Mocking the Misreader: The Un-Typable Bodies of Marian Halcombe and Lucilla Marjoribanks

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents who never made me feel like I had to fit a type and taught me that there was no limit to what I could achieve if I worked hard and put my mind to it, to Jonathan who sees the world in endlessly creative, rather than confining, ways, and to my dog, Ella, who laid her head on my lap while I worked and made me take breaks when she wanted to play. Also, thank you to Susan Fraiman, who helped me hem in my thoughts when my argument, in fact, needed limits, and to Herbert Tucker and Karen Chase. Without wisdom gleaned from these teachers I never could have conceived of this project.

"What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions and unnatural stimulation in others. It may be stated without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted."

-John Stuart Mill, 1869[1]

C. J. Culliford, *Scene on Regent Street,* c. 1865, lithograph, collection of Peter Jackson.

In 1865 a popular lithograph by C. J. Culliford circulated through London's upper, middle and lower classes. It depicted a clergyman offering his Bible to a woman on Regent Street. The caption read, "Philanthropic Divine: 'May I beg you to accept this good little book. Take it home and read it attentively. I am sure it will benefit you.' Lady: 'Bless me, Sir, you're mistaken. I am not a social evil, I am only waiting for a bus.'" The scene enacts a misreading on the part of the clergyman, and the lithographic medium – an image followed by illuminating text – aims to implicate viewers in an initial misreading as well. Many would have fallen for the familiar visual cue of a clergyman offering aid to an unaccompanied woman on the street and read her, accordingly, as a prostitute in need of moral rescue. Like any good political cartoon, however, Culliford's joke hinges on the caption beneath his image. The lady's corrective response in this case compels attention back up to the picture. Not wanting to be implicated in the clergyman's blunder, the viewer looks for the cause of his or her initial misreading and searches for indications that the lady is, in fact, an upstanding woman with means for bus fare. A more discerning examination of the image reveals a ticket office in the background of this street-side exchange. In light of this second look, the clergyman appears a fool for his determination to read character and moral standing from this woman's appearance and for the arrogance his action implies.

Culliford's bit of satire elicited a chuckle from some audiences and offended others (Perry, 173). Like all well-aimed satire, it successfully evoked both reactions because of its timeliness and uncomfortably close portrayal of reality. The offensive nature of Culliford's joke lay in its allusion to stringent codes of female representation that had been anything but a laughing matter for decades. Although at the turn of the

eighteenth century female inferiority was nothing new, the egalitarian impulses of the French Revolution had incited the most aggressive attacks on gender inequality to date and compelled an unprecedented justification of this age-old hierarchy. Thanks to the budding field of biological science, newly in-depth research into female anatomy provided sociopolitical discourses with authoritative evidence to support continued female subordination.[2] Physician Edward Tilt declared that he could read dependence in women's bodies (Levine-Clark, 21). Physiologist Thomas Laycock found women's lack of facial hair to be an obvious sign that they were more akin to children than mature adults (Matus, 33). In addition to framing anatomy as the foundation for women's social and political dependence upon men, nineteenth-century discourses employed female physique to define and maintain hierarchical categories among women. Certain physical qualities were synonymous with women of the upper and middle classes, and they carried moral and domestic implications in addition to social significance. Other body types, hair textures, and complexions signaled agricultural workingwomen, domestic servants, factory girls or prostitutes, depending on the particular makeup of traits. Although they bordered on caricatures, these bodily-coded categories were quite seriously imposed upon real women who were reduced to generalizations in theory and practice.[3] Social stratification depended upon daily adherence to and interpretation of physical codes, and, more often than not, it succeeded masterfully, because their artifice became mistakable for natural law.[4]

The comedic success of Culliford's lithograph suggests, however, that audiences of the 1860s were increasingly aware of this determination to read women — to class them socially and type them morally — based on physical appearance. Furthermore, it

shows that quite a few Victorians were ready not only to acknowledge the presence of these constructed physical codes, but also to push back at them. An interrogation of this push back is a guiding impulse of this thesis. Culliford's lithograph is representative of resistance to arbitrary physical codes in mid-nineteenth-century visual art, a topic that Lynda Nead, among others, has compellingly taken up.[5] More importantly for my purposes, however, Culliford's lithograph is an exemplary subversion of oppressive codes that resists by appropriating the very codes it seeks to confound. In the following pages, I take up a similar strain of resistance in mid-nineteenth-century literature. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Helena Michie and Martha Stoddard-Holmes are a few of many critics who have exposed the politically oppressive patterns of bodily representation in nineteenth-century novels and explored the ideological work of such representations that exalt male over female, middle-class woman over lower-class, white woman over black and able-bodied woman over disabled. Ample attention has been paid to the rhetoric that renders some female bodies monstrous and relegates them to the narrative margins, and to the coded turns of phrase that single out other females for the angelic spotlight of the master narrative.[6] My project considers, instead, female bodies that broke these divisive rhetorical and narrative codes.

This thesis will trace the scientific discourses that effectively rendered Woman as a generic physical type and refused to acknowledge the individual, evolving natures of actual women. After exploring the political motivations behind and social implications of this state of suspended generalization, I consider the relationship between socio-scientific imperatives and concurrent literary practices of representation. Finally, I examine two texts that employ categorical conventions in order to challenge them. Like Culliford's

lithograph, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) and Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) made readers aware of the naturalized modes of physical representation that rendered them passive receivers of types rather than active interpreters of characters. According to narrative convention, Marian Halcombe's masculine features should relegate her to an old-maid-esque supporting role, and Lucilla Marjoribanks's size should code her as a melodramatic, excessively dependent woman rather than as the rational conceiver and implementer of creative solutions that she is. By calling attention to the shallow constructs that fail to truthfully or adequately represent these characters, Collins and Oliphant compel readers to look discerningly and interpret each woman on individual rather than generic terms.

By joining irregular bodies (monsters) with the moral integrity necessary to navigate the perilous path towards proper womanhood (angels), each of these authors produces a female character that feels uncomfortably human. Of course, for all their claims to human resemblance, Marian and Lucilla were nothing more than representations of women. But the move to represent realistic women — whose bodies develop past adolescence, whose minds reason and create, whose natures are not solely maternal — rather than the social construct Woman was a move of resistance to the powerful scientific, political and artistic discourses of the period.

To Know One Is to Know Them All

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, two pseudosciences emerged that were remarkable not so much for their scientific contributions, but for their approaches to scientific study. Physiognomy was an old practice by which the ancient Greeks interpreted personalities through physical appearance. Swedish philosopher Johann Kasper Lavater revived this field during the 1770s, because he became fascinated by the prospect of transforming these age-old interpretive practices into an exact science through scrupulous systemization of body parts and corresponding personality traits (Nead, 170; Fahnestock, 334-39). Inspired by Lavater's work, Austrian medical student Franz Joseph Gall developed another pseudoscience based on similar principles in the 1790s. Phrenology — as Gall termed it — was founded on his belief that character was located in specific regions of the brain and manifested itself in visually apparent conformations of the head. He and his followers drew conclusions about intellect and personality based on post-mortem observations of brains and skulls (Russett, 16-17). Both phrenology and physiognomy were enormously popular during the first half of the nineteenth-century.[7] By 1836, 64,000 phrenological publications had been sold throughout England (Watson, 218). Despite the decline of these pseudosciences after the formation of the British Medical Association in 1856, the basic assumptions of phrenology and physiognomy had established deep roots and retained a hold on scientists and society for the remainder of the century (Haley, 72). To the sciences, notes Cynthia Russett, these fields bequeathed their insistence on empirical observation (24), and to society, notes Lynda Nead, they left a language and precedent for reading intellect, morality and personality through physical characteristics (173).

