Geoffroy" to write works about the unified human body because they were "motivated primarily by the moral and social implications of his doctrine."<sup>64</sup> Whether Stevenson was aware of this past relationship between philosophical anatomy and literary writers, his argument in "The Morality of the Profession of Letters" that "where he [any man who is to write] has even a fear that he does not wholly understand, there he should be wholly silent" reveals the author's wariness of the instrumentalization of another thinker's philosophy for one's own writing that haunts the composition of "The Body Snatcher."

Reflecting once more on the subject of writing in a later essay completed in February 1882, "A Gossip on Romance," Stevenson again articulated his concern with how literature should be written with philosophical anatomy—or at least its terms—in mind. Considering what makes the best works, Stevenson argues "[i]t is one thing to remark and to dissect, with the most cutting logic, the complications of life, and of the human spirit; it is quite another to give them body and blood in the story of Ajax or Hamlet."<sup>65</sup> Using the language of dissection and "cutting logic" Stevenson brings his readers back to a contemplate the work of anatomy. He also links the problem with

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<sup>64</sup> Appel, *Cuvier-Geoffroy Debate*, 201.

<sup>65</sup> Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," 57.

anatomizing to a problem of composition. The author suggests that when a writer or anatomist focuses too much on the practices of cutting into the “human spirit” or “complications of life”—as of the body—they do damage to the work or body itself. Interestingly, Stevenson proposes that the practice of dissection be subsumed under a more important and romantic process: “to give [the complications of life] body.” In order to make such a body, Stevenson suggests, the writer or anatomist must imagine it into being with a larger purpose in mind, as Homer or Shakespeare would; the more important work is the imagining, or philosophizing, behind the creation of the body. Stevenson’s essay further argues that “[i]n the highest achievements of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law.”<sup>66</sup> Almost directly rebuking his own characterization of Knox’s story-telling as a love of “sly illusion” within “The Body Snatcher,” Stevenson contends in his essay that “[n]o art produces illusion.”<sup>67</sup> In concluding that the best of “the art of words” strives to embody “common and organic laws,” he evokes Knox’s own call to embrace philosophical anatomy and the creation of unifying theories. Evoking the more positive work of philosophical anatomizing in this essay, Stevenson begins to turn toward more tolerant understandings of philosophical anatomy.

Later in his career, Stevenson began to form an even more concrete theory of authorial ethics—and, again, borrows terms from Knox’s work on philosophical anatomy. In “The Art of Fiction,” the American author Henry James wrote that the novelist “has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter,” whose

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 61.

work was like the historian's "[t]o represent and illustrate the past, the actions of man."<sup>68</sup> Responding to James, who later became a close friend and frequent correspondent, in the essay "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884), Stevenson emphasizes the necessity of considering fiction as more than the method of producing realism or fact in the mode of the artist or historian, preferring instead to treat the novelist as a kind of philosopher. Like Knox, who wished to move beyond the mere mechanical art of dissection, Stevenson indicates his own wish for more philosophical thinking on what texts should accomplish. He was troubled by the difficulty of balancing the narrative structure against more universal concepts. By 1884, Stevenson was focusing not on the art of fiction in its broadest sense, as James had, but on the idea of the art of narrative as a particular attunement to a concept of voice. "So far as [narrative] imitates at all," Stevenson argues, "it imitates not life but speech: not the facts of human destiny, but the emphasis and the suppressions with which the human actor tells of them."<sup>69</sup> Stevenson states that while life is "monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt, and poignant," art is "neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate" because it is carefully constructed by the "human actor," the story-teller or writer who has in "both the method and the meaning of the work" something "designed and significant."<sup>70</sup> The narrative is, in a sense, one human actor's "suppressions," his attempt to contain and design a body, making it "neat, finite, self-contained, rational," though he knows the "truth" of life to be monstrous in comparison. In "A Humble Remonstrance," as well as an earlier 1883 essay "A Note on

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<sup>68</sup> James, "The Art of Fiction," 380.

<sup>69</sup> Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," 85.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



Realism,” Stevenson expresses regrets about the narratorial construction that produces such “designed and significant” textual bodies. When a work of art “becomes at length that most faultless, but also, alas! that incommunicable product of the human mind, a perfect design,” Stevenson laments, the result is a “technical preoccupation... instead of some robust principle of life.”<sup>71</sup>

By the time that “The Body Snatcher” was published in 1884, Stevenson was already worrying over the problem of narration in ways that may have informed his disdain for what he felt to be a “horrid” short story. In reading “The Body Snatcher,” the reader confronts the problematic narratorial points that preoccupied Stevenson: “The Body Snatcher” is a story of suppression that itself suppresses, specifically, human speech. Rereading “The Body Snatcher” with close attention to its structure and narrative technique, a reader discovers that what seems a single narrative is in fact a retelling. “The Body Snatcher” is told—or constructed, as the reader recognizes upon closer inspection—by a seemingly benign unnamed narrator who quickly disappears from the tale as the story of K—’s dissecting rooms unfolds. This unnamed narrator’s only personalizing detail is that he is one of four who sit in the small parlor of the George at Debenham. Despite this lack of definition, this unnamed narrator shapes the story. Trying to trace the sensational history of the fictionalized anatomists, it is easy to forget that the narrative is not related by Fettes or even by a single narrative voice; it is, instead, a summation and distillation composed by this unnamed narrator, who has lifted the story from the drunken Fettes, just as surely as Fettes himself procured his bodies. Indeed, before he disappears from the text altogether, the narrator proudly proclaims his theft of

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<sup>71</sup> Stevenson, “A Note on Realism,” 68.

the tale: he “was better at worming out a story than either of my fellows,” the other regulars of the inn, and he boasts, “perhaps there is now no other man alive who could narrate to you the following foul and unnatural events.”<sup>72</sup>

The narrator of “The Body Snatcher,” as a story-teller, confounds Stevenson’s definition of the ideal writer outlined in “The Morality of the Profession of Letters.” The narrator of “The Body Snatcher” is not a writer who “see[s] that each man’s knowledge is, as near as they can make it, answerable to the facts of life; that he shall not suppose himself an angel or a monster.” Rather, because he is set on telling a tale of “foul and unnatural events” and does not admit Fettes’s narratorial presence at all, this unnamed narrator shapes the reader’s expectation to find only monsters in the narrative. In creating an authorial character so proud of his own ability to narrate events, but so distinctly removed from the narrative, Stevenson creates his own monstrous double: a writer who co-opts the story of another in ways uncharitable to the narrative told. The narrator, like Stevenson, is a writer who elides recognition of the individual speaker in superseding Fettes’ voice. Instead of representing any of the “beautiful” work of anatomizing, Stevenson mires it in the gruesome, in the sensational. Given the extent to which Stevenson ponders the “moral” role of the writer and the imperative that he places on formal demands, it is clear why Stevenson may have buried “The Body Snatcher” in his desk drawers for so many years between its completion and publication.

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<sup>72</sup> Stevenson, “The Body Snatcher,” 71.

### III. The Anatomy of *Jekyll and Hyde*

In an 1888 article for *Scribner's Magazine* about the composition of *Jekyll and Hyde*, "A Chapter on Dreams," Stevenson suggests the possibility that *Jekyll and Hyde* is the transformed textual body of the earlier tale, "The Body Snatcher." In the essay, Stevenson admits "I had long been trying to write a story on this subject, to find a body, a vehicle, for that strong sense of man's double being," and in the process he "tried one body after another in vain."<sup>73</sup> Having burned one manuscript, a novel titled *The Traveller's Companion*, referenced in "A Chapter on Dreams" as well as in letters to his friend W.E. Henley beginning on July 10<sup>th</sup> of 1881, Stevenson leaves unanswered the question of what other bodies once constituted the strange case of *Jekyll and Hyde*.<sup>74</sup> His naming of *The Travelling Companion*, however, presents "The Body Snatcher," another text composed in 1881, as one of those other bodies. Stating that some aspects of the *Jekyll and Hyde* narrative came from dreams of the Scottish medical world, Stevenson reveals that, in his dreams, he imagined a man who "studied... at Edinburgh College" and "passed a long day in the surgical theatre."<sup>75</sup> Stevenson's dream recalls the setting of the author's earlier short story, bringing Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* perilously close to "The Body Snatcher."<sup>76</sup> More significantly, as McCracken-Flesher notes, Jekyll and

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<sup>73</sup> Stevenson, "A Chapter on Dreams," 136, 137.

<sup>74</sup> Stevenson, *Letters*, 3:208. He writes this letter only one week after he told Colvin he had "laid aside" writing "The Body Snatchers" on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1881.

<sup>75</sup> Stevenson, "A Chapter on Dreams," 129; McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*, 101.

<sup>76</sup> McCracken-Flesher makes a similar connection between "The Body Snatcher" and *Jekyll and Hyde* in *The Doctor Dissected* (103).

Knox are remarkably similar. They may even be recognizably of the same type—the “Philosophical Doctor”—described in one of the possible source-texts Stevenson may have used for “The Body Snatcher,” George McGregor’s 1884 *The History of Burke and Hare*.<sup>77</sup>

If “The Body Snatcher” attempts and fails to tell the story of Knox’s anatomical career, Jekyll’s “Full Statement of the Case” resurrects that story in a different light. Stevenson’s novel offers less moral pronouncement on philosophical anatomy; he chooses instead to reframe and reflect on philosophical anatomy’s more “transcendent” qualities. The conspicuous setting of *Jekyll and Hyde* is, perhaps, no coincidence. Jekyll conducts his transmutation experiments in a “building which was indifferently known as the laboratory or the dissecting-room” bought from “the heirs of a celebrated surgeon.”<sup>78</sup> When Jekyll’s lawyer and friend, Mr. Utterson, comes to call for clues about Jekyll’s mysterious acquaintance, Hyde, Utterson first gazes “with a distasteful sense of strangeness,” crossing the theatre “once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent.”<sup>79</sup> This detail of setting calls to mind the dissecting-rooms where Fettes and Macfarlane debated their philosophy as two “eager students” and the theatre where their teacher would have taught. Stevenson’s novel is thus set in no ordinary laboratory, but rather in the space of philosophical anatomy—the dissecting room, the surgical theatre—uniquely resurrected by both Jekyll and Stevenson.

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<sup>77</sup> McCracken-Flesher, *The Doctor Dissected*, 102–3.

<sup>78</sup> Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Unlike Stevenson's earlier work, *Jekyll and Hyde* is more invested in exploring to the full extent the idea of a philosophical or transcendental science's significance for scientific investigation. As Stevenson suggests in the text, Utterson, as "a man of no scientific passions (except in the matter of conveyancing)," is wrong for assuming the conflict at the heart of Jekyll and Hyde's story is "only" a difference "on some point of science."<sup>80</sup> The author makes much more of this scientific problem in elucidating the conflict between Jekyll's former friend and peer, Dr. Lanyon, and Jekyll over the latter's obsession with "transcendental medicine." In *Jekyll and Hyde*, at the point of transforming before his colleague, Jekyll condemns Lanyon for being among those "who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine," echoing the pronouncements of Knox on the too-materialist work of his fellow anatomists.<sup>81</sup> Like Knox, Jekyll has grown alienated from the mainstream of a scientific inquiry too narrow and material because it is unwilling to see the possibilities of scientific imagining. Stevenson thus situates Jekyll as a modern-day philosophical anatomist, as a "transcendental" theorist of the body. Jekyll, in contrast to his friend Lanyon, sees the body in its most theoretical and aesthetically beautiful of forms. In his "Full Statement of the Case," Jekyll takes the body out of more recognizable corporeal contexts, describing "this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired" as a "trembling immateriality" of "mist-like transience" that he has the power "to shake and to pluck."<sup>82</sup> Thinking of tissue as such transparent material, Jekyll

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 53.

believes he can pull “back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion” in his imagination—and, as it turns out, in life.<sup>83</sup>

Stevenson’s language of “transcendental medicine” in *Jekyll and Hyde* has less of the harshness of the philosophy of lions and lambs from “The Body Snatcher,” with all its violently carnivorous metaphorical undertones. *Jekyll and Hyde* instead allows its philosophical anatomist Jekyll a space to explain himself and bring forward the Knoxian concepts of the “beautiful” that unite anatomizing with art. His narrative offers a vocabulary of “transcendental medicine” that suggests an ethereal imagining of the self as beautiful in its “universal” tendencies. These terms suggest the ideals of philosophical anatomy. Jekyll conceives of these transformed bodies as supple and mystical as a gust of air, incredibly sensitive in their delicately “trembling immateriality,” even though such transformative bodies end in the production of a Juggernaut like Hyde, who crushes all those in his way. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, Stevenson is careful not to fully label such thinking and theorizing in purely moral terms. The beauty of the imaginative language of “transcendental medicine”—a language of philosophical anatomy—is presented alongside its more frightening consequences, and presented by, or rather through the voice of, the man for whom its transcendence is its most important strain. Voiced so carefully and so specifically, this balancing of the ideal of transformation set against its chilling horrors allows Stevenson to celebrate Jekyll’s work while still disavowing its troubling consequences.

The novel achieves this more nuanced representation because Stevenson in this later work attempts a different negotiation of the “suppressions” of the speech of the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

“human actor” from “The Body Snatcher.” As a text obviously divided into three conspicuously labeled parts—a third-person narrative following Jekyll’s lawyer and friend, Mr. Utterson; a document titled “Doctor Lanyon’s Narrative;” and a document titled “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case”—*Jekyll and Hyde* makes clear through its structural transparency which “human actors” it is beholden to. The perspectives of Utterson (accessed by the third-person omniscient narrator), Lanyon, and Jekyll himself are juxtaposed alongside and against each other as they present different perspectives and unspoken “suppressions” on the same set of events rendered from “documents,” as Utterson calls the sections that compose *Jekyll and Hyde*, which become “the two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained.”<sup>84</sup> The reader can only reach a more complete narrative truth by comparing, contrasting, and combining the oblique references of Utterson, Lanyon, and Jekyll. Each human voice is thus accounted for and given its say, directly contrasting “The Body Snatcher,” with its ambiguous differentiation between speaker and narrator.<sup>85</sup> Arguably, the narrative structure of Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* corrects the narrative structure of “The Body Snatcher” by taking the philosophical anatomist’s approach. Where “The Body Snatcher” is a murky story of theft and degradation at a period when Stevenson was trying to develop a style of writing that was “supple, charitable, and bright,” *Jekyll and Hyde* is a tale that, despite its general disavowals of its primary villain, Jekyll, allows each human actor to speak for himself.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>85</sup> Nathalie Jaëck makes the compelling argument that despite narrative attempts at containment, the text continually attempts to escape its boundaries “it starts proliferating, and dissolves narrative integrity as well as textual linearity” (49). See Jaëck, “The Greenhouse vs. The Glasshouse.”

Stevenson thereby becomes a kind of philosophical anatomist himself in keeping with a critical tradition within literature of anatomizing subjects. Specifically, Stevenson seems to be taking up the generic conventions of classical literary “anatomies” as described by Northrop Frye and Mikhael Bakhtin that reflect the philosophical anatomist’s interest in a more unifying form. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye’s examples of anatomies from English literature include Richard Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1727), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759), and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). We could include Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* in his list as well. As Frye notes, pedants and cranks—like Stevenson’s Utterson, Lanyon, and Jekyll—populate the literary anatomy’s pages. Bringing a mass of knowledge to bear on a single subject, literary anatomies “at [their] most concentrated,” Frye states, provide “a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern.”<sup>86</sup> That is, they take up the work of anatomizing in much the same terms as the philosophical anatomist: not just as a dissection of a subject, but as a reimagining and connection of a subject to a mass of information, a vision more universal in its turn to more “philosophical” and aesthetic ideas.

Bakhtin attests to Frye’s assertion that the anatomy is an approach to fiction characterized by an interest in philosophizing, additionally emphasizing that the anatomy is “characterized by an *extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention*.”<sup>87</sup> Bakhtin, with his interest in the carnivalesque, asserts that one of the anatomy’s primary recognizable devices is its use of heterogeneous voices and mixtures. He stresses the

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<sup>86</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 310.

<sup>87</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 114.



significance of anatomy's use of "inserted genres" such as letters or oratorical speeches in what Frye calls the anatomy's "enormous mass of erudition," its "avalanche" of jargon.<sup>88</sup> Bakhtin thus contends that, in literature, the anatomy studies both the high and the low, the great and the squalid, extraordinary situations and a "slum naturalism."<sup>89</sup> Like this vision of the literary anatomy, Stevenson's text also mixes together, indiscriminately, subjects and ideas lofty and low, violent and transcendent, as well as heterogeneous texts. *Jekyll and Hyde* mixes "inserted genres"—the different "documents" formed by the third-person story, Lanyon's "narrative," and Jekyll's "Full Statement of the Case"—on the single idea of man's double being. As such, it explores a philosophical approach to anatomizing through literary structure.

The reader is thus brought to navigate a text reflexively interested in the instrumentalization of textual bodies and the power of Stevenson's "human agent." For example, in the first third of the novel told from a third-person perspective, narrative focuses on the idea of Jekyll as someone haunted by and attempting to escape from his past. This conclusion corresponds directly with Utterson's own obsessions with the consequences of the past, possibly because the narrative so closely aligns with Utterson's primary perspectives of the case. Utterson, himself a dissipated lush, ponders the reasons for his friend's change of personality while leaving the dissecting rooms turned laboratory and concludes that Jekyll must be haunted by his wild youth, believing that though "a long while ago to be sure...it must be that; the ghost of some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, PEDE CLAUDO, years after

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 108; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 311.

<sup>89</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 114–15.

memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault.”<sup>90</sup> This absolute conviction that Jekyll “must be” haunted by his youth is followed by, and revealed to be conflated with, Utterson’s own fears as Utterson “brooded a while on his own past, groping in all the corners of memory, lest by chance some Jack-in-the-Box of an old iniquity should leap to light there.”<sup>91</sup> In contrast, Doctor Lanyon’s narrative offers an alternative view of Jekyll as a scientific adventurer, misguided by his insatiable curiosity. Lanyon’s depiction of Jekyll evokes a Shelleyian Frankenstein or a Faust in Goethe’s mold who pronounces to Lanyon, boldly, “if you shall so prefer to choose, a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon the instant; and your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan” before quaffing the mysterious brew.<sup>92</sup> Yet Lanyon’s narrative, too, is situated in terms of his personal obsessions—precisely his strong belief that Jekyll has gone “wrong, wrong in mind” with “unscientific balderdash,” “transcendental medicine”—as well as his choice of “reader,” his friend Utterson whom he directly appeals to and addresses in his epistolary narrative.<sup>93</sup> In Jekyll’s “Full Statement of the Case,” he addresses no specific audience except an undifferentiated and assumed audience of sympathetic listeners. Writing in a largely biographical style that begins, in classic *bildungsroman* form, from the events of his childhood, Jekyll states that his desire to transform comes from a desire to explore the idea of the dual nature of man and to split himself into the dual natures, an

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<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 12.

“evil” and “good” self.<sup>94</sup> He includes reference to both his disdain for his past actions and his scientific curiosity, but focuses on the existential problem of man’s dual nature as his primary impetus for transformational experimentations. More suggestively, however, he states the possibility that the motivations might be unknowable: “I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable.”<sup>95</sup>

Hyde’s role in the narrative, then, addresses what Stevenson was trying to avoid in rewriting the story of the philosophical anatomist. Hyde’s desire to dominate Jekyll’s body and thereby the narratives of these three men is linked to a fault of his form, a monstrosity inherent in it. Stevenson articulates this monstrosity of form when Utterson initially contemplates the first story of Hyde that he hears from his cousin Mr. Enfield. Utterson is struck by the realization that Enfield’s narrative is not just an intriguing story, but a trap: “his imagination also was engaged, or rather enslaved” by the narrative of a “human Juggernaut.”<sup>96</sup> The suggestion that Hyde’s narrative enslaves recurs at the novel’s conclusion. At the end of his “Full Statement of the Case,” Jekyll’s fears of his bodily transformation become subsumed by his fears regarding Hyde’s attempts to control and even destroy his legacy. “Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it,” Jekyll anxiously writes, “Hyde will tear it in pieces.”<sup>97</sup> This fear of what could happen to Jekyll’s document—its destruction and/or possible doctoring by the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 54–55.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 66.

sensational Hyde—embodies Stevenson’s quandary over the production of the Knoxian narrative and its enslavement to a sensational link to body snatching.

What this in turn rearticulates is a problem of writing, and reading, that is a part of both scientific and literary “philosophical” thinking on the subject of knowledge production. Papers flutter through the air constantly, as Jekyll’s servant Poole notes, and their presence or absence bring with them anxiety-provoking dilemmas regarding what is to be understood or where one’s focus should lie.<sup>98</sup> Thus, when Lanyard goes to examine the notes of Jekyll, he is confronted with the inscrutability of narrative:

The book was an ordinary version-book and contained little but a series of dates. These covered a period of many years, but I observed that the entries ceased nearly a year ago and quite abruptly. Here and there a brief remark was appended to a date, usually no more than a single word: "double" occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries; and once very early in the list and followed by several marks of exclamation, "total failure!!!" All this, though it whetted my curiosity, told me little that was definite.<sup>99</sup>

In examining the information the book provides about the recipe for transformation composed of various powders, Lanyard sees little, but his attention is drawn to note the framing of the work. What he can only attend to in his reading is narrative linearity in the passage of time, in the evidence of repetition marking significant turning points without

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 37. Poole is specifically concerned about how “It was sometimes his way—the master’s, that is—to write his orders on a sheet of paper and throw it on the stair. We’ve had nothing else this week back; nothing but papers, and a closed door, and the very meals left there to be smuggled in when nobody was looking” (37)

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 47.

touching upon “the mystic and the transcendental,” “moral and intellectual” direction to which Jekyll alleges himself drawn.<sup>100</sup>

#### IV. Stevenson, the Anatomist

The problem of narratorial suppression is foregrounded from the start in *Jekyll and Hyde* and made, specifically, a part of a history of “scientific” and “philosophical” knowledge production. This allows Stevenson to shift the ethical dilemma of the textual body from the results of plot’s actions to the *presentation* of such action. There are, in *Jekyll and Hyde*, innumerable ways to read and reread the motives and meanings of the transformation dependent on the question of the “human actor” at the moment of narration, the nature of the document, and its relation to other bodies in its production. In this way, Stevenson attends to the problem of his own mediation of fellow Scotsman Robert Knox’s professional legacy in contemplating the work of his own professional legacy. How could Stevenson account for Knox’s place in science while still attending to the very real suppressions that Knox, as well as writers on Knox such as his biographer Lonsdale, inflicted on the “body” of text?