Although phrenologists, and later doctors and biologists, purported to be neutral observers of irrefutable facts, many critics have noted the hardly coincidental rise of anatomical observation at a time when it became necessary to justify female subordination.[8] Quoting Condorcet, Thomas Laqueur notes that the post-revolutionary declaration of the rights of men, based simply upon "the fact that they are sentient beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning concerning these ideas," obliterated past conceptions of human hierarchies and begged the question, why can women — as sentient beings who acquire moral ideas — not partake of these rights? (1).[9] Theoretically egalitarian men needed justification for their continued domination over women (not to mention other races), and they found it through biological differentiation. Certainly people had examined human bodies before the 1770s. As early as the second century, observes Marjorie Levine-Clark, Galen proposed his theory that the body's elements — blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile — were analogous to air, fire, water and earth (88). But Galen had proposed a theory of the human body, not of gendered bodies whose differing physical traits implied differences in nature. Women of Galen's era were by no means considered equal to men, but until the late eighteenth century there had been no pressing need to justify women's inequality. Laqueur explains that for thousands of years female and male bodies were assumed to be slight variations of the same body. Both women and men were thought to possess identical genitalia and similarly strong sexual impulses; female genitalia merely remained inside the body (2). As Londa Schiebinger elucidates, scientists never felt the need to consider a female skeleton in contrast to a male skeleton until 1796. When German anatomist Samuel Thomas von Soemerring did so he found that women's skulls were generally smaller than those of men and that their

pelvises were proportionally larger. Soemerring's findings were then employed to prove women's intellectual deficiency and primarily reproductive purpose (Schiebinger, 42).

As nineteenth-century biological inquiries moved on from skeletal structures to organ systems, scientists realized that female reproductive organs were not inverted male genitalia. During the early 1800s ovaries were recognized as the locus of a woman's femininity, but by the 1840s they had taken on a life of their own. In 1843 physician Theodor L. W. Bischoff proved that ovulation was a spontaneous — rather than conscious — process, occurring at regular intervals regardless of a woman's will or desire. Jill Matus suggests that Bischoff's discovery dissociated women from the reproductive activity of their bodies and, in doing so, enabled physicians to deem women passive by nature. This new scientific evidence and the deductions that stemmed from it bolstered an increasingly common nineteenth-century view that middle-class women submitted to the sexual act out of duty, rather than for pleasure (46).

Soemerring and Bischoff observed bodies and drew conclusions just as second-century philosopher Galen had, but their conclusions were not purely corporeal in nature. Phrenology and physiognomy had sanctioned the practice of reading character from physical observation, and, in turn, purportedly scientific notations about pelvis size and ovarian cycles brimmed with moral and intellectual — and therefore social and cultural — meaning. As science began to assume the prestige formerly enjoyed by the church, it bore the power and burden of discovering and articulating the immutable laws that governed reality (Gatens, 21-26). In the words of historian Cynthia Russett, "Science was, quite simply, in pursuit of the Law" (5). The scientific observation that female anatomy was different and developmentally inferior to the male standard became a

cultural imperative, because it supported a hierarchical system in an age when so many supposedly immutable systems of order had fallen. For this reason, the practice of reading bodies thrust an enormous weight of meaning onto the female body that it withheld from the masculine physique. Women's bodies were not merely the subjects of scientific study; they became signifiers employed to justify and uphold traditional social practices. They signified not only the increasingly loaded category of gender, but also different types of women within the broad category Woman. Pale, fragile female bodies signaled middle-class respectability, impeccable domesticity and angelic morality. Hearty, muscular bodies belonged to working-class women who were morally inferior and careless in their domestic duties.[10] Untamable hair indicated sexually transgressive behavior, or at least the sexual volatility liable to lead a woman toward moral ruin.[11]

The symbolic nature of female bodies was reinforced not only by the need to justify social and political stratification, but also by the development and increasingly widespread acceptance of evolutionary biology. Although Darwin did not publish his comprehensive theory on the evolution of species until 1859, less ambitious theories of evolution began stirring in the 1820s. Karl Ernst von Baer's law of embryology, published in 1827, declared, "The developmental history of the individual is the history of growing individuality in every respect" (Russett, 74). By this he meant that embryonic development proceeds from simple to complex. Furthermore, according to von Baer's law, increasing complexity was synonymous with increasing individuality. Based on this model of development, early nineteenth-century anatomist Johann Friedrich Meckel concluded that women were less differentiated from the primitive embryonic type than men, and were therefore less highly individuated (Russett, 75). This scientific conclusion

lent credibility to the popular idea that all women were synonymous with their social types, and, conversely, the cultural function of women's bodies as categorical markers helped perpetuate Meckel's train of thought in the sciences. In 1871 Darwin based his theory that men attained higher eminence in whatever they took up — poetry, art, music, science — upon this premise that only the most evolved individuals could produce creative, original work (629). This line of reasoning was so pervasive that as late as 1904, G. Stanley Hall wrote, "Each woman is a more adequate representative of her sex than a man is of his, so that to know one well more involves knowing all … her nature is more generic and less specific" (505). As long as female bodies read as codes for general categories of gender, race and class, those categories and the bodies that composed them could not evolve. This system of representation helped keep actual women (who were, of course, individual rather than generically interchangeable) in a state of arrested social and political development.

A Shared System of Meaning

Jeanne Fahnestock was one of the first scholars to treat female bodily description in the nineteenth-century novel with serious critical attention. She noticed that eighteenth-century novels were sparse in physiological description, but found that by the 1860s, a litany of physical features was par for the course. Fahnestock explains this shift by concluding that novelists must have grown more adept at their form over the course of the century. She finds that authors were able to avoid long digressions into a character's personality by economically implying personality through physique. "Of course," she explains, "this substitution only worked if writers and readers shared a system of

meaning, a code for translating descriptive terminology into aspects of personality"
(325). Conveniently, physiognomy and phrenology had furnished Victorians with an
efficient shared vocabulary for denoting character through physical features. Fahnestock
goes on to define the sorts of physiognomical codes I alluded to in the previous section,
but focuses her attention on their implications in the Victorian novel. A round chin, for
example, functions as shorthand for "desire to love" (340). Large mouths denote
sensuality; bright eyes – quickness of perception; delicate nostrils – sensitivity; high
foreheads – intelligence. The list goes on.

   Although physiognomical and phrenological principles were applied to all sorts of
characters, Fahnestock noticed that certain codes were exclusively employed to describe
the heroine, "endowing her at the same time with more character and more importance in
the novel" (326). Only she received such features as a thin upper lip paired with a well-
developed lower lip, thus indicating the ideal blend of restraint and capacity for
enjoyment. In addition to maintaining a monopoly on certain physical characteristics, the
heroine was described with more and more detail until, by the mid-nineteenth century,
readers had learned to expect "a virtual inventory" of her features (328). A male
protagonist might happen to have a prominent chin, denoting his determined nature, but
the heroine was identifiable as such because of her specifically heroine-like features and
the exhaustively itemized manner in which the author conveyed them. She was indicated
first and foremost by her body and was sorted into the central space of the novel because
that body marked her as moral, youthful and middle-class. Helena Michie, expanding
upon Fahnestock's basic paradigm of shared terminology, recognized this scrupulously
coded practice of heroine description as hardly innocuous. She found that clichés such as

"blue eyes cloudless" and hair like "the brightest living gold" (once metaphors, now deadened by overuse) had the effect of conflating the heroine with "a series" of other female characters in literature who share those same features (90).[12] Seemingly counter-productively, in the very process of singling the heroine out within her novel, the author renders her generic. Although Michie gestures towards the fact that this mode of representation was "historically aggravated" (8), attention to concurrent socio-scientific discourses suggests, more specifically, that this system of literary representation was bound up with the imperative that women remain in their respective castes by means of bodily grouping. The heroines I will consider, by contrast, appear thoroughly individuated, to borrow von Baer's term, because their features distinguish them from the series of physically typified heroines who came before.[13]

Rather than focus on rhetoric that delineates and distinguishes the heroine, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson points out that physical disability in the nineteenth-century novel functions as code for a certain sort of female and effectively relegates that female to the status of minor character. "Disabled literary characters usually remain on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures or exotic aliens whose bodily configurations operate as spectacles," she writes. "Indeed, main characters almost never have physical disabilities" (9). Interestingly, Garland-Thomson finds that the divergent paths of the disabled female and the non-disabled heroine are interdependent. Disabled female figures — who, in Garland-Thomson's examples, are often raced as well — arouse sympathetic indignation in the heroine, and this indignation, in turn, inspires benevolently maternal thoughts and actions that spur the heroine towards liberal selfhood, the end goal in traditional novels of development.[14] Kimberley Reynolds and Roxanne Eberle have

identified a similar split dynamic between the fallen woman, physically coded as immoral and sexually volatile, and the heroine, her sister savior, represented as fair-haired, fair-skinned, slight of frame and innocently adolescent (42-59; 136-201). Martha Stoddard-Holmes draws attention to instances where Victorian authors organize women into marriageable or unmarriageable categories (read major and minor characters) based on body size. Notably large and small bodies, Stoddard-Holmes explains, code women as excessively emotional, and she reads the melodrama of such characters as exteriorized (2-69). Karen Chase notes that elderly bodies "flit about the edges of the [nineteenth-century] plot" (36) and shows how old women, "particularly," are "vulnerable to … tones of corrosive portraiture" (17).