In his *Great Anatomists and Great Artists*, Knox lamented similar possible suppressions that would come after his death. In the history of anatomy, Knox argues, “great and original-minded men lay the foundation of vast intellectual monuments, which their successors are destined... to misapprehend, to neglect or even to destroy.”<sup>101</sup> Following the composition of “The Body Snatcher,” Stevenson remained preoccupied

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>101</sup> Knox, *Great Artists and Great Anatomists*, 80–81.

with the search for a way of writing that would free him from such charges by allowing him to “dissect” fictional bodies without destroying them. *Jekyll and Hyde*, then, was Stevenson’s best attempt at a more sympathetic reflection on the history of philosophical anatomy influenced by the narrative of Dr. Robert Knox.

As his compatriot Henry James reflected in their later careers, Stevenson was much more than what his contemporaries accused him of being: “a happy but heartless pagan, living only in his senses,” interested in “an ingenuous game of word,” but who “in a world of heaviness . . . is not sufficiently aware of the philosophic limitations of mere technical skill.”<sup>102</sup> As James wrote in rebuttal to the critic William Archer:

Much as [Stevenson] cares for his phrase, he cares more for life, and for a certain transcendently lovable part of it. He feels, as it seems to us, and that is not given to every one. This constitutes a philosophy which Mr. Archer fails to read between his lines—the respectable, desirable moral which many a reader doubtless finds that he neglects to point.<sup>103</sup>

James’s characterization of Stevenson as someone invested in the “transcendently lovable” part of life and as a philosopher of feeling is notable because it suggests not just the Americanist sense of transcendence with which James was familiar, but the broader implications of transcendental thinking—philosophical thinking—of which philosophical anatomy was a part. For the philosophical, or transcendental, anatomist, what additionally ‘transcended’ anatomy was a unifying idea, a philosophy that created a broader understanding of who could be a philosopher and how one could philosophize. James

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<sup>102</sup> James, “Robert Louis Stevenson,” 143.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 143–44.

clearly saw the novelist as someone who “has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter,” whose work was like the historian’s “[t]o represent and illustrate the past, the actions of man” but “consisting as it does in having more difficulty in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary.”<sup>104</sup> But for Stevenson, who admitted to seeing James’s point about the work of the novelist as a “moral” pursuit in the profession of letters, this responsibility was a heavy burden to carry. Trying to offer bodies of information that would allow him to be “supple, charitable, and bright” Stevenson produces a narrative, *Jekyll and Hyde*, about inevitable and irreversible transformation; he shows that in the quest to produce the multiple “bodies” (textual, corporeal, formal) that do the moral work of narrative storytelling, one inevitably falls into a transformational trap.

My work for this chapter, then, has been an attempt to locate the burdens of transformation. In part, I have been writing in response to a critical point about “translation or transformation” that Gillian Beer elucidates in her 1996 monograph *Open Fields*. On a chapter studying “the presentation of science through literature,” Beer considers the possibility that a reader might assume Beer’s ideas differently from her original intention: they “might suggest a one-way traffic, as though literature acted as a mediator for a topic (science) that precedes it and that remains intact after its re-presentation,” which Beer expressly denies.<sup>105</sup> For Beer, literature does not just “translate” the ideas of science for its readers, but enacts a “transformation” of those ideas; Beer’s exposure of such non-unilateral intimacies between science and literature

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<sup>104</sup> James, “The Art of Fiction,” 380.

<sup>105</sup> Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 173.

has permeated and advanced thinking about the field of science and literature in necessary and stimulating ways, including my own. Yet in this chapter on Stevenson's own approach to textual transformation and scientific topics, I wanted to focus on how Stevenson's transformational works trouble the logical extension of Beer's connotations about transformation and translation within the presentation of science through literature.

While Stevenson certainly goes beyond "translating" the scientific knowledge for his readers in offering a true "transformation" of Knox's scientific legacy, what does one do when that transformation is seen as "horrid"? Stevenson, as a writer, *uses* and arguably *abuses* Knox's biographical narrative—and he does so openly and guiltily. He transforms—as opposed to translates—the scientific legacy of Robert Knox, but not in ways that can hide significant anxieties regarding the nature—the "morals"—behind his "profession of letters." Perhaps that is why he so focuses on and insists on the role of the "human actor," who is not just the subject of the text, but the text's creator. Stevenson may have revised "The Body Snatcher" into a more acceptable form with *Jekyll and Hyde*, but it was by no means perfect. It has to be read with that human actor, that philosopher of narrative anatomy, present in mind.



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### CHAPTER 3: THE METAPHYSICAL MEDICINE OF JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU

“Green Tea,” the first short story in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) abruptly begins with what seems a tangential note—a brief biographical anecdote by the fictional editor of the collection regarding his career in medicine. “Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery,” the editor begins, “I have never practised either.”<sup>1</sup> This character goes on to explain:

The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly. Neither idleness nor caprice caused my secession from the honourable calling which I had just entered. The cause was a very trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly, and the more painful loss of my health, for I have never been quite well since, and have seldom been twelve months together in the same place.<sup>2</sup>

Made to contemplate the material body of the text’s fictional editor, the reader must uncover complex meaning from these first five sentences of the collection, which contain a series of excisions that hinder her attempts to understand a seemingly straightforward medical case. While the editor reveals that he received a “very trifling scratch” that “cost me the loss of two fingers, promptly amputated,” the reader is left to infer the reason for the editor’s “more painful loss of

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<sup>1</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

my health,” a loss which could be physiological, psychological, or even supernatural in origin. Did the editor suffer further infections in his body? Has the amputation traumatically shaken his sense of self? Or has something else about the amputation come to haunt him painfully? Readers are left to decide for themselves. Similarly, the reason for the editor’s having “seldom been twelve months together in the same place” is also left to imaginative inference; the reader must make an assumption that something about this mutilation has come to cause the editor’s restlessness or, perhaps, that the editor has been prescribed travel as a cure. The reader is therefore invited to pathologize the editor’s amputated two fingers: to take on the role of the doctor, surgeon, or anatomist. Le Fanu’s opening story, and specifically the editor’s brief medical history introduces a series of themes that become dominant preoccupations of Le Fanu’s collection.

Le Fanu’s Gothic tale—one could even say *fantastic* tale, to borrow Tzveten Todorov’s term—leaves the reader suspended between multiple realities, where two interpretations of a story, “supernatural” and “real,” can coexist simultaneously.<sup>3</sup> Thus the reader must make choices about how to read the text with the question of what to dissect and what to leave alone firmly in mind. As the editor reveals, *In a Glass Darkly* is composed of five stories labeled “cases”—“Green Tea,” “The Familiar,” “Mr. Justice Harbottle,” “The Room in the Dragon Volant,” and “Carmilla”—that suggestively mimic genre elements of both the medical case history and supernatural story.<sup>4</sup> Each story invites the reader to learn the history of a patient who has suffered a terrible, sometimes fatal, illness and to make a guess whether the mystery behind the

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<sup>3</sup> This is precisely Mark Wegley’s argument about Le Fanu’s work. See Wegley, “Unknown Fear,” 70.

<sup>4</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 6.

medical case can be solved by turning to medical explanations or supernatural ones. For example, as Mark Wegley states, in reading the first short story “Green Tea,” readers must determine if the patient, the Reverend Mr. Jennings, “is mentally unwell,” so that “the evil monkey-form haunting him really is a ‘spectral illusion’ brought on by his psychological state,” or, in another interpretation, “Jennings’ monkey is a real external entity” who tries and succeeds at destroying Jennings.<sup>5</sup> In Le Fanu’s works, both the medical and the supernatural explanations (i.e. psychological hallucination and paranormal evil) are valid ways to understand the medical cases that he presents to readers. Le Fanu’s ambiguity here reflects the fact that the author was immersed in both scientific and supernatural theories common to his time, specifically the theories of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Indeed, conventional scholarship on Le Fanu often notes the author’s relationship to the writings of the Swedish spiritualist Swedenborg, as Swedenborgian spiritual cosmology features prominently in major works of Le Fanu’s oeuvre. Le Fanu quotes directly from Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-56), a commentary on the books of Genesis and Exodus, in *In a Glass Darkly* as well as an earlier novel, *Uncle Silas* (1864). In these works, Le Fanu also frequently refers to one of Swedenborg’s other major concepts: that of an inner eye which allows individuals to see both into other kingdoms—heavenly, hellish, and spiritual—and into Scripture in ways that illuminate hidden or allegorical meaning. However, few scholars have considered how Swedenborg’s early career as a scientific thinker, specifically an anatomist, determined his spiritualist thinking and, indeed, how Swedenborg’s scientific interests affect interpretation of Le Fanu’s works. Reading *In a Glass Darkly* alongside Swedenborg’s understudied, early anatomical writing, *Regnum Animale* (1744-

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<sup>5</sup> Wegley, “Unknown Fear,” 70.

45), I argue that Le Fanu's short story collection responds not just to Swedenborgian spiritualist thought, but also, to the 'philosophy' behind Swedenborg's anatomical work.

Understanding Le Fanu's scientific interests requires a clear understanding of Swedenborg's century-old ideas as they were presented for a more 'modern,' nineteenth-century audience. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Le Fanu began his most productive creative era, Swedenborgian scientific perspectives were becoming appealing to literary and scientific writers again after a long period of neglect. During his own lifetime, Swedenborg's scientific peers were critical of his grand ideas about the human body as expressed in *Regnum Animale*. As Cyriel Sigstedt states after citing a series of contemporaneous reviews of the anatomical treatise, Swedenborg "knew that the learned of his day were not following him, and would reject the best of what he had to offer."<sup>6</sup> Swedenborgian scientific ideas made a comeback in the nineteenth-century largely due to the influence of one member of the Royal Academy of Surgeons—the surgeon, James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-1899)—who emphasized the philosophical strain of Swedenborg's scientific work. Wilkinson translated many of Swedenborg's scientific and philosophical writings, most notably Swedenborg's *Regnum Animale*, which was published in English as *The Animal Kingdom* in 1843 and 1844. Wilkinson's editorial hand popularized Swedenborg's scientific work during the mid-century, making it more relevant to contemporary discussions by putting Swedenborgian ideas in conversation with contemporary "philosophical" strains of anatomizing that I have elucidated in the earlier chapter on Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Knox. In essence, Wilkinson brought Swedenborg's work into modern conversations about interpretation and scientific epistemology

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<sup>6</sup> Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic*, 177.

linked to philosophical anatomy, making Swedenborg's once seemingly ludicrous anatomical theories intriguing to readers.

By reassessing Le Fanu's work through a historical analysis of its medical and scientific subjects, I suggest a different approach to studying *In a Glass Darkly* as a text interested in, and critical of, the burdens of this nineteenth-century scientific thought. Nineteenth-century scientific obsession with the problem of authority and facts, I suggest, overrode the more thought-provoking ideas about Swedenborgian philosophical anatomy that Le Fanu articulates through his writing. To that end, this chapter begins with a substantial history of Emanuel Swedenborg, James Wilkinson, and nineteenth-century anatomy discourse. Uncovering a relatively forgotten history of Swedenborg's anatomical ideas as they resurfaced in the nineteenth-century helps to explain why Le Fanu deploys and critiques characters such as the short story collection's fictional editor and the editor's "master"—Dr. Martin Hesselius, called both the "medical philosopher" or "metaphysical doctor"—at the heart of the text.<sup>7</sup> In Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*, readers are brought to question what it means to be a "medical philosopher" or a "metaphysical doctor" in the first place. These figures repeatedly bungle the work of healing the body in their philosophical quest to see as Swedenborg purportedly did. Such depictions bring into sharp relief a very different idea of the value of Hesselius's "metaphysical medicine" for the Victorian era as Le Fanu's texts evince a marked skepticism toward the purported moral and ethical value of the work done by philosophical anatomists like Swedenborg and Wilkinson, who invite us to see as the anatomist sees. In my reading of what I call the "anatomizing gaze" in *In a Glass Darkly*, I investigate the problem of interpreting bodies that underlies the metaphysical medicine pursued by Le Fanu's Dr. Martin Hesselius, whose collected papers make up *In a Glass Darkly*.

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<sup>7</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 5.



## I. Emanuel Swedenborg, James Wilkinson, and 19th Century Anatomy

Many critics have long-noted Le Fanu's use of the writings and ideas of the Swedish spiritualist, Swedenborg. William McCormack, the prolific Le Fanu scholar, goes so far as to argue that the "success" of *Uncle Silas* and *In a Glass Darkly* among readers and critics "is intimately connected with [Le Fanu's] reading of Emanuel Swedenborg's theology."<sup>8</sup> However, McCormack, along with the critics Jack Sullivan and Sally Harris, generally agree that the biographical and textual evidence show Le Fanu was not a Swedenborgian himself; in fact, the short story writer, M.R. James, gleefully suggests that the Le Fanu was "a decided foe" to spirit-rapping and other mystical notions.<sup>9</sup> Le Fanu undoubtedly saw in Swedenborgian notions a distinctly significant series of themes, worthy of quoting directly in his works. Contemporary literary critics have particularly focused on themes surrounding communication, especially between spirits and people, which, according to scholars like Wegley and Devin Zuber, Le Fanu ties into larger explorations of the nature of language.<sup>10</sup> According to these scholars, Le Fanu is a predecessor of some of the most important postmodernist thinkers: he is a proto-structuralist whose "texts criticize powerful systems of signification, such as medical science" in the vein of Ferdinand de Saussure, and he "bears out Michel Foucault's proposition that the nineteenth century witnessed a widespread disintegration of language as a stable system of

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<sup>8</sup> McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> James, "M.R. James on J.S. Le Fanu," 93; Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, 22; McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, 242; Harris, "Spiritual Warnings: The Ghost Stories of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu," 21.

<sup>10</sup> McCormack, *Dissolute Characters*, 23; Wegley, "Unknown Fear," 69–70; Zuber, "Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction," 77–78.

representation.”<sup>11</sup> Le Fanu’s study of Swedenborg, according to these scholars, reflects his interest in the underlying biblical hermeneutics that Swedenborg deploys and his opposition to what John Langan notes as the stultifying “Victorian efforts to bring more and more things under the sway of official, institutional knowledge, from the geographical to the historical to the metaphysical.”<sup>12</sup> For scholars overall, Le Fanu’s exploration of Swedenborgianism is first an exploration of the problems of language and God and, second, a work that rejects, or is ultimately ambivalent toward, the authority of medical science. And yet such interpretations do not adequately acknowledge how Le Fanu’s works engage Swedenborg’s scientific thinking and cosmology.

Notably, scholars who have attempted to delineate Le Fanu’s scientific interests in past decades are sometimes critiqued for overstepping the mark in drawing references between Le Fanu and more dominant strains of nineteenth-century science.<sup>13</sup> For example, Helen Stoddardt and Richard Tracy have focused on reading into Le Fanu’s representation of an evil, black monkey in his first story, “Green Tea,” as symptomatic evidence of Le Fanu’s anxieties about Darwinian evolution, despite what Richard Haslam notes as a “formidable” obstacle: the fact that Le Fanu never explicitly references evolution nor Darwin.<sup>14</sup> For historicists trying to make the case about Le Fanu’s participation in contemporary scientific discourse, the task is made

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<sup>11</sup> Wegley, “Unknown Fear,” 74; Zuber, “Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu’s Sensation Fiction,” 82.

<sup>12</sup> Langan, “Conversations in a Shadowed Room: The Blank Spaces in ‘Green Tea,’” 331, 314.

<sup>13</sup> See Haslam, “The Editor’s Amputated Fingers: Le Fanu’s ‘Green Tea’ and the ‘Chasm’ between Inference and Evidence,” 33.

<sup>14</sup> Stoddardt, “The Precautions of Nervous People Are Infectious,” 25; Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, xiv; Haslam, “The Editor’s Amputated Fingers: Le Fanu’s ‘Green Tea’ and the ‘Chasm’ between Inference and Evidence,” 33.

particularly onerous because of a notable absence of information about the author and his interests. Readers of Stevenson and George Eliot, whose fascination with scientific subjects is more than fully accounted for, can make direct connections about the author and his interests. The same cannot be said of Le Fanu. Gary William Crawford notes that studying Le Fanu is made particularly difficult because not only did Le Fanu famously recede from public life to become “The Invisible Prince” of Dublin following the death of his wife Susanna in 1858, but his letters, notebooks, and literary papers were lost as a result of the irresponsible behavior of his eldest son, Phillip Le Fanu, who himself died a year after his father. Accounts of Le Fanu have been marginal and largely second-hand, and, according to Crawford, in the case of some of the anecdotes published in S.M. Ellis’s *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu, and Others* (1931), “either fabrication or factual errors which were not corrected until William Clinton Lougheed’s 1961 Harvard dissertation ‘Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu: A Critical Biography.’”<sup>15</sup> “The gaps in information about Le Fanu’s life and literary opinions are unfortunate,” as Ivan Melada wisely states, “but such knowledge is not absolutely essential to the understanding and appreciation of his fiction.”<sup>16</sup> I trace out Le Fanu’s references to anatomical literature in line with Srdjan Smajic, who also notes that Le Fanu’s infamous metaphysical doctor, Hesselius, has written a definitive work titled *Cardinal Functions of the Brain* that suggests Le Fanu’s knowledge of nineteenth-century philosophical and scientific work on visual perception by English physicians such as David Hartley in his *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations* (1749).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in outlining Le Fanu’s connection to Swedenborg—who, like Hartley, wrote extensively

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<sup>15</sup> Crawford, *J. Sheridan Le Fanu*, 6–8.

<sup>16</sup> Melada, *Sheridan Le Fanu*, preface.

<sup>17</sup> Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists*, 150–51.

on the brain and its fluid and fascial connections, both in his major anatomical works and in separate essays—I find sufficient cause to think that Le Fanu’s reflections on anatomizing define the major ideas expressed in *In a Glass Darkly*.<sup>18</sup>

Emanuel Swedenborg is today known primarily for his mystical writings, but as Langan reminds readers of Le Fanu, the mystic saw and described himself as a scientist consistently over the course of his lifetime.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Swedenborg’s turn to mystic revelations and prophecy came only after a spiritual crisis as he was investigating anatomical subjects and writing his great series on anatomy: the *Regnum Animale* (1744-45), often translated in quite literal terms as either *The Animal Kingdom* or, more to Swedenborgian taste, *The Soul’s Domain*.<sup>20</sup> Zuber suggests that there is a distinct topical and formal connection between Swedenborg’s scientific writing and Le Fanu’s metaphysical fiction: “Besides the *Arcana* and *Heaven and Hell*, Le Fanu seemed to have also been familiar with Swedenborg’s scientific work *Regnum Animale*, published in English as *The Animal Kingdom* (1843-44). The medical-like prologues from *In a Glass Darkly* that clinically discuss ‘openings of the internal sense’ are particularly reminiscent of this work.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Swedenborg’s collected work on the brain was translated into English and published in four volumes as *The Brain: Considered Anatomically, Physiologically, and Philosophically* from 1882 to 1887 by R.L. Tafel, who dedicated the work to Wilkinson. See Swedenborg, *The Brain: Considered Anatomically, Physiologically, and Philosophically*.

<sup>19</sup> Langan, “Conversations in a Shadowed Room: The Blank Spaces in ‘Green Tea,’” 319.

<sup>20</sup> There is significant confusion about *Regnum Animale*, as the text is often also called *De Oeconomia Regni Animalis*. Inge Jonsson clarifies that the first work in the series is titled *De Oeconomia Regni Animalis* (1740-41) and translated as either *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* or *Dynamics of the Soul’s Domain*, though subsequently, in the second volume, the work became simply the *Regnum Animale*. See Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Zuber, “Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu’s Sensation Fiction,” 76.