Just as social practices of reading women and typing them accordingly had become so pervasive (and seemed so scientifically immutable) that they appeared innate rather than acquired, so these literary practices of physically typing women and organizing them into corresponding spaces within the novel became deeply ingrained in reading practices of the period. As Fahnestock puts it, "readers of the 1850s to 1870s could be relied upon" to understand inculcated physical codes and proceed accordingly through the novel (325). In the following sections I read the bodily representations of two central female characters not for how these depictions further socially oppressive discourses, but rather for how they confound reigning discursive practices and expose their artifice in doing so.

As Though No Sharper Than the Rest of Her Sex

Critics of *The Woman in White* (1859-60), no less than Walter himself, have grappled with how to read Marian Halcombe. Beginning with Nina Auerbach's incorporation of Marian into her recovery and exaltation of the Old Maid, nearly every interpretation of the novel includes at least an anecdotal stab at classifying and coining a descriptor for Collins' remarkable spinster. Auerbach describes Marian not merely as an Old Maid type, but also as a "Pre-Raphaelite stunner" (137). D. A. Miller interprets her as "a conspicuous case of a woman's body that gives all the signs of containing a man's soul" (125). Laurel Erickson sees "not man-trapped-in-woman's-body," but an Odd Woman, the Victorian conception of "women who desire other women," in twentieth-century terms, a lesbian (96-97). Susan Balée finds, rather, that Collins created Marian to emblematize the surplus woman in order to promote a new icon of womanhood that would better serve his economically altered society.[15] More recently, Judith Halberstam perceives Marian as a masculine woman whose unattractiveness hints at a long history of social prejudice against even slight masculinity in women.

These ongoing attempts to pin down Marian Halcombe appear within a predominant strain of criticism regarding the novel's treatment of gender that considers Marian's androgynous appearance in conjunction with the effeminate behaviors of Mr. Fairlie, Count Fosco and Walter Hartright. Over the past decade or so, commentary on Marian has also surfaced in a critical strain that contemplates Walter's not so innocent rise to power. Attending more to the contracted Marian of volume three than to her striking physical representation in volume one, Ann Cvetkovich, Pamela Perkins and

Mary Donaghy, among others, read Marian's diminishment in Walter's second narrative as a key marker of his progress in the middle-class male fantasy of self-improvement.

Either focusing on the details of Marian's body or reading her character in conjunction with Walter's development, these otherwise insightful commentaries are limited, however, by their inattention to Marian's placement within the overall workings of her novel. The first critical strain takes Marian's conventionally unbeautiful body as its starting point for analysis, but her physical make-up does not sufficiently explain the attention she garnered from Victorian readers and continues to reap from critics. Surely other unattractive spinsters appear throughout literature of the period. In *A Tale of Two Cities* which immediately preceded *The Woman in White* in *All the Year Round*, Miss Pross, like Marian the valiant caregiver of an angelic blonde, is a "wild red woman, strong of hand" (125), often noted for her "grimness" (235) and capable of lifting formidable Madame Defarge. Critics do not consider Miss Pross's body at length, however, or spend pages trying to place her within a framework of bodily or gendered meaning. I propose that Marian strikes readerly and critical attention not merely because of her ugly (if we choose to align our opinion with Walter's) body, but more significantly because her body is out of place.

By considering when and where she enters the text, I elucidate ways in which Marian disrupts novelistic practices of organizing female bodies into socially sanctioned spheres. I go on to consider how extensively Marian appears in light of Collins' self-proclaimed experiment in form, reading his significant interruption of Walter's would-be novel of development as a pointed undercutting of the preeminent generic paradigm. I aim, by taking a step back from the particulars of Marian's body, to enhance critical

understanding of Marian by suggesting that so much has been made of her, that she continues to unsettle attempts to type her as the Old Maid, the Odd Woman, the heroine or the freak, because her novel made so much of her and mocked female categorical conventions in doing so.

<div align="center">II</div>

The Woman in White introduces Marian as part of a female group - the "two young ladies" whom the novel's first narrator, Walter Hartright, has been hired to instruct in the art of water coloring (59). Because Pesca, Walter's friend who recommends him for this job, repeatedly mentions these ladies as a pair, they might as well be the same person. He describes them collectively as young and explains that they live on an estate in Cumberland, so one can deduce that they are probably well to do, but he offers no other distinguishing details. They function for the first four chapters as interchangeable characters.

Marian's second appearance in the novel is so strikingly original and has sparked such critical attention that it is easy, in hindsight, to forget her banal first mention. In the scene that has been provocatively close read by Nina Auerbach and Judith Halberstam (135-7; 359-363), Walter enters the breakfast-room on his first morning in Cumberland, sees a "comely and well-developed" woman with her back turned towards him and, rather unabashedly, looks her up and down (73). In much the same way that he sizes up the "well-furnished" breakfast table and the length of the room (73), Walter notices the "rare beauty of her form," her figure — "tall, yet not too tall" — and her waist – "perfection in the eyes of a man" (74). He admittedly allows himself "the luxury" of admiring her and

feels "a flutter" of expectation when she turns to face him (74). Then comes Marian's

famously dramatic approach:

> She left the window – and I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved
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> forward a few steps – and I said to myself, The lady is young. She
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> approached nearer – and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which
>
> words fail me to express), The lady is ugly! (74).

If our modern sensibilities feel a bit shocked by Walter's blatant declaration of disgust,

they experience nothing compared to the blow his expectations undergo. "Never was the

fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head

that crowned it," Walter writes, his syntactical facility apparently rejuvenated by

indignation. He goes on to vividly describe her visage: "She had a large, firm, masculine

mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick coal black hair,

growing unusually low down her forehead" (75). To this he adds that she was "almost

swarthy," the darkness above her upper lip – "almost a moustache" (75).

Much has been made of Marian's physique in regards to what it reveals about

Victorian representations of masculinity and preference for a certain sort of femininity.[16]

In light of the scientific dimension to social preferences that I have outlined, I will merely

add that Marian's post-adolescent features rather pointedly push back at concurrent

theories about female biology, notably Thomas Laycock's opinion that men pass through

the female stage of development and attain their highest intellectual faculties once they

move beyond this phase, as evidenced by such evolved features as facial hair, a deep

voice and a strongly defined jaw line (Matus, 28-33). Such a chin, according to

phrenologists, denoted a measure forcefulness and determination that Fahnestock specifically singles out as "not appropriate for a heroine" (341).

Less attention has been paid, however, to the dynamics of Walter and Marian's first interaction, aside from the rather obvious point that he finds her grotesque and, according to Auerbach, dissipates her potentially sexy allure for the reader in deeming her so. But the drama of this encounter does not hinge, quite so simply, on the event of Walter finding Marian ugly. Certainly twenty-something Walter who lives in the heart of London has encountered his share of unattractive faces. Rather he responds so violently to her appearance, because ugliness appears where he expected beauty. Walter feels cheated — "to be charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty … and then to be almost repelled" (74) — because he has read all of the social and physiological cues correctly.

Socially, he prepares to meet a highly bred young woman who lives on a country estate, and he arrives toting all of the stereotypical expectations associated with such a person. When Walter enters the breakfast-room, Marian's figure and position seem to confirm her as the quintessential angelic heiress of British gentry. With a perfectly thin waist and an attitude of "easy elegance" (74), she stands on hallowed domestic ground. Indeed, Elizabeth Langland notes that female social status was marked both on a woman's body and in "her sanctum and sanctuary, the Victorian home" (294). Certain spaces within this home were coded as masculine and feminine; others were marked by class lines. Although an array of visitors and servants went in and out of the breakfast and dining rooms, the lady of the house acted as hostess of these spaces ("Domestic Ideology," 293; *Architectural Identities,* 62-110). Anne McClintock explains that idleness

in these rooms, as well as the drawing room, was an arduously performed character role. In other words, respectable women strove to appear ever ready and waiting to receive guests (132-180). Marian's position, standing and staring out the window of the breakfast room, is just how one would expect to find the lady of Limmeridge.

Situated thus far from Walter's perspective, readers too are primed to read Marian in a certain way. When Pesca, somewhat facetiously, bids Walter farewell with the directive — "Marry one of the two young Misses; inherit the fat lands of Fairlie; become Honourable Hartright, M.P." — any mildly experienced novel reader cannot help but catch the foreshadowing in his words and prepare themselves accordingly to meet the heroine (61). Anticipating a minute catalog of heroine features to confirm her entry into the text (Fahnestock 328-329), readers would also have recognized the voyeuristic inventory of Marian's physical graces as confirmation of Pesca's plot cue. Just as the surveyors of Culliford's lithograph found themselves suddenly implicated in the clergyman's misreading of the woman on Regent Street, however, Walter's readers find themselves implicated in the shock and embarrassment of his interpretive blunder.[17] Collins' scrambling of signs begs a reexamination of the scene and, as this scene appears in narrative rather than cartoon form, compels readers to consider the narrative codes that lulled them into assuming that the perfectly shaped woman, staring listlessly out the window, was the heroine-love interest.

As though doubting his own interpretive faculties, Walter responds to this revolution in his expectations by retreating into himself. He, who so assertively surveyed Marian's figure as though planning (at least in his dreams) his advance towards the young miss and the fat lands of Fairlie, almost disappears entirely from the scene as she

approaches. At a loss as to how to interact with this raced, resolute woman who occupies the space of his would-be docile pupil, Walter must watch and learn how to engage with the female anomaly that stands before him. Marian, on the other hand, proves herself master of the situation. "Shall we shake hands?" she asks, and does so with "easy, unaffected self-reliance" (75). While stunned Walter sits in silence, she monologues, explaining the particulars of Walter's new position, outlining the characters of her uncle and half-sister (who is, in fact, a fair, frail heiress), reading Walter's expressions and responding to them accordingly. Walter, feeling entirely out of sorts, searches for new cues for how to read her. "While it was impossible to be formal and reserved in her company," he processes, "it was more than impossible to take the faintest vestige of a liberty with her, even in thought" (76). Engaging with Marian as a newly astute observer, his analysis conveys both self-awareness — in that he recognizes his tendency to take liberties in thought — and awareness of Marian as an individual to be reckoned with on her own terms, rather than the generic terms usually thrust upon women.

<center>III</center>

Collins goes beyond a mere scene-length mocking of female bodily-ordered representations, however, and further upsets the novel's hierarchical character-system by enabling dark-skinned, strong-jawed Marian to supersede Walter and typified heroine Laura at the narrative center.[18] If the when and where of Marian's entrance into the novel effect a shocking recognition of tropes that facilitate prescriptive readings of women based on body type, the how of her representation throughout the novel pushes beyond awareness of this paradigm and exposes alternate representational modes. Collins

prefaced the first edition of *The Woman in White* with a characteristically enticing opener: "An experiment has been attempted in this novel," he writes, "which has not (so far as I know) been hitherto tried in fiction" (v). Although Collins had actively schooled himself in his chosen literary form, after publishing three novels, he began to push back at the genre. In an essay entitled "A Petition to the Novel-Writers" (1856), he satirized conventions of the day, aiming much of his scathing wit at popular portrayals of women, along with other typified characters such as the Romantic Old Gentleman. In his next novel, *The Woman in White*, Collins went a step further and broke with tradition by enacting an experiment in which an array of characters tell their stories in turn by passing the narrative on as the plot progresses, affording each of them "a new opportunity of expressing themselves" (v). Collins was delighted to find that this narrative dispersal altered "substance" as well as "form" and reaped unprecedented readerly sympathy for unlikely characters (v). Famously his fascinatingly fat villain stole the audience's heart and even fussy Mr. Fairlie, an idiosyncratic invalid, found "sympathetic sufferers" who admonished Collins to be mindful of their favorite's nerves (v). Amidst Collins' erratic fleshing out and flattening of characters (for not all characters get an equal turn as narrator), Marian occupies a character-space rarely, if ever, filled by a woman of her make and mold.

Rather than serve as a static marker of Walter's development,[19] Marian begins to assume considerable character-space in Walter's own narrative after their first meeting, and, before he can advance too far towards Laura and the Fairlie estate, she arrests his progress entirely by dismissing him from Limmeridge and from the plot. What appeared to be the story of immature Walter who departs from his mother and sister on an

adventure that renders him "a changed man," as Miller suggests the novel ultimately

becomes (118), turns into the story of swarthy Marian — who lives off modest savings

and lays no claim to a domestic hearth — as told by herself. With Marian foregrounded

in the central narrative space, everything appears differently than it would in a novel

focalized through a middle-class man or a naïve adolescent heroine. Blond, self-effacing

Laura, who represents the Victorian ideal of proper womanhood and whom Walter,

predictably, lavished his attention upon, assumes a minor place and seems uninteresting

in comparison to Marian, her thoroughly individualized half-sister. Sir Percival, member

of the respectable British gentry, looks threatening. Foreigner Count Fosco looms large,

in contrast to Pesca, the Italian in Walter's tale who appeared stereotypically comical and

caricatured. Madame Fosco, a model English wife, arouses suspicion and even inklings

of terror.

Marian, however, stands as a stable intellectual and moral locus through which to

navigate all that transpires at Blackwater Park. Indeed, Collins represents her as so

adeptly outmaneuvering formidable adversaries that one begins to sense that we do not

merely see things differently than we would through the eyes of typical heroine Laura,

who finds Madame Fosco "so much changed for the better – so much quieter" now that

she is married (226). We also see things more clearly than we otherwise would have,

more reliably than we did when Walter, who was blindsided by Marian's body, stood at

the narrative helm. Collins underscores the destabilization of Walter's narrative paradigm

that takes place on Marian's watch by reminding readers, through the mouth of Fosco,

that "many different sorts of virtue" exist throughout the world – one sort in England,

another in China (258) – and by repeatedly juxtaposing astute observers, who can

conceive of things from multiple perspectives, with passive onlookers.[20] Marian, like the readers Collins' disorienting narrative would seek to cultivate, excels at turning ideas over in her mind and reading people critically rather than complacently, as evinced not only through her sleuthing skills, but also by her aptitude for strategic games such as chess and backgammon.

It is interesting, I think, to consider these superior faculties that Collins reveals in Marian by placing her into an unprecedentedly ample character-space in conjunction with concurrent socio-scientific hypotheses regarding the relationship between human development and environmental factors. In 1857, psychiatrist Bénédict Morel studied patients who exhibited degenerative behaviors and proposed that certain environments could stunt male development, but presumed that women would remain in their innate state of arrested physical and intellectual development regardless of environmental changes. His study helped to proliferate this popular belief throughout social and political discourses. Collins, however, not only releases Marian from the representational confines that would relegate her to a typified minor character, but also utilizes this new space to showcase her remarkable abilities which flourish when afforded a larger scope. In fact, as Marian, towards the end of her account, sheds her stays and climbs (outside the bounds of appropriate feminine-coded architectural space) across a roof to listen in on Count Fosco and Sir Percival's plot against Laura, she hears her most formidable opponent confirm her ability to outwit them. "You drive [this grand creature] to extremities as if she were no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex," Fosco admonishes Percival. "You deserve to fail, and you *have* failed" (340). Although they do not fail, largely because their listener falls ill, just before Marian's demotion to a minor character, Collins leaves

readers with these words that paraphrase, in effect, what her intricately embodied presence has already conveyed: to know Marian is not to know them all.

IV

Perkins and Donaghy read Marian's flattening in the latter half of the novel as a sign of Walter's boost in manliness, endowed through his South American travels. Halberstam, more sinisterly, interprets Marian's suppression as punishment for her "hairy and scary demeanor," as the novel's assertion that masculine women are more horrific than feminized men (361). Miller primarily argues that the desperate measures employed to suppress homosexual panic "dramatize the supreme value of the norm," but he gestures towards the more provocative possibility that "recontextualized in a 'sensational' account of its genesis," such a norm risks appearing "*monstrous*" (119). I want to conclude by teasing out Miller's enticing critical gesture as it pertains to the novel's portrayal of Marian and suggest that, rather than put readers at ease by putting a monstrously adept woman back in her appropriate pen, Walter's narrow-minded account appears monstrously unbalanced and unfair.