Nevertheless, there are more connections to make from the relationship between Swedenborg's *Regnum Animale* and Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* than Zuber suggests, especially when one examines the similarity between the purported authority of the fictional work, Dr. Martin Hesselius, and Swedenborg himself. As a lifelong polymath who studied metallurgy, chemistry, geometry, and engineering, Swedenborg came to pursue anatomy at midlife, during the 1730s, because of his increasing interest in the difficulty of locating the place of the soul in the human body. Swedenborg wanted to determine how the body related to the problem of "correspondences," or, as Harvey Bellin and Darrell Ruhl define it, "psychological-spiritual archetypes—images from outer realities ('the visible universe') which corresponded to inner realities ('the Lord's kingdom')." <sup>22</sup> His arguments about the relationships between the structures of the body, with its complex, logical relations and unity, mirrors his fixation on the structures of relations between heaven and hell, angels and demons, spirits and living people, soul and body. Similarly, Hesselius as described in Le Fanu's text is also a polymath in a distinctly Swedenborgian sense; Hesselius has an immense knowledge of the scientific and spiritual and lives, uniquely, in a world where interpretation of the "case" of the spirit is based almost entirely on a Swedenborgian intuition about the multiple realms in which people and spirits move. In the first pages of the text of "Green Tea," Hesselius articulates almost word for word, at least term for term, many of Swedenborg's ideas:

I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organised substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is;

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<sup>22</sup> Bellin and Ruhl, *Blake and Swedenborg, Opposition Is True Friendship*, 9.

that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body—a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection "in power."<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Hesselius's belief that the real world expresses the spiritual world comes exactly from Swedenborg's Neoplatonic ideals, as does his belief in the materiality of the spirit as substance. To solidify the comparison between Hesselius and Swedenborg, the editor insists that Hesselius has a particularly admirable aptitude for constructing medical case histories that is not dissimilar from the way that Swedenborg himself writes. "He writes in two distinct characters," the editor states: first, with the descriptive abilities of "an intelligent layman," and second, "in the terms of his art, and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis and illustration."<sup>24</sup> The editor adds that, when Hesselius sees his hypothetical patient clearly "through his own hall-door, to the light of day," he also sees "through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead."<sup>25</sup> What Hesselius supposedly sees reveals that he has and believes in the Swedenborgian double-vision: the ordinary and the spiritual side-by-side. As Robert Tracy notes in his introduction to *In a Glass Darkly*, this method of writing in two styles is not typical of medical pathology, but of Swedenborg's Biblical hermeneutics, which relies on

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<sup>23</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

juxtaposing scriptural passages with both analytical commentary and more impressionistic “visionary” experiences of the text.<sup>26</sup>

For Swedenborg, the body served as analogy, or homology, for the universe. He argued that there was “a connection, communion, and mutual relation of all things in the world and in nature.”<sup>27</sup> Swedenborg posited questions of the body’s relation to what he called the “universal” as he believed “the world and nature concentrated themselves in him,” the body of man.<sup>28</sup> For perhaps those reasons, the structures of his texts reflect his conception that there is a “mutual relation of all things in the world and in nature.”<sup>29</sup> His seminal works on anatomy are composed of chapters on different parts of the body, including the tongue; the lips, the mouths, the palate, and the salivary glands; the pharynx and esophagus, and their gland; the stomach and its orifices; and nauseam. Each of these chapters itself is composed of aggregated reflections of other anatomists’ writings on the subjects with a final, contemplative “Analysis” section, composed by Swedenborg himself, that attempts to link these previous writings together and, then, further connect those contemplative theories with Swedenborg’s own interpretations regarding the body’s composition and relation to the spiritual world. He would employ this method of composition—enumerating and arranging the canonical writing on a subject, followed with his own synthesis and interpretation—for the writing of *Arcana*, for which he received most of his fame in the eighteenth century when he and his followers were most actively proselytizing.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>27</sup> Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

However, as Sigstedt notes in his study of Swedenborg, reviewers of the work found Swedenborg's anatomical work "too vast," even "impossible" in its breadth: it was so monstrous that, as one reviewer stated, even the author recognized the work as an "untimely birth."<sup>30</sup> The untimeliness of Swedenborg's mid-eighteenth century writing seems especially key given that, despite such criticism, Swedenborg attained some popularity in Britain nearly a century after his death in 1772.<sup>31</sup> During the latter half of the nineteenth-century, when Le Fanu began what was arguably his most productive creative era, Swedenborgian perspectives were once again becoming appealing in British literary and scientific writers after a long period of neglect. This resurgence in popularity was due in large part to the efforts of Swedenborg's nineteenth-century translator: James John Garth Wilkinson. Indeed, Wilkinson made his name through his translations of Swedenborg's scientific and philosophical writings during the nineteenth century, most notably Swedenborg's *Regnum Animale* as *The Animal Kingdom* in 1843 and 1844.<sup>32</sup> As Wilkinson's contemporary and biographer Carl Theophilus Odhner notes, "Dr. Wilkinson stands unique also as the only professed New-Churchman in the nineteenth century whose name and voice reached widely into both the literary and scientific world, and as such he has effected more perhaps than any other single member of the Church in making known the name of Swedenborg

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic*, 171–72.

<sup>31</sup> William Blake, famously, became linked to Swedenborg in the late eighteenth century following his 1789 meeting with the Swedenborgian-influenced New Jerusalem church. However, the artist and poet would come to directly attack Swedenborgian principles in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), which satirized Swedenborg's ideas about the relationship between the sensual world and the spiritual by putting them into play with each other. For more on Blake's relationship to Swedenborgian thought, see Paley, "'A New Heaven Is Begun': Blake and Swedenborgianism," 15–16, 26.

<sup>32</sup> From here on, I will refer to Swedenborg's writing as *Regnum Animale* and Wilkinson's nineteenth-century translation and interpretation of that work as *The Animal Kingdom*.



and the existence and the general character of the new Revelation.”<sup>33</sup> Odhner was not exaggerating Wilkinson’s significance during the Victorian era: Wilkinson had many dealings with major nineteenth-century British thinkers, including Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, and the Oliphants. Across the Atlantic, he was also a recognized and respected writer in communication with a group of significant American figures, most notably the writer Henry James Sr., father of the three formidable James siblings William, Henry, and Alice.<sup>34</sup> James Sr.’s countryman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, also came to admire Wilkinson for his Swedenborgian translations and other writings. Emerson puffed Wilkinson as the “pupil” of Swedenborg finally arrived to “restore[] his master’s buried books to the day... from their forgotten Latin into English, to go round the world in our commercial and conquering tongue” after a century of critical neglect.<sup>35</sup> As a “philosophic critic, with a coequal vigor of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon’s,” whom Emerson additionally argued in his 1856 *English Traits* “has brought to metaphysics and to physiology a native vigor,” Wilkinson was positioned by one of the leading writers—and flatterers—of the period as the foremost guide for reading Swedenborg’s texts on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, it would have been very difficult for any reader of Swedenborg during the nineteenth-century,

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<sup>33</sup> Odhner, *James John Garth Wilkinson: A Biographical Sketch*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> James Sr. became intrigued by Swedenborgianism after having read Wilkinson’s papers on Coleridge’s readings of Swedenborg’s *De oeconomia regni animalis* (*Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, 1787) alongside *De cultu et amore Dei* (*The Worship and Love of God*, 1745), published in the London *The Monthly Magazine*, in 1841. The impression led to a frequent correspondence and, subsequently, a lifelong friendship between James and Wilkinson.

<sup>35</sup> Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*, 112.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; Emerson, *English Traits*, 249.

including Le Fanu, to escape the reach of Wilkinson's interpretive voice during the latter half of the age.

Throughout his notes and introduction, accounting for roughly 60 pages of *The Animal Kingdom*, Wilkinson emphasizes a series of specific ways to interpret Swedenborg's scientific writing as encompassing both a larger vision of the ultimate goals of scientific research and a more realistic idea of the limitations of the scientific thinker. In Wilkinson's interpretation, Swedenborg's work is significant for breaking free of a taxonomical fetish for collecting facts, common among the modern-day anatomists who were Wilkinson's contemporaries. "Facts are the grand quest of the present time," Wilkinson bemoans, arguing that, as a result, "short-sightedness has so increased upon us, that we must look close in order to see distinctly, and hence extended surfaces do not fall under our vision."<sup>37</sup> Like Dickens's Gradgrind, the present-day scientist has become obsessed with the collection and adherence to "facts," without thinking of the ultimate use or the necessity of such facts. Science, in Wilkinson's age, has become a period of collection, of finding knowledge, without reason, method, or meaning. Significantly for Wilkinson, Swedenborgian thinking pursues a grander plan: a more 'philosophic' goal of searching for "a great principle:—the principle that there exist a universal Analogy and correspondency throughout nature and human society in all their sphere."<sup>38</sup> For Wilkinson, the importance of Swedenborg's work centers on how it "contains new views upon the philosophy of forms and forces" based on a "universality" of structure.<sup>39</sup> To Wilkinson, it is "the grounds of reasons of that universality," which are "well worthy the attention of all those who are engaged

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<sup>37</sup> Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom*, 1:xlvi.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1:xi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1:lvi.

in studying the *living* body.”<sup>40</sup> That ‘philosophical’ work of trying to think about the value of universal ideals—its ethical and moral standing—were what made Swedenborg’s scientific discourse so important and so necessary for the age, in line with the kind of work pursued by other major anatomists of the nineteenth century.

However, such nineteenth-century idealism is not as clearly emphasized in Swedenborg’s scientific writing. Indeed, the spiritualist-scientist emphasizes quite different ideas about the significance of his own work. In *Regnum Animale*, Swedenborg argues that the actual focus of his anatomical studies is methodological: the problem of “how we should investigate it [truth]” through what he calls “analysis.”<sup>41</sup> Swedenborg himself was not concerned with a problematic obsession for finding fact or the philosophical value of his work, but the methodology by which anatomists like himself should pursue the work. Swedenborg rejects the idea of relying on “synthetic” analysis, by which Swedenborg means relying upon a “synthesis” of past principles with present, because he believes such synthesis seizes principles “familiar and favorable to the intellect as formed by previous ideas,” to the detriment of new ideas that “synthesis polishes away” in ways that “represses and removes” anything “adverse” that may appear.<sup>42</sup> His definition of an analytic method suggests, simply, empiricism: “[t]he analytic method, on the other hand, rises from phenomena and effects to causes, and evolves from them principles; consequently evolves universals from experience of singulars, interior things from the exterior, simples from compounds, in a word, the prior from the posterior.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1:lvi, ix.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1:3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1:4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Even as Swedenborg emphasizes his devotion to the analytic method, his anatomical text shows how he clearly fails to meet his goals. In the very text in which he rejects the practices of synthesizers, Swedenborg himself synthesizes the work of other anatomists, Aristotelian, surely, but also of others who have already evinced the ideas he attempts to lay out, including Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), Lorenz Heister (1683-1758), Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694), Jan Swammerdam (1637-1680), and Jacob Winslow (1669-1760). He leans on these writers' interpretations—indeed, often quoting them verbatim for pages on end—before including his own “analysis” of the information that has already been generated by others. In his translator's introduction, Wilkinson admits that Swedenborg rarely practiced what he preached, confessing, too, that he recognizes Swedenborg was not as much an empiricist as he should have been, as Swedenborg “studied more by plates than by actual dissection.”<sup>44</sup> The translator then discloses an even more uncomfortable fact: that “Swedenborg is not to be resorted to as an authority for anatomical facts.”<sup>45</sup> Though he advocated for the examination of phenomena, it is apparent in Swedenborg's anatomical writing that he trusted little in the senses, for, Swedenborg argues, what you see before you is just the representation of something else: “one thing is represented in another.”<sup>46</sup> In short, Swedenborg did not adhere to the ideal of a scientific “philosopher” that Wilkinson wishes him to be. Like Martin Hesselius, the so-called “medical philosopher,” Swedenborg seemed to occupy an uneasy role in the world of philosophical anatomy.

Le Fanu picks up this nuanced difference between Swedenborg's ideas and his nineteenth-century translator's, meditating not only on science and anatomy, but also on the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1:lvii.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1:lvi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1:1.

dynamic between editor/translator and author. Just as Dr. Martin Hesselius, the man whose collected papers form *In a Glass Darkly*, seems another Swedenborg, the unnamed editor of *In a Glass Darkly* seems Wilkinson's double. *In a Glass Darkly*'s fictional editor has the task of selecting what, of the scientific material, should be prepared and presented to a public readership and it is the editor who, like Wilkinson, must explain the significance of the work in these introductory notes. Reading Le Fanu's work, however, exposes the complex power of that editorial role. Trusting to the authority of Hesselius or the events that he enumerates in his medical case histories becomes quite difficult given that the editor often undermines that credibility, as well as his own. For example, in his introduction to the collection—the prologue to “Green Tea,” the first story in the collection—the editor reveals that the first story derives from letters “written, some in English, some in French, but the greater part in German,” requiring his translation.<sup>47</sup> His admission that he is the translator of the work complicates his purported faithfulness to the text and to Hesselius's words, implicating him as a man not unlike Wilkinson, the nineteenth-century Swedenborgian translator. The editor apologetically admits his own dilettantism. “I am a faithful, though I am conscious, by no means a graceful translator,” the editor humbly confesses.<sup>48</sup> Wilkinson never winces to indicate the same ungainliness in his own translation, as his translation of the title *Regnum Animale* as *The Animal Kingdom* indicates his awkward propensity to literality. However, Le Fanu's fictional editor of *In a Glass Darkly* takes this ungraceful translation as something more than mere clumsiness: he suggests to readers that they would be right to question the fallibility inherent in any translator's work. The editor continues on to reveal, “here and there I omit some passages, and shorten others, and disguise

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<sup>47</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

names.”<sup>49</sup> Though he insists “I have interpolated nothing,” the suggestion of the contrary is presented to the reader with frequency.<sup>50</sup>

Readers are often interrupted by this editor, who suddenly appears in a prologue to a chapter, a postscript, between parentheses or brackets (symbols that demand room be made for his presence), or, more insidiously, directly within the text itself. Strikingly, the editor reveals his own hand in manipulating and altering the text. The interloping editor, in one parenthetical note presented intratextually within “Green Tea,” interrupts the flow of the narrative itself to interject a point about an editorial choice made, allegedly, for the reader’s benefit. The narrative text is written from Hesselius’s perspective and at the very moment that Hesselius recounts his return to his own lodgings from a journey to see his patient, Mr. Jennings, the editor abruptly curtails his explanation of the medical case by interjecting:

(There occurs here a careful note of Dr. Hesselius' opinion upon the case, and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious—some persons would say mystical. But, on the whole, I doubt whether it would sufficiently interest a reader of the kind I am likely to meet with, to warrant its being here reprinted. The whole letter was plainly written at the inn where he had hid himself for the occasion. The next letter is dated from his town lodgings.)<sup>51</sup>

Crucially, the editor’s sudden parenthetical point obscures whether the case can be attributed to either supernatural or purely material causes. Yet the editor’s words also occlude Hesselius’s thinking, undermining the supposed medical authority at a moment where he can show his

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 34.

intellectual clout. Making a choice supposedly on behalf of the reader, the editor prevents that very same reader from accessing the relevant medical facts of habits, diet, and medication so important to Hesselius's profession and lifelong work to do something not quite justified by the editor's vague statements that he publishes in order to "amuse and horrify" his lay readers. This editor also appears earlier in the text to undermine Hesselius in a passage where Hesselius and his patient Jennings speak of the "mere materialist" Dr. Harley, whom Jennings cannot fully trust for answers about his strange condition:

‘I never read a book that I go with, so entirely, as that of yours,’ he continued. ‘I saw at once there is more in it than is quite unfolded. Do you know Dr Harley?’ he asked, rather abruptly.

In passing, the editor remarks that the physician here named was one of the most eminent who had ever practiced in England.<sup>52</sup>

Like a specter himself, the editor passes through the material body of the text and the space of the page, interfering and interloping, transgressing the structure of the plot and even the conversation between two men. The text can actually be read in two ways: "the editor" who interrupts the text "[i]n passing" could either be Hesselius taking on the role of the editor in shaping his narrative for Van Loo or the unnamed editor who cuts in on his capacities as the collections' authoritative citational authority—the text does not clarify. In any case, the editor comes in to undermine the opinion of Dr. Hesselius by suggesting Dr Harley's eminence, contorting the text's representative fidelity in the process.

Like Le Fanu's editor, Wilkinson proposes quite distinct ideas from Swedenborg; he reflects his nineteenth-century anxieties about the role of sight in interpretative practices of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

modern age. Wilkinson's translations were among many persistent attempts by anatomists of the period to question the abilities of the mind to see and perceive accurately that were actually questions of how to imagine and how to connect. What were the limits of knowledge? Why did difference truly have to separate one branch of thinking from another? For a Swedenborgian, like Wilkinson, there should have been no limits or horizons for any branch of knowledge. The minds of contemporary scientific thinkers, according to Wilkinson, "came to a standstill" because "they had not conceived the laws of order," lacking "the tincture of a universal method," an abiding overarching approach, that would allow them to imagine how all facts across disciplines and practices connected.<sup>53</sup> For Wilkinson, it came down to a question of authority:

But why should the knowledge of the human frame be limited to the dissecting-room? Why should it be the appendage of one craft, and not an inheritance of universal humanity? Why should the truths of the body be the exclusive property of the physicians, any more than the truths of the soul the exclusive property of the clergy? Have we not all souls, and have we not all bodies?<sup>54</sup>

Physicians and clergy alike bowed down too often and too low to the institutions and habits of their professions, not questioning why and how they worked, all the while closely guarding their right to this "inheritance." Thinking about who should and how one could study the human body, Wilkinson advocated for a thinker who troubled the notion of authoritative interpretation as well as authoritative vision. Wilkinson wanted to believe in a man who rejected seeing closely and narrowly, choosing, instead, to imagine broadly. He wished for a type of person, hitherto unclassified, who was neither physician nor clergy nor any completely disciplined body. He

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<sup>53</sup> Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom*, 1:xliv.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:lvii.



wanted someone who could get at the question of the import and weight of science—its philosophy, its soul. And it is this Swedenborgian debate that Le Fanu is preoccupied with as he lays out his short story collection.

## **II. Medical Philosophers and Metaphysical Medicine**

Understanding *In a Glass Darkly* as a text divided between two medical philosophers—Hesseliuss and his editor, Swedenborg and Wilkinson—with two different ideas of the value of the kind of “metaphysical medicine” practiced by “medical philosophers” changes some key interpretations of Le Fanu’s work. On one hand, it partly explains why Le Fanu so carefully dates his works; his texts continually emphasize the interplay between past and present. The first story in the collection, “Green Tea,” recounts the history of the Reverend Mr. Jennings around the year 1819, when he begins to be hounded by recurring visions of a terrifying black monkey. “The Familiar” follows a similar plot centered around terrifying specters, but set in 1794 in a more urban landscape. “The Familiar” recounts the tale of Captain Barton, a middle-aged navy captain, who at the time of his engagement to a young and beautiful woman, Miss Montague, falls victim to recurring visions of a small, deformed man who menacingly follows his every move. “Mr. Justice Harbottle,” in contrast, is the account of a striking tale from the mid-eighteenth century, specifically surrounding the year 1748: the titular Judge Harbottle dreams that he has been sentenced to death by a supernatural “High Court of Appeal” formed of ghosts for his unethical practices and is found lifeless in his home shortly thereafter under mysterious circumstances. “The Room in the Dragon Volant” departs from the first three stories in the collection for both its length and lack of ghoulish specters. Instead, “The Dragon Volant” is set in the year 1815, in France, shortly after the battle of Waterloo. The tale is composed of a young

Englishman's experience of entrapment at a French hotel, The Dragon Volant, after being duped and drugged by an enigmatic but corporeal trio: a Countess, her older husband, and a suave Marquis. "Carmilla" seems even further removed from the previous stories, set in a remote country house in Styria, the southeastern state of Austria. Equally as long as "Dragon Volant," "Carmilla" unfolds the early biography of a woman named Laura, now in her old age, who recalls her early attraction and repulsion for a beautiful stranger, Carmilla, believed to be a vampire. All the stories are set during a period in time, from the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, when the work of interpreting the structure of bodies was undergoing rapid changes. The narrators of each tale (some direct participants in the narrative, others who record each story second-hand) devote considerable space in their narratives to reflecting on how these events have required the passage of time to understand the course of events properly, or, in contrast, how such ideas still haunt the present. In Le Fanu's consideration of "metaphysical medicine" narratives, the past is always impinging on the present and, likewise, the present (in the form of the editor) interrupting and curtailing the past. The result is that *In a Glass Darkly* always invites its reader to historicize: to contemplate how the specificity of the moment impinges upon the interpretation of the moment.

Perhaps more importantly, the history of anatomy that underlies the text illuminates Le Fanu's complex understanding of the value of the kind of "metaphysical medicine" practiced by his fictionalized anatomists and dissectors. Le Fanu is undeniably critical of scientific authority, but unpacking his definition of "medical philosopher" is important for understanding not just what he thinks is wrong about the medical philosopher's brand of scientific hermeneutics, but also what is valuable in that work. In the first tale, "Green Tea," Doctor Hesselius introduces himself succinctly as not just a German physician, but specifically a "medical philosopher" in

terms that align him, once more, as a Swedenborgian doppelganger. As Hesselius reveals, the title is bestowed upon him by a friend, Professor Van Loo, to whom the bulk of the text of “Green Tea” is directed. The philosophical definition of medicine that Hesselius provides recalls the ideal analytic approach to anatomizing that Swedenborg promotes in *Regnum Animale*. According to Hesselius, a medical philosopher “elaborat[es] theories by the aid of cases sought out by himself, and by him watched and scrutinized with more time at command, and consequently infinitely more minuteness than the ordinary practitioner can afford.”<sup>55</sup> Diligent in his analysis, such a philosopher also “falls insensibly into habits of observation, which accompany him everywhere, and are exercised, as some people would say, impertinently, upon every subject that presents itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry.”<sup>56</sup> Such description, as Daniel Lewis argues in his reading of male bodies in “Green Tea,” clearly evokes Michel Foucault’s idea of the nineteenth-century pathologist who became the wielder of a powerful, clinical gaze.<sup>57</sup> Foucault situates this gaze as “no longer subjected to the immediate law of truth” because it is now “a gaze that dominates,”<sup>58</sup> Yet in his propensity to deal in the supernatural and thus, often, beings (spirits, ghosts, ghouls) from beyond the veil, Hesselius is

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<sup>55</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis, “I Saw Him Looking at Me,” paras. 1–2. For Lewis, male bodies become normalized and disciplined by this corrective medical gaze, which has the ability to cast the patient as a case of a now normative view of sickness or health. However, given the way that Hesselius’ actual medical acuity is satirized and his authority undermined by his own sycophant editor, I do not fully agree with Lewis’ concluding argument that “‘Green Tea’ joins other gothic fiction in its depiction of narratives that contest the boundaries of acceptable behavior” only to “finally restore those boundaries by punishing those characters that move outside their acceptable social and gender roles” (para. 30).

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 39.

aligned less with the pathologist and more with the anatomist who deals in the analysis of the dead.<sup>59</sup> As Hesselius shows in his interactions with the Reverend Mr. Jennings in “Green Tea,” the work of the medical philosopher, in its propensity to “present[] itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry,” has little to do with the work of healing and everything, as Foucault argues, with seeing. While Hesselius uses a gaze similar to that of the clinician, it is arguably a gaze that does not dominate the subjects it studies, so much as decenters that subject altogether.

Throughout “Green Tea,” the medical subject is displaced as the center of import for the practitioner of metaphysical medicine. The particular case subject, Mr. Jennings is described as a “tall and thin” bachelor, “middle-aged,” who “dresses with a natty old-fashioned, high-church precision,” and who is “most anxious to be actively employed in his sacred profession,” but finds that his health quickly fails him in the middle of service, “and in a very strange way.”<sup>60</sup> The doctor, spending much time observing his subject—first, observing Jennings covertly from afar, and later through interviewing his subject comes to find out a startling fact: Jennings is haunted, or believes he is haunted, by a bizarre, spectral vision, “a small monkey, perfectly black,” with “only one peculiarity—a character of malignity—unfathomable malignity,” which leads it to stalk and hurl verbal abuses at Jennings.<sup>61</sup> When Jennings reveals that the demonic monkey nearly led him to commit suicide just a few weeks before their meeting, Hesselius makes Jennings promise to send for him immediately should the malicious monkey reappear. He

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<sup>59</sup> Foucault’s invitation to consider, “strange as it may seem to us now,” how “[a]natomy and the clinic were not of the same mind” allows us to differentiate the clinician’s gaze from the anatomist’s gaze. See *Ibid.*, 126. Notably, Foucault’s interpretation of the anatomical gaze is heavily influenced by his own interpretation of the work of Xavier Bichat—a subject I consider, too, in the third chapter of this work.

<sup>60</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 6–7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

comforts the reverend, with the assurance that Jennings is haunted by no real demon, and has been preserved as “the act of God. You are in his hands and in the power of no other being: be therefore confident for the future.”<sup>62</sup> Hesselius leaves “repeating [his] assurance that [he] would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until [he] had thoroughly investigated [Jennings’s] case, and that tomorrow [Jennings] should hear the result,”—and then, inexplicably, Hesselius leaves town altogether for a country house two miles away.<sup>63</sup> “And there I resolved,” the doctor states simply, “without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night” to further reflection on Mr. Jennings’s case, thinking and reflecting “so much of the morning as it might require.”<sup>64</sup> Hesselius abandons his patient, his medical subject. Unintruded upon for the whole night, the doctor makes the half-day journey back to his London lodgings the next day only to be greeted with a desperate letter from Jennings written the night before. Hastening to the man’s side, Hesselius is informed by Jennings’s shaken servants that the reverend has cut his own throat.

The medical philosopher’s expertise in careful, minute scrutiny makes him an observer in the most insidious of senses. His gaze does not dominate his subject so much as look through and past him, beyond the needs of his patient. Hesselius observes long, “with more time at command” than an ordinary practitioner, and closely, “with infinitely more minuteness” than an ordinary practitioner, but only because it requires much more time for detailed study than a regular practitioner “can afford” on behalf of their patient. Wasting time, as he does, observing without speaking to Jennings, and then traveling away from his patient, Hesselius fails to be of

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 34.

assistance in his capacity as Jennings' physician. His watchful proclivities do not benefit his patient; in fact, they cost Jennings his life. Worryingly, such an approach to medicine can cause the medical philosopher illness as much as his patient. An observant medical philosopher like Hesselius has a tendency to "fall"—spiritually, pathologically—into an insensible "habit," one that others around the individual find impertinent more than helpful. In effect, Hesselius positions himself as a figure not unlike the malicious monkey who watches Jennings equally "insensibly" and "impertinently," except that Hesselius is a watcher not of a single man, but of a natural-spiritual world.

Hesselius's actual contribution to scientific study, then, is put to question. The doctor does not advance understanding through his work of observation: indeed, the medical philosopher reveals that he does not create new theories, so much as "elaborat[es] theories by the aid of cases" that he seeks out. He is not interested in finding new knowledge or even expanding pre-existing knowledge. In making such a statement, Le Fanu provokes the reader to consider the possibility that the "scientific" work of his fictional Swedenborg (Hesselius) is not unlike that of the real Swedenborg. Representing the "analytic" approach of someone like Swedenborg through the actions of Hesselius, Le Fanu critiques the work of medical philosophy of interest to both figures.

As the author of *Essay on Metaphysical Medicine*, Hesselius's true contributions to medical science are or evoke antagonistic impressions of scientific practice: he is, indeed, a collector of metaphysical medicine more so than a practitioner. Talking of more conventional scientific thinkers, specifically a "Dr. Harley" whom Jennings names, Jennings and Hesselius mark an otherwise eminent doctor as "one of the greatest fools I have ever met in my life" for his

“little leaning to the materialistic school,” his being a “mere materialist.”<sup>65</sup> Jennings pronounces that this non-philosophical medical practitioner “seems to me, one half, blind” because he cannot engage in the Swedenborgian metaphysical medicine that so interests and informs both his and Hesselius’s conception of the body. Continuing a long, fragmented rant, Jennings argues that he believes:

one half of all [Harley] looks at is dark—preternaturally bright and vivid all the rest; and the worst of it is, it seems *wilful*. I can't get him—I mean he won't—I've had some experience of him as a physician, but I look on him as, in that sense, no better than a paralytic mind, an intellect half dead. I'll tell you—I know I shall some time—all about it," he said, with a little agitation.<sup>66</sup>

Like Hesselius, who sees a significance in understanding the world as vividly active and full of corporeal and spiritual bodies, his patient Jennings has little taste for those who close off their appreciation for non-materialist answers to the mysteries of science. His speech to Hesselius, however, is so full of fits and starts, indicating the revision and restructuring of his particular argumentative strain, that he betrays his agitated, suggestively pathological, need for a complete form of knowledge. This desire for a more complete knowledge, to Jennings, means not only a willingness to look into the “dark” possibilities alluded to in his marked-up copy of the *Arcana Coelestia*, but a willingness to dim or look past what he admits is the “preternaturally bright and vivid” materialist world. He cannot deny that there are certain materialist facts involving the body, but, as Le Fanu suggests, he wishes to forgo them a little willfully himself. In considering what he wants of his work in medical science, Hesselius states that he also pursues Jennings’

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

method of seeing. That is, both men have no aim to see things anew in the present world, but “darkly” through the old paradigms.

Yet, in describing what he believes medical science should be, Hesselius begins to open up a new concept of what the value of this seemingly useless work of metaphysical medicine might be. Hesselius’s failure to care for Jennings may be linked then not to his failure to be a good physician, but his relative success at being a medical philosopher—someone who looks to universals, albeit much to his own detriment. Hesselius states that, like Jennings, he wishes “to see it more generally understood, in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant.”<sup>67</sup> That is, Hesselius wishes to explore the work of medicine itself. Medicine in his view is the work of recognizing the relationship between things “more generally understood” in ways that recognize the connection between the natural world and spiritual world. In trying to look for explanations for the mysteries of the material world in the spiritual, he makes connections wild, random, unspecified, and hard to prove. Seeing a figure, such as Jennings’s malicious monkey, Hesselius can and does connect the beast to any number of possible causes, but also to no particular cause. Hesselius leaves the rector’s home “dejected and agitated,” and recounts to his interlocutor, Van Loo, his shaken state:

While I write to you I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 37.



While he emphasizes that he knows the events are “true,” what comes to the fore in this brief admission is the sense that Hesselius cannot trust his own perception of events, his own means of interpretation. The barriers between dream, memory, and reality are shattered, but not in the spiritually significant way that they are in Swedenborgian conceptions of the universe. This way of seeing leaves no promised surety, no critical medical help. Hesselius thus awkwardly counteracts what he later states about his own abilities as a physician in his final reflections on the case of Jennings. In his conclusion, Hesselius argues that he has never failed because he knows it is “by acting steadily upon the body, by a simple process” that one can “dim[] and ultimately seal[] that inner eye,” but his is a metaphysical medicine that refuses to work with the body, which is only a referent for something else, something yet unnamed.<sup>69</sup>

As the only work without overt supernaturalism and one of two works—“Carmilla” being the other—where the individual narrating the events of the story is the narrative’s primary subject, “The Room in the Dragon Volant” offers a variation on Le Fanu’s more skeptical idea of medical practitioners like Hesselius. As the only story to completely lack overt hints of supernaturalism, and with its devotion to historic specificity, “The Room in the Dragon Volant” seems to conform to more typical realist genres of the period; much like a stereotypical bildungsroman, the story follows a young man’s coming-of-age and movement from innocence to experience. The autodiegetic narrator Richard Beckett reveals that the events of his account occurred around the year 1815, shortly after the conclusion of the battle of Waterloo allowed English excursionists the freedom to travel through France. Beckett, on a Grand Tour, finds himself assisting a beautiful woman known as the Countess after her carriage has overturned. Following the Countess and her older husband, the Comte de St Alyre, to a nearby inn, he falls in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 39.

love with the mysterious noblewoman and embroils himself in a protracted quest to get closer to her. During the trip, he increasingly finds himself under the influence of another mysterious stranger, the Marquis d'Harmonville, who helps him circulate among rich and influential Continental aristocrats. After a party where he is duped into believing that the Countess loves him, Beckett agrees to run away with her but is ultimately betrayed by his friends and would-be lover. He is drugged by the Countess, d'Harmonville, and the Count, who are revealed to be conmen known for preying on foolish foreigners by collecting their ready money and then burying their victims alive. D'Harmonville is revealed at story's conclusion to be no Marquis, but an unscrupulous physician named Planard, who has been slowly getting to know Beckett in order to perpetuate the con. Planard's efforts to befriend the hapless Beckett are revealed to be an elaborate scheme to test the efficacy of a drug they use on Beckett prior to the night of their ultimate betrayal of the vapid Englishman.

The medical-spiritual “case” that excites Hesselius's interest in this narrative is that of the particular infusion or distillation that d'Harmonville uses to drug the naïve Beckett. As the editor reveals, Beckett's specific case “is referred to, very pointedly, and more than once, in the extraordinary Essay upon the Drug of the Dark and the Middle Ages” that Hesselius has written, also titled “*Mortis Imago*.”<sup>70</sup> The prologue situates the case as reliant upon the mystery surrounding the drug, the *mortis imago*, which translates to the “image of death”—or, reading *imago* less literally, the “face”, or the “likeness,” of death. The work thus evokes an essay that might be found in a study of anatomy: a study of the cadaver. However, the problem of interpretation within this intriguingly non-supernatural text lies exactly in the difference between

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 119.

appearances and reality or, more precisely, the difference between medical and anatomical studies, studies of the living and dead.

Like the doctor Hesselius, Beckett describes himself in terms that emphasize his keen observational abilities. He imagines himself as a learned man, well-read and able to quickly determine what ails the object of his study. Spying on the Duchess as she reads a letter in the drawing-room of the Belle Étoile, he emphasizes the acuity and perfection of his own perceptual ability. His insistence that “I was watching every look and movement, the minutest, with an attention as intense as if an ordeal involving my life depended on them” evokes the kind of perceptual acuity that Hesselius ascribes himself in “Green Tea.”<sup>71</sup> Specifically, he believes he sees a melancholy air about her that others do not.<sup>72</sup> “Being at that time blessed with long and keen vision,” Beckett pronounces, “I saw this beautiful face with perfect distinctness. I saw even the blue veins that traced their wanderings on the whiteness of her full throat.”<sup>73</sup> However, his ability to see almost through her skin to the blue veins beneath her white flesh recalls the work of, specifically, the anatomist who cuts and dissects more than the doctor who works with a living patient. Indeed, he treats his object of love much like a specimen in the way that he imagines her as an object frozen as like a piece of art, an object for him to know completely.

Ironically, though he emphasizes his attention to detail, Beckett often undermines this idealistic notion of his own analytic mastery. Travelling in his carriage through the beautiful countryside of France, Beckett admits that “I ought to have noted it more particularly,” but that he has become distracted with fantasies of Paris and his future that leave him “little patient and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 123.

less attention” for the “rather picturesque little town” whose name he forgets, along with “many more important places through which I posted in my hurried journey.”<sup>74</sup> This forgetfulness does little to serve him in Paris during the multiple instances where he is told of the common cons and species of conmen that prey on romantic fools like himself. In one instance, he ignores ironic foreshadowing freely offered by his one-time friend, the false d’Harmonville, who tells him quite plainly that there is a class in Paris “who live by their wits...some of them even splendidly,” using “animation and invention, and the dramatic faculty” so that they “can affect the manners and enjoy the luxuries of people of distinction.”<sup>75</sup> Shortly after, he encounters, himself, a case of body-swapping where a dead man is passed off as a living Chinese magician.<sup>76</sup> Later, he hears a strange story of the Dragon Volant from a friend, Monsieur Carmagnac, who exactly recounts the disappearance of another foreigner who stayed in his room in the Dragon Volant without making any connections to his own predicament.<sup>77</sup> Hearing of the viciousness of the local criminal class, the repetition of various cons that have been working for “a hundred years... or more” which can be found, not far, but among Beckett’s own collection of French anecdotes and memoirs, Beckett has little desire to connect the imaginative fiction of his experiences with what he actually experiences.<sup>78</sup> This would-be doctor of love is shown to be little more than a dilettante in his knowledge of the relationships between bodies.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 200–201.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 187–89.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 201.

Instead, imagining himself as the Duchess's savior and the cure for her misery, Beckett misjudges his role within the text, but in ways that have particular relevance to the depiction of metaphysical medicine that Le Fanu attempts to articulate. Beckett comes to find that his vision of the doctor is not accurate; there are many types of doctors actually working within his history, often seeking not to heal a heart, but to stop it altogether. When d'Harmonville reveals himself to be not a Marquis but Doctor Planard, who has very carefully been mixing and testing a paralyzing drug upon Beckett over the course of the story, the reader again confronts the language of anatomy, this time devoid of Beckett's naïve sense of anatomizing. Instead of giving one the ability to see into the beauty of a body, with its romantic blue veins against white flesh, Beckett finds himself the object of study being examined by the doctor, Planard, who in looking at him "was treating [him] as coolly as he might a subject which he was about to place on the dissecting-table for a lecture."<sup>79</sup> Now the subject on the table to be dissected—actually, to be buried alive in the place of a corpse—Beckett realizes the ultimate fate and, perhaps, the more accurate work of the anatomist that he believed he was. If Le Fanu's story collection suggests the inadequacy of Beckett's hermeneutic practices, this inadequacy becomes deeply entwined in a clarification that the text attempts to make about the work of such a "doctor." None of the supposed doctors of "The Dragon Volant" work as healers. They are all anatomizers, looking through and past the bodies to other ends. Le Fanu thus suggests that this is actually the delusion that consumes the text and Dr. Hesselius. Beckett's repeated failures in analyzing the static image of the doctor, of the woman, are failures to see the image of death there encapsulated.

Much like "The Room in the Dragon Volant," "Carmilla" seems a notable departure from the first three stories bound together in *In a Glass Darkly*. Set in a remote Austrian countryside

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 230.

with characters of mixed English and Continental bloodlines, Le Fanu's last story in the collection traces the reception of a mysterious young woman named Carmilla to the family circle of the text's autodiegetic narrator, Laura. Laura is at first excited by Carmilla's sudden arrival, as she finds her a suitable replacement for Bertha Rheinfeldt, a friend who was originally meant to stay with Laura's family but who has mysteriously passed away from a wasting illness, the effects of "a monster," according to Bertha's father, General Baron Spielsdorf.<sup>80</sup> However, Laura begins to see a resemblance between her new friend's face and a vision from a childhood nightmare about a beautiful young woman who comforts her and then attacks her, so that she feels "as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment," a trauma "which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking."<sup>81</sup> Laura's old nightmares come back once Carmilla enters the household; thus, Laura begins her descent into "the strangest illness under which mortal ever suffered"—simultaneously pleasurable and painful—a disease which seems similar to one that has steadily been causing the deaths of many local village women in the region.<sup>82</sup>

The story's climax hinges on the destruction of Carmilla by General Spielsdorf and Laura's father, who come to believe Carmilla is actually the same person as Millarca, a strange young woman the General invited into his own household prior to his daughter's death—and that this Millarca, or Carmilla, is also the Countess Karnstein, Mircalla, a woman who was believed to be a vampire hundreds of years earlier. Multiple medical authorities come to corroborate this

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 246, 259.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 281–82.

case of vampirism including Laura's own father, who "piques himself on being something of a physician;" the family physician who is called to treat Carmilla and Laura for separate episodes of shock; "two medical men, one officially present, the other on the part of the promoter of the inquiry" who go with the General and Laura's father to uncover Mircalla's tomb; and the General, who following the successful eradication of Mircalla becomes a scientific investigator devoting himself "to the minute and laborious investigation of the marvelously authenticated tradition of Vampirism."<sup>83</sup> These authoritative men punish Mircalla brutally by driving a sharp stake through the heart of the alleged vampire as she "uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony."<sup>84</sup> Striking off her head to produce "a torrent of blood," the two fathers and the two medical men then burn the head and body, which reduced to ashes are "thrown upon the river and borne away."<sup>85</sup> Though Laura does not attend the event, she reads of the punishment inflicted upon Carmilla from her father's "report of the Imperial Commission" complete "with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings, attached in verification of the statement."<sup>86</sup>

In Laura's experience with doctors, her exchanges with both her father and the General, and her reading of the trial that finally befell the Countess Mircalla Karnstein, the young woman comes to learn two valuable lessons about interpretation: the first regarding who is allowed to interpret and the second about the proper means to interpret. Laura's father and the physician are the ones who engrain within her their sense of disgust for her body's slow "sinking" when they

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 253, 258, 271, 288, 315, 316.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 315–16.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

examine her. The doctor, giving permission to Laura's father to "lower[] [her] dress a very little... to detect a symptom of the complaining under which you have been suffering," causes Laura to feel a sudden fear about her body which she cannot see. Her father shouts "God bless me!—so it is" and the doctor confirms with her father, "You see it now with your own eyes" in "gloomy triumph," telling her all the while that she is actually quite seriously ill.<sup>87</sup> Laura is forced, under their gaze, to take her illness seriously though they will not tell her what is exactly the cause. When she does ask "*what* does he think is the matter with me?" her father responds "with more irritation than I ever remember him to have displayed before" while telling her "you must not plague me with questions."<sup>88</sup> Laura's father insists, "You shall know all about it in a day or two; that is, all that *I* know," and he is right—for Laura comes to learn much about her illness, though neither from her father nor her doctor. She receives that necessary and thorough education on the history of the vampire from General Spielsdorf when he arrives on the scene. The General is the one who informs Laura and her father of his personal experience with the vampire Millarca and the opinions of "a man curiously learned upon the very subject" on vampiric disease.<sup>89</sup> When the General states bluntly that Carmilla is the same as Millarca, who is the same as Mircalla, in front of Laura, he engrains in Laura the argument that the vampire's shifting identity is always grounded in recognizable signs and symbols: birthmarks, coloring, expression.

Laura thus comes to fully commit her mind to the idea that what lies obvious at the surface—these anagrams, gestures, marks of the body—produce the uncanny recognition of that which is dead. Like Foucault's clinician, who accepts "all pathological manifestations [will]

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 310.



“speak a clear, ordered language,” Laura is invited to participate in practicing this work of “composing and decomposing” the body of Carmilla before her that seems “an ordering that is the natural order itself.”<sup>90</sup> Perversely, as is made evident to the reader, this natural and ordered way of interpreting the pathological manifestations of the vampire is entirely artificial, based on the folklore and human narratives of generations of the superstitious peasantry and, now, Christian aristocrats and landed gentry. The named disease of “Vampirism,” according to these men, is a “marvelously authenticated tradition” and a “condition” (“the condition of the vampire”) with a well-recorded past.<sup>91</sup> Laura must then accept her father, the General, and the Imperial Commission’s full knowledge of the case, their authoritative tradition. She determines:

If human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions innumerable, each consisting of many members, all chosen for integrity and intelligence, and constituting reports more voluminous perhaps than exist upon any one other class of cases, is worth anything, it is difficult to deny, or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the Vampire.<sup>92</sup>

Le Fanu invites his reader to consider the import of such tradition and expertise in interpretation. The obsession with tradition comes to define Laura’s way of thinking, as she states that “[f]or her part” she has “heard no theory by which to explain what I myself have witnessed and experienced, other than that supplied by the ancient and well-attested belief of the country.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 94–95.