That Walter gets the final say does not negate the divergent accounts that have come before, nor does it require that readerly sympathies neatly align with his. Despite Collins' effort to tell many stories within one novel, at any given moment, Wayne Booth's blunt truism still holds: "The novelist who chooses to tell this story cannot at the same time tell *that* story; in centering our interest, sympathy, or affection on one character, he inevitably excludes from our interest, sympathy, or affection some other character" (78-9). Walter's generically conventional narratives, that bookend the novel,

get significantly interrupted, and Collins' centering of interest on other characters usurps sympathy and affection along the way. The scribbling outside of the lines that Collins effects through his drawing of Marian as complex, full of integrity, rife with intellect and superior to the generic type Woman does not get erased when Walter reorders himself has hero, Laura as heroine and Marian as muted, minor spinster. Rather, readers encounter Walter's return to narrative convention keenly aware of its constructedness. They know this, because they have seen the story other ways. Thus, when Walter mentions a bit of information that he read in Marian's journal or paraphrases her dialogue rather than portray her as speaking at length, Collins does not represent an appropriately minor female character. He represents a man's strategic diminishment of a woman's true aptitude.

In a violent attack on the Victorian novel's tried and true tropes, outdone only by Count Fosco's narrative interjection that follows on its heels, Collins lets minor-character Marian briefly step out from beneath Walter's thumb and literally push back at him. As Walter departs to best Fosco, a feat readers know would have been impossible without Marian, she meets him at the doorway and "pushe[s] him back into the room" (576). "She held me by both hands, and her eyes fastened searchingly on mine," Walter writes (576). "Don't refuse me because I am only a woman," Marian insists. "I must go! I will go!" (576). A scuffle ensues in which Walter holds her down and she tries to break away, and somewhere in the midst of this skirmish he patronizingly murmurs, "Come, Marian, give me a kiss, and show that you have the courage to wait til I come back" (576). Marian does not submit to this, but rather "trie[s] to hold [Walter] again" as he runs out of the room (567). "I dared not allow her time to say a word more," he writes (576).

So many critics harp, for better or worse, on Walter's final description of Marian, subserviently declaring his son the heir of Limmeridge. Balée optimistically declares her emblematic of the New Woman who makes up for Laura's deficiencies. Richard Collins insists that Walter's closing image symbolizes the defeat of the diabolical hermaphrodite who disturbed his gender security. I propose, instead, that we not let Walter's neat closing image overshadow Marian's second-to-last appearance - this dynamic interaction that Collins gives us of her fighting for space and struggling to move forward, of a skirmish that renders female boundaries not natural, but forced, constructed and brutal.

If Not A Ministering Angel, At Least A Substantial Prop[21]

Miss Marjoribanks (1866), like the rest of Margaret Oliphant's work and Oliphant herself for that matter, was deemed conservative and antifeminist for much of the twentieth-century. The heroine's earnest concern for her role as hostess and her declaration that she "always make[s] it a point to give in to the prejudices of society" (51) seemed to confirm this reading, as did Oliphant's reviews in *Blackwood's Magazine* that many a critic employed as a convenient counterpoint to more overtly transgressive authors of the period.[22] Elizabeth Langland was one of the first to inquire beneath the novel's seemingly placid surface and come back up bearing evidence of subversion lurking behind its tidy irony. She identified Lucilla Marjoribanks' marriage to her cousin Tom as "a means to an end rather than an end in itself" and suggested that the bristling aroused by the novel's initial release (a point that twentieth-century critics had seen fit to ignore) was due to Oliphant's demystification of the angelic ideal through her "unrelenting focus on women's work" (*Nobody's Angels*, 152).[23]

As though a breaking open of Margaret Oliphant had been collectively underway, a slew of subversive readings followed closely in suit. Linda Peterson reads *Miss Marjoribanks* as a parody of the female *bildungsroman* and *Phoebe, Junior* (1876) as a counterpoint to both male and female *bildung* plots. Margarete Rubik similarly points out ways in which Oliphant "ridicules maudlin Victorian values" and "denounces the false pathos … of her contemporaries" across her works of fiction (49). Elisabeth Jay, in her introduction to the 1998 edition of *Miss Marjoribanks*, elucidates how Lucilla's pragmatic vision "repeatedly reduces the realm of abstract speculation, thought or emotion to material dimensions" (xxi-xxii). Following this train of thought, Gail Houston

interprets the novel as a rewriting of Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" (1864) that focuses readerly attention on material conditions rather than on the spiritual power of women as metaphorical queens.[24]

More recent criticism of *Miss Marjoribanks* strikes a chord somewhere in between reading it as a misinterpreted proto-feminist text on the one hand or as archly traditionalist on the other. Melissa Schaub understands Oliphant's ironic tone as neither feminist nor anti-feminist, but as anti-idealist. Andrea Tange sees Lucilla as utilizing the socially sanctioned space of the drawing room in order to expand her cultural place. In her architecturally motivated reading, Tange posits Oliphant, like her heroine, as fulfilling this agenda while operating within the prejudices of society ("Redesigning Femininity," 163-186). June Sturrock adds that Oliphant's approach allows her to both "celebrate women's traditional work and portray it as stifling" (335). Susan Fraiman, more provocatively, cites Lucilla as a rare domestic heroine who remains "cheerfully unbridled" at her novel's conclusion (172).

Although quite a few of these critics admire Oliphant's preference for material matters over and above sentimentality or idealization, and nearly all of them mention Lucilla's large shoe size as a casual detail of interest, not one of the previously noted critical strains has acknowledged her big, blooming body with more than a passing nod. My project is to elucidate the subversive quality of *Miss Marjoribanks* imparted through the facts of Lucilla's person, which have thus far been read as lending character and little else. I want to take seriously Oliphant's astute observation that, "the unobtrusive domestic creature which is held up to us as the great model and type of the sex, could never be guessed as its representative, did we form our ideas according to experience and

evidence, instead of under the happy guidance of the conventional and the imaginary" (*Historical Sketches,* 204) and suggest that, rather than produce another representation of Woman as she was conceived in the Victorian imagination (as representative of her type), Oliphant gave her audience Lucilla Marjoribanks, in all her tawny-haired originality.

I begin by reading Oliphant's inventory of Lucilla's body parts in relation to the physiological catalog it counteracts and go on to evince Lucilla's struggle for central space, arguing that Oliphant's rendering of her coup-d'état as a struggle calls attention to the socially aggravated project of foisting such a girl into the haloed place of heroine. Finally, I propose that placing a new body shape in the narrative center contributes to Oliphant's unusual shaping of the narrative itself by creating new contours and gesturing towards a larger scope for the domestic novel. The conceptual framework that I draw is inconceivable without the contributions of all those who have already read Lucilla as more than a model hostess and her creator as noteworthy and nuanced. I hope, in the vein of Lucilla, to extend the length of this stride.

II

Miss Marjoribanks opens with fifteen-year-old Lucilla riding home from boarding school with her dreams in tow. As "so many young persons of her age have been known to [do] in literature," she hopes to be the sunshine of her father's eye, to preside over dinner parties, to charm everybody with her good humor, to cry languidly when troubles arise and to remain "always heroical" in the face of it all (4). Ironically, her mother's death serves as the catalyst for these aspirations, but our narrator does not perceive this as a flaw for which Lucilla should be admonished. Although Lucilla's ideas are "not at all

extravagant" for a girl as young as she, the narrative voice interjects to explain that an impediment arises in the form of Lucilla's body which "was not, however, exactly the kind of figure for this *mise en scène*" (4). This is not to say that a girl of Lucilla's shape cannot be the apple of her father's eye or preside over dinner parties, rather that Lucilla imagines her self as performing the central role of "a great many young ladies … in novels" (4), and it falls upon the narrator to explain that her figure simply does not suit novelistic representations of this sort of young lady.

As though straining for a polite way to put this, the narrator mentions that the most common description given of Lucilla by schoolfellows was that she was "a large girl" (4). Not a tall girl, our narrator clarifies (for heroines could be tall if also "well made" (Fahnestock, 331)), but a large girl, "large in all particulars, full and well-developed" (4). Recall that working-class female bodies were robust and developed. This was, of course, because women of this class spent their days engaged in physical labor — both in and out of doors — and built up muscle in doing so, but Victorians perceived this body type as essential rather than as a result of daily routine (Levine-Clark, 1-9; McClintock, 132-180; Nead 31-44). Consequently, the female ideal, the middle-class heroine, was not represented in a large or active body. In accordance with the cultural imperatives that Nancy Armstrong terms "economic man" and "domestic woman," the most valued sort of female was represented in a body that conveyed fragility, dependence and domesticity (*The Ideology of Conduct*, 96). Indeed, Lynda Nead notes that in visual art of the period, physical frailty was "a sign of respectable femininity" and that by the mid-nineteenth century "a morbid cult of 'female invalidism' had developed" (29). Lucilla's heartiness and size, therefore, make her stand out from her contemporaries at

boarding school. We find that her gloves were "half a number larger" and her shoes "a hairbreadth broader" than those of any of her companions (4-5).