<sup>91</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 316–17.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Buying in to these beliefs in tradition make Laura increasingly more sickly. As she concludes her narrative, she reveals that revisiting this history of the vampire and its traditions has left her without any composure, “far from it; I cannot think of it without agitation” so that she “has unstrung my nerves for months to come, and reinduced a shadow of the unspeakable horror which years after my deliverance continued to make my days and nights dreadful, and solitude insupportably terrific.”<sup>94</sup>

Yet this method of ‘traditional’ interpretation is challenged in the text by Carmilla, who as the embodiment of delicate, languid femininity suggests a counterbalance to these masculinist perspectives on vampirism. Playing against the idealized image of a woman in communion with nature—that is, as a traditional gothic heroine, under the thrall of more ancient natural or supernatural forces—she reveals herself to be, shockingly, a rather modern scientific thinker for the time. She is the only individual in the short story who attempts to refute the supposed medical authorities on the means of interpretation through a debate about how disease is to be read on the body. When Laura’s father comes home from seeing a young peasant who has been languishing similarly to two other recently deceased tenants, he notes, “All this...is strictly referable to natural causes. These poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbors,” before proceeding to state that they should not worry themselves for “[w]e are in God’s hands; nothing can happen without His permission, and all will end well for those who love Him.”<sup>95</sup> His argument stems from his sense of his authority as someone who “piques himself on being something of a

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 269–70.

physician” and, counter to the superstitious village people, a civilized Christian. Yet his diagnosis—that these “poor people” are only imagining their disease—comes from a strong belief that the poor are subject to delusions of the imagination. Carmilla is more incredulous, bursting out with the exclamation “Creator! *Nature!*” in answer to Laura’s “gentle father” before coming to settle with him: “And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature—don’t they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so.”<sup>96</sup>

Carmilla rejects the authority of the medical doctors—“Doctors never did me any good”—and instead challenges Laura to reconsider the authority of “Nature” by turning to a more modern point of view, that of the natural historian.<sup>97</sup> Telling Laura and Laura’s father that she also “suffered from this very illness,” Carmilla reveals that she was able to overcome it herself, “I forgot all by my pain and weakness, and they were not so bad as are suffered in other diseases.”<sup>98</sup> Carmilla then tries to convince Laura that the specter of death is not bad or immoral, but part of a natural order. She uses not only the discourse of natural history to explain this different idea of naturalness, but the pathos of a trained rhetorician. Such illness and even death does not have any moral registry for Carmilla; rather, such a death retains a sweetness (as long as Carmilla and Laura are together “to die as lovers may—to die together, so that they may live together”).<sup>99</sup> Arguing again for the naturalness of death conflated with the naturalness of a love between women, Carmilla makes her point with romantic fervor:

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae, don't you see—each with their peculiar propensities, necessities and structure. So says Monsieur Buffon, in his big book, in the next room."<sup>100</sup>

Here, Le Fanu reveals Carmilla to be as good a scientific thinker as Laura's father, though in a much different vein. Where Laura's father aligns himself with a Christian-pagan medical "tradition," Carmilla aligns herself with more modern anatomical work through her admiration of "Monsieur Buffon"—the eighteenth-century French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788)—and "his big book," the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* or *Natural History: General and Particular* (1749). Her specific interest in the "peculiar propensities, necessities and structure" of organisms as diverse as caterpillars and girls, and as articulated by Buffon, suggest her interest in two of Buffon's major ideas. First, she seems to show interest in the "principle of the unity of the plan of composition" that led to the idea of a "universal form" so central to a modern scientific turn proposed by Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Goethe.<sup>101</sup> It was Buffon's ideas of the "unity of the plan of composition" formed alongside his collaborator in the *Histoire naturelle*, the physician and anatomist Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton (1716-1800), that argued there were idealized archetypes of bodily form that suggested relationships between divers organisms and it was from his *Histoire naturelle* that "transformism"—a pre-evolutionary theory of the ability of species to "transform" over time—came to be more widely accepted. When Carmilla thinks of the similarities between girls and

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 270–71.

<sup>101</sup> Roger, *Buffon*, 293.

caterpillars, a uniquely non-mammalian creature whose body seems alien to the human, she encourages a collapse of the boundaries that typically divide animals and insects. Secondly, her reference to the transformative qualities of the butterfly evoke Buffon's obsession with classifying not only what was "inside" a creature (its structure, its form) but its "outside," its animating "operations" and "processes."<sup>102</sup>

Le Fanu's inclusion of this specific natural philosopher, Buffon, as the authority to whom Carmilla turns reveals a rather sophisticated scientific and philosophical allegiance. In particular, the author offers again, in his reference to Buffon, an idea of a better way to be what I have called a "philosophical anatomist." Buffon is similar to Swedenborg and Hesselius, as a polymath, as a radical, and as a natural philosopher of questions relating to systems and cosmology. In the eighteenth century, Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was the distinguished, if polemic, bestseller of the century: the first three volumes sold out within six weeks of their first printing—with 250 copies reserved exclusively for Louis XV—and several subsequent reprintings and editions followed the initial publication run.<sup>103</sup> The work was almost immediately translated into German, Dutch, and English, and Italian and Spanish translations were produced during Buffon's lifetime.<sup>104</sup> Though the text was received with critical disdain by many within the scientific elite, who panned the work for its glaring inaccuracies and hyperbole, *Histoire naturelle* nevertheless became one of the most widespread works of the eighteenth century, dwarfing the popularity of rival texts, such as Noël-Antoine Pluche (1688-1761), or the abbé Pluche's, *Spectacle of Nature* (1732-1742) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean le Rond

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>103</sup> Loveland, *Rhetoric and Natural History*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

d'Alembert's (1717-1783) *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-1772), as well as some of the major works by the philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau.<sup>105</sup> Notably, much of the success of Buffon's series on natural history was attributed to its popularity amongst women readers, who could compete against the increasingly professionalizing scientific community as intellectuals during this period for leading the discussions of the greatest salons in Paris. Nevertheless, much of the popularity of *Histoire naturelle* could also be attributed to Buffon's skills as master rhetorician. His writing appealed to the pious and the freethinking, the low and the high. He stirred the blood of his readers with his direct attacks on other, famous naturalists, such as Carl Linnaeus, arguing in his "Premier discours de la manière d'étudier et de traiter l'histoire naturelle" or "Initial Discourse on the Manner of Studying and Expounding Natural History" that taxonomical systems, like that of Linnaeus, had to recognize that there was "of necessity an element of arbitrariness" in their production.<sup>106</sup> Nature, to Buffon, was elusive, for "we are natural led to imagine that there is a kind of order and uniformity throughout nature."<sup>107</sup> He railed against his peers who "led" others to imagine "order and uniformity," asking:

Isn't what we are doing in these cases only bringing the abstractions of our limited mind to bear upon the reality of the works of the Creator, and granting to him, so to speak, only such ideas as we possess on the matter? Nevertheless, such poorly founded statements have been made and are repeated every day. Systems are constructed upon uncertain facts which have never been examined, and which

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<sup>105</sup> Roger, *Buffon*, 184.

<sup>106</sup> Buffon, "Initial Discourse," 102.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

only go to show the penchant men have for wishing to find resemblances between most disparate objects, regularity where variety reigns, and order among those things which they perceive only in a confused manner.<sup>108</sup>

Ambiguously trained in many subjects, and seemingly no expert in any individual subject, Buffon charged against the accepted experts of his age.

Thus, when Carmilla calls upon the authority of “Monsieur Buffon, in his big book” she brings Laura’s attention to Buffon’s noted skepticism of received scientific wisdom written by scientific men obsessed with man’s import. She also points Laura to attend to Buffon’s ideas about how to examine and describe the world holistically, not through just a study of material difference. By talking about the lifecycle of the butterfly, she alludes to Buffon’s attempts to repudiate traditional taxonomic practices of observation common during the era. Buffon’s desire to map the history of beings using more than studies of material beings (their anatomies) by looking to the characters of the whole species pushed the bounds of what more narrow, anatomical work was doing during this period. He was truly working in *natural history*, as a field, going beyond the empiricist—or seemingly empiricist work—of anatomists like Swedenborg, to look into animals’ habits and psychology, “their conception, the time of gestation, their birth, the number of young, the care shown by the parents, their sort of education, their instinct, the places where they live, their nourishment and their manner of procuring it, their customs, their instinctual cleverness, their hunting, and, finally, the services which they can render to us and all the uses which we can make of them” in order to understand them.<sup>109</sup>

Carmilla’s point, in bringing Buffon forward, is perhaps a more subtle one: she invites Laura to

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 111.

think differently about the “marvelously authenticated tradition” of “the condition of the vampire,” with its rich and well-recorded past, to think about the vampiric creature as whole—and thus Carmilla’s own actions, her sweetness and seductiveness—as part of the work of interpreting the moral nature of the vampiric self.

Here, finally, is a contrast to the supernaturalism of the male protagonists that dominate Le Fanu’s other short stories and which threaten to dominate (violently) *In a Glass Darkly*’s competing philosopher, an anatomist. Carmilla, with her idea that the individual should look to “propensities, necessities and structure”—to the fancifulness of love, to the possibilities and not the fear of death—evokes a different way of reading the “illness” of the body and bodily relations. Like Buffon, with her evocative, romantic rhetoric, she attempts to seduce Laura with interpretation of the naturalness of the supposed “disease.” This vision of “disease” is dramatically indifferent to whether the disease is of “monstrous” origins or not, but insists that it is, above all, another expression of Nature and thus not immoral. Here, death and vampirism become another part of the universal system of relationships that unite butterfly and girl. Carmilla’s indifference to the “tradition” of viewing the disease of vampirism marries her indifference to other culturally constructed norms about viewing bodies—particularly her erotic desire for Laura.<sup>110</sup> When the patriarchs and doctors penetrate Carmilla’s flesh with the stake, dismember it, burn it, and then ultimately dissect it by recording their findings via the genre of the bureaucratic documentation of events, she is punished for her radical naturalist reading of the

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<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Signorotti shows that Carmilla and Laura “hungrily” pursue each other and “[d]espite her mingled attraction toward Carmilla and her fear of Carmilla’s often painful midnight visits, Laura refuses to alert her father to Carmilla’s frightening behavior,” undermining her father’s role as protector of the household to claim for herself “the right of bestowal” to Carmilla, thus “eliminating male control over social linkage.” See Signorotti, “Repossessing the Body,” 613–14.



world. Indeed, she is punished through the very means that Buffon found so antithetical to the work of the natural philosopher: the material dissection. Buffon argued “it would be foreign to the purposes of natural history to enter into a very detailed anatomical examination,” but that is exactly what the men around Laura and Carmilla do in destroying the vampire woman—they dissect her not for knowledge, but to annihilate the means to completely understand her kind through the Buffonian approach to observation.<sup>111</sup>

These men seem to be represented, in miniature, by the itinerant hunchback mountebank who visits Laura’s home to give the girls charms against the “oupire,” or vampire, and brief glimpses of fantastical chimeras actually “compounded of parts of monkeys, parrots, squirrels, fish and hedgehogs, dried and stitched together with great neatness and startling effect.”<sup>112</sup> Like this charlatan who insults Carmilla with his insinuation that she has “the sharpest tooth,—long, thin, pointed like an awl, like a needle,”—while hypocritically “smiling from ear to ear, showing his white fangs”—the men of Le Fanu’s “Carmilla” are the ones who get the final laugh in tricking a girl like Laura to believe in their supernatural claims about how to protect one’s body.<sup>113</sup> Le Fanu’s complicated narrative of medicine men and naturalist women sets up the possibility that Carmilla may not have been the monster of the story at all, but just another victim of the beast of supernatural superstition, with its similarly sharp teeth.<sup>114</sup> However, this image of Carmilla is still complicated by her own tyrannical desire. Carmilla’s harnessing of rhetoric to

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<sup>111</sup> Buffon, “Initial Discourse,” 111.

<sup>112</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 269.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 267.

<sup>114</sup> Valerie Guyant suggests as much in her article on “Matska,” one of Carmilla’s retinue who is suggested to be the actual black, catlike mass who attacks Laura. See Guyant, “What or Who Is ‘Matska’ in CARMILLA?”

propose a turn to a cycle of death and immortality that, though cloaked in language of love, girlhood, and sweetness, still undeniably presents a dangerous and violent vision of unification. Her loving words to Laura often deeply disturb the young woman. Carmilla is seductive, her queerness is liberating, but her rhetoric, like her vampiric self, threatens to smother and pierce Laura in ways not dissimilar to the smothering authority of the patriarchal medical professionals of the text.

Le Fanu's sympathies, in readings of these three texts—"Green Tea", "The Room in the Dragon Volant", and "Carmilla"—show obvious distinctions about what should be seen as valuable and harmful in Swedenborgian-inflected anatomical thought. Clearly, Le Fanu seems to admire the capacious possibilities of Swedenborg's universal, formalist approach to anatomizing the cosmos that saw in everything a connection to something else. This is especially true in his final short story, "Carmilla," with its radical thinker and titular character provoking appreciation for more expansive ways of interpreting nature. Nevertheless, it is still clear that Le Fanu's works represent some disdain for the work of the anatomical gaze. Its way of looking through and beyond the subject is not something that Le Fanu finds ultimately appealing, but dangerous, and even, at times, in the case of "The Room in the Dragon Volant," unethical. He does not easily assent to depicting his pseudo-Swedenborgs as heroes to be trusted. Perhaps Le Fanu only appreciates what has been done with his metaphysical medicine—its collection, its juxtaposition, its willingness to consider the problem of relation that are so important for his literary text. These points are what interest and drive Le Fanu's reflections on Swedenborgian cosmology, because it is these facets that inform Le Fanu's own writing, his own interest in problems of representation and interpretation.

### III. Swedenborgian Hermeneutics and Le Fanu

It is precisely Le Fanu's interest in the problem of collection, juxtaposition, and relation which I would like to consider in concluding my analysis of *In a Glass Darkly*. The creation of the fictional editor who interjects and interrupts the narrative introduces a different reflection on the type of authority so clearly anathema to Le Fanu: the kind of control brought about by attention and a willingness to focus more minutely on one part over the whole. This is what Le Fanu seems so critical of in his own work. Le Fanu's unreliable fictional editor who controls the readers' experience of Hesselius' medical case histories is suggested to be a kind of parasite on Hesselius's work, on the collection, and on the reader herself. Focusing the reader's attention or gaze, the editor spends so much of his time exerting control over how the reader is to take the story, that the reader herself becomes aware of the problem of such control altogether. Two of Le Fanu's stories from the middle of the collection, "The Familiar" and "Mr. Justice Harbottle" emphasize the difficulty of reaching a satisfactory reading with such authority always in the way.

In the second short story of the collection, "The Familiar," unlike the similarly-themed "Green Tea," Hesselius is almost entirely absent as an interlocutor for the primary protagonist who is at the heart of a medical-spiritual mystery, and Swedenborgian ideas are not named directly. Instead, "The Familiar" follows the history of a Mr. Barton via the record of an unnamed intradiegetic narrator, an Irish clergyman, with no medical experience, and whose only interaction with Barton is the occasional encounter with a mutual acquaintance.<sup>115</sup> In "The Familiar," the specter that haunts the protagonist is no hallucinatory vision perceptible only to its victim, as was the case in "Green Tea," but a very real menace: the titular "Watcher." The

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<sup>115</sup> Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly*, 50.

narrator himself states that in one of the few encounters he had with Barton, the story's subject, he himself has seen the startling "odd-looking person"—the menace who signs off as "The Watcher" in cryptic notes to Barton—on the street.<sup>116</sup> Like the malevolent monkey of "Green Tea," the most memorable aspect of this figure to most observers is his "maniacal menace and fury" that "indeed irresistibly impressed [the narrator] with an undefined sense of danger, such as [he] had never felt before or since from the presence of anything human."<sup>117</sup> In a series of recounted anecdotes about Barton's increasingly failing health, several individuals apart from the narrator also come to see "The Watcher," including Barton's future father-in-law, General Montague, who sees a retreating "figure"; the maid of the Dowager Lady L—, the aunt of Barton's betrothed, who stumbles upon him in their garden; and Barton's own servant, who thinks he hears this stranger's voice and finds what is suggested to be an imprint of his body on Barton's bed after discovering his master's corpse.<sup>118</sup> These individuals can rarely recount what they have seen as The Watcher. As a figure, or *figura*, he exists appropriately outside the realm of interpretation.

How does one categorize this form of menace and determine, then, this story's place among these other tales of metaphysical medicine collected by the medical philosopher Doctor Martin Hesselius? The reader is invited to see The Watcher as a corporeal, psychological, and supernatural specter through the collected data of all the figures who have encountered it. The reader is also invited to wonder where the medical mystery lies: with Barton, the victim of this unforgiving presence, or with The Watcher himself, who is suggested at the story's end to be a

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 66, 72, 80.

figment of Barton's past, an unduly persecuted fellow sailor, with whose daughter Barton formed a guilty attachment.<sup>119</sup> Is this walking dead man The Watcher? Or perhaps some other bizarre happenstance figment? Speaking to a physician named Dr. R— about the Watcher's indescribable body, Barton asks whether lock-jaw can be mistaken for death, whether a hospital can make a mistake, or whether there is a disease that can exactly contract the structure of an individual's frame so that they seem to shrink in all proportions yet look exactly the same.<sup>120</sup> Barton's questions suggest the difficulty of determining the nature of the figure and the work of interpretation. Trying to focus on a small part of the Watcher is impossible. What is one— especially he—to make of this indescribable but familiar being? Speaking to a priest only identified as Dr. — in "The Familiar," the skeptic, "reputed free-thinker" Barton proclaims that:<sup>121</sup>

The fact is [...] whatever may be my uncertainty as to the authenticity of what we are taught to call revelation, of one fact I am deeply and horribly convinced, that there does exist beyond this a spiritual world—a system whose workings are generally in mercy hidden from us—a system which may be, and which is sometimes, partially and terribly revealed.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 53–54.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 43. In an earlier version of the text that became "The Familiar" titled "The Watcher," originally published in his first story collection *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* (1851), the interlocutor with whom Barton speaks is named Dr. Macklin instead of Dr. —. The significance of the dash as a symbol, here, is that it both constructs a veneer of reality (the polite suppression of an individual's "real" name) and the text's metafictional preoccupation with the work of elisions and occlusions.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 60.

His use of the term “revelation” challenges the scriptural and supernatural interpretation of the word, as the reader is made to wonder over that exact definition of “revelation” when Barton qualifies the idea with his phrasing “what we are taught to call revelation.” Barton’s actual experience of “revelation” composed of these frequent meetings with the menacing figure of The Watcher troubles an otherwise clear field of interpretation—a “system”—in pointing out how medical and spiritual interpretation cannot touch that “partially and terrible revealed” “spiritual” world, otherwise mercifully hidden from us, the readers.

In the remainder of his speech to Dr. —, Barton concentrates on the fact that what bothers him most in encountering this problem of knowledge and knowing is its relation to the pre-existent discourses of Scripture. Despite being a free-thinker, his knowledge of Scriptural authority in the matter of spirits causes him to obsess over the way in which to position his ideas:

I am sure—I know [...] that there is a God—a dreadful God—and that retribution follows guilt, in ways the most mysterious and stupendous—by agencies the most inexplicable and terrific;—there is a spiritual system—great God, how I have been convinced!—a system malignant, and implacable, and omnipotent, under whose persecutions I am, and have been, suffering the torments of the damned!—yes, sir—yes—the fires and frenzy of hell!"<sup>123</sup>

His long verbal pauses and turns, represented by the elongated dashes, slash horizontally across the page, suggesting the cut-ups he makes in the scriptural discourse. The text presents Barton’s words as if he was cutting the notion of God into first “a God” and then, flanked by conspicuous slashing em dashes, “—a dreadful God—.” Barton’s language in this speech does a similar type of work in refusing a relationship between “retribution” and sin in favor of one between

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

“retribution and guilt.” Barton refuses to situate religious belief as a transformation or awakening, but presents it as an entanglement within a system, “a spiritual system,” that is perversely “malignant, and implacable, and omnipotent, under whose persecutions I am, and have been, suffering the torments of the damned!” Delving into a world of “fact,” “revelation,” and a system involving “spiritual worlds,” Barton’s speech familiarly invokes the language of Victorian-era Swedenborgianism, but one that is twisted, obsessed with the crossover between the human world and “the fires and frenzy of hell.” This language of Scripture and Swedenborg causes his outbursts, his anger. “I am not a credulous—far from a superstitious man,” Barton irritably states, interrupting the helpless Dr. —, “but unless I were one whom no amount of evidence could convince, unless I were to condemn the repeated, the perpetual evidence of my own senses, I am now—now at last constrained to believe—I have no escape from the conviction—the overwhelming certainty—that I am haunted and dogged, go where I may, by—by a DEMON!”<sup>124</sup> The evidence of the haunting Watcher overwhelms Barton’s grasp on language, pushing him into the discourse of the familiar in another sense. Barton shouts “DEMON,” but it is the only word he can reach for after repeatedly groping for it, after repeatedly cutting back his own words; thus, it is not clear if the Watcher actually does fit within either scriptural or supernatural systems of knowing. These lenses from which to view the world are as occluded as the glass darkly.

With such violent and literal marks of Barton’s desperate attempts at articulation, Barton’s hermeneutic nightmare leads the man to refuse both the scriptural and Swedenborgian vision of the world and its interpretive promises of complete knowledge and “universality” of vision. “The awful, unutterable idea of eternity and infinity oppresses and maddens my brain

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 61.

whenever my mind approaches the contemplation of the Creator; I recoil from the effort scared,” Barton finally admits, “[t]he idea of an eternal Creator is to me intolerable—my mind cannot support it.”<sup>125</sup> While drawn to an image of the unified whole in his Creator, Barton recoils from not only allowing the language, but this scriptural way of thinking about interpretation. When he states, “I am sure—I know... that there is a God,” Barton articulates that knowledge, both scientific and spiritual, is situated at a hermeneutic knife’s edge between confidence (surety) and truth (knowledge). Revealing that difference, Barton refuses to accept the scriptural, prefabricated world of instant, hermeneutic gratification.

In contrast, the problem of interpretation in the collection’s third short story, “Mr. Justice Harbottle,” lies not in understanding how to consider the relationship of evidence together, but rather becomes the difficulty of interpretation given the viability of multiple methods of gathering evidence. “Mr. Justice Harbottle” follows the hypocrisy and corruption of Judge Elijah Harbottle, described as “the wickedest man in England,” who comes to be judged himself for putting the former husband of his mistress to death in order to hide his sexual scandal. Haunted by a mysterious letter of summons given to him by an enigmatic elderly man named “Caleb Searcher” working on behalf of the “High Court of Appeal,” Harbottle is seemingly kidnapped and sentenced by such a supernatural “High Court” for his criminal conduct and, later, found mysteriously hanged in his own home. Ostensibly, the medical “case” at the heart of “Mr. Justice Harbottle” involves the question of whether Harbottle imagined or really encountered such a “High Court;” whether he truly entered the realm of the spirits and was sentenced to his rightful punishment, or whether it was the complications of particularly painful gout nightmare; whether

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 62.



he was always given to “blue devils,” or whether he felt a sufficient guilt for his past wrongdoings as to lead him to suicide.