To add insult to injury, or in the words of our sardonic narrator "to add to these excellences" (5), Lucilla has "a mass of hair which, if it could but have been cleared a little in its tint, would have been golden, though at present it was nothing more than tawny, and curly to exasperation" (5). It would be difficult to overstate the role that women's hair played in the Victorian imagination and in daily life. Elisabeth Gitter, in her study on the power of hair at this time, writes, "More intensely and self-consciously than any other generation of artists, [the Victorians] explored the symbolic complexities and contradictions of women's hair … There is scarcely a female character in Victorian fiction whose hair is not described at least perfunctorily" (938, 940). Oliphant's extended attention to Lucilla's hair, then, is certainly not incidental. By 1866, an author could not write about women's hair without engaging with the intricate system of meanings that deepened and proliferated as the century wore on. As with all of the previously mentioned bodily characteristics, hair color and texture communicated information about various types of women. Industrious governesses were represented with brown, neatly combed hair. Sexually and emotionally capricious women were drawn with tangled, disorderly tresses – think of Catherine Earnshaw or Hetty Sorel. Virtuous heroines were most commonly portrayed with glossy, flowing golden hair. This hair type has a longer history than the rest, stretching back to myths and fairy tales in which golden hair symbolized sacredness and preciousness.[25] It is easy to see why Victorian authors, drawing on this tradition, endowed their angelic heroines with a saintly crown of radiant blonde hair.

Oliphant evokes images of the typical heroine, which Lucilla is not, when she mentions that Lucilla's hair would have been golden if not for its muddied tint. Interestingly, Oliphant gives Lucilla tawny-colored hair, which bore no symbolic meaning. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, tawny is a "composite color, consisting of brown with a preponderance of yellow or orange." So, in Lucilla's locks, Oliphant subverts categories by blending colors. Thwarted by this confusing and uninformative hue, a Victorian reader could seek to glean meaning from the texture of Lucilla's hair. Its tendency to curl and grow "ridiculously, unmanageably thick" (5) implies untamable sexual and emotional propensities, perhaps even treacherously seductive wiles in the vein of Medusa (Gitter, 939). As one progresses through the novel, however, this interpretation of Lucilla proves utterly false, and Oliphant's reversal of traditional body codes appears perhaps even more confounding than the tawny color that defies meaning altogether.

Oliphant concludes her inventory of Lucilla's physical features with the line: "These were the external characteristics of the girl who was going home" (5), as if to emphasize that they are not her internal ones. Lucilla's inner character comes to light more gradually as the story unfolds. It is not, as I have shown, self-evident in Oliphant's description of her body. In these first few pages Oliphant does mention that Lucilla has a "lively mind … capable of grasping all the circumstances of the situation at a glance" (4), but this bit of information would not have struck a familiar chord with students of womanhood or clued them to expect a familiar sort of character ahead. Rather Lucilla's capacity for abstract thought and for holding a slew of ideas in mind directly contradicts phrenologist Johann Spurzheim's reigning theory that women possessed a less vigorous

intellect and were, therefore, more single minded, rarely extending their reasoning far beyond the visible world immediately in front of them (181-208).

<center>III</center>

Lucilla, by contrast, rides towards Grange Lane with her thoughts thrust far into the future. Her success at achieving every goal she conceives has led a number of critics to read Lucilla as though she were, in fact, the "heir apparent" that the narrator facetiously terms her (18). Langland describes Lucilla as seizing control of local society with her "master-hand" (156). Peterson assumes that "from the first chapter Oliphant makes it clear that her heroine will fulfill the socially accepted patterns of feminine development" (68), although Peterson goes on to elucidate how Lucilla exceeds these patterns. Tange begins her reading after Lucilla has established herself as hostess, and Schaub likewise assumes Lucilla's queen-like role as a given starting point for analysis. Because Lucilla's overall triumph, as Fraiman explains, is "an extreme case" (172), it is easy to overlook the struggle entailed in Lucilla's move into the central role and, in fact, her maintenance of that role. My object here is to show how the narrator is quite serious in declaring that Lucilla's is not the sort of figure to play heroine/hostess and how the imposition of her acategorical body into this position poses difficulties throughout Lucilla's career. Oliphant's rendering of Lucilla's great effort to be read on her own terms, however, exposes the representational constraints that her heroine faces.

To begin with, fifteen-year-old Lucilla's initial endeavor to assume a position of central importance in her father's household upon her mother's death proves entirely unsuccessful. Dr. Marjoribanks does not perceive Lucilla as the heroic woman she insists

that she is, but as a "silly girl" who will get in the way of his habits, namely that of being left a great deal to himself and his male chums (8). Our narrator lets us know that "to go back to being an ordinary school girl" after expecting to be "mistress of her father's house" was, naturally, "painful" for Lucilla (10-11), but the snide tone used to describe this hard and fast failure as an attempted "reign" seems on point (11). Despite Lucilla's earnest desire to play Lucie Manette to her bewildered and grief stricken father, thus far, her father, like her schoolfellows, merely sees "that large girl" whom her mother left behind (8). He pushes her to the margins of the central narrative space for three more years as if she were nothing more than an over-sized minor character.

As Lucilla, refortified after this recess, aims not only to usurp her mother's place but also to enact a social revolution in Carlingford upon her return, the narrative voice cuts the grand spirit of Lucilla's plan down to size again – as it did when pointing out that her figure does not fit – by letting readers know that the world of Carlingford "had not the least idea" of any of this (22). "With the ordinary short-sightedness of the human species," the narrator continues, "Carlingford blinded itself and turned its eyes in every direction in the world rather than [towards] … a large blooming young woman, with tawny short curls and alert decided movements" (22). In this sentence, however, the narrative bite shifts its sting from Lucilla to society. Acknowledging for the first time to the reader that the "good fairies" are going to take care of Lucilla on her mission (22), the narrator switches gears and reveals that the bitter joke will be on those given to shortsightedness where female bodies are concerned. This is not to say that Lucilla will progress in the face of social blindness undaunted, merely that she will succeed in her endeavors. And who is Lucilla's good fairy? Oliphant, of course, mocking a society

content to be guided by types and models rather than form its own ideas according to experience with individual women.

Despite Oliphant's determination that Lucilla will in fact reign as heroine of the domestic hearth, she still must face the patronizing laughter of her father and the steeled grit of Nancy, the cook, upon her second attempt at center stage. Sure, Lucilla successfully takes her father's seat at the head of the breakfast table, but this situation catches "the fancy" of Dr. Marjoribanks who has "a keen perception of the ridiculous" (29). Rather than take Lucilla seriously when she talks about redecorating the drawing room to suit her person and hosting evenings to benefit society, the doctor looks at his daughter in a "moderate and unexcited way" and merely exclaims, "Well, Lucilla, so this is you!" (28). Even far into volume three, despite a decade of Lucilla exceeding her father's expectations, Dr. Marjoribanks spitefully serves his daughter one of the greatest trials of her career in the form of a newspaper article passed across the battlefield of the breakfast table. Lifting her eyes from the name 'Mr. Cavendish,' Lucilla meets an "air of amusement and triumph" in the doctor's face that strikes her "at the tenderest point" (351). Although Lucilla has already discovered and pledged her allegiance to another parliamentary candidate, her father learns that her old beau of sorts, whom she parted with on less than amiable terms but whom Carlingford society adores, has also decided to run. Dr. Marjoribanks laughs unsympathetically at this complication, and merely says, "If you had kept your own place it would not have mattered" (351). Indeed, although it becomes quite clear to readers that Lucilla can more than manage the heroine role, many a narrow-minded character causes her to "swell with that profound sense of being unappreciated and misunderstood" (347).