However, the winding implications of how the story comes to be told gets in the way of interpreting the twists and turns of Harbottle’s real or imagined encounter with the “High Court.” The reader learns from the prologue of the work that the narrative of Mr. Justice Harbottle comes to Hesselius’s hands from a man named Anthony Harman. Harman himself received the narrative second-hand from “a friend much my senior, then living in a remote part of England” whom Harman remembered for “the strange story which now I asked him to give me in greater detail” that composes the full text of the story of Justice Harbottle.<sup>126</sup> To complicate matters further, this old friend, key to explicating the “metaphysical speculation” at the center of “Mr. Justice Harbottle,” reveals that he himself received the story second-hand. This senior friend was “still a boy, in the year 1808,” “about twelve years old, and my imagination impressible” when he heard the story “recounted at the fireside at home, with so a delightful a horror” from his own father, who “was a bachelor of nearly sixty when he married,” and who himself was a child when he learned of the history of the then living Justice Harbottle.<sup>127</sup> Justice Harbottle’s case is revealed to be a memory of a memory, part of a long tradition of ghost stories. Its light grip on realism is only “confirmed” for the reader—given a thin veneer of realism—because of the occasion of its telling. Harman reveals that he is brought to remember the tale after hearing from yet another unnamed acquaintance “thirty years ago” from the time that he supposedly gives the story to Hesselius, of a ghostly encounter with a host of ghouls in the dilapidated former home of the now long-dead judge. This separate acquaintance is a third elderly man, a dependent of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 87–88.

Harman's described as a "dry, sad, quiet man, who had known better days, and had always maintained an unexceptionable character" and to whom Harman also ascribes the character of being "[n]o better authority [that] could be imagined for a ghost story."<sup>128</sup> These three separate elderly men who recount the story—the "senior" friend, the father of this "senior" friend, and the "elderly" acquaintance—seem almost interchangeable, and each so oddly distant from the narrative as to challenge the supposed authority that Harman confers upon them. Indeed, Harman subverts that authority himself in suggesting each man's susceptibility to ghost stories—and, in the case of the "dry, sad, quiet man," a susceptibility to depression. This presentation of the text's transmission history invites the reader to pathologize each teller of the tale, to wonder if their characters have any bearing upon the telling of the Justice's story.

As the reader then begins her analysis of the actual story of the Justice's end, she is increasingly barraged by similar extraneous details of the case that simultaneously create and undermine the narrative's reality effect. On one hand, similar to "The Familiar," the reader learns that there are many other characters beyond the prime victim of the supernatural event, Harbottle, who encounter the supposed-specters. A ghoulish old man who introduces himself with the pseudonym "Hugh Peters" to deliver Harbottle's first warning beats one of Harbottle's footmen bloody for tailing his retreat. Later, three separate individuals are able to give their testimonies about the supernatural activities that occurred in Justice Harbottle's home on the night of his death: the housekeeper Mrs. Flora Carwell, the housekeeper's daughter Margery, and a scullery-maid. On the other hand, the narrative also provides the evidence that these individuals may be suspect themselves. In the morning after Harbottle's alleged suicide, immediately, "it

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 84.

was rumored here and there in the street that the Judge was dead.”<sup>129</sup> The reader is reminded again of the awkwardness of the story’s recounting hampered by suspect narrators and little evidence. Readers must weigh—and are invited to pathologize—each of the motives of the various individuals within the story who are revealed to contribute to the story’s composition. For example, the reader learns early in the narrative that his housekeeper and mistress, Flora, “had some vague trust in the Judge’s good nature” that he would save her former husband from the gallows, but is sadly disappointed and perhaps thus has reason to tell a tall tale regarding Harbottle’s mysterious demise.<sup>130</sup> We also learn that her daughter Margery, was only a child at the time of her encounter with “a thin man,” supposedly an executioner, who is also suggested to be merely a figment of a child’s imagination. The scullery-maid is similarly suggested to have been in a state of shock after encountering the dead body of her master; two other servants report that they went to check on their master after her and saw him well, but then these unnamed, self-effacing hands are subject to the same open speculation as the other corroborative witness. These details all come together, but from no clear source—rumor and guess-work are suggestively positioned as the means for composing the full story of Harbottle’s end.

While Wilkinson and Swedenborg emphasized the significance of authority—specifically, how authority comes to define one’s relationship to knowledge, whether one is shaped by it or in rebellion against it—Le Fanu’s text troubles the idea of such accretive processes of gathering knowledge and its viability. Each successive witness or authority on the particular case that adds a detail to the story becomes increasingly suspect as a source of knowledge. As the reader is given access to each of these accounts—and even the content of one

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 98.

of Harbottle's dreams—they must wonder how trustworthy their sources are and from whence and why they have included the material that they do. Readers are put in the position of being judges themselves, even as they are exposed to the inadequacies of their methods of judgment. Given the facts of the case full of concrete, quantifiable information—the particular date a trial is to be set (the 10<sup>th</sup>); the period when Margery Carwell sees the first specter (sunset); the moment when her mother also sees this vision (ten o'clock); the interval around when the third individual, the scullery-maid, encounters a specter and then the dead judge (twelve o'clock); and the precise hour in the morning the doctor arrives to pronounce his patient death (seven o'clock)—as well as detailed character studies of each individual, the reader is flooded with knowledge about the events that has little bearing or influence on the reader's ultimate interpretation.<sup>131</sup> Made literally to see through Harbottle's own eyes in large sections of the text, the reader's analogous relationship to the titular judge is made clear. Harbottle is described as a “dangerous and unscrupulous judge” who “carried out his cases his own way, in spite of counsel, authorities, and even of juries, by a sort of cajolery, violence, and bamboozling, that somehow confused and overpowered resistance.” The tale, in much the same ways, invites the reader to see their own approach to reading the text as applying the kind of “dangerous and unscrupulous” judgment of a Harbottle, a way of analysis based on a sort of “cajolery, violence, and bamboozling” of the evidence at hand in order to make sense of it.<sup>132</sup>

Presenting his reader with so much information—indeed, presenting his reader with the burden of seeing all at once—Le Fanu makes his reader into an anatomist. The reader is painfully made to realize that a philosophical approach—an attempt to see all simultaneously—is

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 102, 113, 116, 117.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 88.

not only too difficult but also too burdened by questions of authority and methodology. Like Stevenson, who eventually came to see the substantive “food” of Robert Knox’s anatomical thinking, Le Fanu too represents the substantive “food” of Swedenborgian thinking, which in its own way challenged individuals to take on the authoritative mantle of anatomist. Yet, unlike Stevenson, Le Fanu’s encounter with nineteenth-century anatomizing did not make him fully convinced of the ethical imperative of its “universalizing” tendency, its ultimate “philosophical” ends toward exposing the whole of truth before its audience. Pursuing such a system may lead to some sort of knowledge, but within the collected short stories of Le Fanu’s *In a Glass Darkly*, it seems more likely to lead to delusion that all can and should be captured together.

Perhaps this is why Hesselius himself so clearly disappears from the text’s framing device over the course of the 5 successive short stories—why he does not, as Neil Cornwall points out, “dominate the collection in the way we might expect.”<sup>133</sup> While *In a Glass Darkly*’s framing device attempts to lock all the contained “cases” together, the nominal attempt to show similarities between the cases as of the same “type” (the same genre, same supernatural cosmology) belies the fact that all the stories messily adhere together and barely represents a cohesive supernatural cosmology. Readers expecting tales of the traditional gothic get familiar devices but the effect of the Swedenborgian investments that Le Fanu unpacks is to continually take the readers back into the present, contemporary age. The gothic tropes that Le Fanu includes tend equally to symbolism and to a participation in a literary and scientific debate. Read in more or less sequence, together, these collected stories of a medical philosopher who practices metaphysical medicine repeatedly reveal the failure of supernatural and scientific Swedenborgian ideas to cohere. Hesselius’ inability to heal, his inability to affect the ultimate outcome of his

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<sup>133</sup> Cornwall, *The Literary Fantastic*, 91.

narratives shows Le Fanu's troubled perception of the grand conceit of Swedenborgian cosmology: that all is connected, that one text can read another, that there is a transference between different worlds. In his text, such a conceit is no longer possible.

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## CHAPTER 4: THE TISSUE THEORY OF GEORGE ELIOT

Reviews of *Middlemarch* (1872) often noted George Eliot's fondness for "scientific illustration," but also, frequently, the author's ability to anatomize.<sup>1</sup> One reviewer from *The Spectator* praised Eliot's ability to depict "the first descent of the dissecting-knife" into the motives of a character like Solomon Featherstone gave *Middlemarch* its "peculiar stamp."<sup>2</sup> Eliot's skill with the analytical scalpel, another reviewer contended, marked *Middlemarch* as a "moral anatomy," a literary genre that presents moral and social ideals as naturally organized as the human body, and thus subject to the skillful knife-work of one like Eliot.<sup>3</sup> Reviewers in *The Athenaeum* echoed these statements and similarly depicted Eliot as anatomist and her novel as a work of anatomizing. "Properly anatomized," one reviewer wrote, "the most tiresome fools often proves to be fearfully and wonderfully made" by an author with "peculiarly penetrating analytic skill" and a "constructive ability, which enables her, by a few sharp, short touches to strip a soul, and place it before us with its vices and virtues in vivid clearness of outline and precision of detail."<sup>4</sup> Eliot's skill, another declares, "enables her to dissect

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<sup>1</sup> Blackwood, "Middlemarch.," 257–58.

<sup>2</sup> "George Eliot's Moral Anatomy," 1263.

<sup>3</sup> More elaborate definitions of "moral anatomy" can be found in Muñoz and Landers, *Anatomy and the Organization of Knowledge*, 54; Richards, "The 'Moral Anatomy' of Robert Knox," 373.

<sup>4</sup> "Middlemarch," 713–14.

a commonplace soul with all the accurate minuteness of a German entomologist engaged in a monograph upon a cockchafer.”<sup>5</sup>

The language of her reviewers and the language of Eliot’s novel foreground a distinct tension surrounding this work of anatomizing. Eliot’s marvelous ability to “strip a soul” is frequently celebrated, but also found distasteful. The “descent of the dissecting-knife” seems to suggest Eliot’s writing reflects an almost murderous cast. As one reviewer wrote, she was sometimes “unjustly hostile” in her anatomizing of these commonplace souls, and “the authoress’s excessive, almost morbid, intellectual ability” sometimes results in cases where Eliot seemed to “dissect[] her own characters so she spoils the charm of some of them.”<sup>6</sup> Just as Mrs. Dollop suspects Tertius Lydgate of being too willing to cut up his patients, reviewers suspect Eliot is also all-too-willing to dissect.<sup>7</sup> Reviews wanted the author return to her earlier project of sympathy. They wanted Eliot to commence her great project of ‘anatomically’ analyzing the fictional men and women that populated her texts, without the unsavory sense that the author was pulling apart her subjects of study. They wanted, in short, to see her pursue the kind of anatomical analysis that Eliot ascribes to one of Lydgate’s primary heroes: the French anatomist Xavier Bichat (1771-1802).

This chapter closely examines Eliot’s understanding of what it means to anatomize. Upon introducing Lydgate as Middlemarch’s newest resident, the narrator finally and conspicuously clarifies the novel’s setting in the year 1829, a period when

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<sup>5</sup> “Middlemarch. By George Eliot. Book II.” 137.

<sup>6</sup> “George Eliot’s Moral Anatomy,” 1264; “Middlemarch-Part III (Book Review),” 404.

<sup>7</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 415; vol. 5, ch. 45.

“the dark territories of Pathology were a fine America for a spirited young adventurer.”<sup>8</sup>

The novel’s temporal situation during the heyday of pathological innovation quickly gives way to a striking encomium to Lydgate’s professional idol, Bichat. The more Lydgate studies pathology, the narrator breathlessly notes, “the more keenly he felt the need for that fundamental knowledge of structure which just at the beginning of the century had been illuminated by the brief and glorious career of Bichat, who died when he was only one-and-thirty, but, like another Alexander, left a realm large enough for many heirs.”<sup>9</sup> Bichat’s prominent configuration as an almost mythical historical figure hinges on “that fundamental knowledge of structure” to which he devoted a brief and glorious career—the study of tissue.

Gillian Beer and others have long noted Eliot’s extensive reliance on tissue metaphors to unify her novel. Eliot mentions actual webs, tissues, and structures of fabric, and enlists her tissue and web references serve as important analogies for the novel’s form. According to Beer, Eliot uses the metaphor of the tissue or web as a way to think about representing systems of relations and origins, evoking Darwin’s structural metaphor of the tree of life as another model which Eliot uses to organize her text’s primary structure.<sup>10</sup> Yet in emphasizing the influence of plots from Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) on the plots of nineteenth-century novels, Beer overlooks Eliot’s particular interest in Bichat and tissue. Many studies of *Middlemarch* since the publication of Beer’s influential work in *Darwin’s Plots* (1983) have also traced the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 138; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 148–49.

influence of Darwinian theories of evolution on Eliot's work; however, few have hypothesized why Eliot elucidates Bichat's tissue theory so clearly and with so much detail. When Avrom Fleishman, Nancy Henry, and Peter Logan for example, analyze Eliot's interest in anatomy, they stress her desire to recognize the role of imagination as it is shared by literary and scientific thinker alike.<sup>11</sup> While both Darwin's role in Eliot's work and her interest in the entwined nature of nineteenth-century literature and science discourse are undeniable facets of *Middlemarch*, Eliot's engagement with anatomical analysis and the study of tissue as a significant subject to be overtly named, historicized, and woven into her novel's thematic and structural vocabulary implies something more significant about the tissue theory to which Eliot alludes in her text.

Eliot's interest in Bichat's tissue theory and her inclusion of a lengthy explication of Bichat's waning historical significance needs to be considered more fully with readings of her novel not only because tissue theory is an enticingly evocative thematic subject and formal metaphor in *Middlemarch*, but because it is through this consideration of the successes and failures of Bichat's work on tissue that Eliot creates a rather Bichatian approach to anatomical analysis herself. That is, through exploring the ideas of Bichat through *Middlemarch* Eliot comes to define an anatomical form of writing. To prepare the reader to see the ways in which Eliot explores the subject of anatomical analysis, the chapter begins by first providing a necessary introduction to Bichat and his tissue theory. Reading Bichat's scientific texts alongside Eliot's essay "Notes on Form in Art" (1868) and *Middlemarch* allows me to untangle how and why Eliot was intrigued with ideas of tissue as both literary and formal metaphor. The second section of this

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<sup>11</sup> See Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, 161–89; Henry, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Comparative Anatomy"; Logan, *Nerves and Narratives*, 178–94.

chapter then addresses why Eliot is so interested in the limitations of Bichat's theory of tissue. I study how Eliot represents competing approaches to anatomical analysis prevalent during the nineteenth-century, specifically centered on microscopical anatomy. Understanding Eliot's ambivalent attitude toward microscopical vision, I argue, troubles the acceptance of *Middlemarch* as a novel defined by its fidelity to realist representation. To that end, I turn not only to nineteenth-century contemporary debates about microscopical vision, but also to studies of genre. This chapter concludes by speculating on Eliot's lasting interest in tissue theory as reflected in her two last complete works, *Daniel Deronda* and, more significantly, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879).

### **I. Bichat, Tissue Theory, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch***

Xavier Bichat was undoubtedly one of the most important scientific minds of the early nineteenth-century. Born in 1771, Bichat's name first reached the attention of an international print audiences for publishing the surgical works of his mentor and teacher, Pierre-Joseph Desault, in 1795. Bichat's edition was lauded by reviewers. For such a young anatomist, he solidified his standing among his Parisian peers in the medical field with his next major publication, *Treatise of Membranes* (1799). *Treatise* was the first of Bichat's own work to truly shake the foundations of anatomical research. Following its publication, reviewers claimed that the young Bichat was already inspiring a new rigor in "impart[ing] to anatomy the true characters of a science."<sup>12</sup> He was praised primarily for the diligence and originality of his research. Instead of relying on teaching of old anatomy texts, Bichat sought new subjects for analysis, noting that the study of

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<sup>12</sup> "Analysis of Foreign Medical Journals. Anatomy.," 405.

membranes had “not hitherto been a particular object of research among anatomists.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of relying upon received knowledge from the classic texts on anatomy and studying from prints, as was the custom at the time, Bichat undertook many, careful dissections and experiments himself, with his cousin Matthew François Régis Buisson and a student aid, Philibert-Joseph Roux, as attendants.<sup>14</sup> When not working on his anatomical research, Bichat was known to spend his evenings with the enthusiastic Roux at the anatomical theatre, learning more from observations of dissections undertaken there.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Bichat advanced an original concept of human anatomy. Bichat’s *Treatise* called for a new model of the human body that imagined the movement of disease along the body’s “relations,” or network, of tissue.<sup>16</sup> According to his translators and peers, this aspect of Bichat’s work was truly “imperishable;” in trying to imagine the structures of tissues within the human body, Bichat “broke through the common routine [*sic*]; he exhibited anatomy under a new point of view” by “dividing the living economy into several *systems*.”<sup>17</sup> For his work, Bichat was appointed the chief physician of the Hôtel-Dieu by the age of 29. He expanded on his research in the *Treatise* by producing an even more comprehensive text, his major work on human anatomy, the *General Anatomy Applied to Physiology and Medicine* or *General Anatomy* (1800). The *General Anatomy*

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<sup>13</sup> Bichat, *Treatise on Membranes*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Haigh, *Xavier Bichat and the Medical Theory of the Eighteenth Century*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Bichat, *Treatise on Membranes*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

also met with considerable fanfare and among a large, international medical community. By 1801, Bichat was beginning the *Descriptive Anatomy*, a companion and follow-up to *General Anatomy*. However, Bichat met a tragic early death after a fall, and then a fever, in 1802, leaving the completion of the *Descriptive Anatomy* to his aides, Buisson and Roux. Bichat's earliest original work, the *Treatise*, would not be translated into English by the American doctor John Coffin until 1812 and then, again, much later, and significantly abridged, by the British surgeon Joseph Houlton in 1821.<sup>18</sup> Even so, English-speaking students flocked to Paris to learn anatomy from Bichat's successors. A decade after the publication of his first work, Bichat was still lauded as a pioneer and leading medical mind by a diverse community of medical practitioners and experimenters. As one reviewer trumpeted long after Bichat's death, Bichat's work "ha[d] procured for its author the respect and esteem of the profession in all countries."<sup>19</sup>

Did Eliot consult Bichat's medical treatises for *Middlemarch*? At the very least, her notes from the *Middlemarch* notebooks indicate that she had started a general reading of Bichat from *Knight's Cyclopaedia of London* (1851).<sup>20</sup> Eliot had the French language skills to read Bichat's works in the original. She and her partner G. H. Lewes kept a copy of the French original of Bichat's *General Anatomy* in their library, along with a copy of Bichat's vitalist treatise *Physiological Researches of the Living and the Dead* (1855).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bichat, *Treatise on Membranes*; Bichat, *A Treatise on the Anatomy and Physiology of the Mucous Membranes*.

<sup>19</sup> "Analysis of Foreign Medical Journals. Archives Generales.—Nov.," 56.

<sup>20</sup> *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*, 59, 143–44.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library*, 67:19. Eliot and Lewes held an extensive collection on anatomical texts that included not only contemporary anatomical



She would likely have discussed Bichat's history with Lewes, as Lewes wrote extensively on Bichat in both his early work on *Comte's Philosophy of Sciences* (1853) and his later *Physical Basis of Mind* (1877), pieces of which he based on original essays written for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1868, during the very same period when Eliot was beginning to work on ideas for *Middlemarch*.<sup>22</sup> Eliot may have well known from Lewes's works that "Bichat, by his grand philosophical device of decomposing the organism into its various elementary *tissues*, rendered Anatomy the greatest of services" in advancing the field beyond its long-standing early modern obsessions with the individual organs.<sup>23</sup> Many copies of Bichat's work would have been available to her at the time in English as well. The first English translations of Bichat's *General Anatomy* were produced by George Hayward, the first professor of the principles of surgery and clinical surgery at Harvard University, in 1822. A second translation was published in Britain in 1824 by Constant Coffyn and edited by George Calvert, a member of the Royal Academy of Surgeons, which was featured in the "Notice of New Works" from the January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1824 issue of *The Lancet*—the primary journal Eliot used for researching *Middlemarch*'s early-century medical contexts. No doubt, she would have been aware that in 1820s copies of *The Lancet*, Bichat's *General Anatomy* was one of the most prominent texts of reference for surgical and medical writers. In a reprinting of a lecture by the American doctor, C. D. Meigs, from the June 12, 1824 issue of *The Lancet*, Bichat was recognized

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texts, but also 41 seventeenth-century anatomical and medical studies that would have helped in tracing the long history of anatomy (Ibid., 67:xxxix.).

<sup>22</sup> *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences*, 166–67, 180; *The Physical Basis of Mind*, 24–25, 64–65.

<sup>23</sup> *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences*, 180.

in much the same terms that Lewes used: as “the brilliant and analytical genius” to whom “[t]he science of medicine is much indebted.”<sup>24</sup>

By bringing the study of tissue to anatomical analysis, Bichat prompted anatomists to take the philosophical approach that this work has marked as so important for the development of nineteenth-century thinking. Bichat’s concept of the body as organized by pervading structures emphasized a cohesion and universality of forms. According to Michel Foucault, Bichat’s configuration of the body presented tissues as elements of bodily makeup that “traverse [the organs], relate them together, and constitute vast ‘systems’ above them in which the human body finds the concrete forms of its unity.”<sup>25</sup> In the most materialist sense, Bichat showed that the fibrous connective tissues found in one part of the body (say, a tendon) was the same as the connective tissue found in any other part of the body (such as a ligament). He thus insinuated that both seemingly disparate and separate areas of the body, sharing the same tissue, were in fact part of the same system of sympathies. Moreover, the connective tissue in one human body could be then compared to that in another human body. Further, such a connective tissue in a human body could be compared to the kind of connective tissues in a completely different organism: a cat, a mouse. Bichat’s tissue theory allowed anatomists to evoke the species’ body and its structure in new ways by allowing one to imagine the sympathetic connections that bind the individual to a population and a population to the plethora of living creatures inhabiting the world. That is, Bichat’s work provoked

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<sup>24</sup> C. D. Meigs, “Lecture on the State of the Blood-Vessels in Fevers. —Read before the Philadelphia Medical Society, January 17th, 1824,” *The Lancet* 2, no. 37 (June 12, 1824): 343.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 128.

anatomists to understand the body in terms of the multiple and many—concepts pivotal for Charles Darwin.

Bichatian theories of tissue produced, in a more philosophical sense, another entirely different way of interpreting the body. In the “plan” of his *General Anatomy*, Bichat states that his work “consists in considering separately and presenting with all their attributes, each of the simple systems, which, by their different combinations, form our organs.”<sup>26</sup> This way of seeing the body as composed of “simple systems” made it necessary to see disease as not just affecting individual parts of the body, but interconnected lattice-works of tissue systems. Bichat thus transformed the body from a collection of organs into an imaginary network of sympathies. By thus examining tissue, as Foucault states, the anatomist came to confront a “principle of deciphering corporal space that is at once intra-organic, inter-organic, and trans-organic.”<sup>27</sup> That is, the tissue that binds the human body allows the observer to see relations between the different organs (intra-organic relations) and parts within the body’s interior (inter-organic relations) through material likeness that, similarly, allow the observer to imagine the body in sympathy with other bodies composed of the same types of tissues and the same systems of organization (trans-organic relations). Tissue theory was as much about an epistemology of the body as it was an idea about the nature of the building blocks of living creatures.

Bichat’s more theoretic conception of the body as composed by networks and systems of tissue aligns with many key ideas important to Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. For Eliot,

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<sup>26</sup> Bichat, *General Anatomy, Applied to Physiology and Medicine*, vi.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 127.

who tries to draw out sympathies across gendered, classed, and even racialized bodies—as in the case of the Jewish narrative in *Daniel Deronda*—Bichat’s work substantiates many of *Middlemarch*’s positions on the significance of a larger, species-centered perspective. More significantly, Bichat’s concern for structural affinities of systems and webs evokes the kind of interest in understanding networks of sympathetic relation that complement Eliot’s work of depicting a community, in *Middlemarch*, who are intimately tied together. The narrator particularly stresses this point when spelling out for her readers that, in the wake of Bichat, living bodies were no longer seen as associations of parts, i.e. organs, which were to be studied “first apart, and then as it were federally,” but instead as consisting of “certain primary webs or tissues” out of which the organs and the body were composed.<sup>28</sup> Eliot presents her characters like those separate organs within a larger body, as subjects that cannot be studied individually, but must be understood as they participate in “webs or tissues” of connection. According to the narrator, “the conceptions wrought out by Bichat...show[ed] new connexions and hitherto hidden facts of structure which must be taken into account in considering the symptoms of maladies and the action of medicaments.”<sup>29</sup> Eliot respects this concept of the body composed of systems of tissues and transposes its fundamental ideas in tracing character within her metaphoric social organism of *Middlemarch*, which she personifies as a rapacious, primeval creature who “counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him very

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<sup>28</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 139; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; vol. 2, ch. 15.

comfortably.”<sup>30</sup> Though she names her first book in the novel after an individual, “Miss Brooke,” Eliot’s formal emphasis on the individual dissolves in the text. As her narrator gallops across Middlemarch alongside Mrs. Cadwallader’s pony phaeton, the narrator traces the intertwined, tissue-like narratives of multiple individuals and families that constitute the seemingly singular “Miss Brooke.”

Eliot referenced Bichat’s tissue theories as she was pondering the significance of artistic form in her unpublished essay, “Notes on Form in Art,” completed just a year before she began working on *Middlemarch*.<sup>31</sup> In “Notes,” Eliot articulates form as something more than a “[b]oundary or outline & visual appearance,” defining form as a literary term that articulates complex composition, a “whole” experience determined by the ways in which an author binds fragments, which she refers to as “smaller & smaller unlikenesses.”<sup>32</sup> Eliot continually returns to the idea of form using terms drawn from tissue theory. The rules of formal composition, Eliot submits, can be found easily in the human organism:

the human organism comprises things as diverse as the finger-nails & tooth-ache, as the nervous stimulus of muscle manifested in a shout, & the discernment of a red spot on a field of snow; but all its different elements or parts of experience are

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 144; vol. 2, ch. 15; Brantlinger, “Bluebooks, the Social Organism, and the Victorian Novel,” 335–37.

<sup>31</sup> *Notes* was first published within Thomas Pinney’s edited *Essays of George Eliot* in 1963 [Eliot, *Essays of George Eliot*.].

<sup>32</sup> Eliot, “Notes,” 433.

bound together in a more necessary wholeness or more inseparable group of common conditions than can be found in any other existence known to us.<sup>33</sup> For Eliot, literary form comprises “the relation of multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in the most varied & therefore the fullest relation to other wholes.”<sup>34</sup> The body as analogy to the literary work seems an obvious and explicit foundation for Eliot’s writing. Surprisingly, Eliot concludes by stating that despite the parallels between formal elements in art—specifically literature—and nature, she is wary of the idea of form cohering into a natural “pattern-work” alone: “The old phrases should not give way to scientific explanation, for speech is to a great extent like sculpture, expressing observed phenomena & remaining true in spite of Harvey & Bichat.”<sup>35</sup> Eliot’s unwillingness to conform to the “scientific explanations” of Harvey—referring to the sixteenth and seventeenth-century English physician, William Harvey—and, more importantly, Bichat, speaks to Eliot’s larger concerns about the tissue-like structure of the novel.<sup>36</sup>

Despite Lydgate’s paean to Bichat and the study of tissue, the narrator of the novel emphasizes a critical fact regarding the study of tissue: its brief and ephemeral part in the larger history of science. Clarifying that “[t]his great seer [Bichat] did not go beyond the consideration of the tissues as ultimate facts in the living organism, marking the limit of anatomical analysis,” the narrator remarks on the very ephemerality of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>36</sup> Harvey was the first to describe the systemic circulation and properties of blood.

tissue's significance and in so doing suggests some anxiety about her novels' own limitations given its tissue-like form.<sup>37</sup> The difference between Lydgate's perspective on Bichat and the narrator's, novel's, or Eliot's perspective on Bichat are significant. Though Lydgate certainly names Bichat as a hero, as did many young medical professionals in the early nineteenth-century, the text itself takes a longer and more critical view of the French anatomist. Despite Eliot's obvious affinity for a tissue theory of the novel, she also presents a competing way of anatomizing in her text.

## **II. Microscopy and the Limitations of Bichat's Anatomical Analysis**

Within the recorded history of science, Bichat's work is understood as having had clear, methodological limitations that restricted his analysis. The anatomist refused to engage with new technologies of seeing and observing. That is, Bichat purposefully restricted his own work by refusing to use the microscope as instrument to study his tissues, never getting beyond the tissue as the most central unit of bodily composition—and perhaps rightly so. For, despite some incredulous critique from more modern anatomists, Bichat felt particularly wary of the profusion of chromatic and spherical aberrations of eighteenth-century microscope lenses. He believed that these aberrations of the lens would compromise his findings. His tragic early death in 1802 prevented him from seeing the dramatic advancements in microscopy that revolutionized the work of anatomy in the nineteenth century. Joseph Jackson Lister's corrections for the common lens aberrations that so annoyed Bichat would only go to market following the year

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<sup>37</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 139; vol. 2, ch. 15.

1826.<sup>38</sup> Historians of science have noted that those scientific investigators who were so lucky to work with Lister's improved lenses in their microscopes quickly moved beyond the tissue that so interested Bichat. By 1839, the German cytologists Matthias Schleiden and Thomas Schwann had used their microscopes to find that even more microscopic, fundamental unit of life—the cell.<sup>39</sup> The fact that cells made up tissues and were even more granular sites of disease transformed the study of the natural sciences once again. It also paved the way for an obsession with even smaller units of discovery, such as the bacteriological work of the French scientist Louis Pasteur and German physician Robert Koch, which took off in the mid-nineteenth century. The cell challenged notions of anatomical analysis conceived by Bichat and his tissue theory; finding the cell suggested that ever deeper, closer, more careful applications of magnification were necessary to understand the human body, and it also destabilized the necessity of seeing in systems.

Strikingly, *Middlemarch* is set at this exact moment when the technology of the microscope was shifting, and better, commercial versions of microscopic lenses were becoming more available to the public. This is why, perhaps, *Middlemarch*'s narrator advances a critique of the tissue as having reached the “limit of anatomical analysis”: Eliot was also in the thrall of the destabilizing cell that could now be seen under the microscopist's lens. In her text, she hints at how the discoveries of microscopical anatomists were coming to overpower of tissue theory. Lydgate, like Bichat, may be “ambitious above all to contribute towards enlarging the scientific, rational basis of his profession,” but his interest in pursuing Bichat's path by hypothesizing “What was the

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Jackson Lister is also famously known for being the father of the first pioneer in antiseptic surgery, Joseph Lister.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence, “Anatomy, Histology, and Cytology,” 275.



primitive tissue?” is framed by the narrator as a question “not quite [put] in the way required by the awaiting answer,” though “such missing of the right word befalls many seekers.”<sup>40</sup> The cell, the narrator hints, forms a separate paradigm for considering an even more “common basis from which [tissues] have all started,” and perhaps an even better basis.<sup>41</sup> In Kirstie Blair’s study of the Leweses, Blair suggests that both Eliot and Lewes were particularly drawn to studying Rudolf Virchow’s (1821-1902) cell theory, in which case Virchow, and not Bichat, would serve as the better hero for Lydgate.<sup>42</sup>

Eliot’s own notes from *Quarry for Middlemarch* (1868) show that the author was uncertain about the exact significance of the tissue in comparison to the more miniscule cell. Despite Eliot’s significant interest in medicine and pathology, the *Quarry* contains a surprising lack of research regarding the very metaphoric vessel—the tissue—that so interests Eliot’s narrator, Lydgate, and Bichat. Instead, Eliot’s notebook is divided between a significant number of notes about ethics taken from research on medical reform (from 1830 issues of the premier peer-reviewed medical journal, *The Lancet* and the 1826 essay, *An Exposition of the State of the Medical Profession in the British Dominions*); fever; and cell-theory. Eliot’s interest in a more contemporary cell theory continually turns up throughout her notebook in lieu of the tissue. Eliot includes an entire section titled “Microscopic Discovery / Cell-Theory” in her *Quarry* and further extractions about cells, specifically, criss-cross her work, appearing awkwardly out of place in a section labeled “Distinctions of Typhus & Typhoid Fever,” where Eliot situates

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<sup>40</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 138–39; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 139; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Blair, “A Change in the Units,” 10.

two notes on T. H. Huxley's short essay "Cell-Theory" (1853) and a further extraction on membranes of tissues and cells by François-Vincent Raspail, one of the original founders of cell theory alongside Rudolf Karl Virchow. Eliot's notes show the cell's prevalence and how impossible it is to see tissue as the most significant "fact" of her work.

On one hand, her underlying cellular focus in *Middlemarch* articulates the very subversion of the tissue as central theme and metaphor within her novel. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot continually refers to that which could be better seen under improved microscopic lenses: for example, tiny animalcules, with their single-celled bodies, under "a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom."<sup>43</sup> Yet, on the other hand, these more refined microscopic points of view disturbed the perspectival homogeneity of her text. In taking a microscopical approach to anatomizing people or ideas, Eliot forces the reader's attention to deeper, ever-closer and more precise observations so that readers become increasingly disoriented by the scales of thought they have to attend to. Looking at tiny animalcules, the reader must look to greater and greater magnifications of a single image, with each visual enhancement creating even more interpretive objects to consider in the understanding of the whole. This approach to looking at a subject under the lens takes the reader out of the "real" world of *Middlemarch*, to whatever magnified world that Eliot needs to use as an example of the most fundamental idea that the plot bears out. However, this approach to 'anatomizing', as I will shortly show, proves to dissatisfy Eliot even more than tissue theory.

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<sup>43</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 55; vol. 1, ch. 6.

### III. Eliot as Ambivalent Microscopist

Eliot's reflections on tissue theory would have stemmed in part from the studies in microscopy that began with trips to the beaches of Ilfracombe, Tenby, and the Scilly Isles that she took with Lewes in the 1850s.<sup>44</sup> By the sea, Eliot and Lewes would look at the tide-pool specimens they collected under the microscope together. As Mary Ward, the popular writer of microscopy guides, observed in 1859, "[s]omething of the interest of a riddle, then, attaches to these researches; but, more than this, there is an especial charm in the contemplation of these simply-framed plants and animals, which seems to conduct us near to the elementary law or principle on which all organized beings are formed."<sup>45</sup> Scientific thinkers like Lewes thought microscopical investigation enlightening for "revealing the primal form of life itself," as the microscopist could see "the pure principle of being secreted in sub-visible forms, creation at last revealed because at last seen through, at last transparent."<sup>46</sup> During at least Eliot's early career, this search for the "elementary law or principle on which all organized beings are formed" was her great pursuit. Before becoming an author of fiction, Eliot wrote of art as "the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot."<sup>47</sup> Lewes also believed in the necessity of this kind of amplification. In seeing through the microscope, he argued, "then, and only then,

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<sup>44</sup> Eliot's subtle presence as a fellow tide-wader is documented in Lewes's *Sea-Side Studies* and she writes of it herself in her "Recollections of Ilfracombe 1856."

<sup>45</sup> Ward, *The Microscope: Or Descriptions of Various Objects of Especial Interest and Beauty*, 127.

<sup>46</sup> Armstrong, "The Microscope," 46.

<sup>47</sup> "Natural History of German Life," 271.

do we feel how full of Life, varied, intricate, marvelous, world within world.”<sup>48</sup> The two shared a view of the microscope as a means to investigating the most realistic, because full, vision of life.

However, I argue, Eliot questioned the value of microscopical investigation. In her later novel, *Middlemarch*, Eliot projects various instances where readers are drawn in to look at something closer, with more attention, they are subjected to a cataclysmic distortion of vision. For example, while sight-seeing in Rome during her wedding trip, Dorothea finds herself experiencing a scalar perspectival shift: “after the brief narrow experience of her girlhood she was beholding Rome, the city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar.”<sup>49</sup> Eliot emphasizes a spatial distortion, the removal of her subject from a “brief narrow experience” to the experience of Rome, a city that seems to encompass “a whole hemisphere” of both land and history. Eliot represents this change in scope and experience for Dorothea as not just a minor disruption of perception, but as a violent, cataclysmic disruption. Made to see Rome up close, the visions that Dorothea confronts are monstrously huge and seemingly extra-terrestrial:

Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast

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<sup>48</sup> *Sea-Side Studies*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 180; vol. 2, ch. 20.

wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years. Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze; and in certain states of dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued to see the vastness of St. Peter's, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina.<sup>50</sup>

These forms are not just hallucinatory visions that can flicker into obscurity like the images produced by the “magic-lantern,” but permanent visions. And Eliot describes this kind of sight as almost demonic: the profusion of things “living and warm-blooded” “took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory” that cause her to experience sensational, electric excitement. Eliot’s narrator observes the deep impressions of Rome impressing upon Dorothea a new method of seeing, an enforced acuity and attention similar to the experience of looking through a microscope as described by Eliot and Lewes. She sees not only to the minute, but in now vast, cosmic scales. This type of vision, Eliot states, is not entirely salutary; it spreads itself

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 181–82; vol. 2, ch. 20.

everywhere “like a disease of the retina.” The ability to see at these dramatic scalar levels incorporates a form of bodily transformation that Eliot also insinuates is a type of “disease” not just of the retina, but the whole body.

In his popular *Sea-Side Studies* (1858), Lewes reports a similar visual mania introduced by microscopical anatomizing:

The hours I spent thus, fled like minutes, and left behind them traces as of years, so crowded were they with facts new and strange, or if not absolutely new, yet new in their definiteness, and in the thoughts they suggested. The typical forms *took possession* of me. They were ever present in my waking thoughts; they filled my dreams with fantastic images; they came in troops as I lay awake during meditative morning hours; they teased me as I turned restlessly from side to side at night; they made all things converge towards them. If I tried a little relaxation of literature, the page became a starting point for the wandering fancy, or more obtrusive memory; a phrase like “throbbing heart” would detach my thoughts from the subject of the book, and hurry them away to the stage of the Microscope, where the heart of some embryo was pulsating. I could not look at anything intently, but the chance was that some play of light would transform itself into the image of a mollusk or polype. THE THINGS I HAVE SEEN IN TAPIOCCA PUDDING...!<sup>51</sup>

The microscopical experiences displace a comprehensible experience of time, as minutes, hours, and years become confused and distorted. Lewes, once taught how to see sea-side organisms, finds he cannot see but in that vein. The “typical forms” of small organisms,

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<sup>51</sup> Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, 36–37.

and their tissues and organs, do not just become pieces of information or facts for him to consume, but encapsulate an entire way of perceiving that conversely “*took possession of me.*” No longer is Lewes just a remote observer, an unobtrusive yet omnipotent being fixated on the objects underneath his lens. He is, instead, a body in the process of becoming infected by a similar disease of the retina that infects Dorothea Brooke, he comes to see ever deeper and closer, uncovering ever richer troves of incomprehensible knowledge. While Lewes’s account of microscopical work humorously depicts the sinister sights one might find within tapioca pudding, his satire is tempered by real concern about how microscopical vision will affect the individual, distorting his perspective.

In her novel, Eliot emphasizes that such microscopical vision does not just distort one’s vision, but limits one’s abilities to make clear and rational analyses. When a young Lydgate takes a break from his “galvanic experiments” with rabbits and frogs and goes to the theater only to fall in love with the French actress Madame Laure, the young microscopist also sees forms that take complete possession of him.<sup>52</sup> Despite being a devotee of Bichat, Lydgate fails to perceive as a Bichatian student should—thinking across systems of relations—and instead, in using his trusted microscope, turns to a form of microscopical anatomizing that completely denies representational subjectivity. In their first personal tête-à-tête, Laure “sit[s] before him with folded arms, and look[s] at him with eyes that seemed to wonder as an untamed ruminating animal wonders,” and Lydgate becomes particularly transfixed by the vision of her as a stereotypical heroine of

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<sup>52</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 141; vol. 2, ch. 15.

tragedy.<sup>53</sup> Imagining her as the embodiment of the role she plays on stage, he fashions all the details that she tells him into ever more complicated narratives. He gets closer to his subject, Laure, but comes to be confused by the various depths of her being: her role as an actress, victim of tragedy, possible love interest, only add noise to Lydgate's vision of her. He comes to see her as she fits into particular, pre-existent forms: naïve heroine and brutalized wife (though neither vision fits Laure's true self).<sup>54</sup> Lydgate fails to think of her possible relationship to the "untamed ruminating animal" that her eyes suggest her to be—he is unwilling to comprehend anything outside this single, precise depiction of her that he has been taught to investigate. As Logan suggests, the Middlemarch gossip surrounding Lydgate's all-too-ready willingness to cut into his patients' bodies possesses an ironic truth about the doctor: he is singularly focused on looking at the dead, static specimen.<sup>55</sup> Lydgate is hampered by finding a single, principle-organizing core to the subjects of his interest in ways detrimental to his abilities to analyze well.

Arguably, Eliot's focus on the ephemerality of the history of histology is evidence of her suspicions about the limitations of microscopical visions. Lewes may argue that the microscope "brings us into the very homes and haunts of Life; and finally, the high creative combining faculty, moving amid these novel observations, reveals something of the great drama which is incessantly enacted in every drop of water, on every inch of earth," but Eliot retreats from this idea of the omniscience afforded by the microscope.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 143; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.; vol. 2, ch. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Logan, *Nerves and Narratives*, 179.

<sup>56</sup> Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, 58.



Her work is to avoid the errors of Lydgate and his attempts at anatomizing with the microscope. Instead, Eliot tries to show her readers experiments that challenge singular or narrow views. In looking at a drop of water under the microscope's lens, the narrator teaches readers how to see expansively as much as deeply. Conducting the reader as they look down the scope of the microscope, Eliot's narrator not only shows the specimens to be found there, but opines on the technological features of the microscope itself:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs. Cadwallader's match-making will show a play of minute causes producing what may be called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she needed.<sup>57</sup>

Here, there are observations to be made about the voracious creatures and the strength of the lens necessary to understanding the relationship between the creatures of Middlemarch. Interestingly, the microscopic discovery of this more complex relational structure between the swallower and its victims, as well as Mrs. Cadwallader and the young women of Middlemarch, does not suggest that the application of the "stronger lens" allows for a better understanding of that which is beheld. The stronger lens produces only a different perspective. Possibly, an even closer inspection at greater

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<sup>57</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 55; vol. 1, ch. 6.

magnitude would produce another vision altogether. In any case, the ability to perceive the location of discord within that drop does not allow the perceiver to necessarily heal the wounds inflicted on the social body, nor even clearly understand that which they observe. And in all *Middlemarch*'s various visual experiments that require the reader to more closely gaze at the pier-glass, or consider the water-drop, the novel does not reiterate the necessity of a refinement or clarity of vision, but—critically—a plurality of points of view.