Lucilla does not merely find her capacity to accomplish what she aims at repeatedly misread by her father who insists, although she has reached the age of thirty in the aforementioned scene, upon seeing her as a girl playing at power, she also faces obstacles in the form of other women who appear more the heroine-type than she. From the outset of Lucilla's second return, the narrator lets us know that she is hardly the heir(oine) apparent. On the eve of Lucilla's homecoming (when the world of Carlingford was looking in every direction but Lucilla's) we learn that, although Lucilla perceives scraps and fragments of society that need knitting together, "nobody could say that there were not very good elements" already in Carlingford (21). The narrator goes on to list a host of other promising characters, male and female: Mr. Cavendish, for example, "a wit and a man of fashion" who belonged to "the best clubs in town" (21), the Miss Browns who boast "a floating suite of admirers" and a flurry of other "young ladies who sang," "young ladies who sketched" and "men who went out with the hounds" (21). Although Lucilla secures a prime space in her father's home via the breakfast chair coup and some clever words to Nancy, these feats do not ensure her desired place at the center of Carlingford's attention. When visitors arrive to welcome her back, Mrs. Chiley leads with the line, "My dear, you have grown ever so much since the last time I saw you … and stout with it" (Lucilla, naturally, is "not so gratified by this compliment"), and Oliphant identifies Mrs. Centum and Mrs. Woodburn as "two women who could attempt a rival enterprise in Carlingford" (40).

Although they lack the secure middle-class respectability of the Woodburns and the Centums, Rose and Barbara Lake both display excellent romantic-heroine potential in their respective strains of striking beauty and their similarly sympathetic situation to that

of Lucilla – the loss of their mother as they reach the cusp of adulthood. Barbara gives Lucilla the most prolonged run for her money when, for much of volume one, the hero-apparent struggles to choose between the two of them, wishing he could marry "one for his liking and another for his interests" (184). Lucilla, however, never doubts that she can ultimately best Barbara; it is Rose who inspires one of Lucilla's most stinging insults, one that incites a rare rise out of the usually gracious hostess. General Travers pays a visit to Grange Lane and as an outsider has not learned (as the people of Carlingford do) to recognize a woman such as Lucilla as the central social figure. He has heard about Lucilla by name, of course, but when he enters her drawing-room and sees Rose with her "red soft lips" just parted and her delicate, little eyes "clearer than usual" gazing towards the door (239), he mistakes her for Lucilla and whispers "I would call her very pretty" (240). The General's comment harkens back to an earlier conversation with the Centums in which he asks, "as was to be expected," if the hostess of Grange Lane is pretty (239). "'We-ll,' Mrs. Centum had replied, and made a long pause – 'would you call Lucilla pretty Charles?'" (239). When the General finds himself obliged to turn from the "dewy" object of his admiration towards the other stout girl in the room, he "[does] not find her pretty at all" (240), and so looks at her quite blankly when she responds to Mrs. Centum's salutation to 'Lucilla.' "Then it is only *you*, and not that pretty little thing that is Miss Marjoribanks!" he exclaims in surprise (241).

Like the man in Culliford's lithograph, General Travers appears a boor for presuming so assuredly that the lady of the house was the demure, pretty little thing, let alone for speaking these thoughts aloud to Lucilla. At this point in the novel no reader doubts that Lucilla exceeds all social expectations and defies narrow-minded notions

about what middle-class women must look and act like. The irony of the situation is thus more dramatic than in Culliford's image, because readers know from the start that the General is arrogantly determined to see things his way. The transposition of this sort of scene into narrative also facilitates a more prolonged and dynamic mocking of the misreader. Lucilla looks back at the General "not blankly," but as she might have looked at a lowly "upholsterer" and tells him that his officers (and he by default) "[will] not do" in Grange Lane (241). Although she knows perfectly well that she behaves inhospitably both to General Travers and to his host Mrs. Centum, Lucilla feels it "imperatively necessary to bring General Travers down to his proper level" (243). After all, our narrator adds, "she was only human" (243). With a realistic body that resembles no one but her self and an ambitious mind that continues to develop as she ages, Lucilla appears to be exactly that – a fully individuated human being.

As many have noted, Lucilla Marjoribanks succeeds in bringing down to size those who would interpret her in any way other than on her own terms. Although not the heroine apparent, she is the heroine who triumphs, giving everyone "an altogether original, and unlooked for ending for herself" (493). Unlooked for, because even once Carlingford decides to accept large, tawny-haired Lucilla as its reigning lady, society still suffers from the shortsightedness of only being able to perceive young, middle-class women as in want and in search of husbands. Accordingly Mrs. Chiley offers sympathy when potential suitors do not pan out despite Lucilla's unvarying reply that her "affections never were engaged" (115), and Lady Richmond insists that although Lucilla appears to possess fortitude in the face of disappointing men, "I fixed my eyes on her and I saw the difference. You can always find out what a girl's feelings are when you look in

her eyes" (134). But Lucilla undoes all their prescriptive expectations by being in earnest when she declared that she would not marry until the ripe age of thirty, and Oliphant, accordingly, upsets novelistic expectations once again by allowing her heroine to age and mature, pushing back at the tradition of rendering female protagonists as adolescent from start to finish.

In the character of Lucilla, Oliphant also pushes back at scientists and social leaders of the day such as physician Edward Tilt who purported that while puberty endows man with a knowledge of his power, menstruation and a lack of mature physical features give adolescent women a conviction of their dependence and philosopher John Millar who deemed female inactivity a crucial element of social progress. Lucilla's healthy body is nothing if not active, and the progress effected by Miss Marjoribanks – that began with a conviction of her formidable ability at age fifteen – stretches beyond her novel's final pages. Although Langland reads Lucilla as trading "unsentimentally in other lives to consolidate her material and social capital" when she moves to Marchbank (170), I find that, given her sincere desire to consult Nancy "as a friend" in her hour of greatest need (423), we can take Lucilla seriously in her endeavor to expand her custom-fit narrative frame so that it includes the village people of Marchbank. Indeed, we should take Lucilla's county-bound ambitions in the face of all who would seek to define and confine her just as seriously as we should have taken each of her endeavors. For Oliphant was not joking when she set up a sizeable girl with unruly orange curls to lead readers through the space of the domestic novel, nor does her heroine overstate her ambitions in the vein of Emma Woodhouse. Lucilla accomplishes exactly what she says she will, and her success proves all the more gratifying because no one suspected great things from a

girl like her. The joke is on all those intent on reading Lucilla according to traditional

codes of femininity.

An Eminently Artificial Thing

I began with a quote from John Stuart Mill's 1869 essay, *The Subjection of Women*, in which he declared female nature, as it had been construed, to be an eminently artificial thing, the product of forced repression in some directions and unnatural stimulation in others. Rather than attend directly to Mill's statement, I have wished to consider at length those forced repressions and unnatural stimulations as they were conceived through science, eagerly appropriated by society and translated into the Victorian novel. Many critics have exposed the rhetoric within this literary form that sorts female characters based on body type, deifying or devaluing, and thereby dehumanizing them in the process. Although many of these readings are incisive and provocative, even groundbreaking, I found that they stopped, too often, at this rather bleak division between the deified and the devalued, the artificially stimulated and the strategically repressed. It seemed the female bodies that resisted sorting had been insufficiently attended to, perhaps because they were few and far between.

In an effort to elucidate a ray of hope I see in nineteenth-century representations of the female body, I have considered the elaborate construction that made individualized men appear irrefutably superior to all women and biologically sorted women down the social ladder. By attending to the dimensions of artifice that reached from operating tables, to political cartoons, to domestic novels, I hope I have sufficiently gestured toward the pervasiveness of this representational system and towards its supposed immutability. I began in this way to show just how out of bounds Marian Halcombe and Lucilla Marjoribanks' bodies were. Social narratives are powerful, but they can be undone and rewritten. Contrary to most of their contemporaries who adhered to cultural norms of

representation (at least in this respect), that is precisely what Wilkie Collins and Margaret Oliphant did. These authors, like Mill, read falsity in the "facts" of female nature and helped to expose the fiction of Woman by exploiting the tropes that furthered her image, by rendering un-typable women.

I want to close by suggesting that the fiction that some bodies are innately inferior to others has by no means been completely undone and that social discourses masquerading as immutable truth continue to circulate. May this thesis point to astute authors who productively combat oppressive narratives and encourage critical, rather than complacent, readers, eager to engage in discussion and humbly willing to conceive of people and ideas new ways.

Notes

[1] *The Subjection of Women* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), 21.

[2] In 1987, Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur edited a special edition of *Representations* entitled *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century.* Building upon a foundational thesis that the burgeoning field of biological science contributed to nineteenth-century gender and racial subordination, each of the included articles explores various facets of this claim. Londa Schiebinger, for example, examines the first illustrations of the female skeleton, drawn in the 1790s. Mary Poovey attends to medical treatment of Victorian women, particularly the use of anesthesia on women in labor. Poovey expands upon this research in *Uneven Developments.* In *Unstable Bodies*, Jill Matus explores the relationship between nineteenth-century anatomical observations and social and literary representations of Victorian women as primarily maternal or fallen, and innately dependent on either account. Matus emphasizes, however, how rife socio-scientific discourses were with contradictions, suggesting that scientists and politicians appropriated research to meet often incompatible representational agendas. For a more recent examination of the relationship between late-eighteenth/nineteenth-century political agendas and biological science as it pertained to the female body, see Lynda Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body*.