In depicting her various microscopical experiments, Eliot acknowledges that points of view can also be tricks of the candlelight, inadequacies of the lens, and thus determined by the particular technology or method of observation, in these cases: the naked eye, the microscope, or the novel. Eliot's point about the distorting effect of microscopical vision is consistent with discussions about vision and seeing made during the era, as microscopy became more popular. Jonathan Crary, in considering the techniques of observation in the early nineteenth century makes an argument for "the observer" as a long-contentious figure, "one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations."<sup>58</sup> Crary locates optical devices as "sites of both knowledge and power that operate directly on the body of the individual," and posits that some of the tools used to produce the most "realistic" effects "were in fact based on a radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience, thus demanding a reconsideration of what 'realism' means in the nineteenth century."<sup>59</sup> Armstrong implies that Crary's more monolithic account of

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<sup>58</sup> Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 9.

technologies of vision ignores conflicts and ideological challenges created by “rival epistemologies of seeing”: those between natural historians like Philip Gosse, writer of the popular microscopy texts *Evenings at the Microscope: Researches among the Minuter Organs and Forms of Animal Life* (1859) and *A Year at the Shore* (1865), and Lewes, whose *Sea-Side Studies* covered similar ground to Gosse’s.<sup>60</sup> While Gosse saw the sub-visible world and its detail without end as manifestation of God, Lewes refused Gosse’s anthropomorphism of the microscopic world and saw through the microscope to interpret the universe as one of interdependent forms.<sup>61</sup> According to Armstrong, Lewes’ reflection on vision in *Sea-Side Studies* defends microbiology from the charge of distortion and willful readings of data by suggesting that seeing is always inferential.<sup>62</sup> Lewes recognizes that “[u]ndoubtedly men often do see what they want to see, and what no one else can recognize,” and he argues that “this is not the fault of the instrument,” but rather the nature of vision itself: “all vision is mainly *inferential*; from certain appearances certain forms are inferred; this holds of the eye as well as of the Microscope, the optical principles of which are essentially the same; but while the physical conditions are similar, the mental conditions attending vision with the assisted and the unassisted eye are different.”<sup>63</sup>

Graeme Gooday’s work on scientific pedagogy suggests that we should temper Lewes’ idea given what nineteenth-century scientific thinkers knew about the

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<sup>60</sup> Armstrong, “The Microscope,” 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 37, 40–42.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>63</sup> Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, 40.

microscope's limitations. Noting that the microscope provoked radical abstraction and reconstruction of optical experience, Gooday suggests that nineteenth-century scientific thinkers recognized that the microscope actually challenged ideas of "realism." Gooday, in particular, studies T. H. Huxley's pedagogical practices from the early 1870s, when Huxley was working in his South Kensington laboratory to render biology teaching legitimate, meaningful, and efficient. Eliot and Lewes would surely have been aware of their friend Huxley's efforts to reform the practices of the laboratory. The challenge for Huxley was that a relatively concrete idea of Nature became rhetorical device within laboratory environments only as laboratory authorities became increasingly responsible for leading their students to "correct" experimental results.<sup>64</sup> One of the primary problems of microscopical work during the mid-century remained in "the integrity and authenticity of microscopic imagery," as "individuals who had not been inculcated... in how to procure and interpret microscopical evidence could easily contest the veracity of the microscope."<sup>65</sup> Those who did not exactly mount and illuminate their specimens in the ways that their instructors did in the laboratory classroom were often likely to see entirely different sights and come to entirely different conclusions. "Nature" needed containment and its observer training to receive the right kind of knowledge. Over the course of the nineteenth-century, students in classrooms became increasingly disciplined into the "correct" ways of seeing, as well as the discourse and procedures.

In her own work, however, Eliot seems more ambivalent. Like Lewes, she refrains from blaming the instrument, the microscope, for the visions that it produces. Yet

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<sup>64</sup> Gooday, "'Nature' in the Laboratory," 308–9.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

she is clearly wary of the epistemological ideals behind microscopical anatomical analysis. She refutes the idea that depth of exploration might produce necessarily better knowledge. Indeed, as Eliot famously proposes in *Middlemarch*, observers are under the threat of “[dying] of that roar which lies on the other side of silence” if they attempt to “[hear] the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat.”<sup>66</sup> This idea accorded with Bichat’s own attitudes toward microscopical anatomical analysis. For Bichat, even if one looked closer and more directly at objects under a lens, it was difficult to deduce the meaning of what was seen without clear, principled guidance:

If we cast our eyes around us, or direct them towards the most distant objects; if we take the telescope and survey those bodies that are floating in space, or the microscope, and look into the world of atoms whose extreme diminutiveness threatened to conceal them forever from the sight, we shall every where find on one hand the physical, on the other the vital properties, all put in motion; we shall every where see inert bodies gravitating one upon the other, and exerting mutual attraction; every where living bodies gravitating also, but feeling and experiencing moreover a motion which they owe only to themselves.<sup>67</sup>

Bichat seems to acknowledge that while microscopic scale produced powerful, even beautiful, visions there yet still exists “feeling and experience” entirely inaccessible by the microscope’s reach, experiences known “only to themselves.”

Armstrong links this dual skepticism about the acuity of visual technologies and methodologies to the aesthetic philosophies of John Ruskin, an opponent to Lewes who

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<sup>66</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 182; vol. 2, ch. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Bichat, *General Anatomy*, “General Consideration” ii–iii.

connected the microscope with another intensely mediated world: the mechanized world. Armstrong argues that Ruskin “implicitly attacks Lewes’s romance of the microscope through an (oddly Benjaminian) analysis that resists the view that anamorphosis”—the distortions of view that can only be corrected by a specific vantage point or device—“can be corrected by an ‘interrogating’ nature. Anamorphosis, Ruskin claims, is built in to culture, politics and technology, particularly in response to the latter’s rapacious penetration of matter. Undistorted vision is impossible in a modern society.”<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless Armstrong defends Lewes, because Lewes suggests “the untethered specular image precisely releases the observer into scrupulous interrogation, interrogation turned upon his own experiment as well as the natural world” Ruskin’s point both seems particularly pertinent in Eliot’s novel and exposes how Eliot rearticulates a different view of the implications of microscopic vision.<sup>69</sup> Eliot takes seriously Bichat’s revolutionary work on tissue *and* his failures to predict the cell because she understands his objections to the technology of seeing.

Studying the history of British pathology, Russel Maulitz contends that there is a simple and direct reason why Bichat’s theory never progressed among British practitioners:

No doubt one reason for the lugubrious pace at which Bichatian tissue pathology was incorporated was the fact that, although it partook of some of the localism of official, surgically oriented “external” pathology, it was almost as nonvisual as the old general “internal” pathology of the physicians. Given the visual stress in

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<sup>68</sup> Armstrong, “The Microscope,” 44.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 45.

gross anatomy and the visual emphasis in later pathology, it is ironic that general anatomy in the Paris clinic was largely verbal. By locating disease in tissues rather than organs, the new pathology project tended to substitute words for pictures.<sup>70</sup>

Essentially, Bichat's vision of the body could never be seen in real life. Bichat's imagined body of connected systems of tissues was only able to exist in the form of text—it could not be depicted by any scientist as it was only conceptual. This is perhaps why, as Logan notes, Eliot repeats the word “conception” in relation to Bichat with such frequency in *Middlemarch*.<sup>71</sup> What she saw as his most important work was the reenvisioning of the idea of the body and the way in which it lived in the world. This was perhaps why Bichat never included any images or pictures within his treatises on tissue theory; Elizabeth Haigh reasons that “he would not draw them for the same reason that he would not use a microscope”—they would serve no purpose for his greater project of unifying through an imagined relation of tissues and tissue systems, the bodies of all living creatures.<sup>72</sup>

#### **IV. Beyond a Theory of Tissue**

By situating her work as one acutely aware of the great impact and limitations of tissue theory, Eliot recognizes the limitations of *Middlemarch*'s own tissue-like form and theme. Fleishman and Meegan Kennedy suggest that *Middlemarch* already shows the

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<sup>70</sup> Maulitz, *Morbid Appearances*, 372.

<sup>71</sup> Logan, *Nerves and Narratives*, 189.

<sup>72</sup> Haigh, *Xavier Bichat and the Medical Theory of the Eighteenth Century*, 99.

author willing to depart from the genre of realism for which she received fame in her earlier works. Studying Eliot's "Notes on Form in Art" himself, Fleishman argues that Eliot begins to distance herself from the mode of "Dutch realism" she had become famous for in order to conceptualize a new idea of form based on biological theories, similar to Herbert Spencer's and G. H. Lewes', regarding the "complex unity" of living things.<sup>73</sup> And Kennedy suggests that Eliot distances herself from the kind of clinical realism she originally conceived in her earlier novel *Adam Bede* (1859) as she grapples with ideas about the "provisional nature of vision."<sup>74</sup> While *Middlemarch* does not entirely reject the form of the realist novel, I want to conclude this chapter by speculating where tissue theory leads her, if away from the realist novel.

Particularly, my concluding argument is that Eliot's preoccupation with the instability of perspective may account for why she eventually turns away from the cohesive social organism structure of *Middlemarch* in her later works. In *Daniel Deronda* and *Impressions*, Eliot seems to do the more expansive, imaginative work of an anatomist like Bichat once more. On one hand, she turns to a comparative form of anatomy in *Daniel Deronda*, with its split narratives focusing on two linked bodies: its titular protagonist, Deronda, and his counterpart, Gwendolyn Harleth. Rather than turning once again to experiments of vision and microscopy as she had done in *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* in its form and its two primary subjects invites its readers to do a comparative study in the manner of Bichat. Eliot's two specimens, Deronda and Harleth, are situated

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<sup>73</sup> Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, 162–64.

<sup>74</sup> Kennedy, *Revising the Clinic*, 148–49.



side by side, their minds and bodies exposed for the reader to compare and contrast homologous parts and features.

Eliot fully departs from the tissue-system of her earlier work in her last complete work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*—a fragmentary, essayistic, and proto-modernist text. In so doing, as Rosemarie Bodenheimer has shown, Eliot made her readers feel as if the author had abandoned the writing of fiction altogether.<sup>75</sup> Bodenheimer notes that the text, in effect, “is a miscellany shaped by no overall plan, no idea of development,” that “make[s] it possible think again about continuities and discontinuities in [Eliot’s] vision of character and consciousness.”<sup>76</sup> However, I would like to suggest that *Impressions* is more than a miscellany as it ultimately reflects Eliot’s last attempt at the kind of anatomical practice she admired in Bichat.

Eliot transitions from writing the novel as social organism to a more fractured form in her last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, which suggests a turn to a supplier perspectival ethics. In his introduction to Eliot’s collected essays, Thomas Pinney submits that such a stylistic shift is not altogether unprecedented:

Though ‘truthfulness’ always remained a cardinal point in her literary creed, she later came to interpret it more liberally. From the suggestions in her letters after 1860 and in ‘Notes on Form in Art’ it seems clear that she moved away from her early theory of realistic imitation towards a more formal theory of the novel as a highly stylized and patterned construction.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> “George Eliot’s Last Stand,” 607.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 609.

<sup>77</sup> Eliot, *Essays of George Eliot*, 9.

While Pinney states that this shift begins in the 60s, the fact that Eliot continued to pursue a “highly stylized and patterned construction” in *Middlemarch* suggests her interest in producing a novel that—thematically and formally—addressed the problems of structure. Presented as the collected essays of a cantankerous London bachelor named “Theophrastus,” in allusion to the disciple of Aristotle famous for his character writing, *Impressions* has long been regarded as a taxonomy of character types. As a taxonomy, *Impressions* seems also a return to an earlier mode of scientific observation in pursuing the practices of the natural historian, more than the contemporary modes of observation Eliot uses in her highly networked and interconnected *Middlemarch*. Among the samples of human life that Theophrastus records are suggestively anthropomorphized subjects: “A Political Molecule”, “A Watch-Dog of Knowledge”, “A Half-Breed.” Theophrastus represents the work as a comparative study, calling *Impressions* “the natural history of my inward self,” written to “detect small herbage or lurking life” and deduce “the figure the human genus makes in the specimen which I myself furnish.”<sup>78</sup> Though bent on collecting and defining types, *Impressions* is a work distinctly interested in experimenting with these types. He calls *Impressions* “the natural history of my inward self,” but as a text meant to “detect small herbage or lurking life” and deduce “the figure the human genus makes in the specimen which I myself furnish” *Impressions* seems more of a study of anatomy than natural history.<sup>79</sup> The work’s original title “‘Characters and Characteristics’, from the remains of ‘Theophrastus Such,’” as Bodenheimer suggests, “implied that the essays had been selected for posthumous publication by an executor or

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<sup>78</sup> Eliot, *Impressions*, 104.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

editor,”<sup>80</sup> but also, on the other hand, suggests Theophrastus’s concern with “remains” in a different sense. That is, not just textual “remains,” but corporeal ones.

With *Impressions*’ corporeal interests in mind, readers can see how the text’s form reflects a rather specific, neoclassical tradition of writing: the anatomy. *Impressions* reaches well beyond the delineation of natural subjects that comprise the content of each essay. As Henry states in her critical introduction to the work, in *Impressions* “[a]llusions to Lewes’s published work as well as to George Eliot’s own mix with the allusions to classical philosophy, Romantic poetry, contemporary science, and other texts, “hindering the definitive identification of an origin for any idea or phrase in *Impressions*.”<sup>81</sup>

Arguably, *Impression*’s approach to thinking through and about multiple fields and subjects suggests its relationship not to taxonomies of natural history, but to Bichat’s anatomical work. And *Impressions* does this through a distinct practice of anatomizing specific to the literary genre of “anatomy” popularized in the Renaissance period.

Synthesized from scientific and literary conventions, writers of anatomies included Andreas Vesalius, the author of *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), and Robert Burton, the author of *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), who equally “used their pens as scalpels to cut through appearances and reveal the mute truth of objects.”<sup>82</sup> Northrop Frye further postulates that, besides trying to reveal the truth of objects, anatomies attempted to look outside the specific body they represented. The anatomy “deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes” and is mediated by “[p]edants, bigots, cracks, parvenus,

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<sup>80</sup> Bodenheimer, “George Eliot’s Last Stand,” 610.

<sup>81</sup> Eliot, *Impressions*, xi.

<sup>82</sup> Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy*, 1–2.

virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds” (exactly like Eliot’s titular Theophrastus) who become “mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.”<sup>83</sup> The writer of such an anatomy, as anatomist, takes on the role of another type of pedant herself, in her attempts to pile an “enormous mass of erudition” and “an avalanche of their own jargon” upon unwary readers, bringing to bear a cosmos upon what seems, otherwise, narrow and dry topics.<sup>84</sup> Henry notes, “*Impressions* comes at the end of her [Eliot’s] development as a late Victorian writer of organic form, and at the beginning of what looks like early Modernist experimentation through fragmentation in form. Theophrastus is invisible and pervasive; the essays are separate and unified; English culture is multicultural and distinctly English.”<sup>85</sup> While moving away from the narrative story arc common to her more “organic” forms, like the recognizable social organism, *Middlemarch*, Eliot seems to plunge into the turn of the century era of “Modernist experimentation” with “fragmentation” that mirrors a turn to the cellular, the even more infinitesimal.

Here, once more, George Eliot takes on the role of the scientific thinker, or rather, scientific experimenter, but in terms more overtly linked to literary work. More than in her other novels, textual slippage is central and prevalent in *Impressions*, with “contorted sentences, ambiguous quotations, incessant puns” all working to “destabilize the identification of sources, the fixed meanings of words and the readers’ expectations.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 309.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Eliot, *Impressions*, ix.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., xiii.

Where *Middlemarch* continually invited the reader to consider that it is the readers' point of view—his or her particular way of looking—*Impressions* locates the text as the source of destabilization, as that which disallows the whole organism to be understood. In requiring the reader to grapple with opaque references and verbal tricks, the text focuses the reader not on the subject matter of the work itself, but on the text's position as an object. S. Pearl Brilmyer claims a similar point about Eliot's move from studying *subject* to *object* in *Impressions*.<sup>87</sup> Brilmyer suggests that Eliot "treat[s] the human being not as a *subject* to which the author has special access but as a new kind of sensible *object*—a dense and complex material body like any other," in order to argue, first, that Eliot's "naturalistic investment" flattens distinctions between human and nonhuman and, second, that "Eliot puts pressure on the modern association of character with individual human psychology."<sup>88</sup> Eliot (through Theophrastus) studies "the figure of the human genus," but consciously and overtly through seeing it as "the specimen" of the text; the focus on character, so significant for her earlier novel *Middlemarch*, is more conspicuously paired with a focus on the form of the work itself.

A work of anatomy, like Theophrastus's, is not just the cutting up and into of the object of study, but the bearing of whole systems of thought upon the body. Unlike *Middlemarch*, which works microscopically and dissects the subjects within its textual body in order to focus on their beating hearts, *Impressions* dissuades the reader from believing that they can access the meaning in its body through such work. *Impressions* is filled with lacunae about subjects, about characters, about the narrator Theophrastus

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<sup>87</sup> Brilmyer, "The Natural History of My Inward Self," 36.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–37.

himself who screens himself behind the name of a pupil of Aristotle. Theophrastus insists that “[n]o man can know his brother simply as a spectator,” but must know them through “discerning the self in others.”<sup>89</sup> “Dear blunderers, I am one of you,” Theophrastus proclaims, noting that “while I carry in myself the key to other men’s experience, it is only by observing others”—but specifically imagining the self and other as one—that he can “correct his self-ignorance.”<sup>90</sup> His anatomical sympathy perhaps accounts for his interest in seemingly disparate subjects, like that of the final essay in *Impressions*, “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!” “The Modern Hep” particularly seems unrelated, in its attack on British anti-Semitism, from the other essays contained in *Impressions*. Yet, if understood as a part of an anatomy, its relation to the other essays of the collection can be accounted for as another attempt to connect the single body to a more universal form and with more unifying concern.

*Impressions* embodies a form that emphasizes the balance between the study of tissue, a structurally unified work, and the cell, a fragmented work composed of individual units, and in the textual case, one could argue: essays. Henry notes that when *Impressions* is studied at all, it has been unfairly evaluated as “a set of unconnected essays strung together in no particular sequence.”<sup>91</sup> However, though *Impressions* seems so formally remote from *Middlemarch*, both texts tackle the same questions: what composes the formative structural unit? Further, what is the role of the author in relation to the text and the culture that that text represents? In Eliot’s initial meditations on form

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<sup>89</sup> Eliot, *Impressions*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

from “Notes,” the author was considering the work of the novel as something more materially bound just before she began *Middlemarch*. In her notes, Eliot contemplates the creation of a literary work that is brought together by its form. She asks,

what is form but the limit of that difference by which we discriminate one object from another?—a limit determined partly by the extrinsic action of other bodies upon it.... inorganic and organic forms cannot, seemingly, mix as easily as writers would have them: in the case of the inorganic body, outline is the result of a nearly equal struggle between inner constitution & the outer play of forces; while in the human organism the outline is mainly determined by the intrinsic relation of its parts, & what is called fitness, beauty or harmony in its outline & movements is dependent on the inward balance... whereas the outline defining the wholeness of the human body is due to a consensus or constant interchange of effects among its parts. It is wholeness not merely of mass but of strict & manifold dependence.<sup>92</sup>

The unity of *Impressions* is maintained not by the connection of subject matter studied within, but the *text* extrinsic to the majority of the text’s body: the frames at the beginning of the work, the preface to the work, that define the whole as a collection and unified piece. In *Impressions*, then, Eliot eschews attempting to unify the text through metaphors of the body. Instead, interpretation of *Impressions* must be done via the anatomical practices of Bichat’s era: through an imagining of the relations between one’s body and multiple bodies, a recognition of the shared tissues of connection between the

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<sup>92</sup> Eliot, “Notes,” 434–35.

readers (recognized, finally, in their fleshliness) and the characters (fleshed out on the page).

Henry argues that *Impressions* is a work that is deeply concerned with the ethics of writing and the ethics of authorship.<sup>93</sup> In *Impressions*, the author's hand is obvious—obstructive as much as instructive. Theophrastus worries over his own work as author; in the first two chapters, “Looking Inward” and “Looking Backward,” Theophrastus ponders his power and his right to make these accounts, asking himself “can I give any true account of my own?”<sup>94</sup> “I perceive that I cannot escape being compromised,” Theophrastus admits.<sup>95</sup> His anxiety over his own ability to narrate correctly or offer accurate interpretation, is overtly addressed in his later chapter, “How We Come to Give Ourselves False Testimonials, and Believe in Them:”

To judge of others by oneself is in its most innocent meaning the briefest expression for our only method of knowing mankind; yet, we perceive, it has come to mean in many cases either the vulgar mistake which reduces every man's value to the very low figure at which the valuer himself happens to stand; or else, the amiable illusion of the higher nature misled by a too generous construction of the lower.<sup>96</sup>

The act of writing not only instills the writers with “the amiable illusion of the higher nature,” which leads to “vulgar” mistakes, but also brings with it “vague, delightful

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<sup>93</sup> Eliot, *Impressions*, xii–xiii.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.



illusion[s]” of the author’s connection with his audience and also a false power: that to look backwards.<sup>97</sup> That ability to look before and after is a “grand human privilege” that Theophrastus suggests “is in danger of turning to a sort of other-worldliness” that he worries will breed indifference or bitterness from assuming that the human can be so well known.<sup>98</sup> In much the same way, Eliot tackled these same concerns in *Middlemarch*, though not as overtly. The narrator of *Middlemarch* is often brought into sharp focus for the reader as a similarly self-conscious figure, as the narrator focuses the attention of the reader on the tissue, or asks us “—but why always Dorothea?”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 12, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>99</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 261; vol. 3, ch. 19.

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