[3] Along with Poovey and Matus, see Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels* and Marjorie Levine-Clark's *Beyond the Reproductive Body* on maintaining hierarchical categories among women.

[4] On social practices that assumed the place of natural law in the wake of late-eighteenth-century political revolutions see Moira Gatens's *Imaginary Bodies* and Cynthia Russett's *Sexual Science*, along with Laqueur and Schiebinger.

[5] Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*; Gillian Perry, *Gender and Art*; Nicola Humble and Kimberley Reynolds, *Victorian Heroines.*

[6] In addition to Garland-Thompson, Michie and Stoddard Holmes, see also Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon*, Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

[7] Jeanne Fahnestock suggests that, although practitioners of phrenology and physiognomy upheld them as two distinct fields, the popular mind likely compounded the two (336).

[8] See footnote 2.

[9] In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Wollstonecraft's defense was one of the first works of feminist philosophy, although it would not have been termed "feminist" until the 1830s when French socialist Charles Fourier coined the term. She, along with other Enlightenment thinkers who promoted female political rights, inspired the first organized women's movements in Europe and America that began to take shape in the 1830s and 40s and reached unprecedented heights by the turn of the century. For eighteenth-century writings in favor of female political involvement see Nicolas de Condorcet, "On the Admission to the Rights of Citizenship for Women" in *The Works of Marquis de Condorcet* (Amazon Digital

Services, Inc., 2011) and Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996). For a history of the Women's Movement see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1st American Ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (London: Virago, 1994) and Rachel G. Fuchs and Victoria E. Thomson, *Women in 19th Century Europe* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[10] Anne McClintock offers particularly lively insight into the workingwoman's body through her excavation of maid-of-all-work Hannah Cullwick's story. Cullwick carried on a life long romance with (and eventually married) Arthur Munby, the wealthy son of a former employer. Through their diary entries and photographs that Munby took of Cullwick, McClintock elucidates how Cullwick negotiated power through elaborately staged class cross-dressing, but was, first and foremost, immensely proud of her muscular, working-class body. Cullwick habitually measured her body to affirm its value and was immensely pleased when people noticed it and when employers asked her to perform physically strenuous tasks.

[11] Langland argues that the middle-class woman bore the responsibility of enforcing class boundaries, writing that social status was marked not only in her sanctum, the Victorian home, but also on her person. Levine-Clark explores political debates that conflated physical and moral health, and she particularly attends to the moral condemnation thrust upon able-bodied workingwomen. Their sturdy physique, she explains, was rendered as essential rather than situational. Elisabeth G. Gitter investigates the Victorian obsession with women's hair and the complex, symbolic significance that various textures and colors bore.

[12] Michie asserts that these cliché-ridden depictions cruelly disorganize the heroine's representation by distancing her from her body. I contend, by contrast, that - given the concurrent socio-scientific imperative that women remain in their respective castes by means of bodily organization - this conflation with a series of women binds the heroine within a restrictive category through insistent association of her with a typified body.

[13] Of course, each heroine, by assuming significant character-space over the course her novel, appears psychologically individuated. With very few exceptions, however, the virtuous heroine fits this prescriptive body type, and, as both physical and psychological experience comprise the human self, such typing inhibits the full development of the nineteenth-century female protagonist. Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe and Maggie Tulliver are notable exceptions to this rule, and, in a longer study, ought to be considered alongside Marian and Lucilla as bodies that resist oppressive generalization.

[14] See Garland-Thomson on the ideology of liberal individualism (19-46) and on the benevolent maternalism that furthers this aim in the nineteenth-century American novel (82-98). Susan Fraiman (1993) credits philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey with popularizing the term *Bildungsroman* and includes his oft-cited definition of the genre. "[The *Bildungsroman*] examines a regular course of development in the life of the individual; each of its stages has its own value and each is at the same time the basis of a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary transit of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony" (136), translated by G. B. Tennyson from Dilthey's essay, *Das Erlebnis und die Dictung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin* (14th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965).

[15] With Marian Halcombe in mind, Balée calls attention to the fact that "something needed to be done about England's surplus women" and finds that Collins "began to do it in the medium most likely to influence millions" (199). She refers to the perceived over abundance of single women during the mid-nineteenth century. According to an 1851 census, there were between 500,000 to 1 million more women than men in England that year.

[16] Auerbach draws comparisons between Marian and 1860s Italian "stunner" Jane Morris who also had "coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead," suggesting that "un-English" Europeans would have perceived Marian as a Pre-Raphaelite idol. She notes that Englishmen like Walter, however, preferred fair skin, fair hair and a softer, more innocent face to Marian's strong jaw line (135-142). Halberstam interprets the Marian-Walter-Laura relationship as an early version of the heterosexual conversion narrative that hinges upon rendering the masculine woman as sexually deviant (359-363). Miller reads *The Woman in White* in light of Karl Ulrich's 1860s formulation of male homosexuality – a woman's soul trapped in a man's body – and finds that Walter appears to embody this conception during his first narrative. Miller concludes that Marian must represent the opposite – a woman's body that gives all the signs of containing a man's iron soul (107-136).

[17] As a precursor to his reader-response interpretation of *The Woman in White*, Miller explains that, in addressing itself to the sympathetic nervous system, the sensation novel is especially conducive to readerly identification (even at the bodily level) with the narrator (107-112).

[18] Alex Woloch elucidates how the character-space occupied by one character only emerges as a result of the crowding or dispersal of other characters. Thus, when Marian assumes more character-space, Walter and Laura consequently take up less space. Tense relationships may form between character-spaces that do not become manifest in actual character relationships, as in the case of Laura and Marian whose relationship in the story never appears strained. The same cannot be said of Walter and Marian's relationship.

[19] Susan Howe finds that, in male novels of development, female characters serve as static markers of each stage in the hero's progress. It is interesting, I think, to consider Howe's observation in conjunction with the socio-scientific view that actual women marked a pubescent stage on the path towards male biological development. Fraiman (1993) goes a step further than Howe and shows how female characters often serve as milestones of male progress in their own novels of development. Elizabeth Bennet, in Fraiman's reading, functions as bargaining tool that facilitates her father's advancement towards his class ambitions and Mr. Darcy's attainment of new life and stamina for the deteriorating gentry class he represents. Marian is a rare female character who does away with the hero and his development altogether for a third of the novel.

[20] Mr. Fairlie, whom Collins holds up against mastermind Count Fosco, surely stands – or lies – as the most pathetic observer in the text. In a maddening obstruction of Marian's progress, Mr. Fairlie actually refuses to scrutinize his niece and thereby restore her identity with his recognition. He finds it easier to assume that she is another woman, Anne Catherick, who, in a move on Collins' part that quite pointedly exacerbates the issue of typed women, looks exactly like Laura.

[21] The narrator describes Lucilla with this phrase when she visits widowed Mrs. Mortimer. Although Lucilla goes out in the pouring rain, her hearty physique leaves her feeling exhilarated as she splashes through puddles in a waterproof cloak (207).

[22] For a notable anti-feminist reading of Oliphant see Vineta and Robert A. Colby, *The Equivocal Virtue*: *Mrs. Oliphant and the Victorian Literary Marketplace* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1966).

[23] When Oliphant first sent the manuscript of *Miss Marjoribanks* to her editor, John Blackwood, he suggested that she soften the "hardness of tone" as it seemed less congenial to readers than the more emotionally engaging tone of *The Perpetual Curate*. Oliphant, however, refused to budge on that front (*Autobiography and Letters*, 204-205). Accordingly, when *Miss Marjoribanks* was released it met mixed reactions. Some reviewers found the Carlingford heroines too manipulative and self-interested for their taste (*Nobody's Angels,* 151-153).

[24] John Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" was initially given as a lecture in 1864 when Oliphant was away in Italy. It was first published in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), which Oliphant read upon her return home (Houston, 85).

[25] George Eliot called attention to this discriminatory practice six years earlier through the mouth of Maggie Tulliver who, explaining why she never finished reading *Corinne*, declares, "As soon as I came to the blond-haired young lady reading in the park, I shut it up, and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca and Flora MacIvor and Minna, and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones" (*The Mill on the Floss,* 293).

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